ARRIVAL IN LONDON

in 1594; but the parts that remain untouched or slightly altered clearly show by the verbal jests, the elaborate rhyme, the painful balancing of speeches, and the patches of doggerel verse that this was one of his earliest efforts at dramatic composition, if not indeed his very earliest. It is mainly based on the Menaechmi of Plautus with certain additions from the Amphitruo, neither of which appeared in English translation until 1595; and it may well have been the product of his days as a “schoolmaster in the country.”

If he was able to submit this play to the actors upon his arrival, he probably could not at once devote much time to further composition. He would be too busy learning the profession of acting, memorizing his parts, and familiarizing himself with the life of the city. But the Pembroke’s Men were soon to need his facile pen, for in 1592, it seems, they lost the services of their chief playwright, Marlowe. Apparently we have a clue to the cause in a letter written by Kyd after his arrest in May, 1593, on the charge of being the author of an atheistical pamphlet found in his study. After attributing the pamphlet to Marlowe, he says: “Never could my Lord endure his name or sight, when he had heard of his conditions,” i.e., his atheistical inclinations. That Marlowe had left the employ of the Earl of Pembroke long before Kyd’s arrest is shown by a second letter from Kyd: “It was his custom, when I knew him first, and as I hear say he continued it, in table-talk and otherwise to jest at divine scriptures”; and “I left and did refrain his company,” he says, “by my Lord’s commandment.”

1 It has been suggested, but unconvincingly, that the obscure young actor may have had the privilege of seeing the manuscript of Warner’s translation before it was printed. As P. J. Enk, in Neophilologus, 1920, pp. 359–65, shows, Shakespeare took over proper names from the original that do not appear in the translation at all.

2 This letter, recently discovered, may be found in the Literary Supplement of the London Times, June 2, 1921.

[ 133 ]
ceased to write for the Pembroke’s Men in 1592 is further indicated by the fact that in January, 1593, the Lord Strange’s Men brought out his *Massacre at Paris* as a new play. In May, 1593, when Kyd was arrested, Marlowe’s residence is said to have been in “the house of Mr. T. Walsingham, in Kent.”

The loss of Marlowe would naturally throw some of the burden of dramatic revision and composition upon the shoulders of the new arrival, who had already, we may suppose, demonstrated his ability to pen a part. And at once we find Shakespeare exercising his skill in touching up several of the old stock pieces belonging to the company, plays, no doubt, in which he himself had been called upon to act. Perhaps one of these was *Titus Andronicus*, mainly, if not entirely, by George Peele, a crude tragedy which through its sensationalism and bloody horrors was popular with theatre-goers. The success of the somewhat similar play, *The Spanish Tragedy*, bears eloquent testimony to the murderous tastes of the early audiences. At the end of the performance, after giving a detailed catalogue of all the ingeniously devised deaths, nine in number, which had been presented for the delectation of the spectators, Andrea exclaims:

Aye, these were spectacles to please my soul!

And in the remarkably bloody play of *Selimus* (about 1590), the author says to his audience:

---

1 That Shakespeare was not responsible for the whole play is, I think, obvious. Edward Ravenscroft, who wrote a new version of it in 1678, states: “I have been told by some anciently conversant with the stage that it was not originally his, but brought by a private author to be acted, and he only gave it some master touches to one or two of the principal parts or characters.”

2 Mr. H. Dugdale Sykes, who has made an exhaustive study of Peele’s style, confidently declares (*Sideline on Shakespeare*, 1919, p. 125), that “almost every page” of *Titus Andronicus* “exhibits traces of Peele’s vocabulary and phrasing.”
ARRIVAL IN LONDON

If this First Part, gentles, do like you well,
The Second Part shall greater murders tell.

Shakespeare could hardly have had a genuine artistic interest in the bloody Titus, but his business shrewdness showed him the opportunity of turning it into a great money-maker for his company. In this he was more than successful. Nearly a quarter of a century later Ben Jonson declared: ¹ “He that will swear Jeronimo [i.e., The Spanish Tragedy] or Andronicus are the best plays yet, shall pass unexcepted at here as a man whose judgment shows it is constant and hath stood still these five-and-twenty or thirty years.” ² That the play as thus revised by Shakespeare was acted by the Pembroke’s Company is clearly stated on the title-page of the first edition, issued in February, 1593–94.

• But our first definite reference to the success of Shakespeare in this kind of revision appears in the summer of 1592. The Pembroke Company’s chief rival, the Lord Strange’s Company, then newly established at the Rose,

¹ In his Induction to Bartholomew Fair, 1614. With reference to the date of The Spanish Tragedy and Titus Andronicus Jonson, of course, is speaking in round numbers and from general recollection.

² The later history of the play is not without interest. In 1593, when Pembroke’s Company was disbanded, the Lord Strange’s Men bought a number of its best plays, including Titus. This they acted in the country as Derby’s Men. On January 23, 1594, the Sussex Men acted the play at Henslowe’s Rose while the Strange-Derby company was absent. Either they purchased a second copy from some member of Pembroke’s Company, or, as seems more likely, Henslowe, in his desire to make money in a lean year, lent them the copy he had purchased as manager for the Strange-Derby troupe. In his record of the performance he marks it “ne.” or new, meaning, I presume, that it had not before been acted at his theatre (cf. his entry of Edward I), or possibly not acted by this company. The Pembroke’s Company seems also to have parted with a copy to a publisher, who entered it in the Stationers’ Registers on February 6, 1593–94, and published it shortly after. Until recently the existence of this edition was doubted; but in 1905 a copy turned up in Sweden, and was purchased by an American collector for £2000. The title-page states that the play had been acted by “the Earle of Derby, Earl of Pembroke, and Earle of Sussex their Servants,” which agrees with the history of the play as sketched above.
brought out early in 1592 a play by George Peele,\footnote{For the authorship and history of the play see C. F. Tucker Brooke’s edition of \textit{I Henry VI} in The Yale Shakespeare Series. I may add that before the appearance of this volume my own study of the authorship of the play led me to the same conclusion.} possibly assisted by Robert Greene, entitled \textit{Henry VI}. Henslowe, business-manager for the Strange’s Men, notes its first performance on March 3, marking it “ne.,” that is, a new play. It proved to be the chief sensation of the year, and Henslowe records no fewer than fifteen performances of it between March 3 and June 22, when the playhouses were closed by order of the Privy Council. Peele’s friend, Thomas Nashe, writing in July, 1592, exclaims: “How would it have joyed brave Talbot (the terror of the French) to think that after he had lain two hundred years in his tomb he should triumph again on the stage, and have his bones new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least (at several times), who in the tragedian that represents his person imagine they behold him fresh bleeding.”\footnote{See C. F. Tucker Brooke, \textit{The Authorship of the Second and Third Parts of \textit{King Henry VI}},” 1912. There is no ground for the supposition that Greene had a share in these plays; see J. C. Collins, \textit{The Plays and Poems of Robert Greene}, i, 68–69. On the other hand, it seems quite possible that George Peele was associated with Marlowe in their composition; see H. Dugdale Sykes, \textit{Sidelights on Shakespeare}, pp. 108 ff.}

The astonishing popularity of this Lord Strange’s play led the Pembroke’s Men to seek a rival attraction, for such was the custom among theatrical troupes. In order to enable his company to compete with Peele’s great success, Shakespeare, it would seem, hurriedly revised Marlowe’s\footnote{\textit{Pierce Penniless}, entered in the Stationers’ Registers on August 8, 1592.} twin plays, \textit{The Contention betwixt the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster}, and \textit{The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York}, both, as it happened, dealing with the reign of Henry VI. Since the manuscripts belonged to the Pembroke’s Men, Marlowe could
ARRIVAL IN LONDON

raise no objection to any changes the owners might see
fit to make in them. And the plays, of course, were
widely advertised by the actors in bills posted all over
the city as "newly revised, with additions by William
Shakespeare," and as presenting "the history of King
Henry VI." ¹

The connection of these two revisions with Pembroke's
troupe is clearly revealed by the publication of The First
Part of the Contention in 1594 (entered in the Stationers'
Registers, March 12, 1593–94), and the Second Part, The
True Tragedy, in the following year, both by the same
publisher, and with the statement on the title-page of the
Second Part: "as it was sundrie times acted by the Right
Honourable the Earl of Pembroke his servants." The
plays show unmistakable signs of Shakespeare's workman-
ship. As still further revised by the master, they were in-
cluded in the First Folio, 1623, with the titles II Henry
VI and III Henry VI. The Folio editors made use of
the ancient playhouse manuscripts secured from the
archives of Shakespeare's company; and in some of
the old prompter's stage-directions reproduced by the
printers we discover embedded the names of three ac-
tors, Gabriel Spencer, John Sinklow, and Humphrey
Jeffes, two of whom were certainly Pembroke's Men, and
the third may have been.²

These two plays, after Shakespeare's hurried but effec-
tive revision, met with unusual success. Naturally this
success, built directly on the labors of Marlowe and com-
peting with George Peele's popular Henry VI, would lead
to resentment among the University Wits, — "those that
lived by their wits, and such as were of the livery of

¹ "I refer you to the Players' bill, that is styled Newly revised, with Ad-
ditions." — Thomas Campion, Fourth Book of Airs, To the Reader.
² For an interesting discussion of these plays see A. W. Pollard, "The
York and Lancaster Plays in the Folio," The Times Literary Supplement,
1918, pp. 438, 452.

[ 137 ]
learning," ¹ — who would regard the new arrival from Stratford as an "upstart" beautifying himself with stolen feathers. Robert Greene, dying in poverty and neglected by the actors — possibly the Pembroke’s Men ² — who had formerly employed him as their dramatist, wrote a bitter attack upon the "upstart," in which he urged his fellow University Wits to quit the trade of play-making. This attack, in the form of an open letter, was embodied in his Great’s-worth of Wit, the manuscript of which he sold to a publisher at some time before his death on September 3, 1592. The manuscript being illegible, for at best Greene wrote a crabbed hand, Henry Chettle attempted to prepare it for the press. It was entered in the Stationers’ Registers on September 20, 1592, by the bookseller, William Wright, and doubtless appeared shortly after that date.

Greene’s remarks, primarily directed to the three most famous University Wits, Christopher Marlowe, George Peele, and Thomas Nashe, begin thus: “To those gentlemen, his quondam acquaintance, that spend their wits in making plays, R. G. wisheth a better exercise, and wisdom to prevent his extremities.” First he addresses Marlowe, with a glance at Marlowe’s well-known atheistical tendency: “Wonder not, for with thee will I first begin, thou famous gracer of tragedians, that Greene, who hath said with thee, like the fool in his heart, there is no God, should now give glory unto His greatness; for penetrating is His power; His hand lies heavy upon me; He hath spoken unto me with a voice of thunder; and I have felt; He is a God that can punish enemies.” Next he addresses

¹ Thomas Dekker, Knight’s Conjuring.
² Greene’s editor, J. Churton Collins, says: “Greene, as we know from Nashe, wrote, and wrote much, for the Lord Pembroke’s Men.” Mr. W. W. Greg seems to be inclined to the same opinion. Greene’s attack upon Shakespeare indicates that this was likely, but I have not been able to discover any unmistakable evidence of Greene’s having written for Pembroke’s Company.
ARRIVAL IN LONDON

young Thomas Nashe, known as the sharpest satirist of the day: "With thee I join young Juvenal, that biting satirist, that lastly with me together writ a comedy." Finally he addresses George Peele, with an obvious allusion to his name: "And thou, no less deserving than the other two, in some things rarer, in nothing inferior, driven (as myself) to extreme shifts,¹ a little have I to say to thee; and were it not an idolatrous oath I would swear by sweet S[aint] George thou art unworthy better hap, since thou dependest on so mean a stay," i.e., as actors. Then follows his attack upon the players, who, deserting the older writers, now look to the upstart Shakespeare for their success:

Base-minded men all three of you, if by my misery ye be not warned; for unto none of you, like me, sought those burres [i.e., the actors] to cleave,² those puppets, I mean, that speak from our mouths, those anticks garnisht in our colours. Is it not strange that I, to whom they all have been beholding, is it not like that you, to whom they all have been beholding, shall, were ye in that case that I am now [i.e., in dire need], be both at once of them forsaken? Yes, trust them not; for there is an upstart crow³ [i.e., Shakespeare] beautified with our feathers,⁴ that with his Tyger's heart wrapt in a Player's hide [quoted, with alteration, from III Henry VI: "Tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide"] supposes he is as well able to bumbast out a blank

¹ The "extreme shifts" to which Peele was driven are well illustrated in The Jestis of George Peele, published after his death.
² Thomas Nashe wrote of Greene: "He was chief agent for the company, for he writ more than four other." This, however, does not necessarily refer to plays, as Fleay and Collins suppose.
³ Marlowe wrote his first play in 1587 or 1588, probably in the latter year; Greene began his career as a playwright later in imitation of Marlowe, probably in 1589; Nashe, presumably, later still. They could hardly regard Shakespeare as an "upstart" if, as some critics suppose, Shakespeare began to compose plays as early as 1587 or 1588. The likelihood is that Shakespeare was an "upstart" in the summer of 1592, when Greene was writing.
⁴ The author of Greene's Funerals (1594) writes:

Nay more, the men that so eclips his fame
Purloyned his plumes; can they deny the same?
verse as the best of you; and being an absolute *Johannes Factotum* [i.e., Jack-of-all-work — actor, rev amplify of old manuscripts, and writer of plays], is, in his own conceit, the only Shake-
scene in a country.

Both Marlowe and Shakespeare resented the publication of this ill-natured attack, though for different rea-
sons. At first a rumor was circulated that in reality Thomas Nashe was the author of the pamphlet, or in some way responsible for the offensive parts of the letter. Nashe thereupon made haste to issue a public denial. In a formal Epistle prefixed to the second edition of his *Pierce Penniless*, printed about October 15, 1592, he writes:

Other news I am advertised of, that a scald, trivial, lying 
pamphlet called *Greene’s Groat’s-worth of Wit* is given out to be of my doing. God never have care of my soul, but utterly re-
nounce me, if the least word or syllable in it proceeded from my pen, or if I were any way privy to the writing, or printing, of it.

