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### The Sonnets of Shakespeare

T.G. Tucker was the founding professor of Classics and English at Auckland University College before moving to Melbourne in 1885. His 1924 edition of Shakespeare's Sonnets, with full commentary and notes, illuminates the power and beauty of the poetry for the reader. Tucker's detailed introduction contains discussion of key issues including the publication history of the Sonnets, the question of whether they are autobiographical, the arrangement of the First Series and factors of punctuation, spelling and misreadings or misprints. Recognising the significance of any corruptions of the text – however small – such as wrong emphasis or attaching the incorrect meaning to a word or phrase, Tucker aims to clear up as many as possible of the obscurities left by earlier commentators. Concise and accessible notes draw key comparisons between different editions, demonstrating for the reader the many possible variations and their effect on the meaning, and our understanding, of the Sonnets.

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# The Sonnets of Shakespeare

*Edited from the Quarto of 1609*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

EDITED BY THOMAS GEORGE TUCKER



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# THE SONNETS OF SHAKESPEARE

*Edited from the Quarto of 1609*

WITH INTRODUCTION

AND COMMENTARY

BY

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## P R E F A C E

A CONSIDERABLE number of the sonnets of Shakespeare are by no means easy reading. Those who are not content with vague or approximate comprehensions, but who insist, with William Harvey, upon connecting ‘sensible images,’ and not ‘inane phantasms,’ with what they read, must often have failed to make this or that line, if not a whole piece, yield them the full satisfaction of its contents. Benson (1640) may speak of the sonnets as ‘serene, cleere, and elegantly plaine, such gentle straines as shall recreate and not perplexe your braine, no intricate or cloudy stuffe to puzzell intellect,’ but most modern readers will regard that description—probably provoked by vexation at the ‘metaphysical’ school of poets—as needing no small qualification.

That Shakespeare was incapable of writing without fully realising his own conceptions or duly weighing his words, goes without saying. Of whatever strained conceits of thought or tricks of expression he may be guilty, we may be sure that he was at least guiltless of any vagueness or slovenly inconsequence in his own apprehension. If therefore we sometimes find a passage enigmatical, or suspect a conclusion to be comparatively pointless, we must believe that it is because we have ourselves missed the key to its meaning or application.

That even a distinguished critic may often fail to achieve a full interpretation is the only explanation of the remarkable statement of Brandes that the final couplet ‘often brings the burst of feeling which animates the poem to a feeble, or at any rate more rhetorical than poetic, issue.’

To some extent the obscurities may be due to actual corruptions of the text not yet detected and emended; sometimes a mere error of punctuation may lead the reader off the track; frequently the sense will be found to emerge when we discover that emphasis

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should have been laid upon words to which we have been giving insufficient stress; at other times we have been attributing an incorrect meaning to a word or phrase; very often the *nuances* of thought are left to ourselves to supply. Most difficult of all are the passages containing allusions which must have been sufficiently intelligible to the poet's own circle but which time has rendered cryptic to ourselves.

The chief endeavour of the present work is to clear up as many as possible of the obscurities which commentators have left, and at the same time to correct a number of erroneous interpretations which have been more or less in vogue. If patient and repeated study can achieve any good result, it is hoped that the notes given in the following pages may not be fruitless.

The notes have been deliberately made both ample in quantity and simple in expression. Experience teaches that what is 'obvious' to one reader is anything but obvious to another, and that very often the 'obviousness' is a delusion. Moreover the reading of the Sonnets is happily not confined to professional students of language and literature, and the lay reader may frequently be grateful for help with which the expert can dispense. On turning to the explanatory notes which this or that commentator has supplied, it is often hard to tell whether he has taken the meaning to be self-evident or has merely 'shunned' the 'dark passage.' The present work will at least not be open to the latter charge. If it errs, it prefers to err on the other side. In none of Shakespeare's writings is it more important to have mastered the various meanings which are possible to his mere words, and to select the one most appropriate to its setting. Many false interpretations have been due to negligence or mistakes in this respect. This does not mean that in point of vocabulary there is anything peculiar to the sonnets, but only that they afford more opportunities for misinterpretation in consequence of the brevity of the context. Even the most common-looking words must be vigilantly watched if we are to avoid error or the danger of half-appreciation. What, for example, is the proper

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sense to be attached in a given instance to *base, brave, clear, conquest, dear, fair, gentle, gracious, hue, interest, lovely, pride, repose, spirit, state, time, truth, unjust, use, worth?* The fulness with which such questions are treated in the notes to this edition will, it is hoped, find its justification.

