Print and Manuscript

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Abstract
Positioning Shakespeare at the "crossroads of manuscript and print" and exploring what the choice of print or manuscript reveals about the poet's intended audience and the social persona the poet wanted to assume and fashion, argues that "Shakespeare's authorial self-presentation begins as a poet and, more specifically, as a print-published poet" with the publication of Venus and Adonis in 1593 and the allusion to the publication of Rape of Lucrece in the next year. Yet also considers the implications of Shakespeare's early choice to have Sonnets read in manuscript rather than print and the appearance of Passionate Pilgrim which "does not suggest a poet who presents himself through the medium of print but reflects a manuscript poet who is brought into print by others."

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Introduced to England by William Caxton in the 1470s, print is the form most (though not all) of Shakespeare's literary writings assumed during or shortly after his lifetime. Only the wide dissemination made possible by print guaranteed the survival of—and thus makes possible our modern engagement with—most of his works. On the other hand, the production and dissemination of literary works in manuscript was not simply superseded by print once and for all, but the two forms led a coexistence during Shakespeare's time—and well beyond. Some poets writing around the time of Shakespeare actively sought print publication, but others preferred disseminating their poetry in manuscript. A notable example of the former attitude is Edmund Spenser, who counted on print publications, from *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579) to *The Faerie Queene* (Books 1–3: 1590; Books 1–6: 1596), to shape his career as a poet-laureate. A famous instance of the latter preference is John Donne, whose poetry circulated widely in manuscript but who chose to keep most of his poetry unprinted during his own lifetime. Philip Sidney similarly did not seek print publication, and his *Astrophil and Stella*, *Arcadia*, and *Defence of Poesy* were all print-published after his death. While these authors clearly favoured one medium, print for Spenser and manuscript for Donne and Sidney, Shakespeare is a somewhat more complicated and ambivalent figure, and we will need to examine in some detail his poetic output and his likely attitude as they relate to the two rival forms of dissemination.

In this examination of Shakespeare's poems at the crossroads of manuscript and print, much more is at stake than a quasi-archaeological recovery of textual origins in a far and distant past which can safely be entrusted to the care of editors and other scholars. Rather, the channels through and the form in which Shakespeare's poems first took shape can affect their meaning in fundamental ways. To understand how they do so, we first need to establish what difference the choice of channel makes in terms of author and readership. Authors who circulated their writings in manuscript were usually addressing the immediate audience of the scribal community, whereas print publishing authors took their places on the great stage of the world. Manuscript (or 'scribal') publication is therefore usually aimed at a relatively small, private, or semi-private community, an inner circle, as it were, within which more could be taken for granted and more was allowed than in printed books to which any purchaser had access. Certain qualities of Donne's poetry are therefore typical features of coterie poetry, such as the outrageous wit and outspokenness of his lyric poetry. Certain aspects of Spenser's poetry, by contrast, in particular the ambitious scale on which he planned and executed his career, require the print author's 'great stage of the world' to achieve their full impact.

The choice of print or manuscript as the medium for the dissemination of poetry bespeaks not only the audience the writer was addressing but also the social persona he was trying to self-fashion. While certain aristocrats did not refrain from print-publishing their literary creations, others clearly did, and scribal publication could therefore have a social prestige that print lacked. Accordingly, an author of middle-class origins like Spenser was more likely to publish in print than an aristocrat like Sidney: 'publication in print, where poems could be made available to all and sundry without any discrimination was, perhaps, construed as at the very least a lapse in gentlemanly taste and decorum.'

While manuscript circulation could thus have a social cachet which print typically lacked, print conveyed on the literary text stability and fixity of a kind that manuscript poetry could not achieve. As manuscript poems circulated, they were copied, collected, excerpted, altered, abridged, expanded, or appropriated. Marlowe's poem 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love' is a famous example, of which a number of rewritings or responses have survived, including one by Donne, entitled 'The Bait'. The kind of interaction manuscript poetry invited thus turned the circulating texts into malleable social products in contrast to the single-authored text printed in hundreds of identical copies. The rise of the author of lyric poetry is, unsurprisingly, a result of its print publication, as is the rise of authorial copyright. In a system of manuscript circulation of literature, by contrast, 'those into whose hands texts came could, in a real sense, "own" them' (Marotti, 'Literary Property', p. 143). Early modern manuscript culture, far from being a concern to which we can be indifferent, in fact forces us to rethink central categories of literary criticism: the author, authorship, literary and textual authority, literary property (Roberts, p. 9).

