Introduction

All the Sonnets of Shakespeare?

For most people the phrase 'Shakespeare's Sonnets' refers to the 154 poems published in 1609 under the title *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Never before Imprinted*.[1] These have since appeared in numerous editions in print and on-line, ranging from plain-text reproductions through illustrated gift-books to collections with varying amounts of editorial material. *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1609) have been translated into most of the world's languages, anthologised, modernised, and set to music; they have inspired other works of art including plays, novels, other poetry, songs, ballets, and films; and they have been performed and recorded in a variety of media.

But the sonnets that appeared first in 1609 represent only a limited proportion of Shakespeare's uses of sonnet form. Shakespeare includes sonnets in his plays at many points in his career to change, vary, and heighten the dramatic mood. The manner in which he does so resembles that in which other writers of his time, such as Sir Philip Sidney (1554–86) and Robert Greene (1558–92), interspersed their prose fictions with poems, some elaborate in form, and in which dramatists, including John Lyly (1553–1606) and Shakespeare himself, dotted their plays with song lyrics. Martin Wiggins's and Catherine Richardson's multi-volumed *British Drama 1533–1642: A Catalogue* (from 2011) shows that even before Shakespeare wrote, writers of pageants and entertainments used sonnet form for set pieces such as prologues and addresses to the monarch. Shakespeare seems, on the surviving evidence, to be a pioneer in broadening the stylistic range of drama by using sonnet form for spoken dialogue in the linguistic fabric of plays.

1 Images of the 1609 quarto's title page: *SHAKE-SPEARES SONNETS. Neuer before Imprinted* (London: G. Eld for T.T., 1609) are easily viewable on-line. Search for 'Shakespeare's Sonnets title page' in Google, and click 'images'.

Sonnets alter the verbal and aural textures of the drama. In hearing them, his audiences may be set momentarily at a critical distance from the action, character, and story. Sometimes they can be highly comic, as in *Love's Labour's Lost*, when the King of Navarre and his Lords speak rather laboured poems of their own composition (pp. 83–8, this volume). Sonnets are used for moments of personal revelation within passages of dialogue, as in Valentine's sonnet-like letter in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (p. 50) and in *The Comedy of Errors* when the form reflects the inescapably transfixed and confused state of mind of Antipholus of Syracuse (p. 82). Sonnets served Shakespeare as the structure for prologues, as in *Romeo and Juliet* (pp. 89 and 91), and for epilogues, as in *Henry V* (p. 198) and the co-authored *All Is True* (*Henry VIII*) (p. 230). Romeo and Juliet famously share the speaking of a sonnet when they simultaneously fall in love at first sight (p. 90). In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Helen speaks a sonnet and writes a confessional letter to her mother-in-law, the Countess, which Shakespeare casts into the form of a sonnet (pp. 224–5). As his style of versification developed, moving away from the relative formality of his earlier work to the stylistic and rhythmic freedom of his later plays, he found less use for the sonnet structure, but even so it is present in later plays as well. The prophecies of the goddess Diana in *Pericles* (p. 227) and the god Jupiter in *Cymbeline* (p. 228) emphasise their other-worldliness through their use of the sonnet form.

This volume contains all the surviving sonnets of Shakespeare. It includes the 154 collected together and published in 1609 as *Shakespeare's Sonnets*; alternative versions of 2 of them, as well as 3 of uncertain authorship but attributed to him in the unauthorised collection published as *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599); and 23 that he incorporated into the plays, making a total of 182 sonnets. For the first time in their history, we endeavour to arrange them, so far as current scholarship allows, in the order in which they were written.

When Did Shakespeare Start Writing Sonnets?

In the opening scene of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the lovelorn Abraham Slender, seeking inspiration for his wooing of Mistress Anne

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780841.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Page, says 'I had rather than forty shillings I had my book of songs and sonnets here' (1.1.181–2). He is speaking of the book published by Richard Tottel in 1557 – over forty years before the play was first staged – as *Songes and Sonnettes written by the right honorable Lorde Henry Haward late Earl of Surrey, and other.* The word *sonnet* comes from the Italian *sonnetto*, meaning 'a little sound' or 'song'. The first sonnets in the now familiar fourteen-line form were written by Italian poets including Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) and Francesco Petrarch (1304–74). In early English usage the word could refer to any brief piece of lyric verse, and this meaning survived even after the fourteen-line form was introduced into English. *Songs and Sonnets* – often referred to as Tottel's *Miscellany* – the first-ever published anthology of English verse – introduced to the English reading public both the word *sonnet* and the poetic forms to which it can be applied. It includes translations of sonnets by Francesco Petrarch and other writers. Frequently revised, Tottel's *Miscellany* appeared in eight subsequent editions up to 1587 (when Shakespeare was twenty-three years old) and is one of the very few books written during Shakespeare's era to be mentioned in his writings.[2]

Most early sonnets are secular love poems, but they could also be religious in tone and subject matter. In fact the first English sonnet sequence is Anne Locke's *A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner*, published as early as 1560. In 1575 the soldier-poet George Gascoigne (1535–77) wrote: 'some think that all poems being short may be called sonnets', and John Donne's (1572–1631) *Songs and Sonnets*, printed posthumously as late as 1633, contains no poems written in regular sonnet form. Nevertheless, Gascoigne went on to write: 'I can best allow to call those sonnets which are of fourteen lines containing ten syllables. The first twelve do rhyme in staves of four lines by cross metre, and the last two, rhyming together, do conclude the whole.'[3] Two standard sonnet structures were, however, in common

2 Another example is Beatrice's mention of *The Hundred Merry Tales* in *Much Ado About Nothing* (2.1.120).

3 George Gascoigne, *Certain Notes of Instruction* (1575), in *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 237–47 (p. 245).

use in Shakespeare's time. Both are composed of fourteen iambic pentameter lines – that is, lines having (like regular blank verse) ten syllables with five stresses. The difference between the two structures lies in the rhyme scheme. The less common form, known as the Spenserian Sonnet, because of its use by Sir Edmund Spenser (1552–99), rhymes *abab-bcbc-cdcd-ee.* More usually, an English poet would structure a sonnet around fourteen lines made up of three quatrains (four-line units) followed by a couplet, rhyming: *abab-cd-cd-efef-gg*. This has become known as the Shakespearian Sonnet and is exemplified by Shakespeare's regular use of it.

Though Tottel's *Miscellany* is not likely to have formed part of the classics-based Stratford grammar school curriculum, the teenage Shakespeare must surely have owned a copy. And it seems likely that, aged around seventeen, he attempted to further his courtship by imitating its use of sonnet form, writing for a real-life Anne – Anne Hathaway – the sonnet printed in *Shakespeare's Sonnets* as Sonnet 145.[4] It ends with a pun on her surname:

> 'I hate' from hate away she threw,
> And saved my life, saying – 'not you'.

Simple in diction and in syntax, it is untypical in its line length among his wider sonnet collection. We place this sonnet early in our chronologically ordered edition.

It is possible, however, that Shakespeare had written sonnets even earlier, when he was a schoolboy. Sonnets 153 and 154, printed last in the 1609 volume, are anomalous in several respects. They bear no clear relationship to the rest of the collection. Far from being intimate love poems, like some (though by no means all) of the other sonnets, they are impersonal narratives, and each tells the same story though in different form. Both are translations of the same six-line Greek narrative (often referred to as an epigram) by one Marianus Scholasticus (fifth to sixth centuries AD), which circulated in

4 This connection was not made until A. J. Gurr's 'Shakespeare's First Poem: Sonnet 145', *Essays in Criticism*, 21 (1971), 221–6.

manuscript and was first printed in Florence in 1494, and published in Latin in 1603. No one knows where Shakespeare found this widely disseminated Greek text, or whether he knew it in the original Greek or in Latin. It seems reasonable to suggest that it formed part of his early classical education, in the course of which he acquired what Ben Jonson (1572–1637) was to describe (in his memorial poem at the front of the 1623 Folio of Shakespeare's works) as 'small Latin and less Greek'. The existence of two separate versions of the same poem savours strongly of an academic exercise. May the books of exercises prescribed for the pupils of the King's School, Stratford-upon-Avon have included one in which the Greek text was set as a translation exercise?[5] And is it possible that Shakespeare exercised his budding talent for poetic composition first by translating these lines and then, dissatisfied by his first attempt – perhaps as the result of criticism from his teacher – producing a more coherent version? Rendered simply into modern prose, the Greek reads:

> Beneath these plane trees, detained by gentle slumber, Love slept, having put his torch in the care of the Nymphs; but the Nymphs said to one another 'Why wait? Would that together with this we could quench the fire in the hearts of men.' But the torch set fire even to the water, and with hot water thenceforth the Love-Nymphs fill the bath.[6]

Critics and editors – some of them apparently unaware of the classical source – have often related the poems to Shakespeare's sex life, suggesting that they tell of his personal search for medicinal baths, possibly in the city of Bath, to treat a venereal disease. But the closeness of the story told in both poems to the text of its original source surely suggests, rather, that it is an academic exercise in translation, and this impression is heightened by the fact that Sonnet 154 is clearly the earlier version, clarified and improved in Sonnet

5 'He may even have seen the Greek at school', writes David West, in *Shakespeare's Sonnets: With a New Commentary* (London: Duckworth, 2007), p. 468.