In the Introduction there are discussed a number of questions which, though necessarily of interest to literary students, and not irrelevant to the general comprehension of the sonnets, are essentially of secondary importance. It will be found that, while no new theory is advanced as to the identity of the 'fair man,' and no suggestion whatever as to an identification of the 'dark woman,' no previous view concerning them receives an unpromising support. There is something pathetic in the claims of perfervid but singularly unjudicial advocates who, like Gerald Massey, assert (somewhat angrily) that they have 'proved beyond dispute' this or that theory. *Tantaene animis caelestibus irae?* The net result is, after all, but a *non liquet*. This fact does not, of course, exempt an editor from considering any available data with as much impartiality as he can command. A too manifest consequence of an obsessing Herbert theory or Southampton theory has been the corruption of the commentator's interpretation of the mere language, wherever his preconception seems to gain an atom of support or to suffer from a breath of danger. Meanwhile the feats of which esoteric and transcendental theories (mostly German) of the genesis of the sonnets have been capable are appalling to one who approaches the poems as simply artistic creations of the same sane mind which produced the dramas. In the following commentary all such interpretations have been passed over in silence—which need not be taken as a silence of contempt, but simply as one of confessed inability to comprehend them.

The text of Thorpe's edition of 1609 was manifestly very faulty. Thus the instances in which *their* and *thy* are confused are so numerous and so flagrant that very little critical intelligence can have been applied to the reading of the manuscript or the

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correction of the proofs. Editors and critics have not necessarily made all the convincing emendations which are yet possible. The punctuation of Thorpe is so frequently absurd as to call for little consideration, and it is still open to an editor to suggest in this respect new arrangements which have apparently not occurred to his predecessors. Beyond this, whatever suspicions we may fairly entertain concerning certain dark passages, conjectural emendation must proceed with extreme caution and on strictly technical lines. The present edition is therefore textually conservative, in the sense that it upholds the text wherever a sufficiently apt meaning can be extracted without inflicting torture upon Elizabethan English. If it ventures to offer new suggestions in cases where the traditional text is in some degree defensible, it generally does so in a note. In the few instances in which the bolder step is taken it is hoped that the commentary will sufficiently warrant it. But there can hardly be said to be any textual boldness where the solution of a difficulty involves a mere change of spelling or punctuation. Elizabethan spelling was far too unsettled a thing for us to insist upon retaining the chance shape of 1609, if that shape perverts—for us—the whole sense of a passage. It is scarcely even an alteration to write *feres* for *feares* in CXXIV. 9 or *heles* for *heales* in XXXIV. 8. One might perhaps even refrain from changing the spelling, and be content with changing the interpretation, if that course were consistent with the established and rational practice of modernising the orthography throughout. The question for us is not how Shakespeare or his copyist spelled a word, but how it should now be spelled in a sense which the modern reader is unlikely to misunderstand.

In the preparation of the commentary the method has been, first, to study and re-study the sonnets themselves; second, while their matter and their difficulties were familiar to the mind, to search the poet's own dramas and poems for enlightenment and parallels; third, to extend the search into any other English literature which seemed likely to yield assistance; fourth, to examine

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such ancient or foreign literature as is likely to have had some appreciable influence upon Shakespeare. Not until a commentary was provisionally built with the material thence derived have other commentaries, however high their value, been consulted. Only in this way, profound as one's respect may be for many who have worked upon the sonnets, is it possible to keep the mind so clear of prepossessions—and of some bewilderment—that it can hope to see a difficult passage in any new light. Whenever previous commentaries have prompted a readjustment, offered a plausible alternative, or supplied further light and illustration, the debt is duly acknowledged. But in these days of Concordances to Shakespeare, Schmidt's *Lexicon*, and the *New English Dictionary*, it is assuredly unnecessary to waste print upon meticulous ascriptions to Malone or Steevens or others of all the examples of mere Shakespearian usage which those students may have been the earliest to provide. Those who are interested in such matters will find them fully set forth in Alden's excellent variorum edition of the Sonnets. Only where an apt illustration of a thought or image is not deducible from such *subsidia*, but is to be drawn from wider reading outside Shakespeare, is it necessary to recognise that priority of citation must supersede any claim of one's own.

