

**OXFORD WRITES “THE PHOENIX AND TURTLE”  
ABOUT THE DEATH OF HIS SON’S ROYAL CLAIM**

**DAY FORTY-SEVEN IN THE TOWER**

**Sonnet 73**  
*Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*  
**26 March 1601**

*Oxford is now writing The Phoenix and the Turtle, a funeral dirge about the figurative death of Elizabeth as the Phoenix and Oxford as the Turtledove, because Southampton will no longer be able to advance their bloodlines to the throne. The death of the birds is echoed below in “where late the sweet birds sang.” The stark beauty and compactness of this sonnet mirrors that of the poem.*

Sonnet 73

Translation

That time of year thou mayst in me behold,  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

You can see in me that point in my life  
When only the vestiges of past glory remain  
On my person, as I tremble against the death  
Of your royal lineage from Elizabeth and me.

In me thou seest the twilight of such day,  
As after Sun-set fadeth in the West,  
Which by and by black night doth take away  
Death’s second self that seals up all in rest.

In me you see the ending of your royal time,  
Like the fading of my royal son’s glory,  
Which is soon taken away by disgrace,  
Death’s second self that hides all forever.

In me thou seest the glowing of such fire,  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,  
Consumed with that which it was nourished by.

In me you see the dying embers of your royalty,  
Lying on the ashes of your youth,  
As the death bed upon which I must expire,  
Destroyed by what had given me life and hope.

This thou perceiv’st, which makes thy love more  
strong,  
To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.

You see my sacrifice, making your blood more  
royal,  
To love that blood which you must now give up.

**Sonnet 73**

**1 THAT TIME OF YEAR THOU MAYST IN ME BEHOLD**

**THAT TIME OF YEAR** = the autumn of Oxford’s life; **TIME** = the rapidly dwindling life span of Elizabeth, now in her sixty-eighth year; **IN ME** = repeated in lines 5 and 9; **BEHOLD** = look upon; see; “‘My tongue cannot express my grief for one./ And yet,’ quoth she, ‘*behold* two Adons dead!’” – *Venus and Adonis*, line 1070, after Adonis has been killed (“‘Tis true, ‘tis true, thus was Adonis slain: He ran upon the *boar* with his sharp *spear*’” – lines 1111-1112, alluding to the boar of Oxford’s crest and to the spear of ‘Shake-speare’);

## 2 WHEN YELLOW LEAVES, OR NONE, OR FEW DO HANG

**YELLOW LEAVES** = the autumn of the royal tree; Oxford in line 2 of *The Phoenix and Turtle* refers to “the sole Arabian tree”, the habitat of the Phoenix, symbol of Elizabeth:

Now I will believe  
That there are unicorns; that in Arabia  
There is *one tree, the Phoenix’s throne*, one Phoenix  
At this hour reigning there *The Tempest*, 3.3.21-23

A son who is the theme of honor’s tongue,  
Amongst a grove the very straightest *plant* *1 Henry IV*, 1.1.80-81

When I perceive that *men as plants* increase *Sonnet 15*, line 4

Then was I as a tree  
Whose *boughs* did bend with fruit. But in one night,  
A storm, or robbery (call it what you will)  
Shook down my mellow hangings, nay, *my leaves*,  
And *left me bare* to weather *Cymbeline*, 3.3.60-64

“When as a lion’s whelp shall, to himself unknown, without seeking find, and be embraced by a piece of tender air: and when from a stately cedar shall be lopp’d branches, which, being dead many years, shall after revive, be jointed to the old stock, and freshly grow, then shall Posthumus end his miseries, Britain be fortunate, and flourish in peace and plenty” – *Cymbeline*, 5.5.436-443

The lofty cedar, royal Cymbeline,  
Personates thee: and thy lopp’d branches point  
Thy two sons forth: who, by Belarius stol’n,  
For many years thought dead, are now revived,  
To the majestic cedar join’d; whose issue  
Promises Britain peace and plenty *Cymbeline*, 5.5.454-458

I have lived long enough: my way of life  
Is fall’n into the sear, *the yellow leaf* *Macbeth*, 5.3.22-23

(Note: “leaves” in this line is echoed by “leave” in line 14)  
**NONE** = Southampton, without a royal claim, the opposite of “one”

## 3 UPON THOSE BOUGHS WHICH SHAKE AGAINST THE COLD,

**BOUGHS WHICH SHAKE** = allusion to the “Shake” of the Shakespeare name (as in Sonnet 18, line 3: “Rough winds do *shake* the darling buds of May,” also in context with branches of a tree); the reference is contemporary, because of the printed name (“William Shake-speare”) to be used on *The Phoenix and the Turtle*; and it signals the permanent obliteration of Oxford’s identity behind the mask or pseudonym – at least, until the Sonnets might surface in the distant future and be correctly understood.

