Introduction
Why Shakespeare's Sonnets Need an Afterlife

> Probably, more nonsense has been talked and written, more intellectual and emotional energy expended in vain, on the sonnets of Shakespeare than on any other literary work in the world.[1]

Where this situation fills W. H. Auden with dismay, it might equally inspire us with admiration. The creative energy that has gone into re-ordering, re-explicating, rewriting and re-imagining Shakespeare's Sonnets implies something of their plenitude and stimulus to invention. Whilst the attention they have received has much to do with their status as the 'most autobiographical' of Shakespeare's writings, it is also a reaction to the aesthetic and affective power of individual sonnets, lines and phrases. Nevertheless, the partial cause of Auden's dismay, and one of the concerns that drives this book, is the extent to which the autobiographical narrative generated by the 1609 Quarto arrangement or 'sequence' has circumscribed responses to individual Sonnets.[2] As Gary Taylor has observed, 'only a handful of the 154 have ever attracted or rewarded as much enthusiasm as the story told outside and between them'.[3] And yet, alongside the history of the Quarto narrative, with its seductive fictions about Shakespeare, the Dark Lady and the Fair Youth, is a history of individual lyrics, circulating through manuscript, print edition, anthology and literary allusion, which might be just as fascinating and worthy of attention.

To prioritise the sequence over particular Sonnets is not only critically and creatively inhibitive, but anachronistic. Tennyson's *In Memoriam* was

[1] Auden, 'Introduction', p. xvii.

[2] I use the capitalised term 'Sonnets' throughout this book to indicate Shakespeare's poems, and to differentiate them from the published text of *Shake-speares Sonnets*. Although critics including Sasha Roberts and Katherine Duncan-Jones have made a case for discussing *A Lover's Complaint* as a 'thematic counterpart to [the Sonnets]', and a 'carefully designed component of the whole [Quarto]', its circulation and reception are generally separate from that of the Sonnets, and therefore beyond the scope of this study. See Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Duncan-Jones, p. 92, and Roberts, *Reading Shakespeare's Poems*, pp. 146–53.

[3] Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare*, p. 158.

compared in its own time to Shakespeare's *Sonnets* as a sequence idealising male friendship, or one that overstepped the bounds of decency with its excessive effeminate passion. But whilst the elegy's allusions to Sonnet 116 ('Let me not to the marriage of true minds') are informed by this debate, they also draw upon the history of Sonnet 116 as a standalone poem, defining an ideal of constancy that Tennyson used both to romanticise and to deflect homoerotic desire. George Eliot shows no awareness of the fact that the Sonnets quoted in the chapter headings of *Middlemarch* are potentially addressed to a man. She reads Sonnet 93 ('So shall I live supposing thou art true') through the lens of Rousseau, and her own suspicion of *female* beauty. In *To The Lighthouse*, Mrs Ramsay encounters the Sonnets in an anthology, and this allows Virginia Woolf to invoke the history of Sonnet 98 ('From you have I been absent in the spring'), apart from the sequence, and to explore the lyric's Romantic nostalgia.

As suggested above, one of the ways in which the sequence most limits our interpretation of the Sonnets is the understanding that 1–126 are addressed to a man, and 127–52 to a woman – an assumption that dates all the way back to Edmond Malone's editing of the Quarto in 1780. After speculating about the identity of Mr W. H., the *Sonnets*' dedicatee, Malone averred that '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'.[4] This is a critical orthodoxy so monumental in our time that it has only just begun to be dismantled. In an important re-evaluation of Sonnet criticism in 1993, Margreta de Grazia described some of the motives that might lie behind Malone's decision. These included his desire to make the Sonnets into Shakespearean autobiography (restricting the addressees to two made it easier to uncover their identities), and his unconscious response to the scientific 'discovery' of two discrete sexes at the end of the eighteenth century.[5] But if de Grazia exposed the constructedness of this division, she was not willing to reject it entirely: 'Some kind of binary division appears to be at work'.[6] Three years later, Heather Dubrow would cite de Grazia's findings about how little grammatical support *Sonnets* provides for such a division: 'about five sixths of the first 126 sonnets and a slightly smaller proportion of the entire collection do not specify an addressee through a gendered pronoun'.[7] Dubrow would go on to argue

