

**THE “SHAKESPEARE” SACRIFICE
YOUR MONUMENT
DAY FIFTY-FIVE IN THE TOWER**

Sonnet 81

*Your Name From Hence Immortal Life Shall Have
I, Once Gone, To All The World Must Die
Your Monument Shall Be My Gentle Verse
3 April 1601*

Oxford records the reason for what will become “the Shakespeare mystery” in a single verse. He testifies that he faces the obliteration of his identity “to all the world” because of his sacrifice to gain ultimate liberation for his royal son, Henry Wriothesley, from the Tower of London. He vows to construct the Monument of the Sonnets to preserve this truth “which eyes not yet created shall o’er-read.” This sonnet is a glorious homage to Southampton as a king.

Sonnet 81

Translation

Or I shall live your Epitaph to make,
Or you survive when I in earth am rotten,
From hence your memory death cannot take,
Although in me each part will be forgotten.

Whether I survive to create your epitaph
Or you continue living when I am dead,
From now on death can’t destroy your identity,
Even if everything about me is forgotten.

Your name from hence immortal life shall have
Though I (once gone) to all the world must die.
The earth can yield me but a common grave,
When you entombed in men’s eyes shall lie.

From now on, you will live forever as Henry IX,
Though I, when dead, cannot be linked with you.
I will go to my grave like a commoner,
While you live in these sonnets, which entomb you.

Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
Which eyes not yet created shall o’er-read,
And tongues to be your being shall rehearse,
When all the breathers of this world are dead.

My royal verse will stand as your monument,
Which future people will read over and over,
And people to come will speak repeatedly of you,
When all who live now in England are dead.

You still shall live (such vertue hath my Pen)
Where breath most breathes, even in the
mouths of men.

You will always live (such truth has my pen)
Where it counts most: for readers in the future.

Sonnet 81

1 OR SHALL I LIVE YOUR EPITAPH TO MAKE

OR = if either I live long enough to create your memorial; following immediately from the previous sonnet, Oxford now suddenly suggests something quite dramatically different

YOUR EPITAPH = Inscription on a tomb or monument; “an inscription upon a tomb; hence, occasionally, a brief composition characterizing a deceased person, and expressed as if intended to be inscribed on his tombstone” – *OED*

Good my lord, will you see the players well bestowed? Do you hear, let them be well used, for they are the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time. After your death you were better have a bad *epitaph* than their ill report while you live
Hamlet, 2.2.523-527

2 OR YOU SURVIVE WHEN I IN EARTH AM ROTTEN,

Or if you continue to live when I am dead

3 FROM HENCE YOUR MEMORY DEATH CANNOT TAKE,

FROM HENCE, etc. = henceforth death cannot rob the memory of you; **YOUR MEMORY** = “The living record of *your memory*” – Sonnet 55, line 8; “My life hath in this line some interest,/ Which for *memorial still with thee* shall stay” – Sonnet 74, lines 3-4; “Then there’s hope a great man’s *memory* may outlive his life half a year” – the Prince, sarcastically, in *Hamlet*, 3.2.133-134; **DEATH CANNOT TAKE** = “Gainst *death and all oblivious enmity*/ Shall you pace forth!” – Sonnet 55, lines 9-10

4 ALTHOUGH IN ME EACH PART WILL BE FORGOTTEN.

ALTHOUGH, etc. = although each aspect of me (especially my identity as your father) will be forgotten in the time to come; **FORGOTTEN** = “And so having choler to break off all, and *myself forgotten*” – Oxford to Burghley, March 20, 1595

5 YOUR NAME FROM HENCE IMMORTAL LIFE SHALL HAVE,

YOUR NAME = Southampton, his own name; and, if the Sonnets survive, his identity as the rightful Prince Henry or King Henry IX; “And I again, in Henry’s *royal name*, as deputy unto that gracious king” – *1 Henry VI*, 5.3.160-161; Henry Wriothesley’s name has in fact been immortalized by “Shakespeare’s” dedications to him and him alone; **FROM HENCE** = from this time forward, as a result of these verses of the Sonnets (in addition to the “Shakespeare” dedications to you); “hence” repeated from line 3 above; **IMMORTAL LIFE SHALL HAVE** = will live forever, in the eyes of readers of these Sonnets, in the future; (“Add an *immortal title to your crown!*” – *Richard II*, 1.1.24)

6 THOUGH I (ONCE GONE) TO ALL THE WORLD MUST DIE.

A concise summary of Oxford’s sacrifice to “Shakespeare” on behalf of his son, who will continue to live in the Sonnets: though I, once dead, must be forgotten by England and the whole world; **GONE** = deceased, but also departed, possibly suggesting that Oxford intends to leave England once James becomes king and Southampton is liberated and pardoned; the possible distinction between “gone” and “dead” offers this intriguing avenue of speculation; **ALL** = Southampton; (“as *all the world* doth judge” – Oxford to Burghley, September 1572; “the *fable of the world*” – Oxford to Burghley, April 27, 1576; “sith *all the world* doth know” – Oxford to Robert Cecil, November 22, 1601)

7 THE EARTH CAN YIELD ME BUT A COMMON GRAVE,

COMMON GRAVE = an ordinary grave, as opposed to one citing him as father of a king; in fact, Oxford will receive no recorded funeral; he will be buried in an unmarked grave (though possibly his body was moved later to Westminster Abbey); and he will leave no will of record.

