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**ECHOES OF SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS,  
EPITAPH, AND ELEGIAC POEMS OF  
THE FIRST FOLIO IN MILTON'S  
"ON SHAKESPEAR. 1630."**

**by A. Wigfall Green**

Seven years after the unauthorized publication of the quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in 1609, Shakespeare died and the famous epitaph attributed to him became known to the world.

Seven years after his death in 1616 appeared *MR. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARES COMEDIES, HISTORIES, & TRAGEDIES*, usually known as the First Folio. Included in the First Folio of 1623 are several elegiac poems: a brief one, "To the Reader," by "B. I.," probably Ben Jonson, urging that one look not at the Droeshout portrait opposite but at the plays included in the volume; the more distinguished poem by Jonson, "To the memory of my beloued, The AVTHOR MR. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: AND what he hath left us"; "Vpon the Lines and Life of the Famous Scenicke Poet, Master WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE," by Hugh Holland; "TO THE MEMORIE of the deceased Authour Maister W. SHAKESPEARE," by L. Digges; and "To the memorie of M. W. *Shake-speare*," by "I. M.," who has not been identified.

Seven years after the publication of the First Folio appeared John Milton's sixteen verses of heroic couplets under the title "On *Shakespear*. 1630." This poem is included in the Second Folio edition, 1632, of Shakespeare's works under the title, "An Epitaph on the Admirable Dramatick Poet, W. Shakespeare." Although the date assigned by Milton to this poem, 1630, has been questioned as too early, it was republished in 1645 and 1673 among the collected poems of Milton as "On *Shakespear*. 1630."

The brief periods between the first publication of the *Sonnets*, the date of Shakespeare's death, the appearance of the First Folio, and the composition of Milton's poem, although intervals, tend to merge the twenty-one years between the publication of the *Sonnets* and the composition of Milton's poem. If Milton, who was eight when Shakespeare died, composed a great elegy on Shakespeare when he was only twenty-two, it is probable that Milton was quite familiar at this time with the 1609 edition of the *Sonnets*. The next edition did not appear until 1640. It is probable also that he was quite familiar with the First Folio, which appeared when he was fifteen.

Without suggesting that Milton suffered from echolalia, although it is a not uncommon malady among young poets, and without reflecting upon the fine melody, excellent vocabulary, and propriety of Milton's poem, there are similarities of meter, rhyme, vocabulary, and imagery between Shakespeare's sonnets and epitaph and the elegiac poems in the First Folio, on the one hand, and Milton's "On *Shakespear*. 1630" on the other. The rhyme *stones-bones* of Shakespeare's epitaph, for example, becomes *Bones-Stones* in Milton's poem, but similarities also appear in more subtle form.

Although the elegy which is also a eulogy has limitations of vocabulary and basic concepts, it may not be uninteresting to set forth some examples of the use of identical words in the poems listed; such identity of vocabulary frequently leads to similarity of underlying ideas. The postulate that Milton purposefully selected elements of the earlier poems may not be established definitively, but if he was eclectic, he chose well.

In the following passages, the verses of Milton's poem appear without indention and are numbered in the right column:<sup>1</sup> What needs my *Shakespear* for his honour'd *Bones*,<sup>2</sup> 1

Epitaph 4	And curst be he yt moves my <i>bones</i> .	
Sonnet 32.2	When that churle death my <i>bones</i> with dust	
	shall couer The labour of an <i>age</i> in piled <i>Stones</i> ,	2
Sonnet 64.2	The rich proud cost of outworne buried <i>age</i> ,	
108.10	Waighes not the dust and iniury of <i>age</i> ,	

<sup>1</sup>Extracts from the *Sonnets* are from the 1609 quarto published by The Facsimile Text Society from the copy in the British Museum.

<sup>2</sup>Key words appear in italics.