6 Colin Burrow (ed.), *The Complete Sonnets and Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 686.

153 – in other words, Shakespeare wrote a complete sonnet based on a Greek text, and later – but probably not much later – realised that he could do better and composed Sonnet 153, while retaining both the revised and the unrevised version among his papers.[7] Thus the two poems give us a rare (if relatively trivial) insight into his creative processes, most closely paralleled perhaps by the accidental survival in print of two versions of lines spoken by Biron in *Love's Labour's Lost* (4.3 from line 294). Their placing as the final poems in the 1609 collection acknowledges their distinctiveness.

In either late 1598 or 1599, there appeared a slim volume of twenty poems called *The Passionate Pilgrim*, said on its title page to be by William Shakespeare and published by William Jaggard – later one of the publishers of the Shakespeare First Folio of 1623. It is a catchpenny volume, clearly put together by the publisher with no input from Shakespeare; nevertheless, it sold well enough for a reprint to appear soon after the first edition. The first two poems are versions of Shakespeare's Sonnets 138 and 144. These poems used to be regarded as debased versions of the later-printed poems, but it is now thought that they are early versions of poems that Shakespeare later revised into the form in which they appeared in 1609. We include them in our edition as independent poems, earlier versions.

The Passionate Pilgrim also includes versions of passages from *Love's Labour's Lost*, which had appeared in print the previous year. We include only the later versions published in 1609 but collate the differences to be found in the 1599 texts. The remaining fifteen poems in *The Passionate Pilgrim* include some that are known to be by other writers, including Richard Barnfield, Bartholomew Griffin, and Christopher Marlowe – a version of his popular lyric 'Come live with me and be my love', to which Shakespeare refers in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (3.1.16–20 and 22–5). There are also four poems on the theme of Venus and Adonis, one of which appears to have been written by Bartholomew Griffin be-

7 James Hutton, 'Analogues of Shakespeare's Sonnets 153–4', *Modern Philology*, 38 (1941), 385–403.

cause it appears in his *Fidessa* (1596). The remaining three are usually dismissed as imitations of Shakespeare rather than as examples of his work. But in a well-argued though neglected article published in 1975, C. H. Hobday[8] revived and reinforced a suggestion by Edmond Malone (1741–1812), later supported by John Masefield (1878–1967) and John Middleton Murry (1889–1957), that Shakespeare wrote the three poems as early sketches for *Venus and Adonis* (published in 1593). Finding this plausible, we place them early in our chronological ordering.

It was not until 1609, long after Shakespeare composed his first sonnets, that his non-dramatic ones appeared in print, as *Shakespeare's Sonnets* 'never before imprinted', clearly advertising itself as a retrospective publication, and with a suggestion that they were eagerly awaited – a bit of a publishing coup. By then the vogue for sonnet sequences had long passed. After the sonnets themselves appeared, 'A Lover's Complaint', a narrative poem of 329 lines which is sometimes read as being thematically connected to the sonnets.[9] The book was published by Thomas Thorpe, a reputable publisher with no other known connection to Shakespeare. Not reprinted until 1640, it had nothing like the success of *Venus and Adonis*, which went through at least ten editions during his lifetime. Nevertheless, Shakespeare's mastery of the sonnet form warranted international comparison by 1613. His friend Leonard Digges (who wrote one of the memorial poems for the First Folio of 1623) remarked that the sonnets of the Spanish playwright Lope de Vega (1562–1635) were thought of in Spain 'as in England we should our William Shakespeare'.[10]

8 C. H. Hobday, 'Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* Sonnets', in *Shakespeare Survey 26*, ed. Kenneth Muir (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 103–9.

9 John Kerrigan was influential in discerning a significant literary relationship between the Sonnets and 'A Lover's Complaint' in his edition: *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint*, The Penguin Shakespeare (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 13–18. Shakespeare's authorship of 'A Lover's Complaint' has been disputed.

10 Paul Morgan, 'Our Will Shakespeare and Lope de Vega: An Unrecorded Contemporary Document', in *Shakespeare Survey 16*, ed. Allardyce Nicoll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 118–20 (p. 118).

Writing Sonnets in the Plays

Abraham Slender is not the only character in a Shakespeare play to wish he could write a sonnet. In what is probably Shakespeare's first single-authored play, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, written possibly before 1591, when the sonnet vogue began, Proteus, enjoined by the Duke to persuade Silvia to fall in love with the foolish Thurio, advises Thurio to

> lay lime to tangle her desires
> By wailful sonnets, whose composèd rhymes
> Should be full-fraught with serviceable vows.
>
> (3.2.68–70)

The Duke agrees that this might help: 'much is the force of heaven-bred poesy'; and Proteus provides Thurio with a template for the content of a conventional love sonnet along with an account of the frame of mind that will be conducive to its composition:

> Say that upon the altar of her beauty
> You sacrifice your tears, your sighs, your heart.
> Write till your ink be dry, and with your tears
> Moist it again, and frame some feeling line
> That may discover such integrity.
> For Orpheus' lute was strung with poets' sinews,
> Whose golden touch could soften steel and stones,
> Make tigers tame, and huge leviathans
> Forsake unsounded deeps to dance on sands.
>
> (3.2.72–80)

The implication is that the writer must personally feel the emotion that he wishes to express in verse. Thurio agrees that this is good advice, and, saying 'I have a sonnet that will serve the turn', says he will go off to seek out 'some gentlemen well skilled in music' to accompany him. (This may suggest that he is thinking of a 'sonnet' in the sense of a love lyric to be set to music.) When, however, Proteus serenades Silvia it is on his own behalf, not Thurio's, and the words of his song, 'Who is Silvia?', do not fall into conventional sonnet form.

Fascinatingly, we also have a little-known scene in which Shakespeare actually shows someone trying – but failing – to write a love sonnet. This comes in a joint-authored play, *Edward III*, composed some time between 1588 and 1594. The play has only come to be included in mainstream editions of Shakespeare's works since Giorgio Melchiori's Cambridge University Press edition of 1998, and the identity of its other author or authors is unknown, but the sonnet-writing scene is now recognised as being by Shakespeare.

In it, King Edward III (who is married) falls madly in love while on a Scottish campaign with the virtuous (and also married) Countess of Salisbury as soon as he sees her, and before long is so visibly besotted that his servant Lodowick says

> Then Scottish wars, farewell. I fear, 'twill prove
> A ling'ring English siege of peevish love.
>
> (2.188–9)

Seeking to seduce the Countess, Edward calls for Lodowick, who he says is 'well read in poetry' (a phrase that also occurs in *The Taming of the Shrew*, 1.2.168), instructing him to bring pen, ink, and paper and to make sure that they can 'walk and meditate alone'. Privacy, it seems, is desirable for poetic composition. The King, lacking confidence in his poetical powers, says he will 'acquaint' Lodowick 'with' his 'passion, / Which he shall shadow with a veil of lawn' – a fanciful way of saying 'turn into verse' – 'Through which the queen of beauty's queen shall see / Herself the ground of my infirmity' (2.221–4). He retires with Lodowick to a 'summer arbour', then instructs him to

> invocate some golden muse
> To bring thee hither an enchanted pen
> That may for sighs set down true sighs indeed,
> Talking of grief, to make thee ready groan,
> And when thou writ'st of tears, encouch the word
> Before and after with such sweet laments
> That it may raise drops in a Tartar's eye,
> And make a flint-heart Scythian pitiful –
> For so much moving hath a poet's pen.
>
> (2.231–9)

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780841.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(This is interestingly analogous to lines spoken by Biron in *Love's Labour's Lost*:

> Never durst poet touch a pen to write
> Until his ink were tempered with love's sighs;
> O, then his lines would ravish savage ears,
> And plant in tyrants mild humility.
>
> (4.3.322–5))

King Edward praises the Countess in extravagant, even comically hyperbolical terms, instructing Lodowick to call her 'Better than beautiful' (2.250), to 'Devise for fair a better word than fair' (2.251), saying that anything Lodowick may write is exceeded 'Ten times ten thousand more' by the value of the woman he is praising (2.256). Faced with such hyperbole, Lodowick bemusedly enquires 'Write I to a woman?', to which the King replies in exasperation 'What think'st thou I did bid thee praise? A horse?' (2.264).