Nashe’s vehemence indicates considerable anxiety to be freed from any responsibility for Greene’s attack. Finally the blame was placed, where it should with more justice rest, on the head of Chettle, who had prepared the manuscript for publication. Chettle at once made a frank 
and full apology to Shakespeare, though stoutly refusing to do the same to Marlowe. This he published in an ad-
dress “To the Gentlemen Readers,” prefixed to his *Kind-
Heart’s Dream*, entered in the Stationers’ Registers on December 8, 1592. First he explained to the public his slight share in the issuing of Greene’s pamphlet: “About three months since died M. Robert Greene, leaving many papers in sundry booksellers’ hands, among others his *Groat’s-worth of Wit*, in which a letter, written to diverse

---

1 Marlowe and Greene seem never to have been on good terms with each other. Greene was jealous of Marlowe’s greater success as a play-
wright, just as later he became jealous of the upstart Shakespeare.

ARRIVAL IN LONDON

playmakers, is offensively by one or two of them taken; and because on the dead they cannot be avenged, they wilfully forge in their conceits a living author; and after tossing it to and fro, no remedy but it must light on me. . . . I had only in the copy this share: — it was ill written, as sometimes Greene's hand was none of the best; licensed it must be ere it could be printed, which could never be if it might not be read. To be brief, I writ it over, and as near as I could followed the copy; only, in that letter I put something out, but in the whole book not a word in; for I protest it was all Greene's, not mine, nor Master Nashe's as some unjustly have affirmed." 1 Chettle further states: "With neither of them that take offence was I acquainted, and with one of them I care not if I never be." The last clause doubtless refers to Marlowe, who had been directly accused by Greene of atheism, and who was then under grave suspicion by others. Then follows the apology to Shakespeare, indicating, it will be observed, that possibly Chettle of his own initiative had "put something out" of Greene's letter in order to mitigate the attack on the new poet:

The other, whom at that time I did not so much spare as since I wish I had, for that as I have moderated the heat of living writers, and might have used my own discretion, — especially in such a case the author being dead, — that I did not, I am as sorry as if the original fault had been my fault; because myself have seen his demeanor no less civil than he excellent in the quality he professes [i.e., acting 2]; — besides, diverse of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing,

1 Chettle is doubtless telling the truth. The publisher, Wright, entered the book in the Stationers' Registers with the special protecting clause "upon the perill of Henry Chettle."

2 The word "quality" is often applied to acting. So Shakespeare uses it in Hamlet of the child-actors: "Will they pursue the quality no longer than they can sing?" Cf. Thomas Middleton's elegy entitled "On the death of that great Master in his art and quality, painting and playing, R. Burbage."
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approves his art.¹

These constitute our first references to Shakespeare in his new career in London. Greene was jealous of the success of the "upstart." Chettle, a man of letters, had made inquiries about him, had actually met him, and was deeply impressed by his courteous demeanor, which he declared in public print to be not less excellent than his recognized skill as an actor. Moreover, "diverse of worship"—who could not have been players—had vouched for his "uprightness of dealing," and had favorably commented on his "facetious grace in writing." Clearly he had made a fair beginning both as actor and author, and had already established that reputation for gentle behavior which attended him through life.

But the career of Pembroke's Company, with which Shakespeare had thrown in his fortunes, was soon to be interrupted. On June 11, 1592, a riot broke out in Southwark, which started with certain apprentices under "pretence of their meeting at a play." The Privy Council thereupon ordered the closing of all playhouses for three months and a half. Before the expiration of this time, the appearance of the plague in London led to a second inhibition of acting, which extended to the last week in December. Thus for more than six months the city companies were forced to be idle.

During this period of freedom from the onerous duties of acting, Shakespeare, in all probability, devoted his energies to composing Love's Labour's Lost. It has recently been shown that 1592 is the earliest date that can possibly be assigned to the play, and that it is "probable

¹ The fact that Chettle, himself a playwright, apparently did not know Shakespeare before, even by reputation, but learned of him upon inquiry, tends to invalidate the common assumption that Shakespeare had begun his dramatic career as early as 1587, and had by this time produced some of his masterpieces.
ARRIVAL IN LONDON

that the latter part of that year was the actual time of composition.”¹ If so, it came at a happy moment, for the company at once had occasion to use it. The plague, though it kept the actors from performing before the public, did not interfere with their annual performances before the Court;² and the Pembroke’s Men were summoned to give a play before the Queen on December 27, 1592, and again on January 6, 1593. On one of these dates, we may suppose, they acted Shakespeare’s new comedy, which obviously had been composed with the audience at Court in mind. It was closely modeled on the style of John Lyly, whose plays were then in high favor with the Queen.

On December 29, the deaths from the plague having fallen below fifty (the number fixed by law for automatically preventing the assembly of people), the inhibition of playing was raised, and the actors promptly resumed their performances before the public. But their respite was short. The plague soon broke out with renewed fury, and about February 1 acting was again prohibited. The year rapidly developed into one of the worst plague years in history; between ten and fifteen thousand persons died. Realizing that an early reopening of the playhouses was unlikely, the Pembroke’s Men, reducing their personnel,³ began to travel in the provinces. Shakespeare, it seems, either because he was one of the less necessary actors, or because he preferred to stay behind and devote his energies to composition, did not accompany them on their arduous tour. He could not foresee that his enforced leisure would be unduly protracted;

¹ See the able study of the evidence by H. B. Charlton in The Modern Language Review, July, 1918. The biographical evidence both supports and is supported by this convincing article.
² During the winter of 1592-93 the Lord Strange’s Men gave three performances at Court.
³ This was customary. The license of the Strange’s Men in 1593 contains the names of only six players, though this was probably not complete.

[143]
doubtless like the other actors he expected the plague to subside within a short time. From month to month, however, the plague increased in violence, and even with the coming of winter it gave no signs of abating. The inhibition of the playhouses, in reality, was to last for two years.

Thus ends the first chapter of Shakespeare's dramatic career; and for a while his energies, no longer needed for plays, had to be directed into other channels.
CHAPTER IX

PERIOD OF NON-DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

During the long months of leisure enforced by the plague, Shakespeare was able to accomplish much in the way of quiet study and wide reading to make up for the deficiencies of his rather narrow education and provincial sympathies. Fate, indeed, under the guise of misfortune, had thrown before him, in the prime of his young manhood, and at the very outset of his literary career, a golden opportunity. That he took advantage of this opportunity we may be sure. It is significant that his taste led him not only to popular contemporary writers, such as Spenser, Daniel, Lodge, and Drayton, but also to "old father Chaucer," whose antique pen and aged accents exercised over him a special charm. Moreover, we have evidence that he read extensively in the modern writers of France and Italy. That he should acquire a reading knowledge of French and Italian, living as he did in an atmosphere surcharged with the Renaissance literature of the Continent, may be regarded as inevitable. With his mastery of Latin, and his retentive memory, the acquisition of these languages would be to him an easy matter; and there are unmistakable indications that he acquired some facility in both.

How much this study of native and foreign literature contributed to his rapidly developing genius cannot well be estimated; but its influence is quickly apparent, for almost at once he turned his pen to imitation, and produced works that placed his name in the front rank of contemporary artists. Marlowe, whom in all probability he numbered among his close acquaintances, was engaged on an amorous poem, Hero and Leander; Lodge
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

had recently published a similar poem, *Glaucus and Scylla;* Daniel had won great fame in 1592 by his amorous *Complaint of Rosamond;* Nashe was privately circulating a superlatively erotic poem, *The Choice of Valentines;* Drayton was shortly to publish *Endimion and Phæbe.* Thus amorous poems in a richly jeweled style were now distinctly the fashion. With these examples before him Shakespeare selected an amorous theme from his favorite author Ovid (Books iv, viii, and x of the *Metamorphoses*), and working under the inspiration of the Renaissance literature he had been studying, produced the ornate and voluptuous poem to which he gave the title *Venus and Adonis.* The six-line stanza he employed had recently become popular in England, where it had been effectively used by Spenser in his elegy on the death of Sir Philip Sidney, and by Lodge in his *Glaucus and Scylla.* Shakespeare’s handling of the stanza clearly shows the influence of both these masters, but particularly of Lodge, whose poem he had frankly chosen as his model. The following passage from Lodge will enable the reader to observe the similarity in spirit, and also the superiority in craftsmanship exhibited by the upstart from Stratford:

Glaucus, my love (quoth she), look on thy lover,
Smile, gentle Glaucus, on the nymph that likes thee.
But stark as stone sat he, and list not prove her.

1 Writing at some date before July, 1593, Gabriel Harvey refers to this poem as then well known. It was too erotic to be printed, but was being widely circulated in manuscript.

2 It may be significant that Lodge in *Glaucus and Scylla* described the death of Adonis and the grief of Venus, and that he drew his plot and inspiration from Ovid. For a general discussion of the influence of Lodge on Shakespeare see J. P. Reardon, "Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* and Lodge’s *Scylla’s Metamorphosis*" in The Shakespeare Society’s Papers, 1847, iii, 143, and Sir Sidney Lee’s introduction to his facsimile reprint of *Venus and Adonis,* 1905. Marlowe, too, in *Hero and Leander,* alludes to a grove —

Where Venus in her naked glory strove
To please the careless and disdainful eyes
Of proud Adonis that before her lies.

[ 146 ]
PERIOD OF NON-DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

Lord, how her lips do dwell upon his cheeks,  
And how she looks for babies in his eyes,  
And how she sighes, and swears she loves and leeks. . . .

How oft with blushes would she plead for grace,  
How oft with whisperings would she tempt his ears,  
How oft with cristal did she wet his face,  
How oft she wipt them with her amber hairs.

But Glaucus scorns the nymph that waits relief,  
And more she loves, the more the sea-god hated.

It has commonly been suggested by scholars that Shakespeare wrote *Venus and Adonis* while still at Stratford; yet a close examination of all the facts renders the supposition unlikely. Three reasons have been advanced to support a Stratford date of composition. In the first place, it is said, the ornate style and the voluptuous nature of the poem suggest adolescence. But these qualities are inherent in the type of literature to which the poem conforms. The same qualities are found in *Hero and Leander*, *Glaucus and Scilla*, *Endimion and Phæbe*, and the other amorous poems written by the most popular authors of the day; and, as already indicated, the selection of the theme and the style of verse were both dictated by a prevailing fashion. In the second place, it is said, Shakespeare’s description of *Venus and Adonis* as “the first heir of my invention” proves it his earliest composition. But the poem is indeed the first product of Shakespeare’s pen intended for the press, which is all that the statement necessarily implies. Plays were not designed for publication; moreover, in view of the general opprobrium attaching to dramatic composition, he may have regarded this as his first essay in the realm of pure literature. Nor should one forget that it was a conventional form of flattery with young authors to inform a dedicatee that he was the first choice of their Muse. Thus it is dangerous to interpret the phrase too literally, or to see in it more than
the simple fact that *Venus and Adonis* was the first work published as from Shakespeare's pen. In the third place, it is said, the imagery of the poem is mainly drawn from the country, and concerns flowers and spring and "the changing aspects of the sky." Scholars who write thus forget that the rural setting of the poem renders such imagery as inevitable as it is appropriate, that Venus is commonly associated with flowers and the spring, and that Adonis is always pictured in outdoor country life. Furthermore they overlook certain other imagery that quite as clearly points to the London experiences of the poet; for example the theatrical note in the lines—

And all this *dumb play* had his *acts* made plain  
With tears which *chorus-like* her eyes did rain.

Or the reference to the plague raging in 1592–93:

To drive infection from the dangerous year  
That the star-gazers, having writ on death,  
May say, the plague is banish'd by thy breath.

Or the essentially London echoes in such lines as—

Like shrill-tongu'd tapsters answering every call.

Worse still, they overlook the numerous similarities in thought, diction, and metre between the poem and works of Shakespeare that are known to have been produced about this time. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, written in the latter half of 1592, we find him tentatively experimenting with the six-line stanza that he adopted for *Venus and Adonis*. In *Romeo and Juliet* we discover a reference to the earthquake noted in lines 1046–48 of the poem; and the simile of the bird "tam'd with too much handling" appears in both. And in the *Sonnets* we discover innumerable similarities of a most striking nature, both of concept and diction.

But this is not the place for an extended discussion of the date of composition of *Venus and Adonis*. No good
PERIOD OF NON-DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

reason has been advanced to show that the poem was produced during Shakespeare's Stratford period, and internal evidence as well as biographical probability is against the theory. Even if we grant the possibility that it was first drafted in Stratford, we can affirm with confidence that it was subjected to a thorough revision in London during the winter and early spring of 1592–93.

In turning from the writing of plays for the professional actors to the composition of poems for the reading public, Shakespeare had two readily discoverable motives. In the first place, he desired to win recognition in the literary circles of London. Not a line of his had yet appeared in print. His plays were not designed for the critical reader, were not intended for publication, and, so far as the author and his fellow-actors could prevent it, would not be allowed to fall into the hands of the printers. Even if his plays were surreptitiously issued, they would not admit him into the society of the best men of letters, or enroll him in the category of such poets as Spenser, Daniel, Sidney, Raleigh, Barnfield, and Drayton. Plays were regarded as ephemeral products intended only for the mouths of actors; and, as mercenary works, they did not confer literary distinction on the author. As Daniel exclaims: "God forbid I should my papers blot with mercenary lines. . . . No, no; my verse respects not Thames nor Theatres." Such notoriety, therefore, as Shakespeare enjoyed was limited to the applause of vulgar London playgoers in the scorned "public theatres." Henry Chettle, it will be remembered, who was something of a man of letters, knew nothing about him in the summer of 1592. It was thus but natural that Shakespeare should desire to introduce himself into the politer circles of literary London.