[4] Malone, *Supplement to the edition of Shakspeare's Plays*, p. 529.
[5] De Grazia, 'The Scandal of Shakespeare's Sonnets', 37, 42.
[6] Ibid., 41.
[7] Dubrow, 'The Politics of Plotting Shakespeare's Sonnets', 292.

that the existence of 'subdivisions and clusters' challenges a simple bipartite scheme, and that it is entirely possible 'that some poems intended for one group or the other slipped out of place'.[8] Thus, Sonnet 126 ('O thou my lovely boy'), which is usually thought to complete the first sequence, might equally conclude the 'procreation' poems; the sexual innuendos of Sonnet 128 ('How oft when thou, my music, music play'st') might be directed to the male addressee previously identified with music in Sonnet 8; and the confession in Sonnet 147, 'For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright', suggests that some of the pre-127 poems which praise the beloved could refer to the mistress.[9]

The reasons why we continue to perpetuate a bipartite division are varied but include the fact that 'it is easier to discuss these poems critically if one can determine to whom they refer and what story they tell'.[10] It certainly makes them easier to teach. And yet, as this book will show, to insist on Malone's division estranges us from centuries of readers who did not feel similarly constrained and can lead to an unpleasant kind of intellectual snobbery and moral self-righteousness when 'misreadings' are encountered. Such a target has been John Benson, whose reader-centred edition of Shakespeare's *Poems* in 1640 altered pronouns from male to female in Sonnet 101 and replaced 'boy' with 'love' in Sonnet 108. Benson has been the subject of much critical opprobrium for 'censoring' the Sonnets, but he left most of the male pronouns untouched,[11] and the title he gave to Sonnet 122, 'Upon the Receit of a Table Book from his Mistris', arguably emerged less from a desire to misrepresent or obscure the Sonnet's sexuality, than because he 'assumed that the sonnets were to a female, unless otherwise specified'.[12] More recently, in 2007, a student who uploaded a video of Sonnet 18 ('Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?') to YouTube, featuring a female beloved, found him/herself admonished: 'sonnet 18 is about a man. You probably should have checked that out'.[13] In the context of the 'erasure of the male object of address' which Stephen O'Neill has found in other Sonnet videos,[14] we might welcome this critique, which challenges 'the kind of transcendentalizing long associated with Shakespeare, a problematic phenomenon that is predicated on at best an unwitting presumptive

[8] Ibid., 295.
[9] Ibid., 295, 301–2.
[10] Ibid., 303.
[11] See Rollins' critique of Benson in *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare*, vol. 2, p. 20. For a defence of Benson's editing, see Shrank, 'Reading Shakespeare's Sonnets', and Acker, 'John Benson's *Poems*'.
[12] De Grazia, 'The Scandal of Shakespeare's Sonnets', 35–6.
[13] See www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-_QlzUJBbU, accessed 2 May 2018.
[14] O'Neill, *Shakespeare and YouTube*, p. 162.

heterosexuality, at worst a silent erasure of non-heterosexual love and desires'.[15] But Sonnet 18 contains no gendered pronouns and could express a variety of desires. The student's plea that they were using 'creative licence' potentially invokes the long tradition of directing Sonnet 18 to a mistress, which may be 'wrong' or inaccurate, but is so only if we believe that the Quarto sequence is Shakespeare's own,[16] and if we subscribe to the theory that authorial intention can and should delimit the ways in which a lyric functions in the world. As it is, the author of this video cannot invoke the creative tradition of Sonnet 18 because s/he does not know it: the only history at play here relates to interpretations of the sequence, not of the Sonnet.