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- Jonson 17 I, therefore will begin. Soule of the *Age!*  
 43 He was not of an *age*, but for all time!
- L. Digges 11 Nor Fire, nor cankring *Age*, as Naso said,  
 Sonnet 55.4 Then vnswept *stone*, besmeer'd with sluttish  
 time.
- 65.1 SInce brasse, nor *stone*, nor earth, nor bound-  
 lesse sea,
- 94.3 Who mouing others, are themselues as *stone*,  
 L. Digges 3 Thy Tombe, thy name must when that *stone*  
 is rent,
- Or that his *hallow'd* reliques should be hid 3  
 Sonnett 108.8 Euen as when first I *hallowed* thy faire name.
- Under a *Star*-ypointing *Pyramid*? 4  
 Sonnet 26.9 Til whatsoeuer *star* that guides my mouing,  
 Jonson 77 Shine forth, thou *Starre* of Poets, and with  
 rage,  
 Sonnet 123.2 Thy *pyramyds* buylt vp with newer might
- Dear son of *memory*, great *heir* of *Fame*, 5  
 Sonnet 1.4 His tender *heire* might beare his *memory*:  
 55.8 The liuing record of your *memory*.  
 63.11 That he shall neuer cut from *memory*  
 77.6 Of mouthed graues will giue thee *memorie*,  
 81.3 From hence your *memory* death cannot take,  
 122.2 Full characterd with lasting *memory*,  
 6.14 To be deaths conquest and make wormes  
 thine *heire*.  
 80.4 To make me toung-tide speaking of your *fame*.  
 100.13 Giue my loue *fame* faster then time wasts life,  
 Hugh Holland 11 Where *Fame*, now that he gone is to the graue  
 Jonson 2 Am I thus ample to thy Booke, and *Fame*;
- What need'st thou such *weak witness* of thy *name*? 6  
 Sonnet 34.11 Th'offenders sorrow lends but *weake* reliefe  
 131.11 One on anothers necke do *witnesse* beare  
 36.12 Vnlesse thou take that honour from thy *name*:  
 71.11 Do not so much as my poore *name* reherse;  
 72.11 My *name* be buried where my body is,  
 76.7 That euery word doth almost fel (tel) my  
*name*,

- 81.5 Your *name* from hence immortall life shall  
haue,
- L. Digges 3 Thy Tombe, thy *name* must when that stone  
is rent
- Jonson 1 To draw no enuy (Shakespeare) on thy *name*,
- Thou in our *wonder* and *astonishment*<sup>3</sup> 7
- Sonnet 59.10 To this composed *wonder* of your frame,  
Jonson 18 The applause! delight! the *wonder* of our  
Stage!
- Sonnet 86.8 Giuing him ayde, my verse *astonished*.
- Hast built thy self a *live-long Monument*. 8
- Sonnet 55.8 The *living* record of your memory.  
L. Digges 2-3 The world thy Workes: thy Workes, by which,  
out-*liue* Thy Tombe, . . . .
- L. Digges 22 But crown'd with Lawrell, *liue* eternally.  
I. M. 6 Can dye, and *liue*, to acte a second part.  
Jonson 23 And art *aliue* still, while thy Booke doth *liue*,  
Sonnet 55.1 Not marble, nor the guilded *monument*,  
81.9 Your *monument* shall be my gentle verse,  
107.13 And thou in this shalt finde thy *monument*,  
L. Digges 4 And Time dissolves thy Stratford *Moniment*,  
Jonson 22 Thou are a *Moniment*, without a tombe,
- For whilst to th'shame of slow-endeavouring *art*, 9
- Sonnet 24.4 And perspectiue it is best Painters *Art*.  
29.7 Desiring this mans *art*, and that mans skope,  
66.9 And arte made tung-tide by authoritie,  
68.14 To shew faulse *Art* what beauty was of yore.  
78.13 But thou art all my *art*, and doost aduance  
I. M., 5-6 . . . An Actors *Art*,  
Can dye, and liue, to acte a second part.  
Jonson 55-56 Yet must I not giue Nature all: Thy *Art*,  
My gentle *Shakespeare*, must enjoy a part.

<sup>3</sup>Although Milton's use of *astonishment* appears under the second definition in *NED*, "Loss of sense or 'wits,'" it would appear to be related to *Astonied*, of which *NED* says, "Various writers have apparently fancied this word to be a derivative of *stony* and used it as = *petrified*." Verse 8 of "On *Shakespear*" would seem to confirm this opinion; cf. 42 of *Il Penseroso*, "Forget thy self to Marble . . ." and I 317 of *Paradise Lost*, *astonishment*.