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# INTRODUCTION

## I. DATE OF THE SONNETS.

§ 1. The collected Sonnets as we have them were first published in 1609. We are told by the publisher that they were ‘never before imprinted.’ The meaning to be assigned to the statement is that no substantial collection of the poems had previously appeared in print; we must not press it to mean that none of them whatever had so appeared. In point of fact two of them (CXXXVIII, CXLIV) are included in William Jaggard’s piratical compilation *The Passionate Pilgrim* of 1599, although the form in which they are there presented might at first sight suggest that in the interval they had been revised, and one of them (CXXXVIII) in a considerable measure re-written. The case cannot, with this latter poem, be one of mere miscopying, as will be evident from a comparison of the two versions<sup>1</sup>.

Yet such divergences as they show are not sufficient proof of a studied revision by the poet. We should first require to be satisfied (1) that the version printed in 1599 was necessarily the earlier, (2) that Shakespeare was himself responsible for the accuracy of either version. Inasmuch as (according to Heywood) Shakespeare was greatly vexed when, on the republication of *The Passionate Pilgrim* by Jaggard in 1612, its contents were ascribed to him, we may put out of court the author’s own responsibility for the versions of the two sonnets there given.

The variations, great as they are, might perhaps be taken simply as showing that, during its transmission orally or in manuscript, a piece might suffer remarkable changes. Misquotation we have always with us, and it is possible that, where the memory

<sup>1</sup> Jaggard’s is given in the Commentary.

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completely failed, the blank was filled in by alien and incompetent invention<sup>1</sup>. But in the case of Sonnet cxxxviii there had almost certainly taken place a deliberate variation of the language in order to suit different circumstances. In the one application the woman is false in nature and the man false only in the statement of his age; in the other both alike are misrepresenting their respective years. Though the differences in S. CXLIV are less conspicuous, some of them are instructive. All are cited in the notes to that piece, and it will be found hard to believe that the poet at any time wrote l. 8 as it stands in the form of 1599. It is inconceivable that he should speak of 'Wooing his purity with her *fair* pride, since he harps so continually upon the antithesis of 'fair' and dark that he would inevitably eschew the word 'fair' as applied to the dark woman ('colour'd ill') concerning whom the piece was written; moreover the correct antithesis of 'purity' and '*foul*' speaks for itself. 'Fair' has all the appearance of a mere slip, of which only inattention or loose thinking could be guilty. If we simply conclude that these two sonnets—among others—were in manuscript circulation under Shakespeare's name before 1599, and that copies of them were apt to be corrupted or treated with unwarrantable freedom, we shall probably come near the truth.

§ 2. However this may be, it is known that a number of Shakespeare's compositions in this kind were in some circulation before 1598. We do not know how many. In his *Palladis Tamia* or *Wit's Treasury* of that year Francis Meres, speaking of our poet, mentions 'his sugred sonnets among his private friends.' Whether this signifies that they were actually concerned with various private friends as their *theme* is very questionable, but it is at least meant that they were in circulation *within* such a coterie. From the fact that they were accessible to Meres himself, and from his calling

<sup>1</sup> In the variorum matter supplied by Alden (pp. 21-23) will be found sundry 17th century ms. copies of S. II, which show numerous variations or sheer corruptions.



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them to 'witness' the abilities of Shakespeare, we may fairly gather that they were tolerably well known. The same conclusion is to be drawn from the poet's own statement (LXXVI. 6-8) that he 'keeps invention in a noted weed,' so

That every word doth almost tell my name,  
Showing their birth and where they did proceed.

§ 3. From 1599 to 1609 we lose track of the Sonnets, but at the latter date they appeared (with the addition of *A Lover's Complaint*) from the press with the imprint:

SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS. Never before imprinted. AT LONDON by G. Eld for T. T. and are to be solde by *William Aspley*. 1609.

Other copies of the same year have the variant 'and are to be solde by *John Wright*, dwelling at Christ-Church gate.'

T. T., it is known from the *Stationers' Register*, was Thomas Thorpe, the same who also published work of Chapman and Ben Jonson.

§ 4. Both the sonnets which appear in *The Passionate Pilgrim* belong to the so-called 'dark woman' series (CXXVII sqq.), which T. T. evidently prints as a kind of appendix. As that part of the collection is in general of a distinctly lower quality than the one which T. T. first prints as chief (I-CXXVI), it is a natural—though not an inevitable—inference that the 'dark woman' section mostly belongs to a comparatively early date in Shakespeare's sonneteering period. If we omit S. CXLVI, which is of a deeper and exceptional character and suggests no reference whatever to that or any other woman, most of the second section was in all probability complete by 1599. This does not, of course, prevent the view that some at least of the 'fair man' series, as well as others of the first section not referring to him, were also in existence by the same date. Two affairs, now appearing among the sonnets of two sections, seem to have gone on together (compare CXXXIII, CXXXIV, CXLIV with XLI). Moreover S. c (3-4) proves that the poet actually did write of 'baser' subjects while, as he confesses, he should have devoted himself to the more worthy theme.