Shakespeare in print and manuscript

This chapter now proceeds to a survey of Shakespeare's poetic creation and dissemination in the light of the material form it assumed early on in either
manuscript or print. In the 1590s, Shakespeare seems to be acutely aware of the implications of both print and manuscript for the dissemination and reception of his poems. In these years, we know that Shakespeare was neither simply a print poet nor solely a manuscript poet. We know that he was both and that he distinguished between print and manuscript depending on the kind of poetry he wrote. *Venus and Adonis* first appeared in 1593 and *The Rape of Lucrece* the year after, and both were clearly intended and prepared for publication in print. Yet at the same time as these narrative poems went through some of their early editions, a number of Shakespeare’s sonnets appear to have been circulating in manuscript among his friends, though there is no hope of recovering who these friends and what these sonnets precisely were.

But let us begin with what we know for certain. On 18 April 1593, the printer Richard Field who, like Shakespeare, was born and brought up in Stratford, entered *Venus and Adonis* in the Stationers’ Register, which means that Field had acquired from Shakespeare a manuscript of the poem and was securing his rights in the work before going on to publish it. For Shakespeare, Field not only had the advantage of being a fellow-Stratfordian, but he was also known as a careful and reliable printer who had been entrusted with a number of significant literary texts, including John Harington’s translation of *Orlando Furioso* (1591). He may therefore have been an obvious choice for Shakespeare at a time when he was still little-known and unpublished. Shakespeare’s choice of subject for his first venture into print is similarly astute yet unsurprising. Interest in erotic narrative poetry had been on the rise, and Shakespeare could count on an expanding market of young male readers from the universities and Inns of Court with the necessary education to appreciate and the necessary money to purchase his poem. The first quarto of Shakespeare’s narrative poem, which appeared not long after the text had been entered, is so carefully printed that we can safely assume that Shakespeare had prepared an impeccable copy. His name does not feature on the title page, but it does appear at the end of the dedicatory epistle to Henry Wriothesley, earl of Southampton. The dedication places the publication in the context of the discourse of patronage: Shakespeare was clearly hoping for a reward of some kind. By the end of 1594, people browsing through the bookstalls at St Paul’s Churchyard (where London’s booksellers had their shops) must have realized that the poet William Shakespeare – author of a pair of narrative poems, prestigiously dedicated and handsomely printed, indeed one of them already reprinted – had arrived.

Shakespeare refers to *Venus and Adonis* as ‘the first heir of my invention’ despite the fact that he had been a playwright for probably two or three years during which he may have written as many as seven plays, including one masterpiece, *Richard III*. Shakespeare’s authorial self-presentation begins as a poet and, more specifically, as a print-published poet. The announced ‘graver’ sequel to his first appearance in print must have been completed by 9 May 1594 when John Harrison entered ‘a booke intituled the Ravyshement of Lucrece’ in the Stationers’ Register. In the following month, Harrison acquired the rights to *Venus and Adonis* from Field, and *Lucrece* was printed and *Venus and Adonis* reprinted before the end of the year, with similar ornaments on the title page, suggesting that they may well have been intended as companion volumes. Like *Venus and Adonis*, *Lucrece* was carefully printed and it, too, was dedicated to Southampton. The notably warmer rhetoric of the second dedication suggests that Shakespeare had received a reward of some kind. By the end of 1594, people browsing through the bookstalls at St Paul’s Churchyard (where London’s booksellers had their shops) must have realized that the poet William Shakespeare – author of a pair of narrative poems, prestigiously dedicated and handsomely printed, indeed one of them already reprinted – had arrived.

The visibility of Shakespeare’s printed poems did not diminish in the following years. By 1600, *Lucrece* had reached its fourth and *Venus and Adonis* its sixth edition. By comparison, of Shakespeare’s plays, only two had been reprinted more than once by 1600, *Richard II* and *1 Henry IV*, which both received three editions in the sixteenth century. While Shakespeare’s printed plays thus remained less popular than his narrative poems throughout the closing years of the sixteenth century, the publication of his playbooks witnesses an important shift in the course of these years: Shakespeare’s earliest playbooks had been published anonymously, but they started being printed with the author’s name on the title page in 1598. The shift was sudden and decisive: before 1598, all seven Shakespearean playbooks to reach print had been published without any mention of their author’s name. Yet in 1598, no fewer than four editions of Shakespeare plays appeared with the author’s name on the title page, and another five followed in the next two years. All of a sudden, ‘Shakespeare’ was a name that sold books.