Poor Lodowick says he needs more information about the woman's 'condition or state' before he can do as the King wishes, and the King embarks upon a further extended encomium of his beloved's beauty and virtue. The hapless servant gets no further with his sonnet than 'More fair and chaste than is the queen of shades' (2.307) – presumably referring to Diana, goddess of the moon and of chastity – before the King stops him, objecting both to the comparison with the moon and to praise of the Countess as chaste – common in Petrarchan love poetry – whereas he (rather crudely) says he 'had rather have her chased than chaste' (2.320). Then, in seeking to give Lodowick a sense of the kind of sonnet he wants him to write, he rhapsodises at length about the Countess, and, while so doing, speaks a foreshortened sonnet, eleven lines long (see p. 54). At last, the King permits Lodowick to start the second line of his suspended sonnet, 'More bold in constancy' (2.335), before interrupting him again – he does not wish her to be 'constant' to her husband – and finally saying he will take over the composition of the sonnet himself. He is interrupted, however, by the entrance of the Countess and pretends that he and his servant have been drawing up battle plans.

Later in this (very wordy) scene, the King declares his love to the Countess, she repudiates it, and he seeks in vain to get her father, the Earl of Warwick, to persuade her to yield herself to him. Warwick's final speech, during which he commends the Countess for her virtue, is made up of a series of aphorisms including one – 'Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds' (2.619) – that also forms the final line of Sonnet 94. This is the only occasion on which a full line from one of Shakespeare's sonnets is duplicated in one of his plays. Though it sounds proverbial, it has not been found elsewhere. In addition to this line, Sonnet 94 includes other phrases from this scene (at lines 1, 12), as also do Sonnets 95 (line 2) and 142 (line 6).[11] The phrases are identified in the notes of this volume.

This episode of *Edward III* is based on a tale in the popular anthology of short stories known as *Painter's Palace of Pleasure*, by William Painter (1540?–94), first published in 1566–7 and revised and expanded to include over 100 stories in 1575. In Painter, as in *Edward III*, the King gets his secretary to woo the Countess on his behalf, but not by addressing a sonnet to her.

The most heavily sonnet-laden of all Shakespeare's plays is *Love's Labour's Lost*, written we believe around 1594–5, at the height of the fashion for sonnet writing. The climax of the play comes in the great scene in which one by one the King and his three friends are seen and overheard reading sonnets that they have composed which are addressed to the Princess and her ladies-in-waiting with whom they have fallen in love. As the scene opens we see Biron '*with a paper in his hand*', initially trying to resist the thought that he may be in love: 'I will not love. If I do, hang me' (4.3.7–8). But as he imagines Rosaline he capitulates: 'O, but her eye! By this light, but for her eye I would not love her. Yes, for her two eyes. Well, I do nothing i' the world but lie, and lie in my throat. By heaven, I do love, and it hath taught me to rhyme and to be melancholy' (4.3.8–12). He goes on: 'Well, she hath one of my sonnets already. The clown bore it, the fool sent it, and the lady hath it.' (4.1.14–15). He is speaking of the 'sealed-up counsel',

11 Giorgio Melchiori, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Meditations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

which we have not yet heard, and that he has asked the clown Costard to deliver to Rosaline (3.1.164). Now, with mischievous malice, he hopes that his fellows, too, are in love. He stands aside to see what will happen. Sure enough, the King '*entereth with a paper*' (4.3.19.1) and, thinking he is alone, reads aloud a sonnet that he has composed to the Princess. And he drops the paper in the expectation that she will find it. He too steps aside, unaware of Biron's presence, and Longueville comes forward, also with a paper. The King and Biron independently exult in the thought that Cupid has another victim. Longueville reads aloud the sonnet that he has addressed to Maria, and also 'steps aside'. Within seconds Dumaine, too, enters 'with a paper', and Biron gloatingly anticipates what is to happen:

> All hid, all hid – an old infant play.
> Like a demigod here sit I in the sky,
> And wretched fools' secrets heedfully o'er-eye.
>
> (4.3.75–7)

Dumaine reads aloud what he calls 'the ode that I have writ' (4.3.97). Here, however, Shakespeare provides variety by casting Dumaine's poem not into conventional sonnet form (though the stage direction calls it a sonnet) but into trochaic tetrameter couplets (lines of eight syllables with the stress on the first, third, fifth, and seventh syllables) beginning:

> On a day – alack the day –
> Love, whose month is ever May
> Spied a blossom passing fair
> Playing in the wanton air.
>
> (4.3.99–102)

With the lovers all independently concealed over the stage, and each unaware of the other's presence, the King comes forward, hypocritically mocking the men for the composition of their 'guilty rhymes' and joyfully anticipating how Biron will gloat over their folly. But now Biron steps forward, as he says 'to whip hypocrisy', while himself hypocritically boasting of his own constancy, but of course paving the way for the revelation that he too has broken his vows. It is a virtuoso piece of dramatic craftsmanship.

It is perhaps indicative of Shakespeare's concern in each of his plays to match the form to the content that in *Richard II*, believed to have been written straight after *Love's Labour's Lost*, and composed entirely in verse,[12] he makes no use of the sonnet form, though the highly stylised dialogue includes an exceptional number of rhymed couplets. Two passages of verse in the form of a sestet occur in *King John* (1.1.170–5 and 2.1.505–11), both of them spoken by the Bastard; and in both of them the verse form serves as a means of indicating thoughts that are private rather than public, as kinds of soliloquies. We do not include these.

The composition of a love sonnet is more light-heartedly referred to in two other plays. In *Much Ado About Nothing* (written mainly in prose), after Benedick has jokingly asked Margaret to help him pay his addresses to Beatrice, she teasingly asks 'Will you then write me a sonnet in praise of my beauty?' (5.2.3–4); he agrees to do so 'in so high a style that no man living shall come over it'.

In the same play comes the solemn scene in which Claudio hangs on the supposed tomb of Hero an epitaph which opens with the words 'Done to death by slanderous tongues' (5.3.3), and which has the rhyme scheme of a sonnet sestet (though it is written in trochaic tetrameters, not the usual iambic pentameters), and which is followed by an additional couplet. Following this, Don Pedro bids the mourners farewell in lines ('Good morrow, masters …') that have the form of a quatrain, and the scene ends with another quatrain:

DON PEDRO
Come, let us hence, and put on other weeds,
And then to Leonato's we will go.

CLAUDIO
And Hymen now with luckier issue speed's
Than this for whom we rendered up this woe.

(5.3.30–3).

And in the play's final scene, after Beatrice and Benedick have declared their love for each other but are still jokingly denying it in

12 *Richard II* shares this status with *King John*.

public, Claudio produces what he claims to be 'A halting sonnet of his [Benedick's] own pure brain / Fashioned to Beatrice', and Hero produces another 'Writ in my cousin's hand, stol'n from her pocket, / Containing her affection unto Benedick' (5.4.89–90).

The writing of sonnets becomes a matter of jest again – but this time a different kind of jest – in *Henry V*, when, on the eve of battle, the leaders of the French army nervously await the break of day. The absurdity of addressing a sonnet to a horse had been mentioned in *Edward III*. Now, praising his horse in extravagant terms, Bourbon says 'I once writ a sonnet in his praise, and it began thus: "Wonder of nature! –"' (*Henry V*, 3.7.40), to which Orléans deflatingly responds: 'I have heard a sonnet begin so to one's mistress' (3.7.41). 'Then did they imitate that which I composed to my horse, for my horse is my mistress', says Bourbon (3.7.42–3). This leads into bawdy wordplay sustaining the comparison between the horse and a woman with allusions to bestiality. Shakespeare himself did not, of course, address a sonnet to his horse, but he does declare that the love his beloved feels for him is 'of more delight than hawks or horses be' (Sonnet 91, line 11).

