

A Note on the Text

Anyone examining the Quarto of 1609 can see at a glance how confusing the typography can be, and although the text may be deciphered, that process is far from being comfortable. Hence all modern editions have been brought into line with the spellings and conventions of today. Making the sonnets both easily accessible and completely faithful to the original is impossible. My main goal is to make the text readable in our time. Like all other editors, I have included some earlier emendations and made silent corrections, especially in punctuation. We do not know Shakespeare's wishes in these matters. Authors were not usually consulted by printers during that time, and the compositors were given free rein to punctuate at will. No facts have been established concerning the transmission of the text from Shakespeare to Thomas Thorpe, the publisher. No manuscript of any Shakespearian plays or poems has survived.

Capitalization was especially erratic, and I have removed what seems unnecessary or distracting. Some few capitals I have kept to make clear certain personifications, like that of the Rose in the first sonnet. (Although the 1609 edition capitalizes and italicizes the word throughout, I have limited its appearance.) The word *time* usually has an element of personification, but the word was printed with a lower case or capital *t* with no concern for that. Except for the beginning of each line of each sonnet, there is no regular use of the capital letter in the original. I have compromised and used a few capitals for clarity--for *nature* and *fortune*, for example. And I have not failed to follow the traditional capitalization of proper names, especially those of the pagan deities--*Love-god* as well as *Cupid*.

Punctuation also varies considerably. The colon, for example, is used fairly frequently; the semi-colon less so. In trying to keep both marks useful for modern readers, I have often interchanged the two. Dashes were never used. (Parentheses were, quite sparingly. I have kept almost all, contrary to other editors.) Yes, a few exclamation points exist and make sense! There might well have been more. Do the question marks function as they do today? Almost always. Apostrophes (not strictly a matter of punctuation) are used to signify dropped letters, e.g., *unus'd* (4.13) and *'gainst* (throughout). However, the apostrophe to indicate a possessive was often dropped, as in the title: SHAKESPEARES SONNETS.

The title, by the way, is used as a running head throughout, a typographical device that supports the notion of unity. All the sonnets are numbered--as in the original--one of the soundest indications that the poems were meant to be treated as a continuous whole.

Selected Editions of the Sonnets

- 1609 First Quarto: *Shake-speares Sonnets*, published by Thomas Thorpe
The first and most important text.
- 1640 *Poems: Written by Wil. Sh.* Edited and published by John Benson. A garbled version of the Quarto, with other poems, not by Shakespeare.
- 1709 *Works of William Shakespeare*. Ed. Nicholas Rowe. The first collected edition edition (includes the Sonnets).
- 1790 *Plays and Poems*. Vol. 10 of the collected works edited by Edmond Malone.
The first truly modern scholarly edition of the Sonnets.
- 1832 *Poems*. (Aldine Poets) Ed. Alexander Dyce. Important version for Victorians.
- 1864 *Works*. (Globe Edition) Ed. W. G. Clark and W. A. Wright. Standard version of Shakespeare on into the twentieth century.
- 1944 *The Sonnets (A New Variorum Edition)*, 2 vol., ed. Hyder E. Rollins. A compendious version, still much admired for thoroughness, accuracy and sound thinking.

Later and current editions of note:

- 1964 *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. W. G. Ingram and Theodore Redpath.
- 1977 *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Stephen Booth. Reproduces the original 1609 Quarto alongside his own modernized version.
- 1996 *The Sonnets*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans.
- 1997 *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones.
- 1997 *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Helen Vendler. Reproduces 1609 Quarto.
- 2002 *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow.
- 2004 *Shakespeare's Sonnets (Folger Shakespeare Library)*, ed. Mowat and Werstine.

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