This emergence of Shakespeare, the dramatist, was not unrelated to Shakespeare, the poet. Both dramatist and poet figure prominently in Francis Meres’s *Palladis Tamia* (1598) which not only mentions Shakespeare as ‘among ye English . . . the most excellent in both kinds for the stage’, comedy and tragedy, but also praises his poems. And it is Meres’s praise of
Shakespeare, the poet, which provides evidence for the circulation of his poems in manuscript:

As the soule of Euphorbus was thought to liue in Pythagoras: so the sweete wittie soule of Ouid liues in mellifluous & hony-tongued Shakespeare, wittes his Venus and Adonis, his Lucrece, his sugred Sonnets among his private friends, &c.\textsuperscript{8}

Shakespeare's Sonnets did not appear in print until 1609, but we thus know that more than a decade earlier sonnets of his were already in existence and circulating in manuscript. Meres's phrasing is intriguing: they did not simply circulate privately, nor simply among friends, but among 'private friends'. Independently of what Shakespeare's attitude was towards the publication of circulating in manuscript. Meres's phrasing is intriguing: they did not simply Shakespeare's Sonnets did not appear in print until 1609, but we thus know that more than a decade earlier sonnets of his were already in existence and circulating in manuscript. Meres's phrasing is intriguing: they did not simply circulate privately, nor simply among friends, but among 'private friends'. Independently of what Shakespeare's attitude was towards the publication of his Sonnets in 1609 (a topic to which we will return below), Meres's words strongly suggest that in the late 1590s, Shakespeare was consciously opting for manuscript rather than print as the right medium in which to have his sonnets read.

By the end of 1598, an up-to-date London bibliophile thus possessed the teasing knowledge of privately circulating Shakespeare sonnets and must have been aware that the name of William Shakespeare, the poet and the playwright, was well established. All this sets the stage for a small volume which survives of the first edition, but a second edition is dated 1599, a volume of poetry, 'By W. Shakespeare', according to the title page, entitled The Passionate Pilgrim. Only a fragment survives of the first edition, but a second edition is dated 1599, which establishes that The Passionate Pilgrim, like Shakespeare's narrative poems, was a successful publishing venture and provides further evidence of the saleability of the 'Shakespeare' label at the close of the sixteenth century. Published by William Jaggard, this verse miscellany contains twenty poems of which only five can be attributed to Shakespeare with confidence. Only two years after Shakespeare's poems and plays were still customarily printed without being attributed to him on the title page, there is thus a volume ascribed to him, even though published by Shakespeare's narrative poems, was a successful publishing venture and provides further evidence of the saleability of the 'Shakespeare' label at the close of the sixteenth century. Published by William Jaggard, this verse miscellany contains twenty poems of which only five can be attributed to Shakespeare with confidence. Only two years after Shakespeare's poems and plays were still customarily printed without being attributed to him on the title page, there is thus a volume ascribed to him, even though a part of its contents is certainly (and another part probably) not by Shakespeare. Three of the identifiable Shakespeare poems are lyrics from his sonnets. What holds The Passionate Pilgrim together — and is likely to have been counted on for the volume's commercial success — is a number of Shakespearean intertexts: the title's 'pilgrim' calls up the conjunction of the amorous and the religious characteristic of Petrarchan poetry 'hony-tongued' Shakespeare was associated with and may have been meant, more specifically, to remind readers of the sonnet the young lovers share in Romeo and Juliet. The so-called 'Venus and Adonis' poems, whose author remains unidentified, establish a connection to Shakespeare's most popular work in print. The three songs and sonnets from Love's Labour's Lost tap into memories of readers and auditors of Shakespeare's play. And the opening sonnets may not just correspond to but also remind readers of the 'sugred Sonnets' Meres mentioned. Plays and poems, manuscript and print — Jaggard seems to have been able to draw upon a variety of sources to publish a work which was in more than one sense 'Shakespearean', even though most of the content may not in fact have been written by Shakespeare.

Although attributed to Shakespeare on the title page, The Passionate Pilgrim is, in a sense, Jaggard's much more than Shakespeare's, unified by commercial rather than poetic intentions. What corroborates such a view is that the 1599 title page of The Passionate Pilgrim points out that the volume, though published by Jaggard, is 'to be sold by W. Leake'. William Leake had obtained the rights to Venus and Adonis on 25 June 1596, and Jaggard clearly wanted to cash in on the great success of Venus and Adonis by having The Passionate Pilgrim sold alongside it, perhaps remembering John Harrison's similar marketing strategy in 1594 when he in effect offered to his customers Venus and Adonis as a Shakespearean diptych. Contrary to the narrative poems, however, The Passionate Pilgrim needs to be situated at the crossroads between manuscript and print: made up of poems by various hands as manuscript miscellanies usually were, yet attributed to a single author as print publications increasingly required; its most authentic pieces intended by the author for manuscript circulation among friends but nonetheless chosen by the publisher for print publication and sale to the multitude. The Passionate Pilgrim does not suggest a poet who presents himself through the medium of print but reflects a manuscript poet who is brought into print by others.\textsuperscript{9}