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There is nothing further to indicate how many of the total number in both sections were known to Meres in 1598 as in circulation among the poet's 'private friends.' Nor is there any external evidence to show how long they had been in such circulation, or during how many years they were being composed. For any data on such questions we must fall back upon internal indications.

§ 5. Assuming the 'fair man' to be a reality, and that Shakespeare (though he nowhere distinctly says so) began to write the true 'fair man' series—that is to say, such sonnets as are really concerned with one and the same male friend—soon after meeting with this chief object of his affection, we gather that the composition of that series extended over at least three years (CIV), although there is nothing against supposing it to have subsequently continued for a year or so. If William Herbert was the man, we should naturally place the date of that first meeting not later than the year 1598. In that case S. CIV would be written in 1600–1601. But neither *terminus* of even that affair (if it be accepted at all) can be fixed with any certainty. Meanwhile, as will be argued later, we cannot reasonably conclude that all of the first 126 sonnets are connected with the 'fair man.' If they include, as almost certainly they do, other pieces—both earlier and synchronous—called forth by other motives, relations, and circumstances, we find that for these we are destitute of any other data than those of the style, tone, and 'intellectual fibre.' Shakespeare may have produced sonnets for some time, not only considerably before 1598 and during 1598–1601, but also occasionally after 1601 and before 1609. The only sonnet apparently pointing to a positive date is CVII, which is assuredly best interpreted with reference to events immediately following the death of Elizabeth in 1603.

Some of the pieces are of a specific gravity of thought and feeling and a simple mastery of style which irresistibly suggest a much greater maturity than those which are commonly recognised as among the earliest. Had the compositions been arranged in

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strictly chronological order, this fact would doubtless have been still more apparent.

§ 6. If, for the time being, we admit the autobiographical nature of the sonnets, we cannot deduce much of evidential value from the poet's references to his own age. We find him speaking of himself in S. CXXXVIII—a piece which appeared in print in 1599—as already 'old,' and of his years as being 'past the best.' Yet he was but thirty-five in 1599, and the sonnet would hardly date from that very year<sup>1</sup>. If we allow (as indeed the style would suggest) a later date to S. LXXIII, with its declaration that the poet is in the 'yellow' autumn of his life and the 'twilight' of his day, we have to remember that even as late as the publication of that sonnet in 1609 he was but forty-five, and the likelihood of the poem having been very recently composed is small<sup>2</sup>. The statement is manifestly hyperbolic. He feels himself so old simply because he is addressing one who is only in the first bloom of youth. His 'tann'd antiquity' (LXII) is purely relative. In S. II he evidently regards forty as old. 'Forty winters' (he does not say 'forty more winters') are to 'dig deep trenches' in the face of the beloved, to cause 'deep-sunken eyes,' and to make the blood feel cold. If he speaks (xxx) of 'love's long since cancell'd woe,' we need not conclude that he is looking back over any long stretch of years. To a man of, say, thirty-five a woe which has been cancelled at twenty-five or even thirty would be regarded as cancelled 'long since.'

As against all such exaggeration or rhetorical accentuation of his own age at one moment, we find that at others he was not acutely conscious of any overwhelming disparity. Thus (LXXXI):

Or I shall live your epitaph to make,  
Or you survive when I in earth am rotten,

would hardly be written by one who so far felt his seniority as to assume that his own death must necessarily precede that of the

<sup>1</sup> Tyler points out that Drayton (XLIV), when only thirty-six, speaks of himself as aged.

<sup>2</sup> So Byron at thirty-six wrote: 'My days are in the yellow leaf.'

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person addressed. No doubt life is uncertain, even for the younger man of the pair, but there is no suggestion that the poet was reckoning seriously with that consideration at the moment. So (xxxii):

If thou survive my well-contented day

is not the manner in which a man would naturally express himself if he felt that the probabilities of the beloved surviving him amounted to a reasonable certainty.