My assertion that Shakespeare's Sonnets (as opposed to the *Sonnets*) deserve a detailed afterlife may seem redundant – surely we have one? But although a number of important, chapter-length studies exist, there is no monograph on the Sonnets' reception.[17] This matters because the failure to explore the critical, editorial and creative afterlife of the Sonnets has led to a number of erroneous assumptions.

At one extreme is the view, prevalent in popular culture, that the Sonnets have always been admired; as a publishing blurb on the Faber & Faber website reads: 'Shakespeare's Sonnets of 1609 are as thrilling and persuasive today as they were when they were first published; perhaps no collection of verses before or since has so captured the imagination of lovers and readers as these.'[18] Necessary hyperbole aside, this overlooks the ominous silence to which the Sonnets emerged in 1609, and the difficulty that centuries of lovers have had in understanding them, and of finding a way to reconcile them with Shakespeare's plays. At the other extreme is the more informed, but still faulty, notion that the Sonnets languished in obscurity from 1609 to 1780 – that they had 'no history' until they were rescued by Malone.[19]

[15] Ibid., p. 163.

[16] Whether or not Shakespeare authorised the arrangement and publication of the Quarto is discussed further in Chapter 1. For an argument in the Quarto's defence, see Duncan-Jones, 'Was the 1609 Shakespeare's Sonnets Really Unauthorised?'. For a more agnostic approach, see Shakespeare, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Burrow, pp. 91–7.

[17] See the chapters in Smith's *The Tension of the Lyre*, Roberts, *Reading Shakespeare's Poems*, and Edmondson and Wells, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, and essays such as Smith's 'Shakespeare's Sonnets and the History of Sexuality', Roberts, 'Reception and Influence', and Matz, 'The Scandals of Shakespeare's Sonnets', discussed further below. Crawforth *et al.*, *The Sonnets*, also brings together a number of critical essays on the Sonnets' afterlife, and testifies much more positively than most criticism has done before to the 'unbroken tradition of reading [the Sonnets], both professional and personal', p. 1.

[18] This statement accompanies Paterson's insightful and irreverent *Reading Shakespeare's Sonnets*.

[19] De Grazia justifies her focus on the Malone and Malone/Boswell editions on the basis that 'it is with them that the modern history of the Sonnets begins, and since no full edition of the 1609 Quarto

Yet the circle of William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, seems to have been particularly engaged with the Sonnets in the first decades of the seventeenth century,[20] and the Sonnets sustained a 'Cavalier' readership until well into the 1680s. The fact that they were read and adapted in manuscript may mean that they were not 'popular', but it does not mean that their history is a blank. Furthermore, although Malone congratulated himself on being the first to 'separate [Shakespeare's] genuine poetical compositions' from 'the spurious performances with which they have been so long intermixed',[21] he was not the first to favour the 1609 text. Serious critical discussion of the Sonnets emerged in 1709–11, between Charles Gildon and Bernard Lintott, and editions of the Quarto were printed in 1711 and 1766. Moreover, although for modern readers *Shake-speares Sonnets* is 'the Sonnets', the canon of his lyrical verse proved surprisingly fluid well into the nineteenth century, with anthologists incorporating poems from William Jaggard's *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599) and Benson's *Poems* (1640), often out of personal preference – because these lyrics were what readers wished that Shakespeare had written – rather than from ignorance.[22]

