

Notes on the Dedication to the First Folio of 1623.
Wednesday, June 30, 1982

To the Reader.

This Figure, that thou here seeft put,
It vvas for gentle Shakespeare cut;
Wherein the Grauer had a strife
with Nature, to out-doo the life :
O, could he but haue drawne his wit
As well in brasse, as he hath hit
Hisface ; the Print would then furpasse
All, that vvas euer vvrit in brasse.
But, since he cannot, Reader, looke
Not on his Picture, but his Booke.

B. I.

Yesterday I suddenly noticed this properly, below the Droughout portrait in my big Oxford Shakespeare. It is, I think, the evidence I have long been looking for, for the existence of engraved plates, made of brass, from which the figures behind the plays may be printed off.

I would gloss it like this:

1. The figure that thou here seest put
2. It was for gentle Shakespeare cut

The picture was engraved for Shakespeare; just as a coat might have been made for Shakespeare: and/or 'for' = instead of = 'He read his part for him'.

3. Wherein the graver had a strife
4. With Nature, to out-do the life.

In the Oxford English Dictionary the first meaning of out-do is '*put out*' (So one could 'out-do' a light?) Next, '*excel*' etc. *then, defeat, overcome*.

'The engraver battled with Nature to put out or extinguish the life' – because the picture is quite lifeless; because, if you put a mask without holes on to a man's face, he cannot breathe and dies; because 'graver' is perhaps grave-maker as well as en-graver; because this perhaps also speaks of the brass figures.

There was surely a battle between the order they demanded of the poet, and the wild, free impulse of words within him.

5. O, could he but have drawn his wit
6. As well in brass as he hath hit
7. His face: the Print would then surpass
8. All, that was ever writ in brass.

One meaning of 'hit' is 'wound', 'hurt'; also, in the saying 'hit his face', is indistinguishable from 'hid his face' with its biblical overtones.

So, not: 'got his face just right,' but, 'damaged his face', or 'hidden, covered, his face' - again the mask theme. 'Drawn his wit ... in brass' = engraved the geometrical figures that stand behind each one of the plays. When these are used for the making of paper copies, yes, it will be the more wonderful than anything 'writ in brass' (again the biblical echo).

The 'could he but have,' does it imply that he definitely couldn't? Or that Johnson is pretending to be an ignoramus? Or that someone else, not Droushout, engraved the figures on the brass plates?

9. But, since he cannot, reader, look,

10. Not on his Picture, but his Book.

The 'he --- his --- his' should naturally refer to the same person and can all be Shakespeare. 'Cannot' would properly be could not, if it referred to the engraver. 'Since he (Shakespeare) cannot do so, you - reader, look on his book (which is more interesting than this picture)'. We only have to accentuate the 'we' for this meaning to be entirely natural.

Shakespeare cannot 'look in his book', because he has been dead for seven years. Neither can the picture of him look on the book - for it is part of the book, and, besides it seems the two eyes do not look through cut holes. The work has painted eyes and makes the man blind.

'look not on his picture', already tells us that the picture is no likeness - not worth looking at. Or is it to put us off looking at it properly for a few hundred years? The book first - later the picture - and then, perhaps not the common reader. For I suspect this picture is geometrically related to the figures.

Fragmentary notes follow:

Trifle is rel. to truffer (Oxford English Dictionary), to make sport of, deceive, laugh at:

1. Trans. to cheat, delude, befool; to mock - 1533

2. intr. To say what is untrue, etc.

Trifle: sb.

1. A false or idle tale etc, a jest, etc.

2. A matter of little value.

3. A small article, toy, trinket

4. A literary work, a piece of music etc., light and trivial in style.

5. A small sum of money.

6. Light confectionary sponge-cake 1781

7. A kind of pewter of medium hardness; in pl. also articles made of this.

PEWTER: a grey alloy of tin and lead or (sometimes) other metals.

From Astrology in Medical (?)

Rashness:

Subjects of Mars: hasty, foolhardy

Fear?

Subjects of Saturn 'prudent', investigators of mysteries; (masters of) Black Art.

And because painters use lead?

The metal of Mars is iron, and that of Saturn is lead.

Could one make 'trifles', things of Pewter, from lead and iron? Will they rust?

What were Sundials made of?

It is thought the Black Death arose through a conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter and Mars-
Very unlucky.

Is the Astrological Tradition that lead and iron are especially diverse?