In the second place, now that the plague had robbed him of his former means of livelihood, he found it neces-
sary, if he followed the career of letters, to secure a patron. Possibly he contemplated abandoning the "mercenary stage" and henceforth devoting his poetic gifts to the higher, and, as it was thought, nobler, forms of literature. He had just read in Glauces and Scilla how Lodge had vowed —

To write no more of that whence shame doth grow,
Or tie my pen to penny-knaves' delight,
But live with fame, and so for fame to write;

a thought which he shortly echoed in a sonnet addressed to his friend:

My name be buried where my body is,
And live no more to shame nor me nor you;
For I am shamed by that which I bring forth.

But Shakespeare could not thus dedicate himself to Fame and to the free service of the Muses without the aid of a Mæcenas. It was customary for poets to present their work to some nobleman, who in return for the honor would bestow on them a pecuniary reward, and who might, if greatly pleased and generously disposed, become a permanent patron. Spenser's career had been made possible largely through the patronage of Sir Philip Sidney and the coterie that met at the home of the Earl of Leicester. Daniel had just found a munificent patron in the Countess of Pembroke, whom he thus apostrophizes:

Great Patroness of these my humble rhymes,
Which thou from out thy greatness dost inspire!
Sith only thou hast deign'd to raise them higher,
Vouchsafe now to accept them as thine owne.

And he promises: "If my times, hereafter better laboured, shall purchase grace in the world, they must remain the monuments of your honourable favour." Drayton, about the same time, secured generous patrons in the Earl and Countess of Bedford. Shakespeare now
THE EARL OF SOUTHAMPTON
PERIOD OF NON-DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

sought the patronage of the youthful Earl of Southampton, who had recently come into control of his fortune, and was just beginning a career of extravagance. Moreover, he was known to be ambitious of being recognized as a patron of letters. Nashe, in dedicating The Unfortunate Traveller\(^1\) to him, writes: "A dear lover, and cherisher, you are, as well of the lovers of Poets as of Poets themselves." We may suspect that in choosing so young, extravagant, and ambitious a patron Shakespeare was exercising the shrewdness that characterized all his business enterprises.

The dedicatory epistle prefixed to Venus and Adonis implies that he had not secured in advance the permission of the Earl to issue the volume under his patronage. I quote the letter in full as an interesting specimen of Shakespeare’s epistolary style at this early date, and as giving us a glimpse of his elusive personality:

\[ *To the Right Honourable Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton and Baron of Tichfield. \\
Right Honourable: \]

I know not how I shall offend in dedicating my unpolished lines to your lordship, nor how the world will censure me for choosing so strong a prop to support so weak a burthen. Only, if your honour seem but pleased, I account myself highly praised, and vow to take advantage of all idle hours, till I have honoured you with some graver labour. But if the first heir of my invention prove deformed, I shall be sorry it had so noble a godfather, and never after ear [plough] so barren a land, for fear it yield me still so bad a harvest. I leave it to your honourable survey, and your honour to your heart’s content — which I wish may always answer your own wish, and the world’s hopeful expectation.

Your honour’s in all duty,

William Shakespeare.

\(^1\) Entered in the Stationers’ Registers on September 17, 1593.

\(^2\) Halliwell-Phillipps, Outlines, i, 119, observes that this letter, and the one prefixed to Lucrece, "are perfect examples of the judicious fusion of independence with courtesy."

[ 151 ]
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare's friend, Richard Field, undertook the printing of the volume, which he executed in his usual beautiful style. On the title-page the poet set a graceful Latin motto from Ovid:

Vilia miretur vulgus; mihi flavus Apollo
Pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua.

And in all probability he corrected the proof himself with all the meticulous care a young author is apt to bestow on the first heir of his invention. The slender but handsome volume was sold by the distinguished publisher John Harrison at his shop, the White Greyhound, in Paul's Churchyard. Since it had been entered in the Stationers' Registers on April 18, 1593, it must have been offered to the public shortly after; we have record of the purchase of a copy as early as June, 1593.

In this fashion Shakespeare made his formal bow to the literary world. Now for the first time readers were able to judge the worth of the new poet who had already attracted some notoriety in theatrical circles. The public received the volume with unbounded enthusiasm, calling for no fewer than seven editions within less than ten years. Men of letters were charmed by the "mellifluous" verse, and critics promptly bestowed on the author the epithet "honey-tongued." At once he was set in the front rank of

---

1 Thus translated by Marlowe:

Let base conceited wits admire vile things,
Fair Phoebus lead me to the Muses' springs!

Does the choice of this motto indicate that Shakespeare, like Lodge, then contemplated abandoning the drama?

2 For evidence that the author was expected to proof-read his work see Phebe Sheavyn, The Literary Profession in the Elizabethan Age, 1909, p. 82. Writers often complain of errors due to their absence at the time their books were printed.

3 He was three times Warden of the Stationers' Company, and three times its Master.

4 Malone, Inquiry, 1796, p. 67. The price, apparently, was 6d. In 1919 a copy of the fourth edition, 1599, sold in London for £15,000.
PERIOD OF NON-DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

contemporary poets, a position he was to hold throughout the rest of his life. Thomas Edwards, in *Cephalus and Procris*, printed in 1595, includes him among the best poets of the day, such as Spenser, Daniel, and Marlowe, on the score of —

Adon deaflly masking thro
Stately troupe rich conceited.\(^1\)

As might naturally be expected, the poem had an immense popularity with “the younger sort,” who, we are assured, took “much delight” in the voluptuous appeal of the theme, and in the ornate beauty of the verse. The author of the university play *The Return from Parnassus* makes one of the Cambridge students exclaim: “Let this duncified world esteem of Spenser and Chaucer; I’ll worship sweet Master Shakespeare, and to honor him will lay his *Venus and Adonis* under my pillow.”

It pleased, also, the young Earl of Southampton, whose fondness for erotic literature seems to have been well-known. The most lascivious poem in Elizabethan, possibly in all English literature, had recently been dedicated to him — “Thus hath my pen presum’d to please my friend” — by Thomas Nashe,\(^2\) who presented it in manuscript form, for it was too sensual for publication. We may well believe that *Venus and Adonis* exactly suited the tastes of the young nobleman whose name graced the dedication. Moreover, he must have been pleased with

\(^1\) See *L’Envoy to Narcissus*. An amorous poem, written “in direct imitation of Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*, and in the same metre,” *The Scourge of Venus, or the Wanton Lady. With the Rare Birth of Adonis*, has been incorrectly attributed to Thomas Heywood. See A. M. Clark, *The Library*, Series 4, vol. iii, p. 210.

\(^2\) This is the commonly accepted interpretation of the dedicatory title “To the Right honorable the Lord S.” The following year Nashe dedicated to Lord Southampton his *Jack Wilton*, thus apparently fulfilling his promise: “better lines ere long shall honor thee.” McKerrow suggests, however, the possibility that Lord Strange may be the “Lord S” to whom the work is dedicated.
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

the unusual fame the poem achieved, and the honor thereby reflected upon him. He promptly took the poet into his patronage, and — we have Shakespeare's own word for it — gave him full "warrant" of his bounty and "honorable disposition." Rowe quotes on the authority of Sir William Davenport, who as Shakespeare's godson "was probably very well-acquainted with his affairs," the story that Southampton "at one time gave him a thousand pounds." Though this doubtless is an exaggeration, we may readily believe that the young Earl rewarded the author with a gift of money large enough to enable him to continue his career as a poet, so promisingly begun.

While Shakespeare was thus writing non-dramatic verse, and winning the applause of the literary world, his old friends and fellow-actors, the Pembroke's Men, were having trouble in their attempted tour of the provinces. On September 28, 1593, Henslowe, business-manager of the rival Lord Strange's Men, wrote to Edward Alleyn, who was leading that company on its tour: "As for my Lord of Pembroke's [Men], which you desire to know where they be, they are all at home, and have been these five or six weeks, for they cannot save their charges with travel, as I hear, and were fain to pawn their apparel." 1 Presumably, not being able to make their expenses in the country, they had to dispose of their costumes to secure money with which to return to London. The plague, still raging with unbated fury, offered them no chance to recuperate their fortunes in the city; and soon after they sold their stock of plays, and permanently disbanded. 2 This marks the end of the great troupe

2 When a company sold its stock of plays, it formally "gave up the ghost." Henslowe was able to purchase a number of these plays for the Strange's Men. The publishers also secured some, including Titus Andronicus (entered in the Stationers' Registers on February 6, 1593–94) and The Taming of
VENVS
AND ADONIS

Vilia miretur vulgus: mibi flaurus Apollo
Pocula Castalia plena miniis fret aqua.

LONDON
Imprinted by Richard Field, and are to be sold at
the signe of the white Greyhound in
Paules Church-yard.

1593.
with which Shakespeare had originally thrown in his
lot.\footnote{In 1597 a new company was organized under Pembroke's patronage to
occupy the Swan playhouse. The two companies must not be confused. See
my Shakespearean Playhouses, p. 168.}

Seeing his company first go bankrupt, and then per-
manently dissolve, and seeing the plague still raging un-
abated,\footnote{It was commonly placed in the category of erotic literature. Middleton,
in \textit{A Mad World} (1608), writes: "I have conveyed away all her wanton
pamphlets, as \textit{Hero and Leander, Venus and Adonis}"; in \textit{The Dumb Knight}
(1608), it is called "Maid's Philosophy"; Cranley, in \textit{Amanda} (1633), lists
it with \textit{Hero and Leander} as usually in a courtesan's library. Robert South-
well in \textit{Saint Peter's Complaint} (1595), writes:
\begin{quote}
Still finest wits are stilling Venus Rose,
In paynim toyes the sweetest vaines are spent.
\end{quote}

37, 39, 40.}} Shakespeare must have even more seriously con-
templated abandoning the theatre and devoting himself
to a purely literary career. The change now seemed fea-
sible to him, since he had acquired a generous patron. At
any rate, he had thrust upon him more "idle hours"
which would enable him to produce that "graver labor"
he had promised Southampton; and he at once set him-
self to the task.

Some of the "wiser sort" of critics had objected, with
good reason, that \textit{Venus and Adonis} was too lascivious \footnote{Another (ah Lord help me) vilifies
With Art of Love, and how to subtilize,
Making lewd \textit{Venus} with eternal lines
To tie \textit{Adonis} to her love's designs.
Fine wit is shew'n therein; but finer 'twere
If not attired in such bawdy geare.}
to deserve unqualified praise. The opinion is perhaps best
expressed by John Davies of Hereford in his \textit{Paper's Com-
plaint}:

Accordingly, Shakespeare determined next to treat the
theme of chastity. From his beloved author, Ovid, he se-

\begin{quote}  
\textit{The Shrew} (entered May 2, 1594), both of which seem also to have been sold
to the Strange's Men.
\end{quote}
lected the story of Lucrece,¹ and supplementing Ovid’s narrative, it seems, with a reading of the story as related by Livy, and by Chaucer in his Legend of Good Women, produced the beautiful poem Lucrece. For his model this time he used Daniel’s exceedingly popular Complaint of Rosamond.² First printed in 1592, this had been generally acclaimed as a noble lesson in morality most delightfully taught. For example, Nashe, in the Preface to Pierce Penniless (1592), says to the Puritan clergy of England: “You shall find there goes more exquisite pains and purity of wit to the writing of one such rare poem as Rosamond than to a hundred of your dunsticall sermons.”³ The metre Shakespeare adopted for Lucrece, the seven-line stanza, was doubtless taken over directly from Daniel’s poem; but it had been used by other writers, and Shakespeare was familiar with it as employed by Chaucer, and by Spenser in The Ruins of Time.

Upon completing the poem he dedicated it to his patron, the Earl of Southampton, knowing this time that it was “assured of acceptance”; and again he entrusted the press-work to his friend Richard Field. The volume was entered in the Stationers’ Registers in May, 1594, and shortly after was being sold on the stalls of John Harrison’s shop, the White Greyhound, in Paul’s Churchyard. Beautifully printed, it made, like its predecessor, Venus and Adonis, though a slender yet a handsome quarto.

The dedicatory epistle, showing the development of a warm friendship with the young Earl, runs as follows:

¹ From the Fasti, which had not as yet been translated into English.
² The title, The Ravishment of Lucrece, under which Shakespeare’s poem was entered in the Stationers’ Registers, and which may have been the title he first gave it, suggests Daniel’s title.
³ Cf. also John Marston’s Satires, 1598, iv, 81. The same sentiment is also expressed by Thomas Churchyard in the Dedication of his Shore’s Wife, 1593, written in imitation, but “not in any kind of emulation,” of Rosamond, “so excellently set forth.”
PERIOD OF NON-DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

To the Right Honourable Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, and Baron of Tichfield.

The love I dedicate to your lordship is without end; whereof this pamphlet, without beginning, is but a superfluous moiety. The warrant I have of your honourable disposition, not the worth of my untutored lines, makes it assured of acceptance. What I have done is yours; what I have to do is yours; being part in all I have, devoted yours. Were my worth greater, my duty would show greater; meantime, as it is, it is bound to your lordship, to whom I wish long life, still lengthened with happiness.

Your lordship's in all duty,
William Shakespeare.

The success of Lucrece was equal to that of Venus and Adonis. The charge of "wantonness" which had been made against the earlier poem could not be raised against this second effort. As Thomas Freeman, in Rubbe and a Great Cast, wrote:

Who loves chaste life, there's Lucrece for a teacher,
Who list read lust, there's Venus and Adonis.

The great scholar at Cambridge University, Gabriel Harvey, wrote: "The younger sort take much delight in Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis, but his Lucrece," he adds, has in it "to please the wiser sort." The poem, indeed, was viewed as a beautiful exposition of womanly chastity, and was universally commended for its moral values.

From all sides rose a chorus of praise. A few of the printed contemporary notices may here be inserted to indicate its popularity. Sir William Harbert, in an Elegy on Lady Helen Branch (1594), placing Shakespeare among the greater poets, addresses him as —

You that have writ of chaste Lucretia,
Whose death was witness of her spotless life.

The poet Drayton, in his Legend of Matilda (1594), writes of —
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Lucrece, of whom proud Rome hath boasted long,
Lately reviv’d to live another age.