The Originality of *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Never before Imprinted* (1609)

The year 1591 saw the beginning of a sudden vogue for the composition and publication of sequences of interrelated sonnets, initiated by the posthumous publication in that year of Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*. At least nineteen such collections appeared between then and 1597, when the vogue faded out, and it is likely that Shakespeare wrote most of his non-dramatic sonnets during this period. But they did not appear in print during these years, nor do they hang together in the manner of the published sonnet cycles by other writers. Though there was no obvious outlet (such as the literary magazines of later periods) for the publication of individual poems, Shakespeare, it seems, was initially writing sonnets either out of a self-generated creative impulse, or from a desire to

communicate privately in poetic form, or to commission. The titles of the sonnet sequences of the 1590s often included the idealised name of a (sometimes identifiable) female loved one: Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* in 1591, Samuel Daniel's *Delia* (1592), Thomas Lodge's *Phillis* (1593), Henry Constable's *Diana* (1594), William Percy's *Sonnets to Celia* (1594), Richard Barnfield's *Cynthia* (1595), Bartholomew Griffin's *Fidessa* (1596), William Smith's *Chloris* (1596), and Robert Tofte's *Laura* (1597). Barnfield, much influenced by Christopher Marlowe's homoeroticism, was original during this period in also writing sonnets addressed to an idealised male subject in *An Affectionate Shepherd to His Love* (1594).

In the first sonnet of *Astrophil and Stella* (1591), Sir Philip Sidney famously instructed writers of poetry to 'look in thy heart and write'. But the sonneteers who followed him do not seem readily to have taken up his advice. The sequences published in the 1590s are heavily indebted to European models, which Shakespeare's sonnets are not. Those making up Giles Fletcher's sequence *Licia* (1593), described on the title page as being 'poems in honour of the admirable and single virtues of his lady', demonstrate themselves to be literary exercises after Latin examples. In contrast, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* does not present a classical idealisation of love; it is not derivative of previously published sequences. Rather, it is as if he benefitted from and absorbed the other sonnet writers' work, and then made the form a vehicle for a much more unsettling and original expression of his feelings and thoughts. The number of sonnets in *Shakespeare's Sonnets* exceeds that of even the longest contemporary collection by about 50 per cent (Sidney comes second with 108 sonnets).

Whilst *Shakespeare's Sonnets* intermittently reflects his reading of classical literature, by drawing occasionally on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (for example Sonnets 60, 63, and 114), Horace's *Odes* (for example Sonnet 55), and translating Marianus Scholasticus (Sonnets 153 and 154), it is, on the whole, a collection of often highly personally inflected poems written over at least twenty-seven years, rather than a sequence aimed at catching the mood and developing the taste for

a literary fashion. His sonnets are not public poems written and published for money (like his two narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis*, 1593 and *The Rape of Lucrece*, 1594, much reprinted in Shakespeare's lifetime); they were published a decade after the vogue for sonnets had passed, printed only once, and were 'clearly a flop on their first appearance'.[13] He seems interested primarily in using the sonnet form to work out his intimate thoughts and feelings.

As a result, his collection is the most idiosyncratic gathering of sonnets in the period and includes, for example, the frankest of all sonnets about sex. Shakespeare writes vividly about the feelings and effects of lust in Sonnet 129; Sonnets 135 and 136 (with their vibrant and obsessive punning on his own name, 'Will', a polyvalent word with connotations of the male and female sexual organs, and sexual passion in general) read like witty, masturbatory fantasies – private poems which seem surprised to find themselves in the public domain; and Sonnet 151, in part describing the effects of male tumescence and detumescence, ends with a couplet that, surreally, could be spoken by his own penis:

> No want of conscience hold it that I call
> Her love 'love', for whose dear love I rise and fall.
>
> (lines 13–14)

Shakespeare's Sonnets have acquired a romantic reputation. But these are not poems for Valentine's Day, still less are they – with the exception of a handful – poems for loved ones to read to each other. Whilst the collection includes some of the most powerfully lyrical, resonant, and memorable poems ever written about what it feels like to experience romantic love (such as Sonnets 18, 29, and 116), most of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* set forth many other moods and kinds of love, including its tough edges, insecurities, doubts, and negative obsessions. They address many topics, experiences, and emotions, including restlessness and sleeplessness (43); sleepless jeal-

13 Stanley Wells, *Looking for Sex in Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 49.

ousy (61); painful self-abasement (49); the feelings of lust (129); sin and confession (62); the memories of a loved one (122); the power of poetry (54); the immortalisation of the loved one in poetry (55); the endless fascination of a loved one (53); the trials of separation (56); the failure of poetry to praise the loved one (106); the testing of a loved one (117); being blamed for love (121); unconventional beauty (127); the lies lived out in a relationship (138); the state of the soul (146). This is only a selection of some of the concerns and feelings Shakespeare chose to write about, and most of these themes can be applied to more than one sonnet in the collection.

Whilst it is generally agreed that the order in which the sonnets were first printed in 1609 is not the order in which Shakespeare wrote them, it does (as we have shown in Table 1) demonstrate a highly ordering mind at work. Part of the originality of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* lies in the fact that it is not a sequence; it is a collection, or an anthology. But it contains within it mini-sequences and pairs of sonnets which are revealing of what Shakespeare wanted to write about. We do not know who was responsible for the 1609 order, but since whoever it was knew the poems well, we have no objection to believing it was Shakespeare himself. In Table 1 we set out the nineteen pairs and fourteen mini-sequences covering 100 out of the 154 poems within *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. The themes listed in the table augment the ones named in the preceding paragraph and illustrate further the range of subjects covered.

We do not know whether Shakespeare himself authorised their publication.[14] He is curiously referred to in the third person on the title page: *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Never before Imprinted* (as opposed to, for example, '*Sonnets*, by William Shakespeare'). The wording suggests that the publisher takes pride in announcing a coup in making

14 Katherine Duncan-Jones suggests that the 1609 quarto was published with Shakespeare's permission: 'Was the 1609 *Shake-speares Sonnets* Really Unauthorized?', *Review of English Studies*, 34 (1983), 151–71. She also conjectures that Shakespeare was not in London when it was being printed, hence Thomas Thorpe himself providing the dedication: *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 1997; rev. 2010), pp. 10–11.

Table 1: Nineteen Pairs and Fourteen Mini-Sequences (covering 100 sonnets in all) in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*

Nos. in Q (chronological order)	Thematic or content linkage	Pair linked syntactically by first word(s) of succeeding sonnet
Pair: 133 and 134	Triangular relationship	'So'
Pair: 135 and 136	Play on poet's name, 'Will'. N.B. 22, 57, 89, 134, and 143 also play on 'Will'	'If'
139, 140, 141, 142	Power of a loved one's eyes	
Pair: 141 and 142	Love and sin	'Love is my sin'
Pair: 149 and 150	Power of a loved one	'O from what power'
Pair: 64 and 65	Time	'Since'
Pair: 67 and 68	Male beauty	'Thus'
Pair: 69 and 70	Blamed for being beautiful	'That thou art'
Pair: 71 and 72	Forgetting poet after his death	'O, lest'
Pair: 73 and 74	Mortality and poetry	'But'
Pair: 89 and 90	A loved one leaving	'Then'
91, 92, 93	Loyalty	'But'; 'So'
97, 98, 99	Absence	
100, 101, 102, 103	Poetic Muse and poetry	
1–17	Procreation	
Pair: 5 and 6	Procreation	'Then'
Pair: 9 and 10	Procreation	'For shame'
Pair: 15 and 16	Procreation	'But'
Pair: 20 and 21	Love and appearances	'So'
Pair: 27 and 28	Sleeplessness	'How can I then'
30 and 31	Grief and memory	
33, 34, 35, and 36	Mistakes in love	

Continued over

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780841.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 1: *cont'd*