By 2013, the Sonnets can be described as 'the fascinating and frustrating center of Shakespeare's *oeuvre* and, by extension, the corpus of Renaissance poetry [and] the canon of English literature',[23] but for at least two hundred years after publication they occupied a precarious position in the works of Shakespeare, with only a fragile claim to authenticity. They came into print through a counterfeit – Jaggard's pretended single-author volume, *The Passionate Pilgrim* – and their absence from the 1623 First Folio identified them as in some way illegitimate or superfluous – a hint that was taken up by Nicholas Rowe in his edition of 1709, which included all the apocryphal plays but rejected the Sonnets as 'spurious'. Peter Kirwan's *Shakespeare and the Idea of Apocrypha: Negotiating the Boundaries of the Dramatic Canon* (2015) does not, as its title suggests, include the Sonnets, but its compelling account of the fluctuating status of the apocryphal

was printed prior to Malone's that belated history can be considered their *only* history' ('The Scandal of Shakespeare's Sonnets', 40). De Grazia does include a footnote here, acknowledging that editions of the Quarto were reprinted in 1711 and 1766, but the damage has arguably been done.

[20] I am partly indebted here to Katherine Duncan-Jones' work on the Sonnets and Pembroke in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, discussed further in Chapter 1.

[21] Malone, *Supplement to the edition of Shakspeare's Plays*, p. iv.

[22] See Paul D. Cannan's fascinating discussion of stubborn attribution of *The Passionate Pilgrim* lyrics to Shakespeare in 'Edmond Malone, *The Passionate Pilgrim* and the Fiction of Shakespearean Authorship'.

[23] Catherine Nicholson goes on to deconstruct this assumption, tracing the Sonnets' lack of status in the eighteenth century, and exploring ideas about their originality versus their 'commonness' that are extremely suggestive. See 'Commonplace Shakespeare', p. 185.

plays, and its reconsideration of what the Shakespeare canon means, can usefully be applied to the Sonnets. Indeed, for some time these poems were more 'apocryphal' than those plays. In 1738, John Hayward's *The British Muse* gathered together poetry by Daniel, Spenser, Drayton and Donne, but overlooked Shakespeare's Sonnets, though it did find room for extracts from *Locrine*, *The London Prodigal*, *The Puritan*, *Thomas, Lord Cromwell*, *Sir John Oldcastle* and *A Yorkshire Tragedy*.[24] For anyone interested in the processes of canon-formation, the Sonnets also provide a fascinating test case, given the extent to which they endure and eventually thrive through the overlapping of different canons, including the personal, the critical and the pedagogical.[25] Catherine Stimpson's discussion of the personal or 'paracanon' is particularly pertinent here, as one that 'asks that we systematically expand our theoretical investigations of "the good" to include the "lovable" '.[26] Given the critical opprobrium to which the Sonnets were long subject, this might seem like an odd category for them to fall into, but it is evident from early seventeenth-century responses to Sonnet 116 – perhaps the Sonnet with the strongest historical claim to 'lovability' – that their afterlife is partly shaped by writers returning again and again to the same lyric, and even to individual phrases, as Charles Dickens does to Sonnet 111 ('My nature is subdu'd … like the dyer's hand'), or W. H. Auden to Sonnet 121 ('I am that I am').

In terms of the history of individual Sonnets, perhaps the most important syllogism this book will challenge is the notion that our selection has not changed:

> the same sonnets from the 1609 Quarto tend to be anthologised over and over again. This is not merely because, since 1780, we have gradually reached a consensus about those of outstanding aesthetic merit. It is because the majority of them make little sense outside a narrative that gives them a living context. Most of them defy the very idea of the anthology.[27]

But even a cursory examination of which Sonnets are anthologised from 1599 to the present shows that this is not true. The very first 'anthology' to feature Shakespeare's Sonnets, *The Passionate Pilgrim*, opens with two of the least adaptable and most narratively titillating: 138 ('When my love swears that she is made of truth') and 144 ('Two loves I have, of comfort

[24] See Shakespeare's entry in the 'List of Authors' in Hayward, *The British Muse*, vol. 1.
[25] See Alastair Fowler's identification of six kinds of canon in 'Genre and the Literary Canon', and Wendell V. Harris' 'Canonicity' on the way in which they interact.
[26] Stimpson, 'Reading for Love', 958.
[27] Schalkwyk, *Speech and Performance*, p. 27.