Of these two passages, it is true, an easy explanation offers itself. Those who are inclined to the sufficiently reasonable view that the sonnets are not in all cases concerned with the same person may be permitted to find further support in these discrepancies. The one who may survive him is very possibly, if not a wholly imaginary person, at least a different person from the much younger 'fair man.' Combined with other considerations these differences of tone may render that view more than probable.

§ 7. So far we have arrived only at (1) the certainty that a fair number of Shakespeare's sonnets were known to Meres in 1598 and that two of the secondary series were actually printed in 1599, (2) a likelihood that the majority of the 'dark woman' series were in circulation by 1598-99, (3) a plausible suggestion of the Herbertists that the true 'fair man' poems were written during 1598-1601<sup>1</sup>, (4) a high probability that one sonnet dates from 1603. It remains to consider the purely literary indications.

There are certain close resemblances of thought and expression between passages in some of the sonnets and passages in the longer poems of 1593-94 or in the early plays, particularly *Love's Labour's Lost* (1590?) and *Romeo and Juliet* (1591?). It is natural that these should have been used to support the contention that the several productions belong to much the same date. Thus *L. L. L.* 4. 3. 255:

<sup>1</sup> For a not very strong argument for the earliest date of S. LV see note attached to the commentary on that piece.

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O, if in black my lady's brow be deck'd,  
It mourns that painting and usurping hair  
Should ravish doters with a false aspect,  
And therefore is she born to make black fair.  
Her favour turns the fashion of the days,  
For native blood is counted painting now,  
And therefore red, that should avoid dispraise,  
Paints itself black to imitate her brow

is strikingly similar to S. CXXVII. So *L. L. L.* 4. 3. 238:

To things of sale a seller's praise belongs

recalls S. XXI. 14,

I will not praise that purpose not to sell

(although here we may be but meeting with a stock saying put in varied words).

*L. L. L.* 4. 3. 299:

From woman's eyes this doctrine I derive

is virtually identical with S. XIV. 9,

But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive.

To a reader saturated with the sonnets, when he turns to *L. L. L.*

2. 1. 13:

My beauty, though but mean,

Needs not the painted flourish of your praise,

there is an immediate reminder of S. LXXXIII. 1-2:

I never saw that you did painting need,

And therefore to your fair no painting set.

Among other coincidences may be quoted, e.g., *L. L. L.* 5. 2. 848:

Behold the window of my heart, mine eye

(cf. XXIV);

5. 2. 38. I am compar'd to twenty thousand fairs

(cf. XXI. 4: 'And every fair with his fair doth rehearse').

If we turn to *Romeo and Juliet*, we find, for example:

1. 1. 220. O, she is rich in beauty, only poor

That, when she dies, with beauty dies her store

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(cf. XI. 9–14, XIV. 12–14);

1. 5. 44. It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night  
As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear

(cf. XXVII. 11–12);

2. 6. 10. And in their triumph die

(cf. XXV. 8: 'For at a frown they in their glory die');

2. 5. 9. Now is the sun upon the highmost hill  
Of this day's journey

(cf. VII. 5: 'And having climb'd the steep-up heavenly hill').  
We may pass by other parallel expressions, which should naturally  
be regarded rather as belonging to poetic commonplace, e.g.  
*R. and J.* I. I. 156:

As is the bud bit with an envious worm

(a notion frequent in the sonnets, e.g. XCV. 2–3), or the antithesis  
of 'Love's shadows' to its realities.

In *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1592?) there are similar parallels,  
e.g.:

1. 3. 84. O, how this spring of love resembleth  
The uncertain glory of an April day,  
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,  
And by and by a cloud takes all away

(cf. XXXIII and XXXIV);

3. 1. 225. A sea of melting pearls, which some call tears

(cf. XXXIV. 13);

1. 1. 42. As in the sweetest bud  
The eating canker dwells

(with the same borrowing from Lyly as in S. LXX. 7: 'For canker  
vice the sweetest buds doth love').