Nos. in Q (chronological order)	Thematic or content linkage	Pair linked syntactically by first word(s) of succeeding sonnet
40, 41, 42	A man takes away the poet's female loved one	
Pair: 44 and 45	The four elements	'The other two'
46 and 47	Eyes and heart	
Pair: 50 and 51	On horseback	'Thus'
57 and 58	Slavery in love	
78–86	Other poets writing about the loved one	
Pair: 80 and 81	An unidentifiable poet	'Or'
82 and 83	Being truer than other poets	
109, 110, 111, 112	Temporary absences and distractions	
Pair: 113 and 114	Imagination and eyesight	'Or'
118, 119, 120	Sickness in love	

This table demonstrates how Shakespeare often wrote syntactically related, double sonnets (a 'pair'), or wrote sequels to existing ones, thereby either making a double sonnet, or forming a short sequence of two or more sonnets.

available poems that everyone knew about, but few had been able to read. It is equally curious that the printer's initials, 'T.T.' (Thomas Thorpe), rather than those of the author, should appear below the dedication: 'Mr W.H.': 'To the only begetter of these ensuing sonnets Mr W.H. all happiness and that eternity promised by our ever-living poet wisheth the well-wishing adventurer in setting forth. T.T.'[15] 'Mr W.H.' is the dedicatee of the printer ('the well-wishing adventurer'), not Shakespeare. 'Mr W.H.' may then have been the

15 Images of the 1609 quarto's dedication are easily viewable on-line. Search for 'Shakespeare's Sonnets dedication' in Google, and click 'images'.

procurer ('begetter') of the manuscript (the person who supplied Thorpe with the poems), which was obtained by unknown means.[16]

What kind of manuscript, and in what state? It has been plausibly suggested, based in part on spelling variations within the collection, that the manuscript submitted to the printer was the work of two scribes. Transcribing an author's manuscript for the press was a standard practice, an equivalent perhaps of our modern-day copy-editing. Had Shakespeare written individual sonnets on loose, shufflable leaves of paper which were later bound together in some way, or did he write them up into a notebook?

Interestingly – and importantly – the chronological re-ordering has not disrupted any of the pairs or mini-sequences of sonnets as collated in Table 1. Some of these sonnets are syntactically related, for example by connecting keywords which provide a sequel to the sonnet immediately before. Sometimes short sequences of interrelated sonnets are linked by theme. Thirty-six of the sonnets form part of a syntactically linked pair, which suggests Shakespeare liked writing sequels (or afterthoughts) to a sonnet, or writing what we can understand to be a double sonnet. Indeed, some of his most famous sonnets form part of a syntactically linked pair. For example, 'A woman's face with nature's own hand painted' (Sonnet 20) is followed by 'So is it not with me as with that muse' (Sonnet 21), which continues to consider the appearance of the loved one – but now in relationship to how poetry itself might convey that truth. 'That time of year thou mayst in me behold' (Sonnet 73) is followed by its far lesser-known sequel, 'But be contented when that fell arrest' (Sonnet 74). Similarly, the sonnet which begins 'Some glory in their birth, some in their skill' (Sonnet 91) is the first of three syntactically related sonnets, a mini-sequence. These pairs and groups of linked sonnets not only remain together after the chronological re-ordering but seem more prominent and compelling because of it.

16 Geoffrey Caveney has suggested that Mr W. H. was William Holme, a stationer, who like Thomas Thorpe had links with Chester. Holme died in 1607, which may help to explain why the dedication is laid out like a funerary inscription: '"Mr W.H.": Stationer William Holme (d. 1607)', *Notes and Queries*, 260, 1 (March 2015), 120–4.

Setting Forth Shakespeare's Sonnets

Some of the 1609 sonnets are found in manuscript collections from around 1620 onwards,[17] but the collection was not reprinted until 1640 when John Benson published most of its contents as part of *Poems: Written by Wil. Shake-speare, Gent.* (which also includes other pieces by Shakespeare and his contemporaries from the augmented 1612 edition of *The Passionate Pilgrim*). Benson gave seventy-five of the sonnets titles (thereby hinting at narratives) and combined some of them to make longer poems. So, for example, Sonnets 1, 2, and 3 are combined to form 'Loves crueltie'; Sonnets 33, 34, and 35 form 'Loves Releese'; and Sonnets 107 and 108 form 'A monument to Fame' (in which Sonnet 108's 'sweet boy' is replaced by 'sweet-love'). Benson changed some of the masculine pronouns to feminine in Sonnet 101 and changed Sonnet 104's 'friend' to 'fair love'.[18] Though Benson's edition is often maligned – and has been defended – it remains significant because it represents the first, major critical response to *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (a biographical as well as a literary one), and because of its influence on subsequent editions for more than a century. Charles Gildon prepared a volume of Shakespeare's poems based on Benson as a supplement to Nicholas Rowe's 1709 edition of the plays.

Benson's 1640 edition was reprinted with additions several times between 1710 and 1775, and the 1609 collection appeared in Bernard Lintott's *A Collection of Poems* (1711),[19] in George Steevens's *Twenty Plays of Shakespeare* (1766),[20] and, in 1780, George Steevens's and Edmond

17 Jane Kingsley-Smith collates, demonstrates, and discusses the limited, immediate influence of Shakespeare's sonnets from 1598 to 1622, and cites Arthur F. Marotti's observation that 'only eleven whole [Shakespeare] sonnets in twenty different manuscripts' have so far been identified across sixteenth- and seventeenth-century manuscripts. See Jane Kingsley-Smith, *The Afterlife of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 40–2, and Arthur F. Marotti, 'Shakespeare's Sonnets and the Manuscript Circulation of Texts in Early Modern England', in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Michael Schoenfeldt (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 185–203 (p. 186).

18 Margreta de Grazia, 'The Scandal of Shakespeare's Sonnets', in *Shakespeare Survey 46*, ed. Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 35–49 (pp. 35–6).

19 Kingsley-Smith, *The Afterlife of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, p. 103.

20 Kingsley-Smith, *The Afterlife of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, p. 106.

Malone's supplement to Samuel Johnson's and Steevens's 1778 edition of the Complete Works. Malone printed the 1609 text again in 1790 (with more commentary). His text and commentary formed the basis of the first American edition of the Sonnets (1796) and remained little altered until the 1864 edition from Cambridge University Press. Malone, in bringing fresh scholarly attention to *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, began an emphatically biographical way of reading them (he was working on his own – never completed – Shakespearian biography at the time). But, as Margreta de Grazia has shown, Malone's relationship with the Sonnets is complex and anxious: 'his first step was to restrict the Sonnets to two addressees'.[21] He refers to the male addressee as 'this person', and to the female as 'a lady': 'to this person, whoever he was, one hundred and twenty-six of the following poems are addressed; the remaining twenty-eight are addressed to a lady'.[22] Malone's critical and biographical anxiety about *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1609) is residually present in many readings of them. In 1996, Heather Dubrow, considering the state of Sonnet criticism, observed that while critics might differ on many points of interpretation, they are 'nevertheless likely to agree that the direction of these poems can be established with certainty: the first 126 sonnets refer to and are generally addressed to the Friend, while the succeeding ones concern the Dark Lady'.[23] Dubrow's observation (which deliberately resembles Malone's from 1790 in order to show how little approaches to the Sonnets have changed) still applies to many current critics and readers but is not a position shared by the co-editors of this volume. Our chronological approach no longer makes so simplistic a division of these poems possible.

Malone's influence has indeed been extensive, and over the last 250 years much ink has been spilt trying to convince us of the identities of real-life counterparts believed to exist in *Shakespeare's*

21 de Grazia, 'The Scandal of Shakespeare's Sonnets', p. 37.

22 *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare*, ed. Edmond Malone, 20 vols. (London: H. Baldwin, 1790), vol. XX, p. 191.

23 Heather Dubrow, '"Incertainties now crown themselves assur'd": The Politics of Shakespeare's Sonnets', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 47 (1996), 291–305 (p. 291).

Sonnets. Colin Burrow considers this kind of biographical speculation 'critically naïve' and mistaken in its tendency to relate *Shakespeare's Sonnets* to Shakespeare's life. It is partly because the poems give the impression of being autobiographical in their 'modes of address' that readers seek 'to marry these rhetorical features' to Shakespeare's life story: 'once that marriage had occurred it was one to which it was hard to admit impediments'.[24] These biographical assumptions prevail not only in readings of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* but also in some Shakespearian biographies, which continue to apply readings of the sonnets to Shakespeare's life story. This kind of biographical approach is simplistic and overrides the nuances and complexities of some of the greatest poems ever written in English. Although from the 1980s sonnet criticism has demonstrated, in the words of David Schalkwyk, a 'revulsion against biography',[25] the old critical and biographical memes (from Malone) still remain. They are present whenever a critic refers to 'the first 126 sonnets' addressed to 'the Young Man' or 'Fair Youth', to 'the Rival Poet' (in reference to Sonnets 78–86), and 'the Dark Lady' (often in reference to Sonnets 127–54). It is time for readings and studies of the Sonnets to leave behind these biographical tropes. In contrast, our chronological approach enhances understanding of Shakespeare as a developing writer of sonnets and challenges the biographical assumptions and expectations that we as readers might take with us. A chronological ordering frustrates attempts to assume and impose a biographical narrative by (we hope) defamiliarising the poems and presenting them afresh.

