

W[illiam] S[hakespeare], "A Funeral Elegy." Edited by Donald W. Foster from W.S., A Funerall Elegye in memory of the late vertuous Maister William Peeter (London: G. Eld for T. Thorpe, 1612). [4,600 words.] Common nouns capitalized and italicized in Q are here capitalized but not italicized; italicized quotations in Q are rendered in quotation marks.

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TO MASTER JOHN PETER  
of Bowhay in Devon, Esquire.

The love I bore to your brother, and will do to his memory, hath crav'd from me this last duty of a friend; I am herein but a second to the privilege of Truth, who can warrant more in his behalf than I undertook to deliver. Exercise in this kind I will little affect, and am less addicted to, but there must be miracle in that labor which, to witness my remembrance to this departed gentleman, I would not willingly undergo. Yet whatsoever is here done, is done to him, and to him only. For whom and whose sake I will not forget to remember any friendly respects to you, or to any of those that have lov'd him for himself, and himself for his deserts.

W. S.

#### A FUNERAL ELEGY

Since Time, and his predestinated end,  
Abridg'd the circuit of his hopeful days,  
Whiles both his Youth and Virtue did intend  
The good endeavors of deserving praise,  
5 What memorable monument can last  
Whereon to build his never-blemish'd name  
But his own worth, wherein his life was grac'd-  
Sith as [that] ever he maintain'd the same?  
Oblivion in the darkest day to come,  
10 When sin shall tread on merit in the dust,  
Cannot rase out the lamentable tomb  
Of his short-liv'd deserts; but still they must,  
Even in the hearts and memories of men,  
Claim fit Respect, that they, in every limb  
15 Rememb'ring what he was, with comfort then  
May pattern out one truly good, by him.  
For he was truly good, if honest care  
Of harmless conversation may commend  
A life free from such stains as follies are,  
20 Ill recompensed only in his end.  
Nor can the tongue of him who lov'd him least  
(If there can be minority of love  
To one superlative above the rest  
Of many men in steady faith) reprove

25 His constant temper, in the equal weight  
Of thankfulness and kindness: Truth doth leave  
Sufficient proof, he was in every right  
As kind to give, as thankful to receive.  
The curious eye of a quick-brain'd survey  
30 Could scanty find a mote amidst the sun  
Of his too-short'ned days, or make a prey  
Of any faulty errors he had done-  
Not that he was above the spleenful sense  
And spite of malice, but for that he had  
35 Warrant enough in his own innocence  
Against the sting of some in nature bad.  
Yet who is he so absolutely blest  
That lives encompass'd in a mortal frame,  
Sometime in reputation not oppress'd  
40 By some in nothing famous but defame?  
Such in the By-path and the Ridgeway lurk  
That leads to ruin, in a smooth pretense  
Of what they do to be a special work  
Of singleness, not tending to offense;  
45 Whose very virtues are, not to detract  
Whiles hope remains of gain (base fee of slaves),  
Despising chiefly men in fortunes wrack'd-  
But death to such gives unrememb'ed graves.  
Now therein liv'd he happy, if to be  
50 Free from detraction happiness it be.  
His younger years gave comfortable hope  
To hope for comfort in his riper youth,  
Which, harvest-like, did yield again the crop  
Of Education, better'd in his truth.  
55 Those noble twins of heaven-infused races,  
Learning and Wit, refined in their kind  
Did jointly both, in their peculiar graces,  
Enrich the curious temple of his mind;  
Indeed a temple, in whose precious white  
60 Sat Reason by Religion oversway'd,  
Teaching his other senses, with delight,  
How Piety and Zeal should be obey'd-  
Not fruitlessly in prodigal expense  
Wasting his best of time, but so content  
65 With Reason's golden Mean to make defense  
Against the assault of youth's encouragement;  
As not the tide of this surrounding age  
(When now his father's death had freed his will)  
Could make him subject to the drunken rage  
70 Of such whose only glory is their ill.  
He from the happy knowledge of the wise  
Draws virtue to reprove secured fools  
And shuns the glad sleights of ensnaring vice  
To spend his spring of days in sacred schools.  
75 Here gave he diet to the sick desires  
That day by day assault the weaker man,  
And with fit moderation still retires

