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Shakespeare's **Sonnets**

An Original-Spelling Text

EDITED BY PAUL HAMMOND

Shakespeare's Sonnets



AN ORIGINAL-SPELLING TEXT
EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND
NOTES BY PAUL HAMMOND

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Acknowledgements

FOR NICK

It was my interdisciplinary seminar as an undergraduate at Trinity College, Cambridge, in the summer of 1993, supervised by Dr Gerd Gigerenzer, I made a pivotal job, in gratitude to him, and to his colleagues at Trinity, Malcolm Forster and Dr Hans-Joachim Rudolph, for their stimulating seminars, and their teaching. They have remained for me exemplary figures of humane learning. It was a long time before I could reach a point at which I could write, which was aided by Theodore Schick's class with William Leggett, and which was exemplary. I could do with a portion of your thoughtful engagement with the history of a discipline.

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This edition is dedicated to Nick, with love.

David Forster

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I first read Shakespeare's *Sonnets* as an undergraduate at Trinity College, Cambridge, in the summer of 1973, supervised by Dr Carl Baron. I retain a profound debt of gratitude to him, and to his colleagues at Trinity, Mr Leo Salinger and Dr Theodore Redpath, for their stimulating, scholarly, and wise teaching. They have remained for me exemplary figures of humane learning. *Sit vobis terra levis*. The edition which I used then, which was edited by Theodore Redpath along with William Ingram, also remains exemplary, a model of lucid exposition of, and thoughtful engagement with, the nuances of a demanding text.

My own edition has benefitted from the encouragement and criticism of my friends Professor Andrew Hadfield and Professor David Hopkins, as well as from the meticulous critique provided by the publisher's readers, which has helped me to improve my work at many points. The British Academy awarded me a research grant which enabled me to consult copies of the original edition of the *Sonnets* held by the British Library, the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, and the Wren Library of Trinity College, Cambridge. I am grateful to the respective librarians for their kind permission to examine these fragile books.

This edition is offered to Nick, with love.

Paul Hammond

Preface



This book is at once an edition of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* and a guide to how to read these intricate and complex poems. It is offered both to readers new to the poems, and new, perhaps, to early-modern poetry, and to those who are familiar with the *Sonnets* but are ready to engage with them afresh.

The text which it presents is—uniquely among current editions of the *Sonnets*—an original-spelling text of the poems: that is, it prints the poems as they appeared in the first edition, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1609), preserving the spelling, punctuation, italics, and capitalization of the original, with only minor interventions where that edition manifestly needs correction and the required correction is obvious. Modernized editions, though they are helpful in smoothing out difficulties, inevitably also distance the poems from their original milieu and present them as, in some respects, twentieth- or twenty-first-century artefacts. The reasons for keeping the original spelling are set out later in the book (pp. 89–97), and before reading the text or the introduction readers may wish to study the guide on pp. 98–102, which offers help in reading seventeenth-century spelling and punctuation.

There has been much speculation around the *Sonnets*, particularly concerning the supposed historical identity of their male and female protagonists, and the question of what we can learn from the poems about Shakespeare's own amorous and sexual history or interests. But the introduction to the present edition eschews any such speculation, and instead focuses on how we might read the poetry. It therefore discusses the sonnet form, the tradition within which Shakespeare was writing, and the ways in which readers might explore the richly suggestive language which he used. Sample discussions of a dozen poems attempt to track some of these complexities, and to illustrate ways of reading. The sexuality of the *Sonnets* is fully charted, both in the introduction and the notes, but readers are repeatedly advised not to simplify their understanding of how the

PREFACE

poems present varieties of love and desire, and not to pursue biographical speculation.

The annotation which accompanies the text of the poems avoids paraphrase and also attempts to avoid imposing particular interpretations; rather, it provides detailed but concise and carefully-targeted glosses which lay out the possible meanings of the words in order to help the reader construct their own understanding. The text is followed by appendices on Shakespeare's rhetoric and complex words which will enable the modern reader to appreciate the rich verbal play of the poetry.