Establishing chronologies is one outcome of our wanting to understand as much as possible about Shakespeare's progression and development as a writer. Chronologies of Shakespeare's works

24 Colin Burrow, 'Shakespeare's Sonnets as Event', in *The Sonnets: The State of Play*, ed. Hannah Crawforth, Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, and Clare Whitehead, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 97–116 (pp. 100–1).

25 David Schalkwyk, '"She never told her love": Embodiment, Textuality, and Silence in Shakespeare's Sonnets and Plays', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 45 (1994), 381–407 (p. 398).

are difficult. Some of the plays can be dated confidently, others less so. This edition uses the scholarship which helped to construct the chronology of Shakespeare's plays and poems in *The New Oxford Shakespeare* (2016). Its methodology relies largely on study of the development of Shakespeare's vocabulary and his grammatical preferences in the sequence of his works (in so far as this can be established). It is, for instance, noticeable that Sonnet 73 includes the word 'sunset' which occurs elsewhere in the canon only in *Henry VI Part Three*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *King John*: a sonnet published in 1609 was almost certainly written in the early to mid-1590s. Shakespeare's grammatical preferences can be helpful, too. He uses '-eth' rather than the '-es' verb ending much more regularly in plays usually dated before 1600. Work based on criteria such as these demonstrates that textual chronologies of this kind are always theories, hypotheses, and will no doubt continue to be tested and to evolve.

MacDonald P. Jackson has worked significantly on the dating of the Sonnets in the 1609 collection, showing that they seem to have been written over twenty-seven years, from 1582 to 1609. Based on the datability of some of them, the collection can be broken up into segments of chronological composition:

Sonne 1–60	Range: 1595–7 (probably revised 1600–9).
Sonnets 61–77	Range: 1593–1604; best guess 1594–5.
Sonnets 78–86	Range: 1596–1604; best guess 1598–1600.
Sonnets 87–103	Range: 1593–1604; best guess 1594–5.
Sonnets 104–26	Range: 1600–9; best guess 1600–4.
Sonnets 127–44, 146–54	Range: 1590–5.
Sonnet 145	1582?[26]

26 From Gary Taylor and Rory Loughnane, 'The Canon and Chronology of Shakespeare's Works', in *The New Oxford Shakespeare: Authorship Companion*, ed. Gary Taylor and Gabriel Egan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 417–602 (p. 575).

Jackson is keen to qualify that the reality of when Shakespeare wrote particular sonnets or even stretches of sonnets is not as tidy as the above listing suggests. Shakespeare could have been revising any of the sonnets up until their publication in 1609.[27] These dated segments should not therefore be taken as clear-cut; they all contain poems which might be earlier or later than the identification of the segment suggests. But they do represent particular concentrations of rare and key words which are datable within our growing understanding of Shakespeare's wider artistic output. We anticipate this hypothesis will continue to evolve as the scholarship which attempts to date Shakespeare's linguistic practices becomes even more sophisticated. The current hypothesis posits that, of the 154 sonnets published in 1609, those that appear later in the collection (from Sonnet 127) are among the earliest composed; that the sonnets printed at the beginning of the collection (Sonnets 1–60) were composed at least five years later; and that Sonnets 104 to 126 are among the last that Shakespeare wrote. We cannot be certain when Shakespeare started to write sonnets. As we have shown (see pp. 4–6), our own ordering starts with the Oxford chronology but places Sonnets 154, 153, and 145 at the beginning because of the likelihood that they are the product of a young Shakespeare.

When the sonnets from the plays are added at their appropriate moments, Shakespeare emerges as a writer of sonnets from some time before 1582 up to 1613. A chronological ordering seeks to honour Shakespeare's bursts of creativity; his development as an artist, his skill in his use of the form for different purposes, his employment of it across different genres, and his engagement with the sonnet as a private, personal, intimate form of verse, and as one which could be heard in the public theatres. If he was writing sonnets over an almost thirty-year period, then we might imagine that

27 Other poets also revised their work. Michael Drayton reworked and augmented his sonnet sequence *Idea* (1594) over twenty-five years and published it as *Idea's Mirror* in 1619.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780841.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the Shakespeare of, say, 1613 was different from the Shakespeare of 1582. The chronological approach invites us to ask many questions, not least what kinds of personal and artistic development can we deduce across these poems, and how might the sonnets themselves relate to their implied historical context?

'Among His Private Friends'

Though many of Shakespeare's sonnets stand alone as personal utterances, others appear to be addressed to, or to concern, always unnamed individuals. Who were they? The first mention of Shakespeare as a writer of sonnets comes in Francis Meres's literary handbook *Palladis Tamia, or Wit's Treasury*, of 1598, where Meres writes of Shakespeare's 'sugared sonnets among his private friends'. This could refer to any number of sonnets, individually or collectively. The phrase 'sugared sonnets' had been used four years previously, by Richard Barnfield in his *The Affectionate Shepherd*, a collection of poems with strong Marlovian associations. Many of Barnfield's poems are unashamedly homoerotic, and it is conceivable that this is implied in Meres's epithet 'sugared' used along with 'private', meaning 'intimate'. It was common for poems to circulate in manuscript to a select readership. Sadly, Meres does not tell us who Shakespeare's 'private friends' were. In the same breath, he compares Shakespeare to 'honey-tongued' Ovid (because of his two narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, based on Ovidian sources). Meres's comments are the meeting place of a private and public Shakespeare: intimate (with his 'private' sonnets), rhetorical and self-consciously literary in his re-workings of Ovid. We do not know if any of those sonnets 'among his private friends' survived to be published in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*; perhaps some or all of them did. In any case, none of Shakespeare's 'private friends' are identifiable by the sonnets addressed to them.

But 121 of the sonnets do involve people, real, or (and remember these poems are from the quill of an expert dramatist) imaginary (see Table 2). There are a 'Lord of my love' (Sonnet 26, line 1); a male addressed as 'thy' described as being in his 'straying youth'

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780841.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(Sonnet 41, line 10); a male addressed as 'you' who is a 'lovely youth' (Sonnet 54, line 13); a youthful male beauty described in the third person (Sonnet 63); a 'sweet boy' (sonnet 108, line 5); and a 'lovely boy' (Sonnet 126, line 1). Similarly, the terms by which we might seek to identify an addressee's gender are unstable and fluid. There is the female-appearing male 'master-mistress' (Sonnet 20, line 2); Sonnet 96 uses language evocative of both genders to describe the addressee who seems male because of Shakespeare's use of 'youth', 'wantonness', 'wolf', 'strength', and 'state' but has fingers like a 'queen' and, like a femme fatale, leads 'gazers [. . .] away'; Sonnet 97 compares its addressee's absence to 'widows' wombs' in a world of 'abundant issue'.

This volume consistently identifies the sex of a sonnet's addressee, in part to draw attention to the different directions and kinds of love and desire in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Sometimes this can be confidently decided because of Shakespeare's use of personal pronouns ('he', 'she', 'him', or 'her'); sometimes it is less straightforward. Sonnets 1–17 form a discrete sequence of poems addressed to a male whom the poet is urging to beget children. Although the sex of the addressee is not revealed through the use of personal pronouns in all of these seventeen sonnets, their being addressed to a male is discernible through the kinds of language Shakespeare uses, for example, in Sonnet 13, the language of husbandry and fatherhood. Although Sonnet 5 is a meditation and does not mention an addressee, it is syntactically related to its sequel, Sonnet 6, in which the addressee is clearly male. Sonnet 4 lacks personal pronouns and could, if read out of context, be the only one among the first seventeen sonnets addressed to either a male or a female. Its expression is couched in the language of money, finance, commerce, and bequest, predominantly male-orientated activities in Shakespeare's time, but women transacted business, too, and also wrote wills.