From what doth batter virtue now and then.  
But that I not intend in full discourse  
80 To progress out his life, I could display  
A good man in each part exact and force  
The common voice to warrant what I say.  
For if his fate and heaven had decreed  
That full of days he might have liv'd to see  
85 The grave in peace, the times that should succeed  
Had been best-speaking witnesses with me;  
Whose conversation so untouch'd did move  
Respect most in itself, as who would scan  
His honesty and worth, by them might prove  
90 He was a kind, true, perfect gentleman-  
Not in the outside of disgraceful folly,  
Courting opinion with unfit disguise,  
Affecting fashions, nor addicted wholly  
To unbeseeming blushless vanities,  
95 But suiting so his habit and desire  
As that his Virtue was his best Attire.  
Not in the waste of many idle words  
Car'd he to be heard talk, nor in the float  
Of fond conceit, such as this age affords,  
100 By vain discourse upon himself to dote;  
For his becoming silence gave such grace  
To his judicious parts, as what he spake  
Seem'd rather answers which the wise embrace  
Than busy questions such as talkers make.  
105 And though his qualities might well deserve  
Just commendation, yet his furnish'd mind  
Such harmony of goodness did preserve  
As nature never built in better kind;  
Knowing the best, and therefore not presuming  
110 In knowing, but for that it was the best,  
Ever within himself free choice resuming  
Of true perfection, in a perfect breast;  
So that his mind and body made an inn,  
The one to lodge the other, both like fram'd  
115 For fair conditions, guests that soonest win  
Applause; in generality, well fam'd,  
If trim behavior, gestures mild, discreet  
Endeavors, modest speech, beseeming mirth,  
True friendship, active grace, persuasion sweet,  
120 Delightful love innated from his birth,  
Acquaintance unfamiliar, carriage just,  
Offenseless resolution, wish'd sobriety,  
Clean-temper'd moderation, steady trust,  
Unburthen'd conscience, unfeign'd piety;  
125 If these, or all of these, knit fast in one  
Can merit praise, then justly may we say,  
Not any from this frailer stage is gone  
Whose name is like to live a longer day-  
Though not in eminent courts or places great  
130 For popular concourse, yet in that soil

Where he enjoy'd his birth, life, death, and seat  
Which now sits mourning his untimely spoil.  
And as much glory is it to be good  
For private persons, in their private home,  
135 As those descended from illustrious blood  
In public view of greatness, whence they come.  
Though I, rewarded with some sadder taste  
Of knowing shame, by feeling it have prov'd  
My country's thankless misconstruction cast  
140 Upon my name and credit, both unlov'd  
By some whose fortunes, sunk into the wane  
Of plenty and desert, have strove to win  
Justice by wrong, and sifted to embane  
My reputation with a witless sin;  
145 Yet time, the father of unblushing truth,  
May one day lay ope malice which hath cross'd it,  
And right the hopes of my endangered youth,  
Purchasing credit in the place I lost it.  
Even in which place the subject of the verse  
150 (Unhappy matter of a mourning style  
Which now that subject's merits doth rehearse)  
Had education and new being; while  
By fair demeanor he had won repute  
Amongst the all of all that lived there,  
155 For that his actions did so wholly suit  
With worthiness, still memorable here.  
The many hours till the day of doom  
Will not consume his life and hapless end,  
For should he lie obscur'd without a tomb,  
160 Time would to time his honesty commend;  
Whiles parents to their children will make known,  
And they to their posterity impart,  
How such a man was sadly overthrown  
By a hand guided by a cruel heart,  
165 Whereof as many as shall hear that sadness  
Will blame the one's hard fate, the other's madness;  
Whiles such as do recount that tale of woe,  
Told by remembrance of the wisest heads,  
Will in the end conclude the matter so,  
170 As they will all go weeping to their beds.  
For when the world lies winter'd in the storms  
Of fearful consummation, and lays down  
Th' unsteady change of his fantastic forms,  
Expecting ever to be overthrown;  
175 When the proud height of much affected sin  
Shall ripen to a head, and in that pride  
End in the miseries it did begin  
And fall amidst the glory of his tide;  
Then in a book where every work is writ  
180 Shall this man's actions be reveal'd, to show  
The gainful fruit of well-employed wit,  
Which paid to heaven the debt that it did owe.  
Here shall be reckon'd up the constant faith,

