



TREASURES IN FULL SHAKESPEARE IN QUARTO

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2. Shakespeare's poems

Shakespeare's earliest poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, were probably composed when the theatres were closed because of the plague. Both were written to be printed, perhaps reflecting Shakespeare's need of the patronage of the 3rd Earl of Southampton or his intention to become known as a poet. The use of his name on the title-page of *The Passionate Pilgrim* (in which only a few of the poems are his) indicates that by 1599 he was already famous for his poetry.

It was once thought that the edition of *The Sonnets* which appeared in 1609 was unauthorised. More recently, it has been suggested that the collection was printed according to Shakespeare's wishes.

- *Venus and Adonis*, created in about 1592-1593. First printed in quarto in 1593. *Venus and Adonis* was dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton. The poem was regularly reprinted. In all, it appeared in 17 quarto editions before 1641.



Titlepage. William Shakespeare, *Venus and Adonis*, 1594. British Library, G.11180. [Larger image](#)

- *The Rape of Lucrece*, created in about 1593-1594. First printed in quarto in 1594. The title-page calls the poem *Lucrece*, although the longer title appears on the half-title. *The Rape of Lucrece* was also dedicated to the 3rd Earl of Southampton. The poem was successful, but never as popular as *Venus and Adonis*. It appeared in a total of eight quarto editions before 1641.
- *The Passionate Pilgrim*. First printed in octavo in 1599. This first edition survives only in a two-sheet fragment. The second edition was also printed in 1599 and survives complete. A third edition of *The Passionate Pilgrim* appeared in 1612. Of the 20 poems in the volume, only five are by Shakespeare. They include early versions of two of his sonnets, as well as verses from *Love's Labour's Lost*.
- *The Phoenix and Turtle*, perhaps created in about 1601. First printed in Robert Chester's *Loves Martyr*, which appeared in quarto in 1601. This work was reissued with a new title-page in 1611. The poem, which begins 'Let the bird of loudest lay', acquired its title only in 1807.
- *The Sonnets*, perhaps created during the 1590s and early 1600s. Shakespeare's 154 sonnets were first printed in quarto in 1609. The dedication 'to Mr W. H.' is signed by the publisher Thomas Thorpe. The identity of the dedicatee has been suggested as the 3rd Earl of Southampton, or William Herbert, 3rd Earl of

Pembroke, among others. A second edition of *The Sonnets* appeared in 1640, with the poems in a different order.

- *A Lover's Complaint*, created in about 1603-1604. First printed in quarto alongside Shakespeare's sonnets in 1609. *A Lover's Complaint* was also included in the edition of *The Sonnets* of 1640.

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