William Covell, fellow of Cambridge University, in his Polimanteia (1595), declares that “Lucretia” by “sweet Shakespeare” is “all-praise-worthy.” The satirist, John Weever, felt called upon (in 1597?) to celebrate the popular enthusiasm for Shakespeare’s works in an epigram:

Ad Gulielmum Shakespeare

Hony-tongu’d Shakespeare, when I saw thine issue,
I swore Apollo got them and none other;
Their rosy-tinted features, cloth’d in tissue,
Some heaven-born goddess said to be their mother.
Rose-cheek’t Adonis with his amber tresses,
Fair fire-hot Venus charming him to love her,
Chaste Lucretia virgin-like her dresses,
Proud lust-stung Tarquin seeking still to prove her.

The author of the Cambridge play, The Return from Parnassus, makes Judicio, representing the best critical judgment of the university world, exclaim:

Who loves not Adon’s love, or Lucrece rape!

And Richard Carew, in a formal essay on “The Excellence of the English Tongue” (1595–96), inserted in William Camden’s second edition of Remaines Concerning Britaine, writes:

Add hereunto that whatsoever grace any other language carrieth, in verse or prose, in tropes or metaphors, in echoes and agnominations, they may be lively and exactly represented in ours. Will you have Plato’s vein? read Sir Thomas Smith; the Ionic? Sir Thomas More; Cicero’s? Ascham; Varro’s? Chaucer; Demosthenes’? Sir John Cheeke (who in his treatisc to the Rebels hath comprised all the figures of rhetoric). Will you read Virgil? take the Earl of Surrey; Catullus? Shakespeare, and Marlowe’s fragment; Ovid? Daniel; Lucan? Spenser.

It will be observed that Shakespeare’s name is here ranked with the greatest names then known in English literature — Chaucer, Sir Thomas More, Ascham, the
PERIOD OF NON-DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

Earl of Surrey, Marlowe, and Spenser. It may be significant that he is the first, and Spenser the last, living writer to be mentioned.

Perhaps, however, the sincerest testimonial to the popularity of *Lucrece* was the publication in the same year of *Willibie his Avisa*, a long poem celebrating female chastity, and avowedly inspired by Shakespeare's work. The fictitious editor (who is doubtless the author, Henry Willoughby ¹), after speaking of the excellent way in which "Shakespeare paints poor Lucrece' rape," proposes in *Avisa* to celebrate "a Britain Lucretia." This notion of an English rival to Lucrece, especially emphasized by the author, serves to explain the whole poem. Thus, in the complimentary verse, probably written by the author himself, we read: "As great a faith in English ground"; "this Britain bird out-flies them all"; "this English

¹ There is no ground for foisting this amateurish production on the famous poet Mathew Royden. Its avowed author, Henry Willoughby, was an Oxford student, referred to in *Polimanteia* (1595) as one of the Oxford men "able to sing sweetly." In 1596, upon the issue of the second edition, his brother, Thomas Willoughby, prefixed a poem in which he refers to his brother as "nuper defunctus." (For the life of Henry Willoughby and his brother Thomas see the Dictionary of National Biography.) The use of the fictitious "Hadrian Dorrell" to give the manuscript to the public press in the absence of the author, his friend, was a common device among young men of social standing who desired to publish. So Gascoigne had proceeded in issuing his *Posies*, and Petty in issuing his *Petie Palace*. A close parallel may be found in the case of Barnaby Googe's *Eglogues and Epitaphes*, which, so the preliminary pages inform us, was sent to the press by the author's friend, one named Blundeston, during the author's absence in Spain. Blundestone, like "Dorrell," explains at length, both in prose and verse, that he acted on his own initiative, without his friend's knowledge. Cf. also the address to the Reader, prefixed to Percy's *Sonnets to the Faerie Queene*. Robert Greene smirks at the well-known convention in his address to the Reader prefixed to *Epithalamion* to *Censure to Philautus*. Possibly all this goes back to the publication of Tottel's collection of *Songs and Sonnets*. The disinclination of men of social standing to publish their own verse is shown by John Donne, who writes: "The fault that I acknowledge in myself is to have descended to printing anything in verse, which though it have excuse even in our time by men who profess and practice much gravity, yet I confess I wonder how I declined to it, and do not pardon myself." (Gosse, *Life and Letters of John Donne*, i, 303-04.)

[159]
eagle soars alone, and far surmounts all others’ fame.” ¹ The purpose of the poem, we are told, is “to insinuate how honest maids and women, in such temptations, should stand upon their guard, considering the glory and praise that commends a spotless life.” ² Thus Avisa is merely by imitation a compliment to the popularity of Shakespeare’s poem. Further evidence of the same kind is to be found in the recently discovered continuation of Lucrece, by Thomas Middleton, 1600, written in the same stanza, and entitled The Ghost of Lucrece.³

The success of Venus and Adonis and Lucrece, with both the general reading-public and the best literary critics of the day, must have gratified Shakespeare, and have convinced him that he could win for himself a distinguished place among English poets. Indeed Barnfield assured him that he had already attained high rank:

And Shakespeare, thou whose honey-flowing vein
(Pleasing the world) thy praises doth obtain,
Whose Venus and whose Lucrece (sweet and chaste)
Thy name in Fame’s immortal book have plac’t.

He did not, however, stop with the writing of these two amorous poems in the ornate style. He was already at work on a cycle of sonnets. In this we find him again

¹ At the end is a poem entitled “The Victory of English Chastity,” beginning:

Can Britain breed no Phoenix bird
No constant sense in English field,
To Greece, to Rome, is there no third?
Hath Albion none that will not yield?

. . . and ending:

Our English earth such angels breed,
And can disdain all foreign praise.

² I have commented somewhat at length on this poem because some persons have attempted to connect it with the personal loves of Shakespeare, the Earl of Southampton, and Mrs. Jane Davenant, and thereby to explain Shakespeare’s Sonnets. This attempt hardly deserves good-natured mention.

³ The discovery of this hitherto unknown poem was announced in 1920. The volume was purchased by Mr. H. C. Folger, of New York City, and is now in his library.
PERIOD OF NON-DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

bowing to the literary fashions of the day; for in 1592 there began in England a veritable rage for the composition of sonnet-cycles. Every poet of any pretensions tried his hand at this newly-popularized verse form, and many were attaining fame by the ingenuity and grace with which they devised beautiful sequences addressed to some real or fictitious person.

The sonnet had been introduced into England during the reign of Henry VIII by the young noblemen who went to Italy to learn the fashions of courtly life there; and, under the leadership of Wyatt and Surrey, they cultivated this artificial verse form as a social accomplishment. But Wyatt and Surrey and their imitators wrote merely single sonnets, unrelated to one another, or at least not built up into a unified series presenting something like a story. The composition of formal sequences of sonnets — that is, many sonnets related in theme and unified by a single passion — was mainly due to Sir Philip Sidney. In something over one hundred sonnets he dealt with the romance of his unfortunate love for Penelope Devereux, the beautiful and vivacious daughter of the Earl of Essex. This remarkable cycle was published in 1591 under the title Astrophel and Stella. The lyric beauty of the verse fairly swept men of letters off their feet, and started a vogue of sonneteering that is one of the nine wonders of English literary history. Such a wholesale production of sonnets has never been seen in England, or in any other country. With poets of every rank and station in life the composition of ingenious cycles became for a time nothing less than a mania.

In spite of the supposedly private nature of the sequences, and the well-recognized propriety of confining their circulation to manuscript copies, there were printed within a few years numerous collections. In 1592 appeared Daniel's Delia and Constable's Diana; in 1593
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Barnes’ *Parthenophil and Parthenope*, Lodge’s *Phillis*, Fletcher’s *Licia*, Watson’s *Tears of Fancie*, and Locke’s *Hundred Sonnets* (entered for publication, though its issue was prevented by the author); in 1594, Percy’s *Cælia*, Drayton’s *Idea*, and the anonymous *Zepheria*, besides enlarged editions of *Delia* and *Diana*; in 1595, Spenser’s *Amoretti*, Barnes’ *Divine Century*, Barnfield’s *Sonnets*, and E. C.’s *Emaricdulfe*; in 1596, Griffin’s *Fidessa*, Linche’s *Diella*, Smith’s *Chloris*; and in 1597, as the vogue was passing, Tofte’s *Laura*. To this or the preceding year may be assigned Davies’ *Gulling Sonnets* ridiculing the type; and it is significant that with the *Laura* cycle the publication of amorous sequences came to an end. Sir Sidney Lee, who made an attempt to count the sonnets actually printed—not composed—during these few years, informs us that “the aggregate far exceeds two thousand.” How many actually were written and never came to press it is impossible to estimate.

In the aristocratic circles of literary men in London, the composition of graceful sonnets was regarded as the test of poetic ability. The greatest poets of the day, Watson, Sidney, Daniel, Spenser, Drayton, were widely acclaimed for their ingenious cycles, and a host of lesser versifiers were winning a ready fame by demonstrating their facility in handling this new musical instrument. As Drayton, in his *Idea*, puts it:

Many there be excelling in this kind,
Whose well-trick’t rimes with all inventions swell.

And the author of *Zepheria*, addressing English poets in general, exclaims:

Report throughout our Western Isle doth ring
The sweet-tuned accents of your Delian sonnetry.

Such being the vogue that was dominating English literary fashions in 1592–94, the years of “idle hours” for
PERIOD OF NON-DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

Shakespeare’s Muse, it is not strange that, in his ambition to be recognized as a poet among poets, he should join the swelling choir of Elizabethan sonneteers.

That he began to write his sequence in 1592–94 seems beyond reasonable doubt. At this date everything would tempt him to set his pen to the fashionable metrical exercise then at the zenith of its popularity. We may apply to him the words of a fellow sonneteer: “Men may wonder,” says Fletcher, “how I come by so much leisure”; and “for this kind of poetry,” he flippantly adds, “I did it only to try my humour.” Shakespeare, having unexpectedly come by much leisure, may well have liked to try his hand in friendly rivalry with the best poets of the day at “this kind” of verse. Love’s Labour’s Lost, composed in 1592, clearly reveals a lively interest in the sonnet, including as it does seven quatorzains — some woven into the texture of the play, some quoted as fanciful love-offerings, one written experimentally in Alexandrines, — and numerous quatrains combined with each other and with couplets in such a way as to suggest exercises in sonnet construction. Moreover, the many striking parallels in thought, imagery, and phraseology between his Sonnets and his early work, most conspicuous by far in Love’s Labour’s Lost and the poems, and gradually disappearing after we pass the year 1594, make the date of the inception of the cycle virtually certain.¹ Nor is external evidence altogether lacking. The anonymous author ² of

¹ I have collected most of these parallels. The way in which they become increasingly rarer and less significant as the plays advance in date is very impressive. That the style of the Sonnets is chaster and the thought more compact than in the case of Venus and Adonis and Lucrece may be attributed in a measure to the different literary types to which they respectively belong, to the restricting influence of the sonnet as a verse form, and to later revision.

² Some have actually attributed the play to Shakespeare, but the best critics have no hesitation in denying this attribution. The author may be George Peele.

[ 163 ]
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

the play, *Edward III*, entered for publication in 1595, not only echoes the phraseology of several of the sonnets (for example, "scarlet ornaments" of Sonnet 142, "sun flatter our earth" of Sonnet 33), but actually quotes a full line from one of them (Sonnet 94):

Lillies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

It seems likely that this unknown writer was familiar with Shakespeare's cycle in a manuscript copy; and we are informed in 1598 that such a manuscript copy was well-known among the poet's friends. By 1597 the vogue was passing; and it is hardly possible to think of Shakespeare, the busy actor and playwright, who now had definitely abandoned non-dramatic composition, as setting himself at a later period to a literary type then the object of general ridicule.¹

That he did not at once give his *Sonnets* to the press, as he did *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, was quite natural, for amorous sequences, supposedly celebrating a passion for a real person, were regarded as too private for publication. Sidney's sonnets reached the press against his wish, and in spite of the best efforts of his family to prevent their issue. Daniel, when his *Delia* collection was

¹ Sonnet 107, with the allusion to the "mortal morn" enduring an eclipse, has sometimes been cited as evidence that a portion of the *Sonnets* was composed after the death of Elizabeth in 1603. But it is not at all clear that the allusion is to the death of the Queen (neither "endure" nor "eclipse" seems appropriate), rather than to some actual eclipse of the moon. The adjective "mortal" may well be applied to the moon, which is nearly always personified by Shakespeare, and which in passing through the shadow calls to mind the Biblical imagery of death, the theme of the Sonnet as a whole. Even if the allusion be to an actual person, it need not be to Elizabeth. Mrs. Stopes, *Southampton*, p. 94, quotes a passage from a curious letter written by Sir Thomas Cecil to Sir Robert Cecil, July 9, 1595: "I left the moon in the wane at my last being at the Court; I hear now it is a half-moon again, yet I think it will never be at the full, though I hope it will never be eclipsed. You know whom I mean." It was customary at this time to allude thus cryptically to distinguished persons, the allusion being generally intelligible in Court circles.

[ 164 ]
PERIOD OF NON-DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

printed contrary to his will, writes: "I rather desired to keep in private passions of my youth from the multitude, as things uttered to myself." Percy, in a similar situation, declares: "I was fully determined to have concealed my sonnets as things privy to myself"; and Smith complains:

Longer I cannot them in silence keep;
They will be gadding, sore against my will.