Never untrue, where once he love profess'd;  
185 Which is a miracle in men, one saith,  
Long sought though rarely found, and he is best  
Who can make friendship, in those times of change,  
Admired more for being firm than strange.  
When those weak houses of our brittle flesh  
190 Shall ruin'd be by death, our grace and strength,  
Youth, memory and shape that made us fresh  
Cast down, and utterly decay'd at length;  
When all shall turn to dust from whence we came  
And we low-level'd in a narrow grave,  
195 What can we leave behind us but a name,  
Which, by a life well led, may honor have?  
Such honor, O thou youth untimely lost,  
Thou didst deserve and hast; for though thy soul  
Hath took her flight to a diviner coast,  
200 Yet here on earth thy fame lives ever whole,  
In every heart seal'd up, in every tongue  
Fit matter to discourse, no day prevented  
That pities not thy sad and sudden wrong,  
Of all alike beloved and lamented.  
205 And I here to thy memorable worth,  
In this last act of friendship, sacrifice  
My love to thee, which I could not set forth  
In any other habit of disguise.  
Although I could not learn, whiles yet thou wert,  
210 To speak the language of a servile breath,  
My truth stole from my tongue into my heart,  
Which shall not thence be sund'red, but in death.  
And I confess my love was too remiss  
That had not made thee know how much I priz'd thee,  
215 But that mine error was, as yet it is,  
To think love best in silence: for I siz'd thee  
By what I would have been, not only ready  
In telling I was thine, but being so,  
By some effect to show it. He is steady  
220 Who seems less than he is in open show.  
Since then I still reserv'd to try the worst  
Which hardest fate and time thus can lay on me.  
T' enlarge my thoughts was hindered at first,  
While thou hadst life; I took this task upon me,  
225 To register with mine unhappy pen  
Such duties as it owes to thy desert,  
And set thee as a president to men,  
And limn thee to the world but as thou wert-  
Not hir'd, as heaven can witness in my soul,  
230 By vain conceit, to please such ones as know it,  
Nor servile to be lik'd, free from control,  
Which, pain to many men, I do not owe it.  
But here I trust I have discharged now  
(Fair lovely branch too soon cut off) to thee,  
235 My constant and irrefragable vow,  
As, had it chanc'd, thou mightst have done to me-

But that no merit strong enough of mine  
Had yielded store to thy well-abled quill  
Whereby t'enroll my name, as this of thine,  
240 How s'ere enriched by thy plenteous skill.  
Here, then, I offer up to memory  
The value of my talent, precious man,  
Whereby if thou live to posterity,  
Though't be not as I would, 'tis as I can:  
245 In minds from whence endeavor doth proceed,  
A ready will is taken for the deed.  
Yet ere I take my longest last farewell  
From thee, fair mark of sorrow, let me frame  
Some ampler work of thank, wherein to tell  
250 What more thou didst deserve than in thy name,  
And free thee from the scandal of such senses  
As in the rancor of unhappy spleen  
Measure thy course of life, with false pretenses  
Comparing by thy death what thou hast been.  
255 So in his mischiefs is the world accurs'd:  
It picks out matter to inform the worst.  
The willful blindness that hoodwinks the eyes  
Of men enwrapped in an earthy veil  
Makes them most ignorantly exercise  
260 And yield to humor when it doth assail,  
Whereby the candle and the body's light  
Darkens the inward eyesight of the mind,  
Presuming still it sees, even in the night  
Of that same ignorance which makes them blind.  
265 Hence conster they with corrupt commentaries,  
Proceeding from a nature as corrupt,  
The text of malice, which so often varies  
As 'tis by seeming reason underpropp'd.  
O, whither tends the lamentable spite  
270 Of this world's teenful apprehension,  
Which understands all things amiss, whose light  
Shines not amidst the dark of their dissension?  
True 'tis, this man, whiles yet he was a man,  
Sooth'd not the current of besotted fashion,  
275 Nor could disgest, as some loose mimics can,  
An empty sound of overweening passion,  
So much to be made servant to the base  
And sensual aptness of disunion'd vices,  
To purchase commendation by disgrace,  
280 Whereto the world and heat of sin entices.  
But in a safer contemplation,  
Secure in what he knew, he ever chose  
The ready way to commendation,  
By shunning all invitements strange, of those  
285 Whose illness is, the necessary praise  
Must wait upon their actions; only rare  
In being rare in shame (which strives to raise  
Their name by doing what they do not care),  
As if the free commission of their ill