That numberless upon me struck as *leaves*  
Do on the oak, have with one winter’s brush  
Fell from their *boughs* and *left me* open, *bare*  
For every storm that blows *Timon of Athens*, 3.2.263-266

## 4 BARE RUINED CHOIRS, WHERE LATE THE SWEET BIRDS SANG.

**BARE RUINED CHOIRS** = the barren branches of the trees, i.e., of the family tree and lineage; **BARE** = related to the bearing of the royal son; “When your sweet issue your sweet form should *bear*” – Sonnet 13, line 8; “Why is my verse so *barren* of new pride” – Sonnet 76, line 1; “The argument all *bare*” – Sonnet 102, line 3

## WHERE LATE THE SWEET BIRDS SANG

Referring to the Queen and himself as the “dead” birds of *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, the funeral dirge or song, which Oxford is now writing (or has just written) as by “William Shake-speare” for publication this year; the *Phoenix/Beauty* = Elizabeth; the *Turtledove/Truth* = Oxford, as parents of the royal son whose claim to the throne has died; **LATE** = figuratively dead, i.e., their mingled blood in Southampton is now dead; (As a convicted traitor, Henry Wriothesley is now referred to as “*the late earl of Southampton*”); “With these our *late-deceased* emperor’s sons” – *Titus Andronicus*, 1.1.187; **SWEET BIRDS** = royal parents, Elizabeth and Oxford; “To this urn let those repair/ That are either true or fair;/ For *these dead birds* sigh a prayer” – *The Phoenix and Turtle*, lines 65-67; “Thy end is *Truth’s and Beauty’s doom and date*” – Sonnet 14, line 14

### 5 IN ME THOU SEEST THE TWILIGHT OF SUCH DAY,

**IN ME** = repeated from line 1 and again repeated in line 9; **TWILIGHT OF SUCH DAY** = the ending of such royal hope; i.e., ending of the “golden time” of Sonnet 3, line 12, and of the “Summer’s day” of Sonnet 18, line 1; **TWILIGHT** = the faint light after sunset; “Nativity, once in the *main of light*” – Sonnet 60, line 5, referring to Southampton’s birth as royal prince

### 6 AS AFTER SUN-SET FADETH IN THE WEST,

**SUN-SET** = the fading of the royal son; (capitalized as “Sun-set” in Q); “Like feeble age he reeleth from the day” – Sonnet 7, line 10, when Oxford compared Southampton to “his sacred majesty” the sun or royal son; “Even so my Sunne one early morn did shine” – Sonnet 33, line 9; **FADETH IN THE WEST** = “And from the forlorn world his visage hide,/ *Stealing unseen to west* with this disgrace” – Sonnet 33, lines 7-8; “To dim his glory and to stain the track of his bright passage to the occident (i.e., to the west)” – *Richard II*, 3.3.66-67

### 7 WHICH BY AND BY BLACK NIGHT DOTH TAKE AWAY

**BY AND BY** = “And *by and by* a cloud takes all away” – *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 1.3.87; **BLACK NIGHT** = the disgrace covering Southampton, which began in “*Makes black night* beauteous, and her old face new” – Sonnet 27, line 12

### 8 DEATH’S SECOND SELF THAT SEALS UP ALL IN REST.

**DEATH’S SECOND SELF** = alluding to Southampton as Oxford’s second self, i.e., his son; “Which, laboring for invention, bear amiss/ *The second burthen of a former child*” – Sonnet 59, lines 3-4; “What can mine own praise to *mine own self* bring,/ And what is’t but *mine own* when I praise thee?” – Sonnet 39, lines 3-4; “’Tis *thee (my self)* that for *my self* I praise” – Sonnet 62, line 13; “Make thee *another self for love of me*” – Sonnet 10, line 13; **SEALS UP** = closes up, as in a coffin; conceals from everyone; “She carved thee *for her seal*” – Nature, i.e., Elizabeth, who gave birth to Southampton, Sonnet 11, line 13; echoing the Great Seal of the Queen, who is sealing up the truth of both Oxford and their royal son

“To be *sealed up* in an eternal remembrance”

