A COMPANION TO

SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS

VOLUME IV

THE POEMS, PROBLEM COMEDIES, LATE PLAYS

EDITED BY **RICHARD DUTTON AND JEAN E. HOWARD**

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350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5018, USA
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Notes on Contributors

David M. Bergeron is Conger-Gabel Teaching Professor of English (2001–4) at the University of Kansas. He has published extensively on Shakespeare, Renaissance drama, and the Stuart royal family. His most recent books include *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire* (1999) and *Practicing Renaissance Scholarship: Plays and Pageants, Patrons and Politics* (2000).

Bruce Boehrer is a Professor of English Renaissance Literature at Florida State University and founding editor of the *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*. His latest book, *Shakespeare Among the Animals*, was published in 2002.

Dympna Callaghan is William P. Tolley Professor in the Humanities at Syracuse University. Her books include *Women and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy, Shakespeare Without Women,* and the edited collection, *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare.*

Linda Charnes is Associate Professor of English and Cultural Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington. She is the author of *Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare* (1993) and the forthcoming *Hamlet's Heirs: Essays on Inheriting Shakespeare.*

Karen Cunningham is Visiting Associate Professor of English at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she teaches Renaissance drama, Milton, and Renaissance law and literature. She is the author of *Imaginary Betrayals: Subjectivity and the Discourses of Treason in Early Modern England* (2002).

Susan Frye is Professor of English with appointment in Women's Studies at the University of Wyoming. She is the author of *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (1997) and co-editor with Karen Robertson of *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England* (1999). She has published on Spenser, Shakespeare, and women writers and is currently completing a book on the material relations between early modern women's work and women's writing.

John Gillies is Professor of Literature at the University of Essex and has studied and worked in Australia and England at various times in his career. His interests include the poetics of space in Renaissance literature, theatre, and culture; also Shakespearean performance issues and performance history. He explores uses of multimedia as an analytic tool in performance studies. He is the author of *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* in addition to various articles and book chapters.

Suzanne Gossett is Professor of English at Loyola University, Chicago, and is currently editing *Pericles* for Arden Three and *Eastwood Ho!* for the Cambridge Jonson. Her other editions include Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, Middleton's *A Fair Quarrel* and, with Josephine Roberts and Janel Mueller, Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania, Book Two*. She has written extensively about early modern drama, most recently in the chapter on "Dramatic Achievements" in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1500–1600*, edited by Arthur F. Kinney.

Diana E. Henderson is Associate Professor of Literature at MIT. She is the author of *Passion Made Public: Elizabethan Lyric, Gender, and Performance* (1995) and numerous articles including essays on early modern drama, poetry, and domestic culture, Shakespeare on film, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. Recent work includes "Shakespeare: The Theme Park" in *Shakespeare After Mass Media*, edited by Richard Burt (2002), "Love Poetry" in Blackwell's *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, edited by Michael Hattaway (2002), "The Disappearing Queen: Looking for Isabel in *Henry V*" in *Shakespeare and his Contemporaries in Performance*, edited by Edward Esche (2000) and "King and No King: 'The Exequy' as an Antebellum Poem" in *The Wit to Know: Essays on English Renaissance Literature for Edward Tayler*, edited by Eugene D. Hill and William Kerrigan (2000). Her current book manuscript is entitled *Uneasy Collaborations: Transforming Shakespeare across Time and Media*.

Theodora A. Jankowski is the author of *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama* (1992) and *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in the Early Modern English Drama* (2000). She has written numerous articles on Shakespeare, John Lyly, Thomas Heywood, John Webster, Margaret Cavendish, and Andrew Marvell. She is currently working on a project which argues for the use of "class" as a legitimate modality of analysis within early modern English literary texts and also explores the development, in Thomas Heywood's plays, of a "middle-class" identity that is clearly set in contrast to gentry identity.

