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: SHAKE-SPEARES 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.

   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.


   of Shakespeare on into the twentieth century.

   compendious version, still much admired for thoroughness, accuracy and
   sound thinking.

Later and current editions of note:


1977 *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, ed. Stephen Booth. Reproduces the original 1609
   Quarto alongside his own modernized version.


2004 *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (Folger Shakespeare Library), ed. Mowat and Werstine.
Acknowledgments:

To the many debts of gratitude I have owed my wife, dj Bennett--fiber artist and author--I now add one more: her unfailing support for this book, including her scrutiny of the entire text.

Also I must thank my colleagues, Professors Carla Arnell and Franz Schulze, the former for a critical reading of the manuscript and the latter for pumping me up and keeping me on schedule. I salute Ruth Morse, a former student and now on the faculty of the University of Paris 7, for her sensible advice and encouragement.

To the staff of the Lake Forest College library, many thanks for the reference work they did over a long period of time and their uncanny ease and swiftness in summoning up books and information from places I did not know. For their general wisdom in the ways of books and publication, I want to compliment especially Corinne Stevens, Alie Stansbury, Rita Koller and Nancy Sosna Bohm.

The indispensable help in preparing this book for the internet came from the Brown Technology Resources Center of Lake Forest College under the expert aegis of Dr. Donnie Sendelbach, who guided the process with the assistance of Gabriella Panayotova, Alexander Monahov, and Quincy Roberts. Peter Lynn, also a key member of the technology staff, gave me timely advice and directed me on the right path to cyberspace.

The staff of the Newberry Library of Chicago must be commended, too, for its aid in accessing their great resources and coaching me as I tried to thread my way through up-to-date searches. Above all, the good counsel of the Library’s president, David Spadafora, was crucial in determining the mode of publication for this volume.

Lastly, this scholarly effort would not have been so widely available, had not Lake Forest College provided the support necessary for its dissemination. For this, my special thanks to Janet McCracken, Provost and Dean of the Faculty.