In the poem of *Venus and Adonis* (1592), where we have a  
beautiful youth who refuses not only to marry, but to yield to  
the solicitations of Venus, the situation is indeed in some respects  
sufficiently like that of Sonnets I–XVII to make a coincidence of

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thought and language almost inevitable. Nevertheless a reader familiar with the sonnets will naturally suspect that there exists more than a fortuitous parallelism between e.g.,

11 sq. Nature that made thee, with herself at strife,  
Saith that the world hath ending with thy life

and S. XIV. 13-14;

782. Into the quiet closure of my breast

and S. XLVIII. 11 ('Within the gentle closure of my breast');

173 sq. And so in spite of death thou dost survive,  
In that thy likeness still is left alive

and S. VI. 11-12, X. 13-14;

157. Is thine own heart to thine own face affected?

and S. I. 5;

724. Rich preys make true men thieves

and S. XLVIII. 14;

445 sq. But O, what banquet wert thou to the taste,  
Being nurse and feeder of the other four!

and S. CXLI. 5-8;

149 sq. Love is a spirit all compact of fire,  
Not gross to sink, but light, and will aspire

and S. LI. 10, XLV. 7-8;

511 sq. Pure lips, sweet seals in my soft lips imprinted,  
What bargains may I make, still to be sealing?

and S. CXLII. 5-7.

Nor do the resemblances by any means end with these.

The argument is undoubtedly one of considerable strength, and if we are satisfied that, for Shakespeare to have reproduced himself so closely, the various compositions concerned must have been written either at the same date or in very close succession, it would become necessary to regard not only Sonnets 1-XVII—which could not then refer to William Herbert, since he was too young at the time—but also those addressed distinctly to the 'dark

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woman,' as belonging to some such years as 1592-94. That Shakespeare was a composer of sonnets by that date is clear from the inclusion of such quatorzains in both *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Romeo and Juliet* (if the Chorus in the latter is authentic).

But though *prima facie* so strong, the argument is by no means conclusive. In the first place it cannot be taken for granted that a poet who has once employed a figure or an expression will never return to that figure or expression. However fecund he may be, he does not forget a thought because he has once given it embodiment; it is still part of his mental furnishing. Experience shows that a practised and prolific writer is frequently surprised to find that he is repeating almost the same words which he employed years before in the same or a similar connection. Of the mind of any man it may in a sense be said that *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. In the second place we have to remember that *L. L. L.* was revised in 1597-98 and *R. and J.* about 1596, and that the poet's acquaintance with his own matter would then be renewed.

Close parallels to passages in the sonnets are to be found in other early plays besides those cited above. Such are *King John* (commonly ascribed to 1593-95) and *Richard II* (ascribed to 1594). Thus *K. J.* 3. 1. 83:

The glorious sun  
Stays in his course and plays the alchemist,  
Turning with splendour of his precious eye  
The meagre cloddy earth to glittering gold.

This immediately recalls S. xxxiii, but it would scarcely suffice to prove that S. xxxiii was written at the same date with *King John*; nor would any such conclusion be based upon the resemblance (if it be one) in S. xxiv to *K. J.* 2. 1. 498:

in her eye I find . . .  
The shadow of myself form'd in her eye.

If S. xxviii. 8, 13-14 contains an exact parallel to *Rich. II.* 1. 3. 268:

Nay rather every tedious stride I make  
Will but remember me what a deal of world  
I wander from the jewels that I love,



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we do not necessarily infer that the sonnet is of the same year as the play. Nor do we so conclude because in the play (3. 3. 65) occur the lines:

When he perceives the envious clouds are bent  
To dim his glory and to stain the tract  
Of his bright passage to the occident,

which recall the 'low tract' of the sun and its context in S. VII. 12 and the general matter of S. XXXIII.

Those who choose to seek data in *Rich. II* may further cite the allusion to 'perspectives,' the expressions 'determinate the dateless limit' and 'point on me' (as used of a heavenly body), and the contrast of 'substance' with its 'twenty shadows.'

The thought in *Much Ado* (2. 1. 186):

For beauty is a witch  
Against whose charms faith melteth into blood

is but differently expressed in S. XLI. 12-14, and the date given for *Much Ado* is 1598.

In *Troilus and Cressida* (1. 3. 35-42) we have, contrasted with 'ships of nobler bulk,' the same 'saucy boat' which, as a 'saucy bark,' is contrasted with others 'of tall building and of goodly pride' in S. LXXX. In the same play (1. 3. 240) the lines:

The worthiness of praise distains his worth,  
If that the prais'd himself brings the praise forth

mean the same as those of S. XXXIX. 1-3:

O, how thy worth with manners may I sing,  
When thou art all the better part of me?  
What can mine own praise to mine own self bring?

but this, after all, is merely to repeat in other words the commonplace 'self-praise is no recommendation.' *Troilus and Cressida* may have been written in a much earlier shape than that in which we possess it, but in the latter form it is commonly put down to about 1602.