8 WHEN YOU ENTOMBED IN MEN’S EYES SHALL LIE.

When you will be preserved in the tomb of this monument of verse, for men to read about; (“Who will believe my verse in time to come/ If it were filled with your most high deserts?/ Though yet heaven knows it is but as a *tomb*/ Which hides your life and shows not half your parts” – Sonnet 17, lines 1-4; “And thou in this shalt find thy monument,/ When tyrants’ crests and *tombs* of brass are spent” – Sonnet 107, lines 13-14); “and now *all men’s eyes*” – Oxford to Burghley, September 1572; “to *bury and ensevel your works in the grave of oblivion*” – Oxford to Thomas Bedingfield in his prefatory letter to the latter’s translation of *Cardanus’ Comforte*, 1573; “A man in hew all *Hews* in his controlling,/ Which steals *men’s eyes* and women’s souls amazeth” – Sonnet 20, lines

7-8; “When in disgrace with Fortune and *men’s eyes*” – Sonnet 29, line 1; “Your praise shall still find room/ Even in *the eyes of all posterity*/ ... You live in this, and dwell *in lovers’ eyes*” – Sonnet 55, lines 10-11

That did my ripe thoughts in my brain inhearse,
Making their tomb the womb wherein they grew. Sonnet 86, lines 3-4

9 YOUR MONUMENT SHALL BE MY GENTLE VERSE,

These royal sonnets will be your monument, similar to the Pyramids of ancient Egypt, built to preserve dynastic rulers or pharaohs (who are gods on earth, like you)

“Again we see if our friends be dead, we cannot show or declare our affection more than by erecting them of *tombs*: Whereby when they be dead indeed, yet *make we them live*, as it were, again through their *monument*. But with me behold it happeneth far better, for in your lifetime I shall erect you such a *monument* that, as I say, in your lifetime, you shall see how noble a shadow of your virtuous life shall hereafter remain when you are dead and gone. And in your lifetime, again I say, I shall give you that *monument* and *remembrance of your life* whereby I may declare my goodwill....”

- Oxford to Thomas Bedingfield, in his prefatory letter to the latter’s translation of *Cardanus’ Comforte*, 1573

Not marble, nor the gilded monument
Of Princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme
But you shall shine more bright in these contents,
Than unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time. Sonnet 55, lines 1-2

Ever beloved and loving may his rule be,
And when old time shall lead him to his end,
Goodness and he fill up one monument! *Henry VIII*, 2.1.92-94

And thou in this shalt find thy monument,
When tyrants’ crests and tombs of brass are spent. Sonnet 107, lines 13-14

10 WHICH EYES NOT YET CREATED SHALL O’ER-READ,

EYES = the adoring eyes of your subjects, of readers; **EYES NOT YET CREATED, Etc.** = The eyes of future generations will read over and over, a direct statement that Oxford now intends the Sonnets not for contemporary readers but for those to come in posterity; “all men’s eyes” – Oxford to Burghley, September 1572

11 AND TONGUES TO BE YOUR BEING SHALL REHEARSE,

TONGUES TO BE = future voices, which will not be “tongue-tied”; **YOUR BEING SHALL REHEARSE** = will repeat their praises of your royal being over and over, by reading this Book of Sonnets; “And every fair with his fair doth *rehearse*” – Sonnet 21, line 4, referring to the Earl of Southampton as “every fair” or E. Ver’s royal son, i.e., every king repeats his royalty to himself over and over; (perhaps a glance also at the plays of “Shakespeare” – whose works are dedicated to Southampton – being “rehearsed” on the stage in ages to come

12 WHEN ALL THE BREATHERS OF THIS WORLD ARE DEAD.

ALL = Southampton, *One for All, All for One*; **ALL THE BREATHERS** = everyone alive; **OF THIS WORLD** = in our contemporary England, in the current civilized world

13 YOU STILL SHALL LIVE (SUCH VERTUE HATH MY PEN)

You will live forever; “His beauty shall in these black lines be seen./ And they *shall live*, and he in them still green” – Sonnet 63, lines 13-14, with “his beauty” referring to Southampton’s blood

inherited from the Queen; and therefore his relationship to Elizabeth as her son will live forever; **VERTUE** = power, related to “Ver” or truth; i.e., such power of truth has my pen; “And maiden *vertue* rudely strumpeted” – Sonnet 66, line 6

Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn
 The living record of your memory.
 'Gainst death and all oblivious enmity
 Shall you pace forth! Your praise shall still find room
 Even in the eyes of all posterity
 That wear this world out to the ending doom. Sonnet 55, lines 7-12

14 WHERE BREATH MOST BREATHES, EVEN IN THE MOUTHS OF MEN.

Wherever people are alive, speaking to each other; “So long *as men can breathe* or eyes can see./
 So long lives this, and *this gives life to thee*” – Sonnet 18, lines 13-14; **THE MOUTHS OF MEN**
 = the talk of people in the future; “to face the light and *the eyes of men*” – Oxford to the Reader of
The Courtier by Castiglione, 1572; “to be sealed up in *an eternal remembrance* to yourself” –
 Oxford to Robert Cecil, October 7, 1601