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Thy easie <i>numbers</i> flow, and that each heart <sup>4</sup>	10
Sonnet 17.6	And in fresh <i>numbers number</i> all your graces,
38.12	Eternal <i>numbers</i> to out-lieue long date.
79.3	But now my gracious <i>numbers</i> are decayde,
100.6	In gentle <i>numbers</i> time so idely spent,
Hath from the <i>leaves</i> of thy unvalu'd <i>Book</i> ,	11
Sonnet 77.3	The vacant <i>leaues</i> thy mindes imprint will
	beare,
23.9	O let my <i>books</i> be then the eloquence,
59.7	Show me your image in some antique <i>booke</i> ,
77.14	Shall profit thee, and much inrich thy <i>booke</i> .
82.4	Of their faire subiect, blessing euery <i>booke</i> .
B. I. 9-10	. . . Reader, looke
	Not on his picture, but his <i>Booke</i> .
L. Digges 5-7	. . . This <i>Booke</i> ,
	When Brasse and Marble fade, shall make
	thee looke Fresh to all Ages:
12	Of his, thy wit-fraught <i>Booke</i> shall once
	inuade.
Jonson 2	Am I thus ample to thy <i>Booke</i> , and Fame:
23	And art aliue still, while thy <i>Booke</i> doth lie,
Those Delphick <i>lines</i> with deep impression took,	12
Sonnet 16.9	So should the <i>lines</i> of life that life repaire
18.12	When in eternall <i>lines</i> to time thou grow'st.
32.4	These poore rude <i>lines</i> of thy deceased Louer:
63.13	His beautie shall in these blacke <i>lines</i> be
	seene,
71.5	Nay if you read this <i>line</i> , remember not,
74.3	My life hath in this <i>line</i> some interest,
86.13	But when your countenance fild vp his <i>line</i> ,
103.8	Dulling my <i>lines</i> , and doing me disgrace.
115.1	THose <i>lines</i> that I before haue writ doe lie,
Hugh Holland	For though his <i>line</i> of life went soone about,
13-14	The life yet of his <i>lines</i> shall neuer out.
L. Digges 9-10	. . . eu'ry <i>Line</i> , each Verse
	Here shall reuiue, redeeme thee from thy
	Herse.

<sup>4</sup>The word *heart* appears more than thirty times in the sonnets, too frequently to give specimens.

- Jonson 30 Or sporting *Kid*, or *Marlowes* mighty *line*.  
 48 And ioy'd to weare the dressing of his *lines!*  
 68 In his well torned, and true-filed *lines*:  
 Sonnet 112.1 Your loue and pittie doth th'*impression* fill,  
 Then thou our fancy of it self bereaving, 13
- Dost make us *Marble* with too much *conceaving*;<sup>5</sup> 14  
 Sonnet 55.1-2 NOt marble, nor the goulded monument,  
 Of Princess shall out-liue this powrefull rime,  
 L. Digges 5-7 . . . This Booke,  
 When Brasse and *Marble* fade, shall make  
 thee looke Fresh to all Ages:  
 Sonnet 15.9 Then the *conceit* of this inconstant stay,  
 26.7-8 But that I hope some good *conceipt* of thine  
 In thy soules thought (all naked) will bestow  
 it:  
 108.13 Finding the first *conceit* of loue there bred,
- And so *Sepulcher'd* in such *pomp* dost lie, 15  
 Sonnet 68.5-6 Before the goulden tresses of the dead,  
 The right of *sepulchers*, were shorne away,  
 124.6 It suffers not in smilinge *pomp*, nor falls
- That *Kings* for such a *Tomb* would wish to die.<sup>6</sup> 16  
 Sonnet 29.14 That then I skorne to change my state with  
*Kings*.  
 63.6 And all those beauties whereof now he's *King*  
 87.14 In sleepe a *King*, but waking no such matter.  
 115.6 Creepe in twixt vowes, and change decrees  
 of *Kings*,  
 Hugh Holland 8 Which crown'd him *Poet* first, then *Poets King*.  
 Sonnet 3.7 Or who is he so fond will be the *tombe*,  
 4.13 Thy vnus'd beauty must be *tomb'd* with thee,  
 17.3 Though yet heauen knowes it is but as a *tombe*  
 83.12 When others would giue life, and bring a  
*tombe*.  
 101.11 To make him much out-liue a gilded *tombe*:

<sup>5</sup>The word *conceit* in the sonnets appears to be virtually synonymous with *conceiving*, gerund.

<sup>6</sup>The word *die* or variant appears twelve times in the sonnets; it inheres in the subject matter and appears to be too general a word to admit of comparison.

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- 107.14      When tyrants crests and *tombs* of brasse are  
                 spent.
- L. Digges 2-3      The world thy Workes: thy Workes, by which,  
                 out-liue Thy *Tombe*, . . . .
- Jonson 22      Thou art a Monument, without a *tombe*,

“On Shakespear. 1630” is generally accepted as the best of the many tributes to Shakespeare, probably because of its imagery, vocabulary, and unity. No greater tribute can be paid by an elegist to a deceased poet than to reflect the images, the words, and the sound waves of that poet, and to blend the ideas of other elegists in his tribute. If Milton has taken some of the loose nuggets of other poets and has molded them into a harmonious golden altar dedicated to Shakespeare, Milton is not the lesser, but the greater, sculptor-poet.