Shakespeare's other poems and his plays are quoted from the Nonesuch edition of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, edited by Herbert Farjeon, 4 vols (London, 1953).

Abbreviations



- Benson *Poems: Written by Wil. Shake-speare. Gent*, published by John Benson (London, 1640)
- Booth *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, edited with analytic commentary by Stephen Booth (New Haven, 1977)
- Burrow *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, edited by Colin Burrow, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford, 2002)
- Capell *Collection of Poems*, vol. II, published by Bernard Lintot (London, 1711), annotated by Edward Capell; copy in the Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge (Capell MS 5)
- Duncan-Jones *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones, The Arden Shakespeare Third Series (London, 1997; revised edition 2010)
- Ed. The present editor
- Evans *The Sonnets*, edited by G. Blakemore Evans, The New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge, 1996)
- Hassel R. Chris Hassel, Jr., *Shakespeare's Religious Language: A Dictionary* (London, 2005)
- Hope Jonathan Hope, *Shakespeare's Grammar* (London, 2003)
- Ingram & Redpath *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, edited by W. G. Ingram and Theodore Redpath (London, 1964)
- Kerrigan *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint*, edited by John Kerrigan, The New Penguin Shakespeare (Harmondsworth, 1986)
- Kökeritz Helge Kökeritz, *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* (New Haven, 1953)

ABBREVIATIONS

- Malone Edmond Malone, *Supplement to the Edition of Shakespeare's Plays published in 1778* (London, 1780)
- OED *The Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition (Oxford, 1989) (NB: The numbering of the senses varies in some entries in electronic versions of the second edition as revisions were incorporated.)
- Partridge Eric Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy* (London, 1947; revised edition 1968)
- Pooler *Sonnets*, edited by C. Knox Pooler, The Arden Shakespeare, first series (London, 1918; third edition 1943)
- Q *Shake-speares Sonnets Neuer before Imprinted* (London, 1609) [Q for Quarto]
- Rollins *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: The Sonnets*, edited by Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols (Philadelphia, 1944)
- Schmidt Alexander Schmidt, *Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary*, third edition revised by Gregor Sarrazin, 2 vols (Berlin, 1902; reprinted New York, 1971)
- Tilley Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor, 1950)
- Williams Gordon Williams, *A Glossary of Shakespeare's Sexual Language* (London, 1997)

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The Sonnets and their First Readers

PART I



READING SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

The *First Folio* of Shakespeare's works, the volume called *The Works of Wm. Shakspeare* contains that first printed edition of the text that contains the majority of the poems known to us as a complete but abridged manuscript. The Folio poems reveal Shakespeare's language, thought, and feeling. Although we have a good deal of contemporary evidence about Shakespeare's life and career, it rarely relates to his personal affairs and the practical arrangements of the acting company for which he worked as actor, manager, share, or other interests. The only letters which have been preserved in all this abundance simply relating the Sonnets to an individual person are, at least by tradition, supposed to have been written by Shakespeare himself. Since the poems are written simply to the "third person" with the pronoun "I" prominent, and usually designated "My selfe" (see, e.g., 13, 91, 126, 141, 171) on the title pages of the Folio edition, and since written any day for names such as the persons of the individuals mentioned, such as Richard Burbage, or the Philip Henslowe (spelled as "Henshull"), they may indeed appear to be conventional letters. And since they possess the passionate feelings which the poet has for an unnamed man, and the poetic skill of a friendship with an unnamed woman, and all the intellectual plenitude of poet, young man, and woman, the simplest narrative account is a lively and loving tale, and clearly leads back to high spiritual companionship. Furthermore, words of art, technical, philosophical, scientific.

If it all has been of what interesting acquaintance to posterity, the way we write the words and structure in this supposed narrative may indeed have been to give the poet his own name to

¹ See, e.g., 13, 91.

² Complete Works of Shakespeare, with an Introduction by W. G. Clark, London, 1892, pp. 139-140.

³ See, e.g., *Shakespeare's Works*, ed. by W. G. Clark, London, 1892, pp. 139-140.