and despair'). By contrast, Sonnet 18 ('Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?'), which is now a staple of anthologies of love poetry, and has arguably become *the* archetypal Shakespeare Sonnet in the sense that it compounds some of their most obvious themes,[28] went missing for more than one hundred years, after being left out of Benson's *Poems*. Once returned to print, it was not one of the Sonnets that Malone lingered over, and it was generally ignored by early nineteenth-century anthologists, until it found a place in Victorian hearts through the agency of Francis Turner Palgrave. Similarly, the pall that fell over the 'Dark Lady' sequence,[29] for reasons both moral and aesthetic, meant that Sonnet 130 ('My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun') was cheerfully ignored until the beginning of the twentieth century, when the tragedy of Oscar Wilde made even such a mistress as this preferable to the alluring Mr W. H.

A comparison between Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* and the most recent *Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Sixteenth Century and Early Seventeenth Century* (2012) is instructive. Palgrave excludes all of the 'procreation' Sonnets, along with Sonnet 20 ('A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted') for perhaps obvious reasons. He is either uninterested in or disapproving of the 'Dark Lady' Sonnets, featuring only the morally chastising 146 ('Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth') and 148 ('O me! What eyes hath love put in my head'). The *Norton Anthology* selects, among others, Sonnets 1, 3, 12 and 15 of the 'procreation' series, Sonnet 20, and ten Dark Lady sonnets (including 146 but not 148) but makes its own surprising omissions. It does not include Sonnet 2 ('When forty winters shall besiege thy brow'), although, as Gary Taylor has shown, this was the runaway manuscript success of the early to mid-seventeenth century.[30] It also excludes Sonnet 64 ('When I have seen by Time's fell

[28] It praises the beloved's beauty, which it finds beyond compare; it insists upon his/her defiance of Time; it glories in the poet's power to confer immortality through the poem. Sonnet 18 has also become a 'gateway' Sonnet. In a change to Victorian practice, twentieth-century anthologies began to print the Sonnets in sequential order, thereby giving prominence to Sonnet 18 which seems to have been the first Sonnet that editors would alight on. It appears first in three editions of *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, as edited by Arthur Quiller-Couch (1900, 1939), Helen Gardner (1972) and Christopher Ricks (1999).

[29] All references to the Dark Lady or Fair Youth in this book should be understood as having quotation marks around them: these fictional individuals probably contain multiple real-life addressees, and have their own conceptual history, as discussed further in the final chapter. See also Wells, '"My Name is Will"', and Paul Hammond's discussion of the terms 'Dark Lady' and 'Friend' in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 3–5. I will also refer to the 'procreation' Sonnets (Sonnets 1–17) as a convenient shorthand, and because they do have some internal coherence, but this does not preclude the movement of lyrics in and out of this grouping.

[30] Taylor, 'Some Manuscripts of Shakespeare's Sonnets'. See also Chapter 2.

hand defaced'), despite the impact this had on Romantic poetry, and its recurrence in nineteenth-century anthologies.[31] It might be argued that the *Norton*'s ambition 'to bring together works of enduring value' and 'to give access to many of the most remarkable works written in English during centuries of restless creative effort' would be enriched by a sense of which Shakespeare Sonnets have most inspired this 'restless … effort'.[32]

One critic who *has* usefully engaged with the history of individual Sonnets is Robert Matz. In an article which seeks to survey the Sonnets' history from 1640 to 2007, he maps the differing popularity in anthologies of (in ascending order of popularity) Sonnets 54, 98, 130, 30, 18, 73 and 116, and his conclusions overlap broadly with the findings of my own research.[33] However, the limited scope afforded by a journal article inhibits how useful these conclusions can be. Matz has conducted 'a survey of over 2000 choices in the anthologization of selected Shakespeare sonnets from 1800 to the present',[34] but he cannot list which ones, or explain how those anthologies' self-description and implied audience might influence their choice of Sonnets. He also does not explain why he went looking for these Sonnets in particular: 64 and 129 ('Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame') are significant omissions, whilst 30 ('When to the sessions of sweet silent thought') and 54 ('O how much more doth beauty beauteous seem') arguably prove less influential. Finally, Matz's focus on anthologies limits his ability not only to trace the influence of particular Sonnets but also to explain what readers found in them.