290 Were even as boundless as their prompt desires;  
Only like lords, like subjects to their will,  
Which their fond dotage ever more admires.  
He was not so: but in a serious awe,  
Ruling the little ordered commonwealth  
295 Of his own self, with honor to the law  
That gave peace to his bread, bread to his health;  
Which ever he maintain'd in sweet content  
And pleasurable rest, wherein he joy'd  
A monarchy of comfort's government,  
300 Never until his last to be destroy'd.  
For in the Vineyard of heaven-favored learning  
Where he was double-honor'd in degree,  
His observation and discreet discerning  
Had taught him in both fortunes to be free;  
305 Whence now retir'd home, to a home indeed  
The home of his condition and estate,  
He well provided 'gainst the hand of need,  
Whence young men sometime grow unfortunate;  
His disposition, by the bonds of unity,  
310 So fast'ned to his reason that it strove  
With understanding's grave immunity  
To purchase from all hearts a steady love;  
Wherein not any one thing comprehends  
Proportionable note of what he was,  
315 Than that he was so constant to his friends  
As he would no occasion overpass  
Which might make known his unaffected care,  
In all respects of trial, to unlock  
His bosom and his store, which did declare  
320 That Christ was his, and he was Friendship's Rock:  
A Rock of Friendship figured in his name,  
Fore-shewing what he was, and what should be,  
Most true presage; and he discharg'd the same  
In every act of perfect amity-  
325 Though in the complemental phrase of words  
He never was addicted to the vain  
Of boast, such as the common breath affords;  
He was in use most fast, in tongue most plain,  
Nor amongst all those virtues that forever  
330 Adorn'd his reputation will be found  
One greater than his Faith, which did persevere,  
Where once it was protested, alway sound.  
Hence sprung the deadly fuel that reviv'd  
The rage which wrought his end, for had he been  
335 Slacker in love, he had been longer liv'd  
And not oppress'd by wrath's unhappy sin-  
By wrath's unhappy sin, which unadvis'd  
Gave death for free good will, and wounds for love.  
Pity it was that blood had not been priz'd  
340 At higher rate, and reason set above  
Most unjust choler, which untimely Drew  
Destruction on itself; and most unjust,

Robb'd virtue of a follower so true  
As time can boast of, both for love and trust:  
345 So henceforth all (great glory to his blood)  
Shall be but seconds to him, being good.  
The wicked end their honor with their sin  
In death, which only then the good begin.  
Lo, here a lesson by experience taught  
350 For men whose pure simplicity hath drawn  
Their trust to be betray'd by being caught  
Within the snares of making truth a pawn;  
Whiles it, not doubting whereinto it enters,  
Without true proof and knowledge of a friend,  
355 Sincere in singleness of heart, adventures  
To give fit cause, ere love begin to end:  
His unfeign'd friendship where it least was sought,  
Him to a fatal timeless ruin brought;  
Whereby the life that purity adorn'd  
360 With real merit, by this sudden end  
Is in the mouth of some in manner scorn'd,  
Made questionable, for they do intend,  
According to the tenor of the saw  
Mistook, if not observ'd (writ long ago  
365 When men were only led by Reason's law),  
That "Such as is the end, the life proves so."  
Thus he, who to the universal lapse  
Gave sweet redemption, off'ring up his blood  
To conquer death by death, and loose the traps  
370 Of hell, even in the triumph that it stood:  
He thus, for that his guiltless life was spilt  
By death, which was made subject to the curse,  
Might in like manner be reprov'd of guilt  
In his pure life, for that his end was worse.  
375 But O far be it, our unholy lips  
Should so profane the deity above  
As thereby to ordain revenging whips  
Against the day of Judgment and of Love.  
The hand that lends us honor in our days  
380 May shorten when it please, and justly take  
Our honor from us many sundry ways,  
As best becomes that wisdom did us make.  
The second brother, who was next begot  
Of all that ever were begotten yet,  
385 Was by a hand in vengeance rude and hot  
Sent innocent to be in heaven set-  
Whose fame the angels in melodious choirs  
Still witness to the world. Then why should he,  
Well-profit'd in excellent desires,  
390 Be more rebuk'd, who had like destiny?  
Those saints before the everlasting throne  
Who sit with crowns of glory on their heads,  
Wash'd white in blood, from earth hence have not gone  
All to their joys in quiet on their beds,  
395 But tasted of the sour-bitter scourge