This was the regular attitude of the sonneteer. But manuscript copies were allowed to circulate freely, and sometimes transcripts of these might be made by friends, with the tacit understanding that the wish of the author to prevent publication should be respected. In this manner the cycles received a wide publicity among those who were genuinely interested in poetry. Shakespeare availed himself of the dignity which the observance of this custom would give him; in Palladis Tamia, 1598, we read: "As the soul of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras, so the sweet wittie soul of Ovid lives in melifluous and hony-tongued Shakespeare; witness his Venus and Adonis, his Lucrece, his sugred Sonnets among his private friends." Doubtless, too, he took advantage of the opportunity which the custom allowed, as did other poets, to revise and improve his sonnets from time to time. This may partly account for their exquisite choice of words, their compact energy of thought, and that enchanting melody of diction which is their crowning grace. Of such revision we have, I think, unmistakable evidence. The two sonnets printed by Jaggard in 1599 show variations from the final text of 1609 which cannot be explained as errors in transcript; the imperfect form of Sonnet 99, with seven superfluous words, indicates an unsuccessful or unfinished effort to hammer the thought into the requisite fourteen lines; Sonnets 36 and 96 awkwardly have

[ 165 ]
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

the same concluding couplet; and the two final sonnets are merely variants of the same theme. Perhaps the poet was especially applying himself to a revision of the cycle in 1597–98. This might explain the fact that he composed two sonnets as choruses for Romeo and Juliet, which he put on the stage late in 1596 or early in 1597,¹ and one as an epilogue for Henry V, written early in 1598. It would explain, too, the few but very striking echoes in phraseology between the Sonnets and some of the later plays, most notably I and II Henry IV, 1597. And, of course he might, if so disposed, add an occasional new sonnet.

Shakespeare was able to keep his Sonnets in this plastic state for many years, though their widespread fame must have rendered them desirable objects in the eyes of what Daniel called “the greedy printers.” In 1599 William Jaggard managed to secure two of them, Sonnets 138 and 144, which, with an appendage of various other poems derived from miscellaneous sources, he promptly issued under the fanciful title The Passionate Pilgrim, by W. Shakespeare. His intention obviously was to deceive the unwary purchasers into supposing that here at last they had the opportunity to buy Master Shakespeare’s “sugred sonnets.” On January 3, 1600, another publisher entered in the Stationers’ Register “A book called Amours by J. D., with certain other Sonnets by W. S.” The sonnets thus entered, however, were not published. It has been customary for scholars to assume that the entry referred to a hypothetical cycle by William Smith, whose collection entitled Chloris had been issued in 1596. But there is no evidence that Smith composed a second cycle, and no reason why the entry may not refer to Shakespeare’s Sonnets. If the entry really concerned Shakespeare’s collection, as seems at least possible, it is signifi-

¹ Since, however, the first draft was probably written in 1593–94, the two sonnets may have been then composed.
cant that the publisher did not proceed with his undertaking. In 1609, however, the fate overtook Shakespeare's manuscript which had long before overtaken the manuscripts of Sidney, Watson, Daniel, Constable, Fletcher, and other poets. A stationer of small repute, Thomas Thorpe, managed to secure a transcript, which he promptly issued as *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, significantly placing the author's name at the head of the title-page, and in unusually large type. Thus at last the cycle, long confidentially circulated among private friends, was issued to "the multitude," and preserved for that critical study to which we must now turn.

When in 1592–94 Shakespeare set his pen to a trial of skill with his fellow-poets in sonneteering, he found himself face to face with certain conventions which, as a loyal artist, he would observe, at least so far as his better judgment might allow; for in theme and in treatment the amorous sequence was as artificial as the pastoral poem, and in some respects more restricted. The sonneteer was expected to celebrate in a series of "conceitful quatorzains" a deep and usually hopeless passion for some "fair cruel one." This passion, which in expression was essentially poetical, might shadow a real experience in the life of the writer. So it did in the case of Petrarch, of Sidney, of Spenser, and probably of Drayton. But in the case of certain other poets we know that it was purely fictitious. As Fletcher reminds us in a prefatory letter to his *Licita* cycle: "A man may write of love and not be in love, as well as of husbandry and not go to the plough." The literary artist always has the right to use his imagination; and we do not need a Touchstone to tell us that often "the truest poetry is the most feigning." All that was required of the sonneteer was that he make his passion seem real.

And since the passion was real—or presumably so—
the identity of the person celebrated was carefully hidden under a fanciful name, such as Laura, Stella, Diana, Licia, or Delia; and the autobiographical element, in so far as it was allowed to appear, was rendered shadowy and tenuous, and kept in the background. The foreground was solely occupied with elaborate conceits, designed for the twofold purpose of displaying the wit of the writer, and of furnishing a series of handsome compliments to the person celebrated.

Furthermore, in devising these compliments, the sonneteer was expected to employ certain well-worn stock themes, most of which went back to Petrarch; as, for example, the superlative beauty of the beloved, the transitoriness of that beauty, promises of immortality in verse, the pretended old age of the poet, the pangs of absence, the cruelty (or the graciousness) of the beloved, the apostrophizing of Cupid, and the relief to be found in sleep. In handling such threadbare topics the poet was expressly called upon to demonstrate his skill in presenting them in fresh and beautiful patterns. Thomas Nashe, in his satirical way, describes the sonneteer as "more in love with his own curious forming fancy than her face; and truth it is, many become passionate lovers only to win praise to their wits." ¹ One should never forget that the Elizabethan cycle was mainly a tour de force in ingenuity, designed to reveal the wit of the author, and his skill in metrical artifice.²

In composing his cycle, Shakespeare drew inspiration chiefly from the Delia collection by Samuel Daniel, which was published in 1592 along with The Complaint of Rosamond, the poem which served as the model for Lucrece. Daniel’s sonnets had been received by the literary world

¹ Jack Wilton, ed. by Gosse, p. 104.
PERIOD OF NON-DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

with unusual favor. Spenser, whose visits to London kept him in touch with poetic affairs, wrote:

And there is a new shepherd late up sprung,
The which doth all afore him far surpass,
Appearing well in that well-tuned song
Which late he sung unto a scornful lasse.

Drayton, though a rival, graciously refers to him as "excelling in this kind," and the anonymous author of Zepheria, as we have seen, characterized all amorous sequences as "Delian sonnetry." 1 Thus in choosing his model Shakespeare, as was usual with him, reflected contemporary taste. From Daniel's sonnets he took his form, acquired much of his sugared style, 2 borrowed not a little imagery and thought, echoed occasional phrases, and learned the trick of nicely linking his poems together. But Daniel, like most of the followers of Sidney, produced merely a disconnected series of sonnets, miscellaneous verse-offerings celebrating in pretty conceits the beauty and unyielding cruelty of a "marble-hearted" mistress. Shakespeare chose to give a firmer unity to his cycle by employing the device, exemplified in Petrarch and Sidney, of stringing his sonnets together in episodes reflecting an autobiographical story; and his genius being essentially dramatic, he rendered this story-element more pronounced than did any of his contempo-

1 The word "Delian" became recognized as an anagram for Daniel. Weever writes in Epigrams, p. 11:

I cannot reach up to a Delian's straine,
Whose songs deserve for ever your attention.

As a descriptive adjective applied to sonnet sequences "Delian" could hardly be used without allusion to Daniel's famous Delia collection, though in the passage quoted from the author of Zepheria there may be also an allusion to the quinquennial festival of Apollo at Delos, noted for its musical contests.

2 Sweet honey-dropping Daniel doth wage
War with the proudest big Italian,
That melts his heart in sugred sonneting.

—II Return from Parnassus, I, ii, 241–43.
raries, even Sidney. Thus his cycle came to differ from its model in a way that has led scholars to underestimate his really important indebtedness to the *Delia* sequence.

Since Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* so obviously followed a vogue, and were so patently inspired by a collection which was regarded as the exemplar of English sonnetry — described by one as “Delian sonnetry” — we find, as we might expect, that he observed many of the conventions of the type. There are the familiar themes of the superlative beauty of the beloved, of the transitoriness of that beauty, of immortality in verse, of pretended old age, of the pangs of absence, of death, of the comfort or restlessness of sleep, and such like, though not so many as characterize the work of certain other sonneteers. There, too, is the tireless ingenuity which almost at times tempts us to believe that his verses are merely, as Gabriel Harvey would put it, “dainties of a pleasurable wit.”

But in the general theme of his cycle we discover an originality worthy of the master. He refused to celebrate, as did his Italian, French, and English predecessors, a poetical passion for some beautiful and coldly-chaste woman, set high aloft on a pedestal of absolute perfection for saint-worship. Possibly he felt a reaction against the extravagant artificiality in the contemporary imitators of Petrarch. His early plays give evidence of this. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* he speaks slightingly of “wailful sonnets.” In *Romeo and Juliet* Mercutio jestingly comments: “Now is he for the numbers that Petrarch flowed in: Laura, to his lady, was but a kitchen wench; marry, she had a better love to berhyme her.” The same note of ridicule appears in Sonnet 21:

So is it not with me as with that Muse
Stirr’d by a painted beauty to his verse,
Who heaven itself for ornament doth use,
And every fair with his fair doth rehearse.
PERIOD OF NON-DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

And in Sonnet 130 he laughs at the style of the conventional sonneteer:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks.

That he should feel this revolt at the absurd artificiality of the Petrarchists was only natural; Harvey, Chapman, Davies, and others felt it strongly;#1 it occasioned the ridicule so effectively heaped on sonneteering in general, and led to the early downfall of the amorous sequence.

Whatever the reason, Shakespeare selected a new theme for his sonneteering effort, the friendship of man for man. And in developing this theme he wove in the idea—a favorite one in the Renaissance—that the friendship of a man for a man is superior to the love of a man for a woman. The idea doubtless came to the Renaissance from the classics,#2 from such stories as Pylades and Orestes, Theseus and Pirithous, Lælius and Scipio, Damon and Pithias, Achilles and Patroclus, Harmodius and Aristogiton; it was popular in Italian literature, for example in the stories of Palæmon and Arcyte, and Titus and Gisippus; in Spanish literature, for example in the Diana of Montemayor; and it was exceedingly common in English literature, especially with courtly writers.

---

#1 It is well-expressed in the play, LINGUA (about 1603), II, ii: "But these puling lovers, I cannot but laugh at them, and their encomiums of their mistress. They make, forsooth, her hair of gold, her eyes of diamond, her cheeks of roses, her lips of rubies, her teeth of pearl, and her whole body of ivory; and when they have thus idoled her like Pygmalion, they fall down and worship her!"

#2 One should not overlook the Biblical story of David and Jonathan. Cf. especially David's lament over his friend, II Samuel, i, 26:..

Very pleasant hast thou been unto me:  
Thy love to me was wonderful,  
Passing the love of women.

[ 171 ]
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Richard Edwards had won his greatest fame by his Palæmon and Arcyte and his Damon and Pithias; and John Lyly effectively celebrated the theme in his novel Euphues and in his play Endimion. Shakespeare himself used it in The Two Gentlemen of Verona. The general conception is perhaps best expressed by Lyly in his Endimion, which was published in 1591 and served Shakespeare as a model for Love's Labour's Lost:

Shall the enticing beauty of a most disdainful lady be of more force than the rare fidelity of a tried friend? The love of men to women is a thing common and of course; the friendship of man to man infinite and immortal. . . Love is but an eye-worm, which only tickleth the head with hopes and wishes; friendship the image of eternity, in which there is nothing movable, nothing mischievous. As much difference as there is between beauty and virtue, bodies and shadows, colours and life, so great odds is there between love and friendship. . . . Friendship standeth stilly in storms. Time draweth wrinkles in a fair face, but addeth fresh colours to a fast friend, which neither heat, nor cold, nor misery, nor place, nor destiny can alter or diminish.

Shakespeare has put this same thought far more beautifully in one of the finest sonnets addressed to his friend, beginning "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments":

Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken. . . .
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

Perhaps as a foil to this superior affection existing between him and his friend, as well as a laughing satire on the amorous cycles of the day, Shakespeare created the
figure of the Dark Lady, who has neither the unalterable loyalty of a genuine friend, nor the marvelous beauty and chastity of the conventional sonnet mistress.

When we come to examine the Sonnets as a formal sequence, we discover several well-marked groups. The first group, Sonnets 1–99, are addressed to a young man, and all written soon after first meeting him. The second group, Sonnets 100–125, are addressed to the same young man, but after a lapse of nearly three years, during which the friendship had been allowed to grow cold. The poem numbered 126 is not a sonnet at all, but the envoy, formally marking the close of the cycle. Then follows an appendix, Sonnets 127–152, mainly dealing with the Dark Lady whose shadow was thrown over the cycle addressed to the man. In themselves these do not constitute a cycle, or even a fragment of a cycle, but must be regarded as miscellaneous sonnets, allied in theme to the formal cycle of 125 sonnets already discussed. Finally, attached at the end, are two sonnets, 153 and 154, celebrating the town of Bath and its hot springs famous for their curative powers. These two poems are really different versions of the same theme, and it may be supposed that Thorpe appended them for the sake of completeness, or merely because he found them in the manuscript.

I have already said all that need be said about the artificiality of the Sonnets. They are throughout character-

---

1 The order in which Thorpe's transcript gives the sonnets seems to be in the main, if not completely, that in which Shakespeare arranged them. Where links are discoverable, and they are numerous, the order is demonstrably correct; moreover, in many cases where there is no formal link but a continuity in thought, the order is again correct.

2 Professor Mackail suspects that this appendix contains miscellaneous sonnets by various writers, some by Shakespeare, and some "pretty certainly not by Shakespeare." He would reject Sonnets 153 and 154 certainly, and 128 and 145 probably, while against Sonnets 135, 136, and 143 he thinks "a plausible case can be made out." (Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, 1912, vol. iii.) I see no reason for rejecting any of these sonnets.
ized by an ingenuity that suggests pride in wit rather than deep emotion. Yet, when full allowance is made for this, the careful and sympathetic student of the Sonnets finds in them a residuum that can be explained only by the poet’s having embodied in the artificial and ingenious cycle form a real friendship. It may be admitted that much is fiction for the sake of artistic effect; the whole figure of the Dark Lady, “a woman coloured ill,” seems to me to be an admirable stroke on the part of the dramatist, serving, as has been said, not only as a satire on the beauty and chastity of the conventional sonnet mistress, but also as a splendid foil to the superiority of friendship over love. By creating, too, an effective triangular situation, the poet was able to heighten the interest in the story-element, an interest which probably constitutes for many readers the chief fascination of the cycle. Thus the Dark Lady can be fully justified on literary grounds. But we must not exclude the possibility that she may have had a real existence in some form. On this point I may quote the remarks of Hadrian Dorrell, about the portrait of the woman in Willibie his Avisa:

Whether it be altogether feigned, or in some part true, or altogether true, and yet in most part poetically shadowed, you must give me leave to speak by conjecture and not by knowledge. My conjecture is doubtful, and therefore I make you the judges.