But even when the sex of the addressee is not apparent through the use of personal pronouns, there is little doubt that the first seventeen sonnets, as printed in 1609, are addressed to a male. Shakespeare, writing in an extremely patriarchal culture, would not be trying to persuade a female to procreate. Whether those seventeen

Table 2: The Direction of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*

	Nos. in Q (chronologically ordered against each category)
Translations of a Greek epigram (2).	154, 153
Addressed to a male (14).	1, 3, 9, 10, 13, 15, 16, 20, 26 ('Lord of my love'), 41, 42, 54 ('beauteous and lovely youth'), 108 ('sweet boy'), 126 ('lovely boy')
Likely to be addressed to a male (13)	2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, 17, 34, 35, 36, 40
Addressed to a female (7)	135, 136, 139, 141, 142, 143, 151
Likely to be addressed to a female (3)	132, 140, 119
Could be addressed to either a male or a female (84)	128, 131, 133, 134, 147, 149, 152, 61, 62, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 102, 103, 18, 22, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 37, 38, 39, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 104, 106, 107, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 117, 118, 120, 122, 125.
Sonnet letters (2)	26 (accompanying a 'written embassage'), 77 (accompanies the gift of an almanack)
To Love (2)	137, 56 (56 could also be addressed to a male or female)
To Time (2)	19, 123
To the Muse (1)	100
To the poet's soul (1)	146
On a woman (3)	145, 127, 130
On a man (3)	63, 67, 68
On a relationship with a female (1)	138
On a relationship with a male (1)	33
On a relationship with a male and a female (1)	144 (see also 40-2 and 133-4)

Continued over

Table 2: *cont'd*

	Nos. in Q (chronologically ordered against each category)
On lust (1)	129
On love and eyesight (1)	148
On time (3)	64, 65, 60
On the world's wrongs (1)	66
On individual power over others (1)	94
On procreation (1)	5 (see also 1-17)
On poetry and truth (1)	21
On the lack of eloquence (1)	23
On the freedom of love (1)	25
On the nature of love (1)	116
On the sickness of love (1)	119
On being judged (1)	121
On the vulnerability of love (1)	124
On love and poetry (1)	105

121 sonnets are addressed to people (84 of which could be addressed to either a male or a female, and 2 of which are sonnet-letters); 6 sonnets are addressed to abstract concepts; 25 are meditations; 2 are translations of the same Greek epigram.

sonnets are all directed towards the same man, or to several men, or to men in general, is a different and unanswerable question. Certainly the intimacy among these sonnets varies. Sonnet 10 with its 'Make thee another self for love of me' (line 13) and Sonnet 13, in which the poet refers to the male addressee as 'dear my love' (line 13), are more intimate than, for example, Sonnets 8, 11, and 12, which read much more like professional acts of persuasion to procreate. In writing them, Shakespeare is in part borrowing terms and images from Desiderius Erasmus's (?1466–1536) 'Epistle to persuade a young man to marriage'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780841.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Sometimes the mini-sequences within *Shakespeare's Sonnets* help us to determine the sex of the addressees. But this, too, is sometimes not straightforward. Sonnets 100 to 103 form a mini-sequence of four sonnets about the poetic muse. The first is addressed to the muse, the second to the muse about a male, the third and fourth are addressed to either a male or a female about the muse and the writing of poetry. The fact that one of those four sonnets is addressed to a male does not necessarily imply that the other three are.

Similarly, although Sonnets 139–42 are linked by the power of the addressee's looks to kill the poet, and by the poet's own sense of sinful loving, in two of the poems the sex of the addressee is not made clear. Sonnets 140 and 142, removed from their immediate mini-sequence, could be addressed to either a man or a woman. But the mini-sequence they form is more closely knit than that formed by Sonnets 100–3, and all four sonnets (139–42) seem to be addressed to a female, and possibly even the same one because of the continuation of dramatic and emotional experience across them.

If sonnets are syntactically rather than thematically related by a keyword indicative of a sequel or serialisation (for example, if a sonnet is followed by one which begins with 'So', 'Or', 'But', or 'Thus'), and if only one of the sonnets in the pair identifies the sex of the addressee, then this identification has been applied in this edition to the accompanying poem as well. When the sex of the addressee is genuinely indeterminate, we make this clear in the accompanying note.

Shakespeare was a master at projecting different tones of voice in the plays, and, whilst sonnet writing is a different genre and practice, readers find there a poetic scope and freedom to accommodate many different kinds of imagined speakers. Whilst *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (unlike the sonnets in the plays) were not written primarily for performance, they are rhetorically shaped and invite us to read them aloud. Presented alongside Shakespeare's dramatic sonnets from the plays, the gender, sex, and indeed sexuality of the poetic voice in *Shakespeare's Sonnets* seems to become much more open, playful, unstable. Whilst we might be likely to imagine the poetic voice as

male, many of the sonnets can be convincingly voiced by a female. Sonnet 128, 'How oft, when thou, my music, music play'st', for example, usually read as an address by a man to a woman, may equally be imagined as being spoken by a woman watching her male lover play on a keyboard instrument. The poems themselves demonstrate a fluidity and openness of desire and identity (like the fluid desires depicted in *As You Like It*, or in *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*).

Whilst some critics have focused on reading *Shakespeare's Sonnets* through a gay lens,[28] relatively few have celebrated them as the seminal bisexual text of literature in English. Bisexuality attracts a lot of casual prejudice even in twenty-first-century culture, manifested, for example, by a common assumption that a bisexual person is probably really either gay or lesbian without wanting fully to admit it. When bisexuals look for literature about bisexuality, they often encounter a difficulty not faced by gay and lesbian people. In her bisexual reading of the 1609 sonnets, Marjorie Garber asks 'Why avoid the obvious? *Because* it is obvious? Or because a bisexual Shakespeare fits no one's erotic agenda?'[29] We hope that in consistently identifying the sex of the addressee, and especially by signalling when this cannot be determined, we have played a part in emphasising the bisexual quality of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. The multiplicity of the Sonnets' sexual identities is matched by their gender fluidity – as dizzying and as complex as that bodied forth in Shakespeare's

28 See, for example, material included in Joseph Pequigney, *Such Is My Love: A Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Stephen Orgel, 'Introduction', in *The Sonnets: Updated Edition*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; rev. 2006); Paul Hammond, *Figuring Sex between Men from Shakespeare to Rochester* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); *Shakesqueer*, ed. Madhavi Menon (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011); and *Queer Shakespeare: Desire and Sexuality*, ed. Goran Stanivukovic, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

29 Marjorie Garber, *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), p. 515.

comedies. How far is the speaker of each poem taking upon him or herself binary, non-binary, or fluid gender portrayals?

An abiding, twentieth-century literary comparison which helps to illustrate and illuminate the complexity of sexuality and gender in *Shakespeare's Sonnets* is Virginia Woolf's playful, lyrical, elegiac *Orlando: A Biography* (1928). The poet Orlando wakes up one morning to discover that he has turned into a woman, and then transcends time from the sixteenth century to the present day, 'For she had a great variety of selves to call upon, far more than we have been able to find room for, since a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many thousands.'[30] The power of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* as poems lies in part within their multi-layered subjectivities. They plunge us into Shakespeare's real self and his imagined selves; his loved ones, friends, and acquaintances, and his talent for dramatic characterisation. If the sonnet is addressed to somebody, we might as we read it start to imagine the person to whom he is writing; or we might choose to turn it into a dramatic speech and bring characterisation to it (perhaps based on one of the plays); or we might read it as though Shakespeare were addressing it to us, imagining ourselves into the position of the addressee, the other person in the dialogue who reads, feels the range of Shakespeare's emotions, thinks, and then works out how to respond (creatively, critically, silently). We could, when we read *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, even take it upon ourselves to become Shakespeare's 'private friends'.