The Afterlife of Shakespeare's Sonnets represents a new reception history of these lyrics, extending across a period of more than four hundred years and based on the evidence of manuscripts, commonplace books, print editions and anthologies, reviews, critical articles and academic books, the letters, diaries and notebooks of key literary figures, and quotations and allusions in some of the most celebrated literary texts. Whilst I hope to offer a more extensive and detailed account of the *Sonnets*' reception than any before, I am also concerned to trace the cultural history of individual Sonnets. The heading of each chapter quotes from a Sonnet which was particularly resonant at this historical moment, either because it was admired or because it

[31] The Norton selection has also changed substantially since the first 1962 volume, which included a section headed 'Songs from the Plays' and then nineteen Sonnets: 18, 29, 30, 55, 56, 60, 71, 73, 97, 98, 106, 107, 116, 118, 129, 130, 138, 144, 146. See *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M. H. Abrams *et al.* (1962), vol. 1.

[32] See Greenblatt, 'Preface to the Ninth Edition', in *The Norton Shakespeare*, p. xxii.

[33] Matz, 'The Scandals of Shakespeare's Sonnets', 500.

[34] Ibid., 479.

seems to get to the heart of some larger issue with the Sonnets (as in the case of Sonnet 20). Although tempting, I have tried to refrain from declaring any of these Sonnets to be the most 'popular' in their time. Such a determination is hampered by the absence of any kind of statistics on who was reading what for the majority of the period covered by this book, as well as by the more troubled question of defining who and what we mean by 'popular'.[35] Instead, I focus on the cultural, political and aesthetic influence of particular Sonnets, and suggest those which seem to have been most enabling in terms of allowing readers to articulate their own experiences. In the process, I offer new interpretations of Sonnet allusion in the work of Milton and Suckling, Keats and Wordsworth, Tennyson, George Eliot and Oscar Wilde, Wilfred Owen and Virginia Woolf, William Empson, W. H. Auden and Anthony Burgess. In each case, I am concerned with the particular manuscript, print edition or anthology which mediates the Sonnets. By reading these writers' appropriation of certain Sonnets through the material text, and through the Sonnet's individual history, we gain a deeper understanding of the allusion's resonance for the author and for his/her contemporary readers.[36] As this list suggests, my focus has been on literature written in English by British writers, with limited forays into American literature represented by the work of Laura Riding, Harryette Mullen and Samuel Beadle in the final chapter. A very different but equally rich afterlife might be written about the Sonnets in Continental Europe, and in North American and other post-colonial literatures.[37] The Sonnets' reinvention in other art forms such as music and film cannot be included here but would also be worth further study.

Each of the following five chapters is defined by a significant critical moment or publishing event in the Sonnets' history. Chapter 1 (1598–1622) begins with the first testimony to the Sonnets' existence by Francis Meres, and examines the experience of reading the Sonnets in both Jaggard's *Passionate Pilgrim* and Thorpe's 1609 Quarto, before examining their early manuscript transmission. Chapter 2 (1623–1708) considers the Sonnets' 'omission' from the first Folio, and the ways in which John Benson attempted

[35] For a fascinating account of this dilemma in the early modern period, including some key chapters on methodology, see Kesson and Smith, *The Elizabethan Top-Ten*.

[36] Andrew Murphy's work in *Shakespeare in Print* and *Shakespeare for the People* proves particularly important here.