John Jowett is Reader in Shakespeare Studies at the Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham. He edited plays for the *Oxford Shakespeare Complete Works* (1986), and is currently an Associate General Editor of the forthcoming Oxford edition of *Thomas Middleton's Collected Works*. Publications include *Shakespeare Reshaped 1606–1623* (1993) with Gary Taylor, and the Oxford edition of *Richard III* (2000).

Coppélia Kahn is Professor of English at Brown University, and is the author of *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (1981) and *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women* (1997). She has also written articles on Shakespeare, early modern drama, and gender theory. Her current work deals with the racialized construction of Shakespeare in the early twentieth century.

Russ McDonald teaches at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He is the author of *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare*, has edited four plays in the *New Pelican Shakespeare* series, is at work on a critical study of Shakespeare's late style, and is preparing a collection for Blackwell called *Shakespeare Criticism, 1945–2000*.

Barbara A. Mowat is the Director of Academic Programs at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Senior Editor of the *Shakespeare Quarterly*, and Chair of the Folger Institute. She is co-editor, with Paul Werstine, of the *New Folger Library Shakespeare* and the author of *The Dramaturgy of Shakespeare's Romances* and of essays on Shakespeare's plays and on the editing of his plays.

Marion O'Connor teaches at the University of Kent at Canterbury. She has published widely on dramatic revivals and theatrical reconstructions.

Richard Rambuss is Professor of English at Emory University. He is the author of *Spenser's Secret Career* and *Closet Devotions*. His numerous essays in journals and edited volumes range from Renaissance literature to various topics in cultural studies and gender studies.

Julie Sanders is Reader in English at Keele University. She is the author of *Ben Jonson's Theatrical Republics* (1998) and *Novel Shakespeare: Twentieth-Century Women Writers and Appropriation* (2002). She is currently editing *The New Inn* for *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*.

Bruce R. Smith is Professor of English at Georgetown University. He is the author of *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (1991), *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (1999), and *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (2000).

Barbara Howard Traister is Professor of English at Lehigh University. She is the author of *The Notorious Astrological Physician of London: Works and Days of Simon Forman* and *Heavenly Necromancers: The Magician in English Renaissance Drama*.

Valerie Traub is Professor of English and Women's Studies at the University of Michigan. She is the author of *Desire and Anxiety: Circulation of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* and *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*.

Daniel Vitkus is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Florida State University. He specializes in Shakespeare, Renaissance drama, and the culture of early modern England and is especially interested in cross-cultural encounters. He has edited *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England* (2000) and *Piracy, Slavery and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England* (2001) and has recently completed *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570–1630*.

Valerie Wayne is Professor of English at the University of Hawaii. She has edited *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (1991), Edmund Tilney's *The Flower of Friendship: A Renaissance Dialogue Contesting Marriage* (1992), and Thomas Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One* in *The Collected Works of Thomas Middleton* (forthcoming), for which she also served as an Associate General Editor. She is preparing an edition of *Cymbeline* for the Arden Shakespeare, Third Series.

Paul Yachnin is Tomlinson Professor of Shakespeare studies at McGill University. His first book is *Stage-Wrights: Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, and the Making of Theatrical Value* (1997); his second, co-authored with Anthony Dawson, is *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare England: A Collaborative Debate* (2001). He is an editor of the forthcoming Oxford edition of *The Works of Thomas Middleton*, and editor of *Richard II*, also for Oxford. His book-in-progress is *Shakespeare and the Dimension of Literature*, which will argue that literature's political consequentiality is an effect of the long term rather than the short term.

Contents

Introduction

The four *Companions to Shakespeare's Works* (*Tragedies*; *Histories*; *Comedies*; *Poems, Problem Comedies, Late Plays*) were compiled as a single entity designed to offer a uniquely comprehensive snapshot of current Shakespeare criticism. Complementing David Scott Kastan's *Companion to Shakespeare* (1999), which focused on Shakespeare as an author in his historical context, these volumes by contrast focus on Shakespeare's works, both the plays and major poems, and aim to showcase some of the most interesting critical research currently being conducted in Shakespeare studies.