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If *L. L. L.* (quoted in the notes) affords a close parallel to S. CXXVII, so *Merchant of Venice*, 3. 2. 92:

So are those crisped snaky golden locks  
Upon supposed fairness often known  
To be the dowry of a second head,  
The skull, that bred them, in the sepulchre

is at least as close a parallel of S. LXVIII. 5-7:

Before the golden tresses of the dead,  
The right of sepulchres, were shorn away  
To live a second life on second head.

The date for the *Merchant of Venice* is apparently 1596.

Such correspondences, sometimes in the thought, sometimes in the phrasing also, can be accumulated in much greater numbers than those here given. It would indeed be strange if the case were otherwise. The 'myriad-minded' man cannot keep stock of all his myriad notions. We have seen at least enough to demonstrate the danger of deciding that a writer is unlikely to repeat himself unless he does so within a year or two. The case may actually be the contrary. While we are conscious of having recently given a certain form of expression to a certain notion, we are perhaps more likely to avoid it than to repeat it. How conscious Shakespeare himself was of the need of novelty is manifest from S. CVIII. He feels (LXXVI. 6) that one should not 'keep invention in a noted weed.' He shrinks from 'dulling' with his song (CII. 14).

If it is urged that, unless we assume approximately the same date, it is very remarkable that so many resemblances should be found between the quotations given from *Venus and Adonis* and the passages in Sonnets I-XVII, an answer has already been partly given. The subjects are in certain ways so closely akin that the same notions inevitably suggest themselves, and to a large extent similar words would follow. Even allowing for a few years of interval, we might argue that the poet had as yet scarcely attained to that full freedom of thought, or even that full range of diction, which he afterwards displayed. The more or less unconscious

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recollection of a phrase once happily turned with some effort causes the mind, in similar contexts, to travel over much the same ground and the same vocabulary. The process is for the most part unrealised. The greater wonder is perhaps that the repetitions were not in this instance more numerous. Nor, again, is it inconceivable that even Shakespeare, when writing short pieces in a different form, may have wittingly borrowed here and there from an earlier and longer work, of which he did not suppose that the detailed recollection would obtrude itself upon the general memory. He speaks of 'invention' in terms which compel us to believe that novel 'invention' was not the entirely easy thing which we commonly associate with his superlative genius. If he did not scruple to borrow at different dates from the *Arcadia* or the *Euphues* which everyone knew, why should he scruple to borrow from himself? In the Sonnets themselves he repeats in xcvi a concluding couplet already used in xxxvi. In xciv. 14: 'Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds' is identical with a line in the play of *Edward III*, in which he probably had a hand.

So far as versification is concerned, it is an almost inevitable conclusion that the sonnets were nearly all produced during the period when Shakespeare preferred to write with 'end-stopped'—or rather 'end-paused'—lines rather than with lines *enjambées*. But this 'end-stopping' is no regular and deliberate stopping at the end of individual lines as in the very earliest plays, but only a natural stopping at the end of sentences which, from the structure of the Shakespearian sonnet, frequently coincides with the end of a short section of lines.

§ 8. We could not therefore decide from all these data that such sonnets as really belong to the 'fair man' series were too early to suit with the plausible theory (not here expressly asserted) that they were addressed to William Herbert from about 1598. Other pieces, which do not belong to that series, were doubtless earlier, just as some were later, and if we put down the sonnet-period as extending from about 1592 to 1601, without denying

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that a few (e.g. cvii) may be even later, we shall probably come as near to the truth as we are ever likely to get. So far as the argument from parallels applies, it will be seen that those which have been quoted would relate the sonnets to the whole range of the plays between *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Troilus and Cressida* (1602). In the later plays it would be hard to find any such distinct resemblances to expressions in the sonnets.

§ 9. Subsequent publications of the Sonnets are scarcely of sufficient moment to concern us greatly. In 1640 appeared:

POEMS: *Written by Wil. Shake-speare* Gent. Printed at LONDON by *Tho. Cotes*, and are to be sold by *John Benson*, dwelling in *St Dunstan's Churchyard*. 1640.

In this collection the pieces are in a different order and under individual headings, but xviii, xix, xliii, lvi, lxxv, lxxvi, xcvi, cxxvi are omitted. *A Lover's Complaint* is again attached, together with parts of *The Passionate Pilgrim*<sup>1</sup>. The inclusion of some versions of Ovid and of other compositions which are distinctly not the work of Shakespeare shakes any faith which might be given to the edition, and the fact that 24 years had elapsed since the death of the poet throws a natural doubt upon the warrant which Benson may have supposed himself to have for saying (in his Address 'to the Reader') that the poems are 'of the same purity the author himself then living avouched.'