[37] Sonnet 66 ('Tired with all these for restful death I cry'), for example, has a fascinating history during the twentieth century as a response to political tyranny in Europe. See Phfister, 'Route 66 and No End'. Sonnet 29 ('When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes') influenced Walt Whitman, 'the bardic voice of American individualism, expansiveness and freedom', as explored by Claussen in '"Hours Continuing Long"', 131.

to exploit this absence, and to refashion the Sonnets into 'Cavalier' poems. It also explores the Sonnets' strongly Royalist associations as they circulated in manuscript through the period of the English Civil Wars, up until the end of the seventeenth century. In Chapter 3 (1709–1816), we begin with Nicholas Rowe's castigation of the Sonnets as 'spurious', and their struggle to find a secure foothold in the burgeoning Shakespeare industry of the eighteenth century, until Malone's *Supplement* finds them a role in the canon that will bring them both prestige and notoriety. Chapter 4 (1817–1900) opens with the ecstatic re-reading of the Sonnets by John Keats, and a Romantic re-evaluation which not only produces new biographical fictions, but begins the vital process of selection and anthologisation that will increase their familiarity and accessibility by the mid-nineteenth century. Victorian women writers, including Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot, prove particularly concerned with how Shakespeare loves in the Sonnets, but it is Oscar Wilde's advocacy that destroys their romantic innocence, and brings the chapter to a tragic end. Chapter 5 (1901–1997) sees a new interest in Shakespeare's Dark Lady as a response to the Wilde scandal, but also demonstrates the sustained use of the Sonnets by First World War and modernist poets to give voice to homoerotic desire and to critique heterosexual convention. By the end of the twentieth century, however, the Dark Lady returns, providing a means by which women may write back to Shakespeare, but also prompting the first sustained discussion of the Sonnets' racial politics. Finally, in the Conclusion (1998–2018), we examine the innovations of contemporary poets and scholars in the last twenty years, which have reshaped even Shakespeare's most 'temperate' Sonnet, 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?'.

Given that Shakespeare's dramatic canon now looks more collaborative and 'open' than it has for centuries,[38] an insistence on the Quarto's authority and integrity appears somewhat nostalgic, if not reactionary. With what we know about the Sonnets' early fluidity in manuscript,[39] and the errors apparent in Q, so that 'It is impossible entirely to exclude the possibility that the sequence was set from different manuscripts, or from a single manuscript containing different hands',[40] the notion that there are other voices included in this text, and indeed other writers' lyrics, should no longer seem so transgressive. But this is not a study of the Sonnets'

[38] See, for example, Shakespeare, *The New Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. Taylor *et al.* (2016), which adds *Arden of Faversham*, *Edward III*, and *Sejanus* to the Shakespearean canon, and extends Shakespeare's collaboration with Marlowe.
[39] See Marotti, 'Shakespeare's Sonnets as Literary Property', pp. 143–73.
[40] Shakespeare, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Burrow, p. 93.

authorship. Rather, I am interested in the processes by which the *Sonnets* fragments and comes together, becomes spurious and then authentic, moves from the margins into the centre, and what happens when individual Sonnets go out into the world and form relationships with their readers. As one of the Sonnets' most sensitive critics, David Schalkwyk, puts it, their very lack of specificity makes them available for appropriation:

> the 1609 sonnets are not works of fiction in the usual sense of the word. Like a series of snapshots, they arise from, respond and refer to a world that they make no attempt to recover, because that world was self-evident to the people who appear in the photographs and to the persons who took them. It can only be glimpsed in the discrete shards of the poems. By an ironic paradox, then, the rootedness of the sonnets in real experiences and relationships leaves them especially abstracted and open to subsequent appropriations and projection: to precisely the 'death of the author' that is the consequence of 'the birth of the reader'.[41]

The invitation to speak through the Sonnets is one that centuries of readers have taken up in intriguingly different ways. That difference is the subject of this book.

[41] Schalkwyk, *Speech and Performance*, pp. 26–7.