As to the man celebrated, however, we can hardly doubt that he was of flesh and blood, and that Shakespeare entertained for him a high regard. Allowing for the inevitable exaggeration of the sonnet convention, we can picture him with some accuracy, and trace, though not so surely, the episodes in the friendship. He was, when the poet first met him, in the prime of young manhood, with all the beauty of youth. In appearance he was notable for his bright eyes, rosy cheeks, and auburn
hair; and he was gifted with a kind disposition and a charming gentleness of spirit. He seems to have been of high birth, but without a great title of nobility, possibly without any title at all — the younger son, we may suppose, of a distinguished house, living in one of the Inns of Court, and devoting his time, as did so many young gallants, to the theatres and men of letters. He had wit, we are told, and learning — at least a university training. He was also possessed of wealth, and was generous to his friends. But the chief distinctions he enjoyed were his beauty of face and his engaging disposition. For a time Shakespeare alone was aware of his superlative excellence, and alone celebrated him in verse.

The Sonnets open (1–14) by the poet urging this young man to marry, and thus seek immortality in posterity. Soon dropping this theme, however, the poet promises him immortality in verse (15–19), and proceeds to celebrate his beauty and kindness (20–25). Certain episodes to constitute a story, some quite conventional, some startlingly unconventional, follow. The poet, separated by travel, dispatches three sonnets (26–28) written in absence. Next he addresses to his friend three sonnets (29–31) written in a mood of depression. A single sonnet (32) comments on the progress of English poetry. Then comes the unusual episode (33–35) of the wrong to friendship committed by the young man. He had met the poet’s mistress, the Dark Lady, and, tempted by her, had yielded at a moment when loyalty to friendship failed. But he repented with tears, and was forgiven. In the next group (36–39), Shakespeare, painfully conscious of his low rank as an actor and a writer of plays, confesses that he is unworthy of associating intimately in public with his friend. Then (40–42) the friend repeats the original wrong:

[175]
That thou hast her, it is not all my grief,
And yet it may be said I lov'd her dearly;
That she hath thee, is of my wailing chief,
A loss in love that touches me more nearly.

And again the poet, his love for his friend surmounting all else in the world, forgives him. In the following group (43–52), another separation through travel induces thoughts in absence, sonnets marked by ingenuity rather than deep feeling. In the following group (53–55), the constancy of the friend is immortalized in verse. As if by contrast, the next group (56–61) reproaches the friend for wilfully absenting himself in waning love. The poet then (62–65) takes advantage of the time-worn tradition of his assumed old age, and the general decay of all things, to immortalize his friend's beauty. The next group (66–68), written in a mood of cynicism, discusses the vileness of the world, in which his friend alone is good. Another strikingly original theme appears in Sonnets 69–70. The friend has become the victim of public slander, but is comforted by the poet with the assurance that slander usually attacks the innocent and pure. In a very beautiful group (71–74) the poet writes of his own death, and makes a plea to be forgotten. This is followed by a celebration of delight in the friend's love (75–76), and an ingenious sonnet (77) to accompany the gift of a blank table-book.

How long the friendship had lasted we cannot say, but now comes another poet, usually called the Rival Poet, who begins to celebrate Shakespeare's friend, hitherto wholly unnoticed by any writer of verse. He is a younger man than Shakespeare, of great learning, and with a highly ornate style. By his polished rhetoric and his use of gross and fulsome flattery he steals away the love of

---

1 Sonnets 59 and 60, however, are digressions on the beauty of the friend and the immortality of that beauty in the poet's verse. Such digressions are not uncommon in sonnet cycles.
PERIOD OF NON-DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

the friend. That the Rival Poet was a real person seems obvious from the nature of the sonnets (78–86) dealing with this episode. Many details, circumstantial and personal, yet obscure, are without the slightest artistic merit, and wholly without significance unless understood as allusions to a specific individual. Note, for example, the following lines:

Was it his spirit, by spirits taught to write
Above a mortal pitch, that struck me dead?
No, neither he, nor his compeers by night
Giving him aid, my verse astonishèd;
He, nor that affable familiar ghost
Which nightly gulls him with intelligence...

If we knew whom Shakespeare had in mind, or what he is referring to in these curious lines, the sonnet might be effective; as matters stand, however, it is quite meaningless, and as literature of little worth.

In the next group (87–93), Shakespeare contemplates the possibility of desertion by his friend, and its probable effects. Then follows (94–96) another most unusual theme: the friend has fallen into a life of gross sensuality, and the poet finds it necessary to rebuke him in the strongest language:

But if that flower with base infection meet,
The basest weed outbraves his dignity:
For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;
Lillies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

The remainder of this first section (97–99) deals in an artificial way with the idea that the changing seasons and the flowers merely serve to remind the poet of his friend.

At this point the composition of the Sonnets was interrupted. But after a lapse of two or possibly three years (see Sonnets 100, 102, 104, 108, 115), the poet, like the Prodigal Son, returns to his friend, and after a prologue of

[ 177 ]
apology (100–103), begins again the familiar old themes, celebrating his friend's beauty and constancy, and promising for these immortality in verse (104–108). Again (109–110) he reproaches himself for his long absence and silence. And again (111–112) he laments his low social standing and the brand the world stamps upon his name as an actor. After celebrating his friend's love (113–116), he returns to further apologies for his absence and neglect (117–120), exclaiming, "That you were once unkind befriends me now." The remaining sonnets (121–125) deal with miscellaneous themes, and the cycle is closed by an envoy of ten lines in couplets.

Who this young man was we do not know. The publisher of the manuscript, Thomas Thorpe, knew, or thought he knew; and he dedicated the Sonnets in beautiful monumental style to him as their sole inspirer.

It is hardly possible to interpret this dedication, as certain scholars attempt to do, as merely an acknowledgment on Thorpe's part of his indebtedness to some inferior hanger-on of the publishing trade who procured ("begot") the manuscript for him. The word "begetter," especially with the significant modifier "only," would spontaneously suggest to all readers, perhaps then even more strongly than now, the idea of paternity, so familiar in the current renderings of the Bible. Moreover, it was a commonplace for Elizabethan poets thus to describe the inspirer of their verse. Daniel, in dedicating his Delia sonnets to the Countess of Pembroke, refers to them as "begotten by thy hand." Donne writes of "her who begot this love in me"; and in dedicating his Divine Poems to the Earl of Doncaster says:

See, sir, how the sun's hot masculine flame
Begets strange creatures on Nile's dirty slime,
In me your fatherly yet lusty rhyme
— For these songs are their fruit — have wrought the same.
TO THE ONLIE. BEGETTER. OF.
THESE. INSVING. SONNETS.
MR. W. H. ALL. HAPPINESSE.
AND. THAT. ETERNITIE.
PROMISED.

BY.

OVR. EVER.LIVING. POET.

WISHETH.

THE. WELL.WISHING.
ADVENTVRER. IN.
SETTING.
FORTH.

T. T.

THOMAS THORPE'S DEDICATION OF THE SONNET'S
PERIOD OF NON-DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

Thomas Randolph wrote to Ben Jonson:

And to say truth that which is best in me
May call you father; 'twas begot by thee.

One need not multiply instances, for the thought is clearly enough expressed by Shakespeare himself in the Sonnets:

Yet be most proud of that which I compile,
Whose influence is thine, and born of thee.

How can my Muse want subject to invent,
While thou dost breathe, that pour'st into my verse
Thine own sweet argument?

For who's so dumb that cannot write to thee
When thou thyself dost give invention light?

Where art thou, Muse, that thou forget'st so long
To speak of that which gives thee all thy might.

Sing to the ear that doth thy lays esteem,
And gives thy pen both skill and argument.

For to no other pass my verses tend
Than of your graces and your gifts to tell.

In coining the phrase "onlie begetter" Thorpe shows that he had read the Sonnets to good advantage. And it will be observed that he attributed this parental inspiration merely to "the insuing sonnets," apparently excepting the long poem, A Lover's Complaint, which follows, and which likewise he assigns to Shakespeare's pen. Moreover, he specifically wishes for "the onlie begetter" of the Sonnets "that eternitie promised by our ever-living poet." Here again he shows that he had read the Sonnets with clear understanding, for the poet is constantly promising eternity to the inspirer of his verse, and asserting that his lines are ever-living:

My love shall in my verse ever live young.
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

The phrase "the well-wishing adventurer in setting forth" (i.e., meaning well in putting the sonnets into print), is an apology for giving publicity to a manuscript which the author obviously desired to keep private. Such an apology was conventional with piratical "adventurers" from the days of Tottel’s Miscellany. Tottel, who had secured his manuscript in the same way Thorpe had procured the Sonnets, says in an epistle To the Reader: "It resteth now, gentle reader, that thou think it not evil done to publish, to the honour of the English tongue and for the profit of the studious of English eloquence, those works which the ungentle hoarders up of such treasure have heretofore envied thee." ¹ And Thorpe merely means to assure "the onlie begetter," as well as the reading public, that his intentions are good. "Setting forth" was a common technical phrase for "publishing"; note the address to the publisher of Randolph’s Hey for Honesty: "To his worthy friend, F. J., on the setting forth of this excellent comedy"; or that to the publisher of Richard Brome’s Five New Plays: "Upon his setting forth Mr. Rich. Brome’s playes."

Thus the Dedication is couched in language that is simple, compact, and clear. On its face, it seems to be addressed to the inspirer of the Sonnets; and this natural inference is supported by the internal evidence of the poems. From the well-known "Will Sonnets" we are led to believe that the given name of the friend was William.

¹ Compare the prefaces to Gascoigne’s Posies, Pettie’s Petite Palace of Pleasure, Greene’s Euphues His Censure to Philautus, Breton’s Bower of Delights, Jones’ edition of The Court of Civil Coursesy. We find here the conventional apology to readers in various forms: "accept my good will"; "take them as a token of good will"; "make some favourable conjecture of my good meaning"; "as a testimony of my serviceable heart and good meaning to you."
PERIOD OF NON–DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

But this does not help to lift the anonymity of Thorpe’s “Mr. W. H.” Perhaps, since the Sonnets were designed by the poet primarily as literature, it is just as well that we do not know more. Fletcher, in an address prefixed to his Licia cycle, after refusing to disclose whom he is celebrating, says to the reader: “If thou like it, take it.” And Shakespeare may well say the same thing to us.¹

The Sonnets ended with the usual “Finis”; but to the collection Thorpe appended another work, a poem of 329 lines, entitled A Lover’s Complaint, which he stated to be also “by William Shakespeare.” It is in the same stanzaic form used in Lucrece, but is more far-fetched in its conceits, and more labored in its imagery and style than any work positively known to be from Shakespeare’s hand; and whether we are justified in accepting Thorpe’s attribution is a matter of grave doubt. Scholars, indeed, are not yet agreed what to think of the poem. Dowden declares: “There appears to be no good reason to question the correctness of this ascription”; Mr. Masefield holds that “It is a work of Shakespeare’s youth, fresh and felicitous as youth’s work often is, and very nearly as empty”; Swinburne seems to be seriously in doubt, referring to it as an “actual or possible work” of Shakespeare, though calling attention to some “superbly Shakespearian” lines in it; Professor J. W. Mackail, who alone has subjected the poem to a careful analysis, concludes positively that it could not have been written by the dramatist.² In the 329 lines of the poem he finds twenty-three words that do not elsewhere occur in Shakespeare, seven words that may fairly be regarded as non-Shakespearian, sixteen words that are used in a sense not employed by Shakespeare, and twelve words that are found only in the

¹ For a summary of the many theories advanced by scholars, and a complete bibliography, see the excellent variorum edition of the Sonnets by R. M. Alden.
² Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, 1912, iii, 51.
master's maturer work; and in addition he notices the
writer's special fondness for Latinisms. Under the head
of "Syntax," he calls attention to three peculiarities (el-
lipsis of subject, ellipsis of verb, and asyndeton) which are
alien to Shakespeare's ordinary usage. Finally, he points
out that by the tests of "phrasing and style" the poem
is generally unlike Shakespeare's recognized work.

The evidence which Professor Mackail thus presents
seems to carry weight. Yet he admits: "On the other
hand, there are more than a few passages in the poem
which are like Shakespeare at his best, and of which one
would say at first sight that no one but Shakespeare could
have written them, so wonderfully do they combine his
effortless power and his incomparable sweetness."

As to questioning the accuracy of Thorpe's attribution
we need have little hesitancy, for we know how stolen
verse-manuscripts were constituted, and what slight ef-
fort the publishers often made to discover the real author
of the poems contained therein. A study of Jaggard's is-
sue of The Passionate Pilgrim will furnish a good illustra-
tion, and Elizabethan literature supplies numerous other
eamples. Possibly Thorpe had secured the common-
place-book of some gallant, containing chiefly the Sonnets
of Shakespeare, but also other poems, some no doubt at-
tributed to their authors, others without signature. And
finding there A Lover's Complaint, Thorpe might, either
in ignorance or with the easy conscience of his kind, print
the poem as by Shakespeare in order to increase the size
and heighten the importance of his volume.

Our chief difficulty in rejecting Thorpe's ascription lies
in the fact that it is hard to discover any one besides
Shakespeare to whom we may assign the poem, which
despite its many absurd faults has at times a beauty that
reflects the art of the great master. Professor Mackail,
recognizing this difficulty, would attribute the poem to
the mysterious Rival Poet, whom Shakespeare himself had confessed to be gifted with a "golden quill, and precious phrase by all the Muses filed." On this hint Mr. J. M. Robertson would go a step further, and assuming it as proved that the Rival Poet was George Chapman, give the poem to that writer.¹ Both hypotheses seem fanciful and unlikely. Any one who has read Chapman's minor poems could hardly agree that the author of *The Shadow of Night* and *A Coronet* was also the author of *A Lover's Complaint*.