– Oxford to Robert Cecil, October 7, 1601

**ALL** = Southampton, *One for All, All for One*; **REST** = “Tired with all these, for *restful death* I cry” – Sonnet 66, line 1; “That am debarred the benefit of *rest*” – Sonnet 28, line 2; cessation from motion or disturbance; repose; peace of mind; a pause in music, echoing a pause in this funeral dirge or song; “The *rest* is silence” – *Hamlet*, 5.2.365, his dying words, referring to the “rest” of the story to be told, but also to his eternal rest; “*Rest, rest, perturbed spirit*” – *Hamlet*, 2.1.190, to the ghost of his dead father

Death is now the Phoenix’ nest,  
And the Turtle’s loyal breast  
*To eternity doth rest,*

Leaving no posterity;  
'Twas not their infirmity,  
It was married chastity.

Truth may seem, but cannot be;  
Beauty brag, but 'tis not she;  
Truth and Beauty buried be.

To this urn let those repair  
That are either true or fair:  
For these dead birds, sigh a prayer.     *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, 1601, 56-67

**9 IN ME THOU SEEST THE GLOWING OF SUCH FIRE,**

**IN ME** = repeated from lines 1 and 5; **THE GLOWING OF SUCH FIRE** = the fading embers of your royal flame; as in "*thy light's flame*" of Sonnet 1, line 6; also as in "*love-kindling fire ... holy fire of love ... dateless lively heat*" of Sonnet 153, lines 3-6, and "*heart-inflaming brand*" of Sonnet 154, line 2; "Till my bad angel fire my good one out" – Sonnet 144, line 14

**10 THAT ON THE ASHES OF HIS YOUTH DOTH LIE**

**ASHES OF HIS YOUTH** = the dying embers of Oxford's youth, in reaction to the death of Southampton's hopeful time, which has lived within Oxford himself; **LIE** = as in the coffin; also, suggesting the "lie" about them that must be told to the world from now on; "On both sides is simple truth suppressed ... Therefore I *lie* with her, and she with me" – Oxford, referring to Elizabeth, in Sonnet 138, lines 8,13

**11 AS THE DEATH-BED WHEREON IT MUST EXPIRE,**

**DEATH-BED** = "Thy *death-bed* is no lesser than thy land, wherein thou liest in reputation sick" to the King in *Richard II*, 2.1.96-97; **WHEREON IT MUST EXPIRE** = upon which the royal Tudor blood must die; **EXPIRE** = to die; to run out of time; as the "lease" of Southampton's royal blood and claim is now expiring; "I will lay odds, ere this year expire" – *2 Henry IV*, 5.5.106

**12 CONSUMED WITH THAT WHICH IT WAS NOURISHED BY.**

**CONSUMED** = devoured, destroyed, wasted; consumed by the same fire of his son's royal blood that had nourished him; "Wasting away on the dead ashes which once nourished it with living flame" – Dowden; consumed by the cinders of their son's (and therefore Oxford's) *right*, which has gone up in flames:

So between them love did shine  
*That the Turtle saw his right  
Flaming in the Phoenix' sight...*

Beauty, Truth, and Rarity,  
Grace in all simplicity,  
*Here enclosed in cinders lie.*     *The Phoenix and Turtle*, 1601, 33-36, 53-55

**THAT WHICH IT WAS NOURISHED BY** = harking all the way back to the opening verse of the collection: "*Feed'st thy light's flame* with self-substantial fuel" – Sonnet 1, line 6, referring to Southampton's source of royal blood and claim; "*Feed'st thy light's flame* with self-substantial fuel,/ Making a famine where abundance lies/ ... To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee" – Sonnet 1, lines 6-7, 14, a similar concept

**13 THIS THOU PERCEIV'ST, WHICH MAKES THY LOVE MORE STRONG**

You know all this, and in knowing this you realize that your royal blood is even stronger; **THY LOVE** = your royal blood; ("And *you and love* are still my argument" – Sonnet 76, line 10); **STRONG** = "If thou wouldst use the *strength* of all thy state" – Sonnet 96, line 12; which makes your royal blood more able:

14 **TO LOVE THAT WELL WHICH THOU MUST LEAVE ERE LONG.**

**TO LOVE THAT WELL** = to love and serve your own royal blood, which you must soon give up, in terms of making any claim to the throne or revealing the truth; to love me, Oxford = Vere = Ver = spring = well; **LEAVE ERE** = the sound of *l'hiver*, French for winter, and playing again on Ver or Vere; "To *leave* poor me thou hast the strength of laws" – Sonnet 49, line 13; "Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,/ Save that to die, I *leave* my love alone" – Sonnet 66, lines 13-14