This holds true not only for The Passionate Pilgrim but also for Shakespeare's 67-line 'The Phoenix and Turtle', published in 1601 among a group of fourteen poems (by Ben Jonson, John Marston, and George Chapman among others) appended to a long poem by Robert Chester, called Love's Martyr. Like the Shakespeare poems in The Passionate Pilgrim, 'The Phoenix and Turtle' forms part of a larger collection, and the characteristic form of the manuscript book — be it a miscellany, an anthology, or a journal — is
a uniting of smaller units. On the other hand, there is no sense that the poem reached print in spite of — rather than because of — Shakespeare, and no poems by other authors are here attributed to him. The separate title page preceding the group of poems following Chester's Love's Martyr suggests that a concerted effort went into the making of the miscellany:

Poetical Essays on the former Subiect; viz: the Turtle and Phoenix. Done by the best and chiefest of our moderne writers, with their names sub/scribed to their particular workes: neuer before extant. And (now first) consecrated by them all generally, to the love and merite of the true-noble Knight, / Sir John Salisbury.

A possible reason why some of the poets — in particular Chapman and Jonson — contributed to this volume is that in 1601, following the fall and execution of the earl of Essex, a powerful, literary patron, Salisbury may have been counted upon to fill the gap left by Essex or at least to offer an introduction to further patronage. Yet what motivated the contribution by Shakespeare — who as a shareholder in his company had amassed a handsome fortune by 1601 and seems likely to have been beyond the need for Salisbury’s patronage — will probably never be known.

The Passionate Pilgrim had successfully cashed in on Shakespeare’s name as the publication of two editions within a year or so suggests. The volume in which The Phoenix and Turtle appeared, however, does not mention Shakespeare on the title page, nor even on the separate title page prefacing the shorter poems. This may have contributed to the book’s commercial failure: by 1611, still not sold out, it was reissued with a new title page and a new title, The annuals [sic] of great Britaine. It seems more difficult to explain why another volume similarly appears to have been a commercial failure, the 1609 quarto advertising ‘SHAKE-SPEARES SONNETS’ in large capital letters on the title page. Whereas The Passionate Pilgrim received a third edition in 1612, Shakespeare’s Sonnets were not reprinted. The 1609 title page seems careful in spelling out that it contains the real thing. So what explains its apparent lack of success compared to the slight Passionate Pilgrim volume which is trying to capitalize on what Shakespeare’s Sonnets really offers is a question that has never been satisfactorily answered. It may constitute a necessary reminder that our modern notions of authenticity and literary value did not yet exist.

The apparent lack of success as evidenced by the absence of a second edition in the following decades is of course not the only enigma surrounding Shakespeare’s Sonnets. The identity of the ‘young man’, the ‘dark lady’, and the ‘rival poet’ has prompted countless theories and endless speculation, but they need not detain us here. More important in this context is the identity of  

‘Mr. W. H.’ — whom the epigraph by the publisher Thomas Thorpe addresses as ‘the onlie begetter of these insuing sonnets’ — as it relates to the question of how the Sonnets came to be printed. If begetter means ‘procurer’, as some have argued, and if ‘Mr. W. H.’ therefore refers to the person who supplied Thorpe with a manuscript, then there is little hope of recovering to whom the initials refer. A much more straightforward answer would present itself if ‘beggetter’ in fact refers to the author himself, and if ‘W. H.’ misprints Shakespeare’s initials, ‘W. S.’ or ‘W. Sh.’ Most scholars have opted for neither of these views, however, but have held that the Sonnets’ begetter is the person who prompted Shakespeare to write them (or most of them) and is therefore to be equated with the biographical figure behind ‘the young man’ to whom most of the sonnets are addressed. William Herbert, earl of Pembroke, and — with the initials inverted — Henry Wriothesley, earl of Southampton, are the two main contenders, though neither of them would normally have been addressed as a mere ‘Mr.’ There is enough information for us to go on speculating, but not enough to arrive at a solution, and perhaps that is precisely the point. Thorpe remarks on the title page that Shakespeare’s Sonnets have been ‘Neuer before Imprinted’, promising a reader access to what before had been confined to a circle of ‘private friends’, giving away but also withholding just enough information about this circle to keep up the curiosity. Whether or not ‘W. H.’ refers to a real person, the enigmatic initials may well play with this teasing promise to readers, placing them ‘both inside and outside a charmed circle of knowledge’.