It is safe only to conclude that Thorpe's attribution carries little authority, and that the poem may have been an inferior (it seems to be an incomplete) product of Shakespeare's pen, or an unusually excellent imitation of Shakespeare's popular style, in which the unknown author occasionally, as Professor Mackail observes, "writes like Shakespeare at his best."

¹ *Shakespeare and Chapman*, 1917.
CHAPTER X

WITH THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN'S COMPANY.

During his two years of freedom from acting and playmaking Shakespeare had succeeded in establishing himself as one of England's leading poets. His *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, and his *Sonnets* had won him the unstinted praise of literary critics, and had carried his fame even to the cloistered halls of Oxford and Cambridge. From Ireland Edmund Spenser wrote to acknowledge his power, including him, "though last, not least," in his famous list of eminent poets who glorified the Court of Elizabeth:

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{A gentler shepheard may nowhere be found,} \\
\text{Whose Muse, full of high thoughts' invention,} \\
\text{Doth like himself heroically sound.} \\
\end{align*} \]

Shakespeare's name was indeed sounding wherever men came together to discuss the poetry of the day.

In view of his rapid rise to fame in the courtly circle of writers, he may, as has already been suggested, have contemplated abandoning the actor's profession and dramatic composition, with the purpose of henceforth devoting his energy to the production of works in the realm of pure literature. If so, Fate was soon to determine otherwise. Whether he lost the patronage of the Earl of Southampton, or whether the actors were able to offer him pecuniary inducements that he could not resist, we are unable to say. All that we positively know is that before the end of 1594 he is back again at the "common theatres," as an

---

1 *Colin Clout’s Come Home Again*, probably written in 1594, published in 1595. It is not certain that Spenser is referring to Shakespeare, but the passage seems to fit no one else so well, and most scholars assume that it alludes to the dramatist. Did Spenser first write "Doth like his name," and subsequently change "his name" to "himself" for the sake of alliteration?
actor treading the rush-strewn stage before the "penny-knaves" of London, and as a literary artist devoting his splendid powers to refurbishing old plays and composing new ones.

- He could not, of course, rejoin the Pembroke's Men, for they had ceased to exist. Instead he became affiliated with the Lord Chamberlain's Company, which, having survived the lean years of the plague, was just entering upon a new and brilliant career. Since he was destined to remain with this notable company throughout the rest of his life, and produce for it the plays which render him immortal, we must hurriedly glance at its previous history, and observe the course of circumstances which led it in 1594 to engage the services of England's most promising young poet.

The company was originally known as Lord Strange's Men. It seems to have been constituted a metropolitan troupe in the autumn of 1588, though our first notice of it bears the date of November 6, 1589: the Lord Mayor had peremptorily forbidden the Admiral's and the Strange's Men to perform in the city; the Admiral's Men obeyed, but the Strange's Men, so the Lord Mayor complained, "in a very contemptuous manner departing from me, went to the Cross Keys [Inn], and played that afternoon." Obviously the company was already numbered among the important London troupes; and this importance was augmented in the winter of 1591-92. The Admiral's Company, of which the famous Edward Alleyn was the most conspicuous figure, was temporarily dissolved in 1591 in order to allow some of its chief players to undertake a prolonged tour of the Continent, a custom then popular with English actors. But Alleyn, who at this time was in

---

1 There was an earlier troupe enjoying the patronage of Lord Strange, which appears in the provinces from 1576 to 1588, but never in London or at Court. It does not concern us here.
his twenty-fifth year, and at the height of his great fame, declined to accompany them. Instead, with a few other members of the Admiral's organization who failed to go on the tour, he affiliated himself with the Strange's Men, and at once became their leading actor.

Thus enlarged and strengthened, the Strange's Men entered into an agreement with Philip Henslowe by which he was to furnish them the Rose playhouse, and serve as their business-manager. From his Diary we learn that he spent a large sum of money in altering, improving, and beautifying his theatre for their occupancy. And on February 19, 1592, they opened that handsome building with a performance of Robert Greene's Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay.

Our knowledge of the personnel of the troupe is unusually complete. From the stage "plot" of The Seven Deadly Sins, belonging to the year 1592, we derive the names of the following members:

- Richard Burbage
- Augustine Phillips
- Thomas Pope
- George Bryan
- Henry Condell
- William Slye
- Richard Cowley
- John Duke
- John Sinkler
- John Holland
- Thomas Godall
- Christopher Beeston
- T. Bell
- Sander Cooke
- Nicholas Tooley
- Robert Gough
- Robert Pallant
- Ned
- Will

Boys

This list, however, is incomplete, and from the traveling-license we are able to add the names of Edward Alleyn
THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN'S COMPANY

(who still describes himself as "servant to the right-honorable the Lord High Admiral"), William Kempe, and John Heminges. Shakespeare's name, of course, is nowhere mentioned in connection with the troupe, for the simple reason that he was then, as I have attempted to show, connected with the Pembroke's Men.

This splendid Strange organization, with such expert actors as Alleyn, Burbage, and Kempe, performed at the Rose until June 22, 1592, when, it will be recalled, theatres were closed by order of the Privy Council. On December 29, the plague having subsided, they reopened the Rose, and continued to act there until February, 1593. Henslowe recorded in his Diary each day the play that the company presented, and duly noted the appearance of new or revised plays; the long list, however, contains not a single piece that can be identified as Shakespeare's.¹

The plague breaking out with renewed violence in February, 1593, theatres were again closed; and it becoming evident that the inhibition would last a long time, the Strange's Company, under Alleyn's leadership, began an extensive tour of the provinces, as did also the rival Pembroke's Company. After some months, however, the Pembroke's Company, not being able to make expenses in the country, returned to London, went into bankruptcy, and sold its stock of plays. Henslowe bought a number of its manuscripts for the use of the Strange's Men, including Hamlet, Titus Andronicus, and The Taming of the Shrew. Whether he also bought some of Shakespeare's earliest plays, as The Comedy of Errors and Love's Labour's Lost, we do not know, but they were not disposed of to publishers, and Henslowe's judgment would hardly allow good manuscripts like these to slip through his fingers.

¹ The Strange's play of Henry VI, as already observed, was by George Peele.
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

In the course of time Edward Alleyn, who had married Henslowe’s only daughter, became weary of traveling, left the Strange’s Men, and returned to London. Thereupon Richard Burbage, it seems, took the position as leader of the troupe on its tour, for he was rapidly developing into an actor of the first rank, vying even with Alleyn himself. The Strange’s Men, however, could hardly have made much more than expenses, and were merely struggling to maintain their existence as a company.

When on September 25, 1593, their patron succeeded to the Earldom of Derby, they assumed the name of Derby’s Men, a title they were to hold less than six months, for Derby died on April 16, 1594. His players, thus left without a patron (for a short time they called themselves the Countess of Derby’s Servants), were forced to seek the protection of another nobleman. By good fortune they secured the patronage of Lord Hunsdon, the Lord High Chamberlain; and from this time on they bore the designation The Lord Chamberlain’s Men.¹

Early in the summer of 1594, the plague having at last spent its fury, the actors were gradually reassembling in the city. Naturally, as a result of the long inhibition of the theatres lasting nearly two years, there was disorganization in the big London troupes, and much confusion among the players. The great Pembroke’s Company had ceased to exist, other companies had been sadly reduced in size, and there was a general shifting about of actors. The situation was further complicated by the return of certain of the Admiral’s Men from their foreign tour.

¹ Except between July 23, 1596, and March 17, 1597. Henry Carey, the Lord Chamberlain, died on July 23, 1596, and the company passed under the protection of his son, George Carey, Lord Hunsdon. On March 17, 1597, however, George Carey, Lord Hunsdon, was appointed Lord Chamberlain, and his players resumed their former title, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men.
THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S COMPANY

The old Admiral’s players, who had been only temporarily dispersed in 1591, were now reorganized under their former patron; and Edward Alleyn, who had been their leader, and who, even after he became associated with the Strange’s Men, continued to describe himself as “servant to the right honorable the Lord High Admiral,” rejoined them. Moreover, he persuaded his father-in-law, Henslowe, to become their business-manager, and to allow them the use of the Rose playhouse. Thus re-established as a first-class city troupe, they began to act at the Rose while the Lord Chamberlain’s Men were still traveling in the country.

On, or shortly before, June 3, 1594, the Chamberlain’s Men arrived in London, and reported to their former manager Henslowe. They found — to their dismay no doubt — that Alleyn and Henslowe had deserted them, and that a new and formidable rival company was occupying their playhouse. For a time they seem to have been uncertain what steps to take. Henslowe possibly desired to amalgamate them with the Admiral’s Company, in order both to strengthen that organization and to suppress competition. At any rate, the Rose being then closed for painting and repairs, he sent them, along with the Admiral’s Men, to act temporarily at the old Newington Butts house; whether they acted in conjunction with the Admiral’s Men, or on alternate days, is not clear. But twelve days later, on June 15, the Rose being now ready for occupancy, the Admiral’s Company returned to take permanent possession of that excellent playhouse.

Thereupon the Chamberlain’s Men broke off their alliance with Henslowe, and undertook to build themselves into a first-class city company to compete on even terms with the Admiral’s Men. Doubtless a partial reorganization, with increased personnel, was necessary; for not only had they lost some of their members through their
long period of traveling, but presumably, others, like Alleyn, had rejoined their old companions under the Lord Admiral. Moreover, a full-sized city troupe had to have an adequate supply of hirelings and boys, as well as sharers — and, above all, had to have playwrights.

In this reorganization Richard Burbage, whose fame as an actor made him the natural rival to Alleyn, must have taken a prominent part. By virtue of his wonderful power in the presentation of heroic character he became the leading actor for the company. William Kempe, generally conceded to be the ablest clown since Tarlton, became their chief comedian. And, of course, the other sharers of the older organization — experienced actors, and most of them eminent in their profession — were included. But best of all, William Shakespeare, who in his former association with the Pembroke’s Men had demonstrated his ability to write plays, and who more recently had attained great fame as a man of letters, was induced to join the company. The players offered him a position as an actor with the rank of full-sharer, and in addition agreed to pay him generously for such plays as he might produce.

Finally, their patron, the Lord Chamberlain, secured for them the immediate use of the Cross Keys Inn, in Gracious Street. On October 8, 1594, he wrote to the Lord Mayor:

After my hearty commendations. Where my now company of players have been accustomed for the better exercise of their quality, and for the service of Her Majesty if need so require, to play this winter time within the city at the Cross Keys in Gracious Street, these are to require and pray your Lordship (the time being such as, thanks be to God, there is now no danger of the sickness) to permit and suffer them so to do.¹

¹ *The Remembrancia, The Malone Society’s Collections*, i, 73. The earlier editor of the *Remembrancia* reads “my new company” instead of “my now company.”

[ 190 ]
THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S COMPANY

And Richard Burbage secured for them the permanent use of his father’s large and splendid playhouse, the Theatre, in Finsbury Field. Possibly during the company’s stay at the Cross Keys the Theatre was repaired, improved, and repainted for their future occupancy.

The chief members of the company as now constituted were:

- Richard Burbage
- William Shakespeare
- William Kempe
- John Heminges
- Thomas Pope
- Henry Condell
- Augustine Phillips
- Christopher Beeston
- William Slye
- Richard Cowley
- George Bryan
- John Duke

In addition there was the usual supply of hirielings and boys. Most of these men remained with the organization throughout the rest of their lives, and the first six, as we shall see, became Shakespeare’s intimate and trusted friends. For histrionic skill the most distinguished member of the company was Richard Burbage; but one should not forget the presence in the troupe of William Kempe, whose reputation as early as 1589 extended beyond the shores of England. Thomas Nashe, in dedicating An Almond for a Parrot (1590) to “That most comical and conceited cavaleire, Monsieur du Kempe, Jestmonger and Vice-gerent generall to the Ghost of Dicke Tarlton,” writes:

For comming from Venice the last summer, and taking Bergamo in my waye homeward to England, it was my happe, sojourninge there some foure or five dayes, to light in fellowship with that famous Francatlip Harlicken, who perceiving me to bee an English man by my habit and speech, asked me many
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

particulars of the order and manner of our playes, which he termed by the name of representations: amongst other talke he enquired of me if I knew any such Parabolano here in London as Signior Chiarlatano Kempino. Very well (quoth I,) and have beene oft in his company. He, hearing me say so, began to embrace me anew, and offered me all the courtesie he colde for his sake, saying, although he knew him not, yet for the report he had hard of his pleasance, hee colde not but bee in love with his perfections being absent.

And we have much other testimony to the same effect. The combination of Burbage and Kempe, with Shakespeare as playwright, made the Chamberlain's Company the most excellent troupe in England, surpassing even the Admiral's Men under Alleyn's brilliant leadership and Henslowe's experienced management.

Having become a full-sharing actor and dramatist for this great company, Shakespeare henceforth had few "idle hours" at his disposal. Elizabethan troupes, it should be remembered, not only performed as a rule every day in the week, including Sunday, but also changed their plays from day to day in a most astonishing fashion. The following list from Henslowe's record of performances at the Rose in 1594 will illustrate how taxing this must have been on the memory of the actors:

Friday, September 2, The Jew of Malta
Saturday, September 3, Tasso
Sunday, September 4, Phillipo and Hippolito
Monday, September 5, The Venetian Comedy
Tuesday, September 6, Cullack
Wednesday, September 7, Massacre of France
Thursday, September 8, Godfrey of Bulloigne
Friday, September 9, Mahomet
Saturday, September 10, Galiaso
Sunday, September 11, Bellendon
Monday, September 12, Tamburlaine

To care for such an elaborate repertoire, the forenoons of the actors were commonly spent in rehearsals, absence or
EDWARD ALLEYN
(Reproduced by permission from a painting in the Dulwich Picture Gallery; photograph by Emery Walker, Ltd.)
even tardiness being heavily fined. The afternoons, of course, were occupied with performances before the public, lasting from two or three o'clock until five or six. As to the evenings, not a small share of the time, surely, had to be devoted to learning new, or refreshing the memory on old, plays. In all this busy stir of rehearsing and performing plays Shakespeare, as a full-sharing actor, would be called upon to take his part. In addition he was expected to provide new manuscripts for the company, and often to revamp old ones. If his fellows made his duties as an actor less burdensome in order that he might create plays for them, his responsibility was none the lighter, and the time they placed at his disposal was not his own.