Benson can hardly have printed the sonnets merely from Thorpe's edition. In his arrangement, which lacks any ascertainable system, that of Thorpe is almost wholly ignored until we reach S. lxxxii, whence to S. cl the earlier order is, with a few exceptions<sup>2</sup>, maintained. The headings assigned to individual sonnets, or to groups of two or three, e.g. 'A Bashful Lover,'

<sup>1</sup> How loose the ascription of poems was apt to be is illustrated by the history of Barnfield's Sonnet to R. L., which passed as Shakespeare's for nearly three centuries (nor is it altogether unlike in general impression). So, when Constable's *Diana* was republished in 1594, it included compositions which were not by that author.

<sup>2</sup> Viz. cxxxviii, cxliv appear early in the collection, cxvi precedes lxxxii, while xcvi and cxxvi are omitted.

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'A Valediction,' 'A Lover's excuse for his long absence,' may, it is true, have been added by the editor himself, but they rather suggest that the several compositions had been found in a scattered form, and possibly with these or similar headings already attached<sup>1</sup>. Had Benson intended to conceal a direct use of Thorpe's edition, he would hardly have left nearly half the pieces in the order in which they there occur. Sonnets cxxxviii and cxliv appear in the form in which they are presented by Jaggard in *The Passionate Pilgrim* and not in that in which they are given in the volume of 1609. This, of course, may be explained by supposing that, inasmuch as Benson was incorporating much of *The Passionate Pilgrim*, he simply took those sonnets with the rest of the matter, and, having once used them, ignored them when he came to handle the 'Sonnets' of Thorpe. On the other hand it may equally indicate that Thorpe's versions were not prominently before him. That Benson does not use the term 'Sonnets' at all may be due to the fact that his book includes other pieces, which call for the more general title 'Poems'; having employed the latter term, he finds no occasion to differentiate the sonnets from the rest. We can therefore build nothing upon that omission.

It is, however, more difficult to understand why, if he was drawing upon Thorpe, he should have omitted the eight sonnets enumerated. It is manifestly a far more probable conclusion that he did not find them among the material which came into his hands. It is doubtless just possible that in the interval between 1609 and 1640 it had been discovered that those pieces were not written by Shakespeare, but few are likely to hold that Benson was actuated by any such motive. There is nothing in the compositions themselves to indicate a different authorship.

As Sir Sidney Lee points out, the printer Cotes was closely associated with property in other work of Shakespeare. It is there-

<sup>1</sup> If so, this would be among the strongest arguments for the view that the sonnets were composed as literary exercises and without any real autobiographical relation. In any case it would appear that Benson himself so regarded them.

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fore conceivable that Cotes himself may have been in a position to supply versions of the sonnets which differed from those in Thorpe. We ourselves naturally set so much value upon the Quarto of 1609 that we probably overrate, if not the extent of the circulation which it may have enjoyed, at least the permanence of that circulation. In reality it may never have ranked as a standard work of prominence, and in thirty-one years it may practically have fallen into abeyance.

The Benson edition contains some few corrections of errors in that of 1609. These may be purely editorial, but, if so, it is remarkable that an editor thus bent upon correcting Thorpe should meanwhile have allowed so many egregious blunders of his own to pass the press in corruption of Thorpe. Those blunders are often of such a sort that they are much more likely to have been due to misreading of a manuscript original than of one in print. Moreover there is at least one case in which neither a correction of the editor nor a misreading of Thorpe can explain the divergence. This is in S. CI, where the sex of the person concerned is changed (l. 11 *her* for *him*, l. 14 *her...she* for *him...he*). The only reasonable way of accounting for that variation is to suppose that the piece existed in two versions, one applicable to a man and the other to a woman, and that Benson's copy was in the latter form<sup>1</sup>.

It may be taken for granted that many manuscript copies of the sonnets were in existence, and that this or that album might not only contain different arrangements according to the manner of gathering the several pieces, but also suffer from incompleteness. It is impossible at this date to discover that (or those) upon which either Benson or Thorpe drew.

## II. ARE THE SONNETS AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL?

§ 1. As to the autobiographical reality of the feelings and emotions embodied in the Sonnets the evidence, though strong, can hardly be rendered decisive. Among modern poets Wordsworth

<sup>1</sup> Compare the variants in S. cxxxviii and the explanation in § 1.