1 The *Sonnets* and their First Readers



'With this key Shakespeare unlocked his heart', wrote Wordsworth,¹ and the character Erskine in Oscar Wilde's story about the *Sonnets* called *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* (1889) similarly exclaims that we 'are almost afraid to turn the key that unlocks the mystery of the poet's heart'.² It is a tempting but dangerous assumption that these poems reveal Shakespeare's innermost thoughts and feelings. Although we have a good deal of documentary evidence about Shakespeare's life and career, it mostly relates to his financial affairs and the practical arrangements of the acting company for which he worked;³ we have no letters, diaries, or other intimate records. Readers have often been tempted to fill this tantalizing gap by treating the *Sonnets* as an autobiographical text, or at least by wondering whether they might have had some biographical basis. Since the poems are written mainly in the first person, with the pronoun 'I' prominent, are unambiguously called 'SHAKE-SPEARES | SONNETS' on the title page of the first edition, and come without any fictive veneer such as the persona of the 'Affectionate Shepherd' used by Richard Barnfield, or Sir Philip Sidney's disguise as 'Astrophil', they may indeed appear to be confessional pieces. And since they focus on the passionate feelings which the male poet has for an unnamed young man, on the poet's sexual relationship with an unnamed woman, and on the triangular relationship of poet, young man, and woman, the implicit narrative scenario is a richly intriguing one, and clearly lends itself to biographical interpretation. But these are works of art: fictions, not confessional statements.

It is all too easy to allow misleading assumptions to colour even the way we name the supposed characters in this supposed narrative: many critics have chosen to follow Sonnet 104 and refer to

¹ Rollins, II 134.

² *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, with an introduction by Vyvyan Holland (London, 1966), pp. 1155–6.

³ See Samuel Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life* (Oxford, 1975).

the young man as the 'Friend', perhaps hoping that by such an insistence that the poems concern male friendship they can dispel any notion that there might be a sexual element to this relationship; yet in Renaissance English 'friend' could mean anything from casual acquaintance to sexual partner,⁴ so the choice of that term, far from clarifying the relationship, only returns us to its ambiguity, and makes us rely upon the text itself to show where on that wide spectrum of meanings the term 'friend' lies in the case of any particular sonnet, for the meaning of the word—and the character and intensity of the relationship—may vary from poem to poem. Meanwhile, the woman has become known almost universally as 'The Dark Lady', imparting to her an air of mystery and even sinister attraction. To minimize (though, inevitably, not entirely to eliminate) an interpretative assumption being smuggled into the present discussion, the characters who appear to figure in the *Sonnets* will be designated as 'the Poet' (because the first person singular of the *Sonnets* writes about himself as a poet), 'the Boy' (because the male addressee is called 'boy' in Sonnets 108 and 126), and 'the Woman' (because she is so called in Sonnet 144). The Boy is indeed called a 'man' in 144, but the age difference between the Poet and the Boy is important at several points in the sequence (e.g. 73); yet he is no child, for it is clear even from the opening sonnets that he is a sexually mature youth of marriageable age. Though the Woman is often called 'The Dark Lady' by critics, we do not know that she is, in any accepted social (or even moral) sense, a 'lady'; the word 'lady' is never used in the poems, and 'dark' when applied to a person occurs only in one poem (147:14) which is not self-evidently about the Woman at all.⁵

Although it is usually assumed that Sonnets 1–126 have a male addressee, many of them contain no signals as to the gender of the lover.⁶ The question 'Are they addressed to a man?' has no answer

⁴ See p. 18 below, and Paul Hammond, *Figuring Sex between Men from Shakespeare to Rochester* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 18–21.

⁵ There are no indications of gender in 147, and the poem occurs in a portion of the sequence which includes some more miscellaneous pieces (146, which it follows, is the only religious poem) rather than in the earlier portion (127–44) where the poems seem clearly to be about the Woman or the triangle of Poet–Boy–Woman.

⁶ For a discussion of the gender of the addressees, and a reminder that many of the sonnets have no indication of the gender of the beloved, see Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 30–1.