To that end the editors commissioned scholars from many quarters of the world – Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States – to write new essays that, collectively, address virtually the whole of Shakespeare's dramatic and poetic canon. The decision to organize the volumes along generic lines (rather than, say, thematically or chronologically) was made for a mixture of intellectual and pragmatic reasons. It is still quite common, for example, to teach or to write about Shakespeare's works as tragedies, histories, comedies, late plays, sonnets, or narrative poems. And there is much evidence to suggest that a similar language of poetic and dramatic "kinds" or genres was widely current in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. George Puttenham and Philip Sidney – to mention just two sixteenth-century English writers interested in poetics – both assume the importance of genre as a way of understanding differences among texts; and the division of Shakespeare's plays in the First Folio of 1623 into comedies, histories, and tragedies offers some warrant for thinking that these generic rubrics would have had meaning for Shakespeare's readers and certainly for those members of his acting company who helped to assemble the volume. Of course, exactly *what* those rubrics meant in Shakespeare's day is partly what requires critical investigation. For example, we do not currently think of *Cymbeline* as a tragedy, though it is listed as such in the First Folio, nor do we find the First Folio employing terms such as "problem plays," "romances," and "tragicomedies" which subsequent critics have used to designate groups of plays. Consequently, a number of essays in these volumes self-consciously

examine the meanings and lineages of the terms used to separate one genre from another and to compare the way Shakespeare and his contemporaries reworked the generic templates that were their common heritage and mutually constituted creation.

Pragmatically, we as editors also needed a way to divide the material we saw as necessary for a Companion to Shakespeare's Works that aimed to provide an overview of the exciting scholarly work being done in Shakespeare studies at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Conveniently, certain categories of his works are equally substantial in terms of volume. Shakespeare wrote about as many tragedies as histories, and again about as many "festive" or "romantic" comedies, so it was possible to assign each of these groupings a volume of its own. This left a decidedly less unified fourth volume to handle not only the non-dramatic verse, but also those much-contested categories of "problem comedies" and "late plays." In the First Folio, a number of plays included in this volume were listed among the comedies: namely, *The Tempest, Measure for Measure, All's Well That Ends Well*, and *The Winter's Tale. Troilus and Cressida* was not listed in the prefatory catalog, though it appears between the histories and tragedies in the actual volume and is described (contrary to the earlier quarto) as a tragedy. *Cymbeline* is listed as a tragedy, *Henry VIII* appears as the last of the history plays. *Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Pericles* do not appear at all. This volume obviously offers less generic unity than the other three, but it provides special opportunities to think again about the utility and theoretical coherence of the terms by which both Shakespeare's contemporaries and generations of subsequent critics have attempted to understand the conventionalized means through which his texts can meaningfully be distinguished and grouped.

When it came to the design of each volume, the editors assigned an essay on each play (or on the narrative poems and sonnets) and about the same number of somewhat longer essays designed to take up larger critical problems relevant to the genre or to a particular grouping of plays. For example, we commissioned essays on the plays in performance (both on stage and in films), on the imagined geography of different kinds of plays, on Shakespeare's relationship to his contemporaries working in a particular genre, and on categorizations such as tragedy, history, or tragicomedy. We also invited essays on specific topics of current interest such as the influence of Ovid on Shakespeare's early narrative poems, Shakespeare's practice as a collaborative writer, his representations of popular rebellion, the homoerotic dimensions of his comedies, or the effects of censorship on his work. As a result, while there will be a free-standing essay on *Macbeth* in the tragedy volume, one will also find in the same volume a discussion of some aspect of the play in Richard McCoy's essay on "Shakespearean Tragedy and Religious Identity," in Katherine Rowe's "Minds in Company: Shakespearean Tragic Emotions," in Graham Holderness's "Text and Tragedy," and in other pieces as well. For those who engage fully with the richness and variety of the essays available within each volume, we hope that the whole will consequently amount to much more than the sum of its parts.