Thus it is obvious that he could not now find that leisure to produce poems for the literary public, or devote himself to those “graver labours” he once had in mind. Henceforth all his energies were to be spent in aiding his troupe at the Theatre to compete with the Henslowe-Alleyn troupe at the Rose. The whole theatrical history of London throughout the remainder of the century resolved itself into a keen rivalry between the Chamberlain’s and the Admiral’s Men. The great fame of Alleyn’s acting was able for a time to fill the yard and galleries of the Rose; but the matchless genius of Shakespeare soon lifted the Chamberlain’s Company to a position of easy superiority that could not be challenged. Young Richard Burbage, or “Dick” as he was affectionately known to the public, quickly rose, through his excellent rendition

---

1 See Henslowe Papers, ed. by W. W. Greg, p. 124.
2 Of Thomas Heywood, who like Shakespeare was a full-sharing actor and playwright for the Queen’s Men, Francis Kirkman writes: “As I have been informed, he was very laborious, for he not only acted every day, but also obliged himself to write a sheet every day.” (Address to the reader affixed to A True, Perfect, and Exact Catalogue, 1671.)
3 “There’s better law amongst the players yet, for a fellow shall have his share though he do not play that day.” (A Cure for a Cuckold, II, iii.)
of the heroic rôles specially created for him, to the pinnacle of histrionic fame. And within a few years the sharers in the Company — including Shakespeare — had acquired such affluence as to draw down upon them the abuse of many satirists.

The Elizabethan playwright, Thomas Randolph, in discussing the power of money, exclaimed: “Did not . . . Shakespeare therefore write his comedy?” ¹ And many years later Alexander Pope cynically declared:

Shakespeare (whom you, and every playhouse bill,
Style the divine, the matchless, what you will)
For gain, not glory, wing’d his roving flight,
And grew immortal in his own despight.²

In this statement, no doubt, there is a grain of truth; but it would be fairer to say that Shakespeare labored for gain and glory, with the added comment that in pursuing both he lifted his plays from the level of the mercenary and ephemeral to the heights of enduring art. And surely we, who are the heirs of his “glory,” have no right to begrudge him the relatively small “gain” to which he was justly entitled.

Yet perhaps he himself at times regretted his inability to devote his genius to what were regarded as nobler forms of literature — to the making, let us say, of some great epic like the Faerie Queene. In one of his Sonnets he exclaims:

O, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
That did not better for my life provide
Than public means.

And he may occasionally have felt that his nature was “subdued to what it works in.” If, however, he had such

¹ Plutophthalmia Plutogamia, or Hey for Honesty, I, ii. The play was written after Shakespeare’s death.
² The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace.
THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN'S COMPANY

moments of regret, they must have been fleeting, for his whole life, with all of its interests, was now centred in the theatre; and we cannot doubt that he was happy in the companionship of his "friends and fellows," who seem to have loved him only "this side idolatry," and that he rejoiced in the success his company was able to attain under his rapidly developing powers as a dramatist. Nor could he have been unmoved by the applause of the public in the "throngèd theatres," thus described by his contemporary playwright Drayton:

In pride of wit, when high desire of fame
Gave life and courage to my lab'ring pen,
And first the sound and virtue of my name
Won grace and credit in the ears of men,
With those the throngèd theatres that press,
I in the circuit for the laurel strove,
Where the full praise, I freely must confess,
In heat of blood a modest mind might move;
With shouts and claps at every little pause,
When the proud round on every side hath rung.¹

Such applause, we know, Shakespeare gained in abundant measure. As Leonard Digges exclaimed:

Oh how the audience
Were ravish'd! With what wonder they went thence!

And it was no mean thing for him to ravish the audiences then, and since, as no one else has been able to do. We might like to have from his pen a great epic like the Faerie Queene, dealing, let us say, with the Trojan War, a theme which always fascinated him; on the other hand, we should not be willing to pay the price by giving up Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Macbeth, Cymbeline, and The Tempest, which he could have produced only as a result of years of painstaking effort in dramatic composition. After all, is it not enough that he has won from the

¹ Idea (1605), Sonnet 47.

[ 195 ]
world such praise as is thus expressed by Browning?

"Shakespeare"! — to such name’s sounding, what succeeds
Fitly as silence? Falter forth the spell, —
Act follows word, the speaker knows full well,
Nor tampers with its magic more than needs.
Two names there are: That which the Hebrew reads
With his soul only: if from lips it fell,
Echo, back thundered by earth, heaven, and hell,
Would own, "Thou didst create us!" Naught impedes
We voice the other name, man’s most of might,
Awesomely, lovingly: let awe and love
Mutely await their working, leave to sight
All of the issue as — below — above —
Shakespeare’s creation rises: one remove
Though dread — this finite from that infinite.
CHAPTER XI

LONDON RESIDENCES AND ACTOR FRIENDS

Now that Shakespeare, after some uncertainty, had found his permanent place in the world, and had settled down into the regular existence he was thenceforth to lead, we may turn to consider his more personal affairs.

His first residence in London, so far as our knowledge goes, was in the Parish of St. Helen’s, Bishopsgate, near the Theatre where his company was acting, and close by the homes of his friends the Burbages. From the Subsidy Rolls we learn that in 1595–96 (how much earlier is not indicated) he was a householder in this parish, and that upon his goods the tax collectors had set the very respectable assessment of £5. In the same Rolls, Richard Burbage, who had inherited property from his father in addition to what he had accumulated as a successful actor, was assessed only £3; and his brother Cuthbert, the owner of the Theatre, and a prosperous man of affairs, who with his family was occupying the dwelling his father had erected in Holywell, was assessed only £4. That Shakespeare as a householder was assessed more than either of these men indicates that he was living in better circumstances than they, and suggests that he had with him in London his wife, Anne, and his three children, Susanna, Judith, and Hamnet.

But his home in St. Helen’s was soon to be broken up, as is shown by the following facts. In 1593 Parliament had voted to Queen Elizabeth three subsidies,¹ each of 2s. 8d. in the pound on personal assessment. The third subsidy (for the year 1595) was divided into two install-

¹ For a reprint of these records see The Athenæum, March 26, 1904.
ments, the first, of 1s. 8d. in the pound, due on or before February 1, 1596, the second, of 1s. in the pound, due on or before February 1, 1597. In preparing to collect this second installment the officers of St. Helen's, in October, 1596, made up their usual list of subsidy-payers, and set Shakespeare down as owing 5s. on his original assessment of £5. But when they came to collect the sum early in 1597 they did not find him at his former address; and in their report, dated November, 1597, they entered his name among the defaulters: "William Shakespeare, vli. — vs."

The inference is that he had moved away from the Parish of St. Helen's at some date between February, 1596, when the previous installment had been paid, and February, 1597, when the second installment was due. And this inference is verified by Malone, who had in his possession a document showing that at some date in 1596 Shakespeare was a resident of the Bankside in Southwark: "From a paper now before me, which formerly belonged to Edward Alleyn, the player, our poet appears to have lived in Southwark, near the Bear Garden, in 1596." 

Presumably, if he had his family with him, he broke up housekeeping, probably early in the summer of 1596, and sent his wife and children to live in Stratford. For this there may have been good reasons. The crowded housing conditions of London, as well as the unwholesome marshes of Moorfields close by, might have rendered it desirable for him to rear his children in the fresh air and open life of Warwickshire. In this connection, too, it may be significant that in August, 1596, his only son, Hamnet, aged eleven and a half, died in Stratford. As a twin-child he was possibly not strong physically; and his declining

---

1 *Inquiry into the Authenticity of the Shakespeare Papers*, 1796. The document, like many others once belonging to Alleyn, is now lost, but the integrity of Malone is above suspicion, and we may safely accept the authenticity of the document in his hands, especially in view of the evidence to follow.
LONDON RESIDENCES

health would furnish an adequate motive for the poet's sending his family back to the country.

Shakespeare's grief at the loss of his only son must have been poignant, yet in none of his plays does he allow an echo of this sorrow to obtrude itself upon his audiences, nor did he write an elegy on the boy, for by nature he was too shrinking to give utterance to his private emotions. His fellow playwright, Ben Jonson, who was less reserved in such matters, some time afterwards lost his little son, and published a tender elegy celebrating his grief, the opening and closing lines of which may supply for us the lack of one from Shakespeare:

Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy.
My sin was too much hope of thee, loved boy...
Rest in soft peace; and asked, say: "Here doth lie
Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry."

The removal of his family to Stratford may have caused the dramatist to purchase there in May, 1597, the fine estate of New Place, one of the handsomest houses in the village, as a home for his wife and his two little girls. In their native town, amid numerous relatives and friends, and surrounded by the beautiful Warwickshire country, they could be happier than in the crowded city. Moreover the children would be subject to more wholesome influences than those that attended the lives of actor-folk, or that crept into the parish of St. Helen's from the neighboring regions of Shoreditch.¹

But let us return to the records of the poet himself in London. In 1597 Parliament granted the Queen three further subsidies at the old rates. The collectors of St. Helen's, still supposing that Shakespeare was a householder in that parish, or, what is more likely, working

¹ Here were many of the city's houses of ill fame. Beeston said of Shakespeare: "lived in Shoreditch, would not be debauched." It was probably the most disreputable section of London.

[ 199 ]
with the old tax-lists, set him down as due 13s. 4d. on his original assessment of £5. But when early in 1598 they called at his former address to collect the subsidy, they were again unable to find him, and learning upon inquiry that he had moved away from the parish, inserted his name among those who "have no goods or chattels, lands or tenements, within the limits" of their jurisdiction. So large was the deficit of the returns from this particular parish, that the officers were required to seek out the defaulters, and collect the taxes due the Queen. Accordingly, they traced the dramatist — it must have been an easy task — to his new residence in Southwark. In the Rolls for 1598 we find the entry: "William Shakespeare, in the Parish of St. Helen's, in Bishopsgate Ward, owes 13s. 4d. of the subsidy; and he answers in the following Roll in Residuum Sussex." The "following Roll," to which we are thus referred, deals with the residents of both Sussex and Surrey, over which there was a single sheriff. Upon examining this Roll, we find Shakespeare's name, and the old debt, duly recorded. In the margin is written "Episcopo Wintonensi," meaning that since Shakespeare was a resident of the Bankside in the Liberty of the Clink, a district under the jurisdiction not of the sheriff but of the Bishop of Winchester, the matter had to be referred to the ecclesiastical authorities. It may gratify the reader to learn that the officers subsequently marked the debt as paid in full.

The precise location of Shakespeare's new residence has not been discovered; it could not have been far, however, from the Rose, and from the homes of Alleyn and Henslowe — hence, possibly, the allusion to him in one of Alleyn's papers of 1596, as noted by Malone. That he should have moved to the Bankside was natural, for this was the centre of the theatrical fraternity. Several of the leading members of the Chamberlain's Company re-
sided there, and it is quite possible that he secured lodgings with one of them — with Pope, or with Phillips, both men of wealth, living no doubt in excellent houses.

This suggests, what we might otherwise suspect, that the poet’s life was now largely bound up with the lives of the actors, and that his most intimate friends and comrades were the "fellows" of his own troupe — Burbage, Kempe, Heminges, Condell, Phillips, Pope, Slye, and the rest. We have abundant evidence of their affection for him, and it may be noted that to all who were surviving at the time of his death he left memorial rings as tokens of his love.

What sort of folk were these actors? Perhaps a close view of the Burbage family will give a partial answer, for they were the leading spirits in the Chamberlain organization: James Burbage was the owner and manager of the Theatre; his elder son, Cuthbert, was later proprietor of the Theatre, and largely responsible for the erection of the Globe; his younger son, Richard, was the chief actor for whom Shakespeare wrote, was associated with the building of the Globe, and was proprietor of the Blackfriars Playhouse. Shakespeare must often have been in their home, and throughout his life was on terms of the closest intimacy with them. The following episode, selected from many, dealing with their ownership of the Theatre, will serve to reveal something of their personality.¹

James Burbage, it will be remembered, at first owned merely a half-interest in the Theatre; his brother-in-law, John Braynes, who bore most of the expense of erecting the building, owned the other half. After some years the two partners found it necessary to mortgage the playhouse to a money-lender named Hide, giving him as security the title to the building. Braynes died with the

¹ For this and other episodes, see my Shakespearean Playhouses, 1917.
mortgage unpaid; whereupon his widow, we are told, visited the money-lender with an offer to settle the debt in full if he would make over the deed entirely to her, and Burbage made the same unfair proposal. Hide apparently was too upright to yield to their solicitations; but at last, the mortgage remaining long unpaid, he lost patience, and declared that whoever first brought him the money might have the deed to the Theatre. Cuthbert Burbage, acting for his father, promptly paid the mortgage, came into full possession of the deed, and at once excluded the widow from any share in the revenues of the building.

In her distress the widow appealed to a friend, Robert Miles, who brought suit, and secured a written order from the Court of Chancery in her favor. Armed with this order, he came to the Burbages' dwelling near the playhouse, called to the door Cuthbert Burbage, and demanded one-half the profits of the Theatre for the plaintiff. James Burbage, "being within the house, hearing a noise at the door, went to the door, and there found his son, the said Cuthbert, and the said Miles, speaking loud together." The father joined in the talk, and being "dared by the said Miles, with great threats that he would do this and could do that," lost his temper, and offered to beat Miles off the grounds. This promptly ended the interview, and Miles took the order of the Court and went away.

Next day the widow herself, attended by Miles and other men, visited the Burbage home, "to require them to perform the said award" of the Court of Chancery. They were met at the door by James Burbage's wife, who "charged them to go out of her grounds, or else she would make her son break their knaves' heads." Aroused by these words, "James Burbage, her husband, looking out a window [above] upon them, called the complainant [Mrs. [202]
RICHARD BURBAGE
(Reproduced by permission from a painting in the Dulwich Picture Gallery; photograph by Emery Walker, Ltd.)