Directly related to speculations about the identity of ‘W. H.’ is the question of Shakespeare’s role in the publication of his Sonnets and of A Lover’s Complaint included in the same volume following a separate title page that attributes it to Shakespeare. Was the 1609 Shake-speares Sonnets Really Unauthorized?, Katherine Duncan-Jones asked in an article of 1983, arguing against a long-standing consensus to suggest that it was not. The debate has continued ever since, and no consensus is about to emerge. In the 1590s, Shakespeare wrote for a print readership two narrative poems which were published in 1593 and 1594, and he wrote for ‘private friends’ sonnets which circulated in manuscript. This much is clear. But whether, in the following decade, he wanted the entire Sonnet collection to be print-published or whether he wanted to keep his Sonnets in manuscript remains unclear. This considerably complicates our analysis of Shakespeare’s relationship towards manuscript and print. Those who believe that Shakespeare opposed the publication of the Sonnets thus think of Shakespeare primarily as a manuscript rather than a print poet, in direct opposition to those who argue that he actively sought publication. Manuscript or print poet — the diametrical opposition is that between a private coterie poet like Donne or a
public laureate poet like Spenser, the opposition being that which I evoked early on in this chapter.

Since it seems impossible to determine with certainty whether Shakespeare wanted his sonnets to be printed or not, we have to look instead at the sonnets themselves. If we do so, a first point that emerges is that the printed sequence, whether authorially intended or not, significantly shapes the way a reader makes sense of the sonnets. In particular, by fixing the sonnets' precise textual make-up and arranging them in a certain order, the print publication raises questions about the sequence as a whole — its design and coherence — which have figured prominently in recent scholarship. In manuscript, by contrast, the sonnets must have originally existed on separate leaves (though quite possibly in small groups), were detachable and adaptable, entailing a radically different relationship to the other sonnets from that in the 1609 quarto. Whether the sonnets have a plot or show a progression are questions that naturally arise in the context of a printed sequence but are less likely to pose themselves if the sonnets circulate dispersely in time and space.

Once we examine the sonnets' propositional content, we realize that it preserves significant traces of their media of transmission. In a significant way, manuscript and print are not only the media through which the sonnets were disseminated but also what they are about. At times, it is difficult or impossible to determine whether manuscript or print is referred to: when the speaker expresses the hope 'That in black ink my love may still shine bright' (65.14), he may be referring to a handwritten or a printed page. Yet several of the poems to the young man show unmistakable signs of a relationship between a poet and a patron in which hand-written sonnets formed part of an ongoing economy of exchange. Other poems, by contrast, show an authorial self-presentation and the hope for the immortality of his verse in ways which by Shakespeare's time had become closely associated with print.

Manuscript, in particular, is inscribed into a number of sonnets as their original medium of transmission. Sonnet 26, for instance, refers to itself as a commodity, a hand-written epistle sent from the poet to his patron:

Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage
Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit,
To thee I send this written ambassage
To witness duty, not to show my wit.

(1-4)

The deictic 'this' in line 3 clearly refers to the poem in an earlier material form than the 1609 Sonnets. Even though the poem records its original status as a manuscript poem presented as gift to a specific patron, it survives thanks to its print publication in a book available for purchase by anyone. Other sonnets similarly point to their original manuscript status: 'if you read this line, remember not / The hand that writ it' (71.5-6), where the proximity of 'hand' to 'writ' reminds us that the former word also refers to handwriting (Oxford English Dictionary, n. i6); or: 'my papers (yellowed with their age)' (17.9), referring to the papers on which the poet originally wrote his sonnets.

A number of other sonnets, however, entirely remove them from the context of their early existence, expressing instead the hopes for the permanence of their reception and importance, hopes which, in Shakespeare's time, largely depended upon the dissemination made possible by print. Some of these sonnets are among the best-known, for instance 18 ('So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee', 13-14) or 55 ('Not marble nor the gilded monuments / Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme', 1-2), but there are instances throughout, in particular in the first 126 Sonnets, addressed to the young man. Indeed, it seems that Shakespeare 'has written both more copiously and more memorably on this topic [i.e. poetry as immortalization] than any other sonneteer'. We may be tempted to object that the idea of 'immortality through verse' was in fact voiced long before the invention of the printing press. Yet what applied to Horace and Ovid, securely aware of the lasting importance of their masterpieces, surely does not apply to Shakespeare's sonnets: not only was Shakespeare aware that lyric poetry remained relatively low on the scale of generic respectability, but he also knew that important sonnet collections of his own time, especially Sidney's Astrophil and Stella and Spenser's Amoretti, had appeared in print. Shakespeare must have known that the lasting importance of his sonnets would be bound to the printing press.

Sonnet 60 offers a particularly telling example in this context: the poet's hopes that his 'verse shall stand' (13) are voiced in a sonnet that is carefully placed within the sequence as a whole, within Shakespeare's Sonnets of 1609. Just as the number of Sonnet 12 alludes to the number of hours on the clock at the same time as it is about 'the clock that tells the time' (1), so the number of Sonnet 60 corresponds to the 'minutes' (2) that make up an hour. Indeed, the minutes that 'hasten to their end' are specifically 'our minutes', playing on 'hour minutes'. Sonnet 60 is thus emphatically not a detached or detachable sonnet pointing towards original manuscript circulation. On the contrary, it is firmly part of and occupies a specific place within a sequence of sonnets whose printing rendered possible the immortality which the sonnet itself thematizes.