Of torture and affliction ere they gained  
Those blessings which their sufferance did urge,  
Whereby the grace fore-promis'd they attained.  
Let then the false suggestions of the froward,  
400 Building large castles in the empty air,  
By suppositions fond and thoughts untoward  
(Issues of discontent and sick despair)  
Rebound gross arguments upon their heart  
That may disprove their malice, and confound  
405 Uncivil loose opinions which insert  
Their souls into the roll that doth unsound  
Betraying policies, and show their brains,  
Unto their shame, ridiculous; whose scope  
Is envy, whose endeavors fruitless pains,  
410 In nothing surely prosperous, but hope-  
And that same hope, so lame, so unprevailing,  
It buries self-conceit in weak opinion;  
Which being cross'd, gives matter of bewailing  
Their vain designs, on whom want hath dominion.  
415 Such, and of such condition, may devise  
Which way to wound with defamation's spirit  
(Close-lurking whisper's hidden forgeries)  
His taintless goodness, his desertful merit.  
But whiles the minds of men can judge sincerely,  
420 Upon assured knowledge, his repute  
And estimation shall be rumor'd clearly  
In equal worth--time shall to time renew 't.  
The Grave-that in his ever-empty womb  
Forever closes up the unrespected  
425 Who, when they die, die all-shall not entomb  
His pleading best perfections as neglected.  
They to his notice in succeeding years  
Shall speak for him when he shall lie below;  
When nothing but his memory appears  
430 Of what he was, then shall his virtues grow.  
His being but a private man in rank  
(And yet not rank'd beneath a gentleman)  
Shall not abridge the commendable thank  
Which wise posterity shall give him then;  
435 For Nature, and his therein happy Fate.  
Ordain'd that by his quality of mind  
T' ennoble that best part, although his state  
Were to a lower blessedness confin'd.  
Blood, pomp, state, honor, glory and command,  
440 Without fit ornaments of disposition,  
Are in themselves but heathenish and [profaned],  
And much more peaceful is a mean condition  
Which, underneath the roof of safe content,  
Feeds on the bread of rest, and takes delight  
445 To look upon the labors it hath spent  
For its own sustenance, both day and night;  
While others, plotting which way to be great,  
How to augment their portion and ambition,

Do toil their giddy brains, and ever sweat  
450 For popular applause and power's commission.  
But one in honors, like a seeled dove  
Whose inward eyes are dimm'd with dignity,  
Does think most safety doth remain above,  
And seeks to be secure by mounting high:  
455 Whence, when he falls, who did erewhile aspire,  
Falls deeper down, for that he climbed higher.  
Now men who in a lower region live  
Exempt from danger of authority  
Have fittest times in Reason's rules to thrive,  
460 Not vex'd with envy of priority,  
And those are much more noble in the mind  
Than many that have nobleness by kind.  
Birth, blood, and ancestors, are none of ours,  
Nor can we make a proper challenge to them,  
465 But virtues and perfections in our powers  
Proceed most truly from us, if we do them.  
Respective titles or a gracious style,  
With all what men in eminence possess,  
Are, without ornaments to praise them, vile:  
470 The beauty of the mind is nobleness.  
And such as have that beauty, well deserve  
Eternal characters, that after death  
Remembrance of their worth we may preserve,  
So that their glory die not with their breath.  
475 Else what avails it in a goodly strife  
Upon this face of earth here to contend,  
The good t'exceed the wicked in their life,  
Should both be like obscured in their end?  
Until which end, there is none rightly can  
480 Be termed happy, since the happiness  
Depends upon the goodness of the man,  
Which afterwards his praises will express.  
Look hither then, you that enjoy the youth  
Of your best days, and see how unexpected  
485 Death can betray your jollity to ruth  
When death you think is least to be respected!  
The person of this model here set out  
Had all that youth and happy days could give him,  
Yet could not all-encompass him about  
490 Against th'assault of death, who to relieve him  
Strook home but to the frail and mortal parts  
Of his humanity, but could not touch  
His flourishing and fair long-liv'd deserts,  
Above fate's reach, his singleness was such-  
495 So that he dies but once, but doubly lives,  
Once in his proper self, then in his name;  
Predestinated Time, who all deprives,  
Could never yet deprive him of the same.  
And had the Genius which attended on him  
500 Been possibilited to keep him safe  
Against the rigor that hath overgone him,