His Name Is Will

We believe that many of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* are deeply personal poems, written out of Shakespeare's own experience. This does not mean that we should seek to tell a coherent biographical narrative through them, nor should we impose one upon them. Thirty-three

30 Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, ed. Michael Whitworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992; repr. 2015), p. 179.

out of 154 sonnets are not addressed to a person; 25 of these are personal meditations (miniature soliloquies), and 6 are addressed to an abstract concept, for example to Time, or to Love; and 2 are translations (see Table 2). Biographical readings that misunderstand Shakespeare's collection as a unified sonnet sequence hunt for a single, deterministic narrative where, in fact, none exists. Indeed, though the sonnet form lends itself to a compressed narrative development across its fourteen lines, we do *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1609) as a collection a disservice if we go to it expecting to find a story.[31]

They are personal poems in as much as they present themselves to us immediately and at varying levels of intimacy. They have Shakespeare's DNA running through them. Setting aside the classical names of Adonis and Helen (Sonnet 53) and Cupid and Dian (Sonnet 153), the only personal name mentioned in any of them is the poet's own: 'my name is Will' (Sonnet 136, line 14). Sonnets 22, 57, 89, 134, 135, and 143 also pun on Shakespeare's first name, reason enough to consider the collection as personally inflected – but to varying and of course ultimately unfathomable degrees.

Reading *Shakespeare's Sonnets* can intermittently seem like encountering miniaturised dispatches from life turned into poetry: the poet's relationships, inner turmoil, feelings of mortality, regret, self-loathing, guilt, but also his joys and gratitude. But rather than turning these elements into an historical, autobiographical narrative, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* can instead be read for traces of his personality, as though the poems were his emotional, psychological, and spiritual memoir, in part made up of his addresses to other people, in part his own soliloquies played out primarily for himself. In some of them he seems to take delight in his own ingenuity, the compactness of his own expression (for example Sonnets 39 and

31 Patrick Cheney interestingly suggests that 'Will' is the persona Shakespeare adopts for all of the Sonnets printed in 1609, rather as Sir Edmund Spenser uses the persona of Colin Clout for *The Shepheardes Calendar* (1579). But Spenser's name is not Colin. Cheney's assumption arises, too, from his reading the poems within the long-established biographical tropes. *Shakespeare, National Poet and Playwright* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 215.

40), and only the toughest, most precise and demanding of minds could have written, for example, Sonnets 118 to 120. He wrote sonnets in Stratford-upon-Avon and London, and probably worked on them in his mind through his daily activities, as poets do, and as he commuted on horseback between the town and the city that divided up his life. Sonnets 50 and 51 are written from the perspective of someone riding a horse.

Many of them contain what might be regarded as personal allusions: 'the trophies of my lovers gone' (Sonnet 31, line 10); Sonnet 24 seems to refer to a portrait of the loved one which the poet's eye has copied in his heart (lines 1–2); Sonnet 23 refers to 'my books', which suggests private reading; and three sonnets refer to lameness or limping (Sonnets 37, 66, and 89), which might refer metaphorically to the lines of verse, or literally to the poet's own lameness. Some of the sonnets contain references to things or happenings the meaning of which has been lost to time, for example the 'peace' mentioned in Sonnet 107 which 'proclaims olive of endless age' (line 8). Nobody knows whether this refers to an actual political or personal moment (or, if so, when). Sonnet 125 begins 'Were't aught to me I bore the canopy', which might refer to an actual aristocratic or even royal procession, or one that took place in the context of stage production. Sonnets 78 to 86 refer to other poets writing about the loved one. Traditionally, these have been read as referring to 'a rival poet', but in fact only Sonnet 79 refers to one rival. Sonnet 83 refers to 'both your poets' (which could mean Shakespeare himself plus another, or two other poets), and Sonnet 86 mentions some secret confederacy of collaborators working with a rival poet in love, as well as one particular collaborator and advisor, 'that affable familiar ghost / Which nightly gulls him with intelligence' (lines 9–10). These references seem plausibly to refer to actual individuals who have been working against the poet in some way.

It is often said that there are no surviving examples of Shakespearian correspondence (apart from Richard Quiney's letter addressed to him in October 1598). But in fact two of the sonnets are letters by Shakespeare (in this resembling Helen's in *All's Well That Ends Well*, see p. 224). Sonnet 26 is the accompanying note

for another 'written embassage' (line 3). Malone in his edition of 1790 cited Edward Capell's commentary on similarities between this sonnet and Shakespeare's dedication to the Earl of Southampton for his narrative poem, *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594). Sonnet 77 is another sonnet-letter, and one which accompanied a personal gift:

> The vacant leaves thy mind's imprint will bear,
> And of this book this learning mayst thou taste.
>
> (lines 2–3)

The 'book' to which the poet refers is usually thought to be a notebook. But Adam Barker identifies it as an almanac on the grounds that the gift already contains information ('learning') as well as blank pages ('vacant leaves'), as almanacs did. It was common practice to use the empty pages included in almanacs for memoranda, notes, and personal reflections.[32] Sonnet 122 does, however, mention a notebook, apparently containing memoranda, which the loved one has given to the poet ('Thy gift, thy tables', line 1). But the poet, it seems, has given the notebook away:

> Nor need I tallies thy dear love to score
> Therefore to give them from me I was bold.
>
> (Sonnet 122, lines 10–11)

In fact, Sonnet 122 marks the occasion of the poet explaining that notes from the loved one need not be kept because he or she is already etched into the poet's 'lasting memory' (line 2). Many of the sonnets – apart from these examples – can be read and thought of as similar to personal correspondence.

As readers we need to ask ourselves how far we imagine Shakespeare himself as the first-person voice in his sonnets. Poets fluctuate in how far they self-identify with their first-person subject – unless of course they are writing poetic drama or

32 Adam Barker, 'The Book with "Waste Blanks" referred to in Shakespeare's Sonnet 77 is an Almanac rather than an Empty Notebook as has previously been assumed', *Notes and Queries*, 66, 3 (September 2019), 429–30.

dramatic speeches. It has long been thought that Shakespeare, when writing sonnets, did indeed 'look into [his] heart and write'. Poets have been especially attentive to this quality of *Shakespeare's Sonnets.* William Wordsworth (1770–1850) powerfully admired Shakespeare for so doing in a sonnet which begins:

> Scorn not the Sonnet, Critic, you have frowned,
> Mindless of its just honours; with this key
> Shakespeare unlocked his heart.

Robert Browning (1812–89) refuted Wordsworth in his poem 'House' of 1876: 'Did Shakespeare? If so, the less Shakespeare he!'. Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–92) was inspired by *Shakespeare's Sonnets* and, over a period of seventeen years, wrote love lyrics in memory of his beloved friend Arthur Henry Hallam. He ordered them into a single collection of poems, *In Memoriam: A. H. H.* (1849), which sets out to show the development and progression of his grief and faith. In structuring it around a fictional, three-year period, Tennyson was probably inspired by Sonnet 104:

> Three winters cold
> Have from the forests shook three summers' pride;
> Three beauteous springs to yellow autumn turned.
> (lines 3–5)

The poems which form *In Memoriam* are at one and the same time deeply personal and literary, based on Tennyson's own experiences, his reading, and poetic inheritance. In one of the lyrics, he evokes the name of Shakespeare in order bravely to confess his love for his friend:

> I loved thee, Spirit, and love, nor can
> The soul of Shakespeare love thee more.
> (*In Memoriam*, 61, lines 11–12)

Wordsworth and Tennyson represent the many readers who, over the centuries, have sought a personal conversation with and within *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1609).

Shakespeare made the sonnet form his own. He thought and felt through it; he brought an often astonishing compactness of articulation to its individual, disciplined lines; and to many, though by no means all of them, he brought his own strength of feeling and personality. Most of them seem to us to be costly, confessional poems, rather than merely literary exercises – but the imagination of a dramatist is always there. In being composed over at least twenty-seven years, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1609) is most likely to encompass many different occasions and people in his life, unidentifiable and anonymous moments which, because he was inspired to write about them in the ways he did, are obscured by but not lost to time.

⁂

It is our hope that in arranging all the sonnets of Shakespeare chronologically we have newly minted these poems and poetic extracts in a fresh and open context, furthering our understanding of what the sonnet form meant to Shakespeare, its difficulty, its individuality, its rhetorical and dramatic potential. This particular form of verse was an inspiration to Shakespeare for around three decades, and he used it to great effect and for a variety of purposes. His plays echo with his sonnets; his sonnets echo with his plays, and it is this interplay within his art that helps to make Shakespeare the supreme poet-dramatist. Sonnet writing forms a crucial part of his creative endeavour as well as being at the heart of Shakespeare's self-understanding. We hope the reader will be as fascinated as we are to read all the sonnets of Shakespeare in an approximate order of their composition, and without the over-deterministic biographical narratives of the past.