Given the impossibility to determine whether Shakespeare authorized the 1609 edition or not, whether he wanted his sonnets to be printed or to remain in manuscript, it is strangely appropriate that the sonnets themselves yield ambivalent evidence regarding their relationship to manuscript or print.
While some preserve distinct traces of their original composition and transmission in manuscript, others anticipate the sequentiality and permanence of the printed collection. Oddly enough, we know a good deal about Shakespeare's attitude towards his poems in print or manuscript earlier in his career, that he wanted *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* to reach print in 1593 and 1594, that he consciously kept his 'sugred Sonnets' in manuscript in the 1590s and that a small collection of lyric poetry attributed to Shakespeare, *The Passionate Pilgrim*, was printed despite and not because of Shakespeare in 1598, but the attitude of Shakespeare's Sonnets of 1609 towards manuscript and print remains inconclusive.

**Poetry and print in Shakespeare's plays**

I now wish to enlarge and complicate the notion of 'Shakespeare's poetry' and its various forms of publication by relating it to his dramatic works. Shakespeare wrote poems and plays, and what characterized Shakespeare's creative output is that he was a writer of both throughout his career.22 Indeed, in the years 1593 to 1612, sixty-three quartos or octavos with plays or poems by Shakespeare were published, and twenty of them, almost one third, contained poems.21 While the coincidence of poetic and dramatic writing throughout Shakespeare's career is undeniable – and allows a privileged angle from which to consider Shakespeare as a poet-playwright – the exact form the poems/plays coincidence takes significantly depends, however, on whether we look at it from the angle of print publication or from that of original (manuscript) composition. If we do the latter, the picture that emerges encourages us to divide the history of Shakespeare's artistic production into two periods, that up to and that after 1594. In the first period, a dramatic output of probably seven plays, of which as many as four may not be Shakespeare's unaided work,22 is balanced by two narrative poems of some length, amounting to a total of more than 3,000 lines. In the second, by contrast, a total of thirty-one plays (of which perhaps twenty-six are of sole authorship) are complemented by a relatively meagre poetic output: the short 'Phoenix and Turtle' (67 lines), the relatively short *A Lover's Complaint* (329 lines), and the Sonnets (assuming all or at least most of them were written after 1594), amounting to little more than 2,500 lines of poetry. While the poetry–drama ratio up to 1594 is about one to five, in the period after 1594 it is closer to one to thirty-five. In the approximately twenty years after the completion of *Lucrece* during which we believe Shakespeare to have remained active as a writer, his average yearly poetic output is approximately 125 lines. Granted, numbers if cunningly handled can be made to suggest many things in many ways, and plays and narrative poetry may well require rather less writerly care than the extremely dense 'Phoenix and Turtle' or the Sonnets. Even so, there is no escaping the conclusion that Shakespeare's poetic output in the twenty-odd years after 1594 and until the end of his writing career is quite modest.

It is true that Shakespeare may still occasionally have attempted to make a mark as a poet. Burrow has suggested that the purpose of 'The Phoenix and Turtle' was 'to keep the name of Shakespeare alive and to keep it associated with new forms' (*Complete Sonnets and Poems*, p. 90). This may be so, but it makes us wonder why Shakespeare seems to have undertaken little else to uphold his reputation as an active poet. And why, if Shakespeare wished to keep his name alive, did he do so in a volume that does not advertise his presence in it in any significant way, not on the title page nor even on the separate title page prefacing the shorter poems? The title page of *The Passionate Pilgrim* suggests that Shakespeare the poet could have gained greater visibility for his name if he had striven for it.

In quest for an explanation as to why Shakespeare wrote little poetry after 1594, we might be tempted to advance the reverse of the plague theory with which the writing of *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* has often been explained. According to the plague theory, Shakespeare became a poet – writing *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* – because the theatres closed for an extended period starting in July 1592; the reverse of this theory would dictate that Shakespeare no longer wrote poems later on because he simply returned to playwrighting once the playhouses had opened again. Yet in fact, there were several lengthy periods during which the playhouses remained closed, in particular in 1598, 1599–1600, 1603–4, and August 1608 to May 1609.23 So had Shakespeare been waiting for periods of theatrical inactivity to return to poetry, there would have been plenty of opportunities to do so. Also, Shakespeare's dramatic output in the 1600s was lower than in the 1590s, with some twenty-two plays written in the last decade of the sixteenth century compared to only fourteen in the first decade of the seventeenth. So Shakespeare could probably have written more poetry if he had wanted to.