Within this structure we invited our contributors – specifically chosen to reflect a generational mix of established and younger critics – to write as scholars addressing

fellow scholars. That is, we sought interventions in current critical debates and examples of people's ongoing research rather than overviews of or introductions to a topic. We invited contributors to write for their peers and graduate students, rather than tailoring essays primarily to undergraduates. Beyond that, we invited a diversity of approaches; our aim was to showcase the best of current work rather than to advocate for any particular critical or theoretical perspective. If these volumes are in any sense a representative trawl of contemporary critical practice, they suggest that it would be premature to assume we have reached a post-theoretical era. Many lines of theoretical practice converge in these essays: historicist, certainly, but also Derridean, Marxist, performance-oriented, feminist, queer, and textual/editorial. Race, class, gender, bodies, and emotions, now carefully historicized, have not lost their power as organizing rubrics for original critical investigations; attention to religion, especially the Catholic contexts for Shakespeare's inventions, has perhaps never been more pronounced; political theory, including investigations of republicanism, continues to yield impressive insights into the plays. At the same time, there is a marked turn to new forms of empiricist inquiry, including, in particular, attention to early readers' responses to Shakespeare's texts and a newly vigorous interest in how Shakespeare's plays relate to the work of his fellow dramatists. Each essay opens to a larger world of scholarship on the questions addressed, and through the list of references and further reading included at the end of each chapter, the contributors invite readers to pursue their own inquiries on these topics. We believe that the quite remarkable range of essays included in these volumes will be valuable to anyone involved in teaching, writing, and thinking about Shakespeare at the beginning of the new century.

1

Shakespeare's Sonnets and the History of Sexuality: A Reception History

Bruce R. Smith

Most readers of Shakespeare's sonnets today first encounter the poems in the form of a paperback book. Even a moderately well stocked bookstore is likely to offer a choice. Some of these editions are staid academic affairs. Others, however, package the sonnets as ageless testimonials to the power of love. A particularly striking example is *Shakespeare in Love: The Love Poetry of William Shakespeare*, published by Hyperion Press in 1998. The title says it all. The book was published as a tie-in to Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard's film of the same name, also released in 1998. There on the cover is Joseph Fiennes passionately kissing Gwyneth Paltrow. Other photographs from the film illuminate scenes and speeches from selected plays, along with the texts of sixteen of the 154 sonnets first published as Shakespeare's in 1609. These sixteen sonnets, presented to the unwary buyer as "*the* love poems of William Shakespeare," have been carefully chosen and cunningly ordered. The first two selections, sonnets 104 ("To me, fair friend, you never can be old") and 106 ("When in the chronicles of wasted time / I see descriptions of fairest wights"), give to the whole affair an antique patina. Next comes that poem of ten thousand weddings, sonnet 116 ("Let me not to the marriage of true minds / Admit impediments"). Two sonnets explicitly referring to a woman, 130 ("My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun") and 138 ("When my love swears that she is made of truth, / I do believe her"), then establish a thoroughly heterosexual, if not altogether conventional, context for the eleven sonnets that follow (18, 23, 24, 29, 40, 46, 49, 57, 71, 86, 98), even though all eleven of these poems in the 1609 Quarto form part of a sequence that seems to be addressed to a fair young man. All told, the paperback anthology of *Shakespeare in Love* participates in the same heterosexualization of the historical William Shakespeare that Norman and Stoppard's film contrives (Keevak 2001: 115–23).

Contrast that with the earliest recorded reference to Shakespeare's sonnets. Francis Meres included in his book of commonplaces, *Palladis Tamia, Wit's Treasury* (1598), a catalog of England's greatest writers, matching each of them with a famous ancient writer. "The soul of Ovid," Meres declares, "lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued

Shakespeare, witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, and his sugared sonnets among his private friends" (Meres 1938: fols. 280v–281).[1] It was a high compliment. For Renaissance writers and readers, Ovid was the greatest love poet of all time: witness his how-to manual (*Ars Amatoria*), his love lyrics (*Amores*), and his encyclopedia of violent transformations wrought by love (*Metamorphoses*). The love Ovid wrote about was not, however, the sort that led to the marriage of true minds. Shakespeare's narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* share with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* a fascination with the violence of desire. Venus's predatory lust for Adonis ends in the young man's being gored by a wild boar. Tarquin's brutal violation of the chastity of his friend's wife ends in her sheathing a knife in her breast. Of the 154 sonnets included in *Shake-speare's Sonnets Never Before Imprinted* (1609), fully half express disillusionment or cynicism. The first editions of both of Shakespeare's narrative poems bear dedications to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton. The "private friends" mentioned by Meres as the first readers of Shakespeare's sonnets may have included the other young men who counted Southampton as friend and patron. The nature of the books dedicated to Southampton, as well as the testimony of at least one eyewitness, suggest that the earl was, in Katherine Duncan-Jones's words, "viewed as receptive to same-sex amours" (Duncan-Jones 2001: 79). With this group of readers Joseph Fiennes and Gwyneth Paltrow sort very oddly indeed. The distance from Southampton House on The Strand in the 1590s to *Shakespeare in Love* at the local cineplex in the 1990s points up the need for a reception history of Shakespeare's sonnets.

Meres's allusion to Ovid likewise suggests the need for a history of sexuality. In describing the various configurations of erotic desire in Ovid's poems we are apt to say that the poems imply a certain sexuality, or perhaps a certain range of sexualities. Sexual acts between man and boy, sexual acts between woman and woman, sexual acts between woman and beast, sexual acts between father and daughter all find places in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. With what authority, however, can we speak of "sexuality" in connection with Ovid's poems? Or Shakespeare's? "Sexuality," after all, is a relatively recent word. It was coined about 1800 as a strictly biological term, as a name for reproductive activity that involves male and female apparatus. In fact, the earliest recorded application of the word in English refers specifically to the reproductive processes of plants (*OED* "sexuality" 1). It was not until the later nineteenth century that the word came to mean manifestations of a sexual "instinct" and not until the early twentieth century, with the publication of Sigmund Freud's works, that the subjective experience of sexual desire was added to the ensemble of meanings (Smith 2000b: 318–19). (Curiously, both of these later meanings are absent from the *OED*, even in its revised 1989 edition.) "Sexuality" and "sexual" are not in Shakespeare's vocabulary. The word "sex" occurs in Shakespeare's plays twenty-one times but only in the anatomical sense of female as distinguished from male. "You have simply misused our sex in your love prate," Celia chides Rosalind after she has said unflattering things about women to Orlando (*As You Like It* 4.1.185 in Shakespeare 1988).[2]

To describe stirrings of feeling in the genitals the word that Shakespeare and his readers would have used instead was "passion." Sonnet 20, for example, addresses the

speaker's beloved as "the master mistress of my passion" (20.2). The word "passion" in this context carries a quite specific physiological meaning. According to the ancient Greek physician Galen and his early modern disciples, light rays communicating the shape and colors of another person's body enter the crystaline sphere of the eyes, where the sensation is converted into an aerated fluid called *spiritus. Spiritus* conveys the sensation to the brain, where imagination receives the sensation and, via *spiritus*, sends it to the heart. The heart then determines whether to pursue the object being presented or to eschew it (Wright 1988: 123). Whichever the choice, the body's four basic fluids undergo a rapid change. If the heart decides to pursue the object, quantities of choler, phlegm, and black bile are converted into blood. The person doing the seeing experiences this rush of blood as passion. What a person told himself or herself was happening when a good-looking person excited feelings of desire was thus different in the 1590s from how the same experience would be explained today. What causes a person to feel desire for genital contact with another body? A sudden flux of blood, or release of the infantile id? The very question proves the validity of Michel Foucault's claim that sexuality is not a natural given. Sexuality has a history: "It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power" (Foucault 1980: 105–6).