He had been to the public use a staff,  
Leading by his example in the path  
Which guides to doing well, wherein so few  
505 The proneness of this age to error hath  
Informed rightly in the courses true.  
As then the loss of one, whose inclination  
Strove to win love in general, is sad,  
So specially his friends, in soft compassion  
510 Do feel the greatest loss they could have had.  
Amongst them all, she who those nine of years  
Liv'd fellow to his counsels and his bed  
Hath the most share in loss: for I in hers  
Feel what distemperature this chance hath bred.  
515 The chaste embracements of conjugal love,  
Who in a mutual harmony consent,  
Are so impatient of a strange remove  
As meager death itself seems to lament,  
And weep upon those cheeks which nature fram'd  
520 To be delightful orbs in whom the force  
Of lively sweetness plays, so that asham'd  
Death often pities his unkind divorce.  
Such was the separation here constrain'd  
(Well-worthy to be termed a rudeness rather),  
525 For in his life his love was so unfeign'd  
As he was both an husband and a father-  
The one in firm affection and the other  
In careful providence, which ever strove  
With joint assistance to grace one another  
530 With every helpful furtherance of love.  
But since the sum of all that can be said  
Can be but said that "He was good" (which wholly  
Includes all excellence can be display'd  
In praise of virtue and reproach of folly).  
535 His due deserts, this sentence on him gives,  
"He died in life, yet in his death he lives."  
Now runs the method of this doleful song  
In accents brief to thee, O thou deceas'd!  
To whom those pains do only all belong  
540 As witnesses I did not love thee least.  
For could my worthless brain find out but how  
To raise thee from the sepulcher of dust,  
Undoubtedly thou shouldst have partage now  
Of life with me, and heaven be counted just  
545 If to a supplicating soul it would  
Give life anew, by giving life again  
Where life is miss'd; whereby discomfort should  
Right his old griefs, and former joys retain  
Which now with thee are leap'd into thy tomb  
550 And buried in that hollow vault of woe,  
Expecting yet a more severer doom  
Than time's strict flinty hand will let 'em know.  
And now if I have level'd mine account  
And reckon'd up in a true measured score

555 Those perfect graces which were ever wont  
To wait on thee alive, I ask no more  
(But shall hereafter in a poor content  
Immure those imputations I sustain,  
Learning my days of youth so to prevent  
560 As not to be cast down by them again)-  
Only those hopes which fate denies to grant  
In full possession to a captive heart  
Who, if it were in plenty, still would want  
Before it may enjoy his better part;  
565 From which detain'd, and banish'd in th' exile  
Of dim misfortune, has none other prop  
Whereon to lean and rest itself the while  
But the weak comfort of the hapless, Hope.  
And Hope must in despite of fearful change  
570 Play in the strongest closet of my breast,  
Although perhaps I ignorantly range  
And court opinion in my deep'st unrest.  
But whether doth the stream of my mischance  
Drive me beyond myself, fast friend, soon lost,  
575 Long may thy worthiness thy name advance  
Amongst the virtuous and deserving most,  
Who herein hast forever happy prov'd:  
In life thou liv'dst, in death thou died'st below'd.

FINIS