Alternatively, is it possible that Shakespeare wrote more poetry than is extant, poetry which perhaps circulated in manuscript, like his 'sugred Sonnets' in the 1590s? Had the 1609 edition, published late in Shakespeare's life, never materialized, what would we know about the sonnets? That some had circulated in manuscript in the 1590s and that a number of those published in *The Passionate Pilgrim* are likely to be by Shakespeare (though which ones, in the absence of the 1609 quarto, might have been difficult to determine); plus a very small number might have survived in manuscript and been identified as Shakespearean.24 It is perhaps unlikely that much Shakespearean poetry was written, existed in manuscript, did not circulate
beyond the confines of a very restricted circle and — in the absence of friends who did for the poems what Heminge and Condell did for the plays — was never printed, but the possibility should not be entirely discounted.

A more likely explanation for the decrease in Shakespeare's poetic output presents itself if we think of 'Shakespeare's poetry' without opposing it to or excluding it from Shakespeare's drama. If we do so, we may realize that after 1594 Shakespeare usually did not alternate between drama and poetry by writing the one or the other but combined the two by writing drama and 'poetry'. There is nothing archaistic about this idea. On the contrary, even though modern scholarship has often opposed the poet to the playwright, 'playwright' is in fact a term that came into use after Shakespeare's writing career, and the term Elizabethans used to designate a writer of plays is precisely that of 'poet'. Moreover, in the prefatory material to the 1623 quarto of The Duchess of Malfi, a clear distinction is made between 'the play' and 'the poem', the former designating the script as it was performed on stage, the latter referring to the dramatic text written and printed for readers. The same distinction can be related to Shakespeare's dramatic practice.

Once Shakespeare had become a member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594 and could exert greater control over his playtexts, he and his fellow players and shareholders seem to have adopted a consistent policy of 'publishing', as it were, both the 'play' and the 'poem', the first one in the theatre, the second one by having it printed about two years later, a practice which they seem to have applied whenever possible until the end of the century. As in the case of Webster, the difference between 'play' and 'poem' was a matter not only of publication but also of length. The title page points out that the printed text contains 'diuere things ... that the length of the Play would not beare in the Presentment', meaning that the play was significantly abridged in performance. At roughly 3,000 lines, The Duchess of Malfi is a long play ('poem' would be Webster's word), but there are two other playwrights who repeatedly wrote playtexts of a similar or even greater length: Ben Jonson, of whom we have long known that he cared more for readers than for the "loathed stage" and whose Every Man Out of His Humour (1600) was advertised on the title page as 'Containing more than hath been Publickly Spoken or Acted', and Shakespeare.

The suspicion that Shakespeare, like Webster and Jonson, distinguished between a long readerly 'poem' and an abridged theatrical 'play' is corroborated by what we know about the practice of Shakespeare's successors as playwrights for the King's Men: Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher. According to the publisher Humphrey Moseley's prefatory address in the Folio edition of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays of 1647, when their plays were performed, 'the Actours omitted some Scenes and Passages (with the Author's consent) as occasion led them'. Many of Shakespeare's plays are significantly longer than even the longest play in the Beaumont and Fletcher Folio, suggesting that Shakespeare wrote his long 'poems' in the knowledge that they would be reduced to the practicable performance length of 'plays'. If we wish to compare Shakespearean 'poems' to 'plays', the best evidence we have may be those plays of which short and long versions survive, in particular Romeo and Juliet, Henry V, and Hamlet. The second quarto of Romeo and Juliet (1599), the Folio text of Henry V (1623), and the second quarto of Hamlet (1604/5) are as long or even longer than The Duchess of Malfi. They seem to be what Webster calls 'poems', whereas the substantially shorter first quarto of Romeo and Juliet (1597), Henry V (1600), and Hamlet (1603) may well correspond to Webster's 'play' in that they reflect — however dimly — how these plays were performed in Shakespeare's time.

Significantly, one of the chief differences between 'poem' and 'play' resides precisely in the amount and the sophistication of poetic material. What is typically omitted in the process of abridgement are poetically elaborate passages like substantial parts of Juliet's soliloquies (for instance, all but the first six lines of her opening soliloquy in 2.5 and all but four lines of the one in 3.2), most of the Player King's long speech in 3.2 of Hamlet, and a long passage in Henry's speech before the gates of Harfleur. Such material does little to advance the plot and may therefore have been most liable to cutting when the texts were abridged.