In the course of his multi-volume *History of Sexuality*, left unfinished at his death, Foucault suggests several points when major paradigm shifts occurred, but for the purposes of Shakespeare's sonnets the crucial change came about in the eighteenth century. It was during the Enlightenment that sexuality was isolated as an object of rational inquiry. What had been an ethical concern in Shakespeare's time ("Two loves I have, of comfort and despair, / Which like two spirits do suggest me still," declares sonnet 144) became in Diderot's time a medical concept (Foucault 1980: 23–4). In the course of the nineteenth century the medical concept became a psychological concept. It is Freud who is responsible for the modern conviction that sexuality is a core component of self-identity. We have, then, two histories to consider in these pages: the history of how Shakespeare's sonnets have been read and interpreted and the history of how men and women have experienced and articulated feelings of bodily desire. We can trace these interrelated histories in four broad periods, each defined by a major event in the publishing history of Shakespeare's sonnets: 1590–1639, 1640–1779, 1780–1888, and 1889 to the present.

The Man of Two Loves: 1590–1639

Each word in Meres's reference to Shakespeare's "sugared sonnets among his private friends" is worthy of scrutiny. Of the six words, "sugared" may be the oddest. In the

days before coffee and tea had reached England, what was most likely to be "sugared" was wine. Biron in *Love's Labor's Lost* mentions three varieties, "metheglin, wort, and malmsey," in one of his verbal games with the Princess (5.2.233). In *1 Henry IV* Poins adds a fourth when he hails Falstaff as "Sir John Sack and Sugar" (1.2.112–13). But the adjective is still puzzling. By the 1590s "sonnets" were a well-established verse form, perfectly devised for expressing both sides of being in love, the pleasures and the pains, thanks to the *volta* or "turn" that typically divides the fourteen lines into two parts. Shakespeare's sonnets, taken as a whole, are rather longer on the pains than the pleasures. Metheglin, wort, malmsey, and sack might be appropriate ways of describing Michael Drayton's sonnets or Edmund Spenser's or Sir Philip Sidney's but hardly the piquant, often bitter poems that make up most of the 1609 Quarto of *Shake-speare's Sonnets.* Combined with the reference to "mellifluous [literally, "honey-flowing"] and honey-tongued Shakespeare," Meres's taste metaphor may have less to do with the poems' content than with the feel of Shakespeare's words in the mouth. In his own time Shakespeare was known, not as a creator of great characters, but as a writer of great lines, and lots of them.

"Sugared" may also refer to the way the sonnets were circulated, "among his private friends." In 1598, when Meres was writing, Shakespeare's collected sonnets were eleven years away from publication in print. Before then, they seem to have been passed around in manuscript, probably in single copies or in small groups rather than as a whole 154-poem sequence. The word "among" suggests the way manuscript circulation in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries served to establish and maintain communities of readers who shared a certain place of residence, institutional affiliation, profession, religion, or political purpose (Love 1993; Marotti 1995). The word "his" confirms Shakespeare's already recognized status as an author unmistakable for anyone else; the words "private" and "friends," the close-knit, even secretive character of the readers who passed his sonnets from one to another. This sharing of poems, Meres implies, was like sharing a cup of sweetened wine, perhaps like kissing on the lips. Ben Jonson catches the scenario in a famous lyric: "Drink to me only with thine eyes, / And I will pledge with mine; / Or leave a kiss but in the cup, / And I'll not look for wine" (Jonson 1985: 293). Reading Shakespeare's sonnets in manuscript, Meres seems to imply, was in itself an act of passion.

Be that as it may, reading Shakespeare's sonnets in manuscript was an act of identity-formation, both for individuals and for the social group to which they belonged. To judge from surviving manuscripts, erotic desire figured prominently in that process of identity-formation. No manuscripts of the sonnets from Shakespeare's own time have survived, but a single sheet of paper, datable to 1625–40 and bound up a century or so later in Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson Poetic 152, gives us some idea of how Shakespeare's sonnets may have circulated as individual poems in the 1590s.[3] On the six-by-six-inch sheet, five poems – all of them about the pains and the pleasures of love – have been written out in a neat italic hand. Vertical and horizontal creases in the paper suggest how it might once have been folded for passing from hand to hand. In the sequence of poems two stanzas from John Dowland's song "Rest awhile, you