It thus emerges that Shakespeare appears to have been a writer of not only lyric and narrative but also dramatic poems, of playtexts written not only with performance on stage but also with a readerly reception on the page in mind. Once we keep this in mind, we recognize the significance of the kinds of plays Shakespeare wrote in the mid-1590s, shortly after Venus and Adonis and Lucrece — Love's Labour's Lost, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Romeo and Juliet, and Richard II all fall within this period — plays, that is, which are characterized by the amount and sophistication of their poetry. In earlier accounts of Shakespeare's career, these years used to be called 'the lyric phase', and the connection in genre and chronology to the earlier narrative poems used to be recognized. Chambers thought that 'it is most reasonable to suppose that at some date Shakespeare decided to make a deliberate experiment in lyrical drama. A very natural stimulus would be afforded by his experience of lyrical work in the narrative poems'. Once we are aware that Shakespeare kept writing 'poems' throughout his career, we may recognize that what Chambers calls an 'experiment' in fact marks the transition from narrative to drama as the predominant form taken by Shakespeare's poetry in the course of his career. By 1600, all four of the above-mentioned dramatic poems had appeared in print just as by 1594 both of Shakespeare's narrative...
poems had been published. In other words, as Shakespeare must have become aware, the fact that his plays were performed on stage did not keep them from having a second existence in the form of printed texts, making their elaborate poetry available to the reading public just as his narrative poems had been.

Shakespeare's contemporaries were clearly responsive to both kinds of poetry. Around the turn of the century, Gabriel Harvey, in a discussion of several contemporary poets, juxtaposes Lucrece and Hamlet as material fit 'to please the wiser sort'. Harvey sees no generic incompatibility between the two works, but considers them both as poems on a serious subject. Similarly, William Drummond, Laird of Hawthdon, who read the second quarto of Romeo and Juliet (1599) in 1606, treated it much like poetry, highlighting lyric purple patches by overscoring them. Montague's metaphor for dawn is representative for the kind of passage Drummond singled out: 'as the alcheering Sunne, / Should in the farthest East begin to draw, / The shadie curtaines from Aurora's bed' (B 1r.). Drummond's overscorings show that he read Shakespeare's playtext as a dramatic poem, not as a theatrical script that happened to have been printed.

The most telling evidence of the early reception not only of Venus and Adonis and Lucrece but also of his playtexts as poetry is provided by two literary anthologies, England's Parnassus and Belvedere, or the Garden of the Muses, both published in 1600. They compile verse passages, mostly from Shakespeare's narrative poems and his plays. As a consequence, lyric passages from his plays, excerpted both from his narrative poems and his plays. As a consequence, lyric passages from Richard II, Love's Labour's Lost, Romeo and Juliet, Richard III, and Henry IV appear among excerpts from works by contemporary poets such as Michael Drayton, Samuel Daniel, Sidney, and Spenser, as well as among lines from Shakespeare's own Venus and Adonis and Lucrece. It appears that half-way through his career, Shakespeare, the poet, was firmly established in print as a writer of both narrative and dramatic poems.

Conclusion

This chapter has thus suggested that there are two complementary ways of looking at Shakespeare's poetic career in terms of print and manuscript: the first one stresses the continuity of Shakespeare's output of poetry in the narrow sense of this term by focusing on three periods of print publication, one early, one middle, one late: Venus and Adonis and Lucrece in 1593-4; The Passionate Pilgrim and 'The Phoenix and Turtle' in 1598-1601; the

NOTES

1 Sir Thomas More, to which Shakespeare is usually thought to have contributed, was not printed until the nineteenth century, and Cardenio, a play co-authored by John Fletcher and Shakespeare according to an entry in the Stationers' Register, only survives in an eighteenth-century adaptation by Lewis Theobald.


11 It has wrongly been argued that the book was reprinted, not reissued. See, for example, E. K. Chambers, William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Fiction, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), li 549.


17 For the material form of early modern manuscript circulation of poetry, see Marotti, ‘Literary Property’, p. 147.
18 See Marotti, ‘Literary Property’.
20 As Cheney points out, ‘the publication of Shakespeare’s poems coincided throughout his career with the staging of his plays and even the printing of his plays in quartos’ (*Shakespeare, Poet—Playwright*, p. 19).
22 The three parts of *Henry 6* and *Titus Andronicus* all seem likely to have been written in collaboration (see Wells and Taylor, with Jowett and Montgomery, *Textual Companion*, pp. 111–15; and Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author* (Oxford University Press, 2003)).
24 On extant manuscript versions of Shakespearean sonnets, probably all dating from after Shakespeare’s death, see Burrow (ed.), *Complete Sonnets and Poems*, pp. 106–7. See also Roberts, *Reading Shakespeare’s Poems*.
25 The date of the earliest occurrence recorded by the OED (2nd edn, 1989) is 1687, but John Davies mentions it in fact as early as 1617, in *Wit’s Bedlam* (177a).
26 See Erne, *Literary Dramatist*; what follows draws on ideas developed in this study.

**READING LIST**