

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am sincerely grateful to those who have preceded me in writing about the *Sonnets*. Though I mention only recent scholars in my Introduction, I am of course also indebted to all those, from the eighteenth century onward, who have reflected on these poems. My understanding of individual sonnets has been helped over the years by the editions and commentaries and books and articles and translations I have absorbed. The sheer volume of comment on Shakespeare precludes my footnoting work by others on individual sonnets, but I regard my own writing as part of a long collaborative effort to take the measure of Shakespeare—an effort that shows no sign of waning.

Over the nine years of work on this commentary, I was funded for residence at various places, to all of which I am grateful. To the Rockefeller Foundation for a residency in 1987 at the Villa Serbelloni in Bellagio, where I began my work on this commentary; to read and annotate the *Sonnets* in that most generous of atmospheres was a distinct happiness. To the National Humanities Center in North Carolina, where for two months the staff assisted me in getting an unwieldy manuscript under computer control, and where the Fellows provided absorbing conversation on many subjects; I thank Robert Connor, Director of the Center, for inviting his Trustees (of whom I was then one) to come for short stays at the Center. To Drue Heinz and the Hawthornden Foundation for a memorable five-week stay at Hawthornden Castle, Edinburgh, Scotland; the poet Daniel Halpern encouraged me to apply, and I owe him gratitude for the company (and solitude) I found there. To the Wilson Center, where (though I was funded for work on Yeats) I also began revisions of the first complete draft of this work; my semester stay was enlivened by the company of James Morris, Director of the Literature and Culture Division. To Magdalene College, Cambridge University, where, as the Parnell Fellow, I spent three months in eloquently beautiful surroundings working on various projects, of which this was one; I thank the Master, Sir John Gurdon, and the Fellows for their hospitality and friendship. And finally, to Harvard University, which granted me sabbatical leave in 1994–95, a leave the more deeply appreciated because it came in the wake of illness.

Though I do not normally show work in progress to others, the long evolution of this commentary led to my giving parts of it as lectures, and to printing four essays deriving from it (see Bibliography). I thank especially Professor Ruth Stevenson and the Department of English at Union College for my time spent there as Lamont Professor; the lecture and workshop on the *Sonnets* that I gave there has appeared in a collection of essays on teaching Shakespeare of which Professor Stevenson is coeditor. When Professor Sylvan Barnet of Tufts University requested a short essay to include in his revised *Sonnets* for the Signet Shakespeare, he caused me to think further about synecdoche; he also has been unstintingly helpful on many other occasions. Professor Russ MacDonald of the University of Rochester solicited an essay from me for his collection *Shakespeare Re-read*. And the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, by inviting me to speak, generated an essay printed in its *Bulletin*. Professor Jonathan Bennett of the Department of Philosophy at Syracuse University evoked another effort, a lecture, given at Syracuse, which later became one of three Messenger Lectures on Shakespeare's *Sonnets* at Cornell University, where my kindly host was the poet A. R. Ammons. The genesis of the commentary came from a 1973 essay on sonnet 129 that I wrote in honor of I. A. Richards, at the invitation of the late Professor Reuben Brower of Harvard University; the delights of thinking about sonnet 129 were such that I found I could not forgo thinking about the other sonnets. I also wish to thank Professor Massimo Bacigalupo of the University of Genoa for sending me a photocopy of Basil Bunting's copy of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (altered under Ezra Pound's direction), and for alerting me to the existence of Bunting's Shakespeare. Two poets—my former colleague at Boston University, George Starbuck, and Howard Moss of *The New Yorker*—by their inspired parodies of the *Sonnets*, helped me see (or see through) the poems with a poet's eye; I am sorry that they did not live to receive my thanks. Professor Emeritus George T. Wright of the University of Minnesota was kind enough to take pleasure in my writing on Shakespeare as he saw it evolve over several years, and gave me much-needed support when my ideas were still sketchy ones. Elsie Duncan-Jones, scholar of Hopkins and Marvell, by her friendship, her love of poetry, and her spirited interest in literary criticism, encouraged me by example.

I owe debts of gratitude to colleagues close to home: to President Neil Rudenstine, who permitted an extra sabbatical term and a reduced teaching load in one semester in order to let this work go forward, and who visited my undergraduate seminar to discuss the *Sonnets* with us; to Professor

Gwynne Evans, editor of the Cambridge Shakespeare, who, in an act of extraordinary generosity, read my manuscript and offered numerous annotations, additions, and corrections from his exemplary knowledge of the texts; errors remaining are mine. The late Professor Hyder Rollins, editor of the *Variorum Sonnets*, left a bequest to the Harvard English Department which helped me to meet research expenses. I warmly thank Margaretta Fulton of the Harvard Press, my impeccable editor since 1960, for her long sponsorship of this project; Maria Ascher, my erudite copy-editor, who contributed the anagram-insight noted of sonnet 8; and my former assistant Susan Welby, who resiliently coped with computer conversion and successive manuscripts.

I am grateful to the Getty Foundation for permission to reproduce on my book jacket a Renaissance panel painting incorporating a quotation from Petrarch's *Canzoniere*; the painting is thought to be by Holbein, and was once owned by Prince Henry (the son of James I). The Harvard Library, the Library of Congress, and the Folger Shakespeare Library were places indispensable to me, as they have been to so many others. The Quarto *Sonnets* are reproduced by permission of the Folger Library.

My mother was the first person to introduce me to Shakespeare's sonnets. She quoted them often, and had memorized many of them. Her last pieces of writing (which we found after Alzheimer's disease had robbed her of memory) were fragments of the *Sonnets* which, either from fear of forgetting or as a means of self-reassurance, she had written down on scraps of paper. It is no mean tribute to the *Sonnets* that they, of the hundreds of poems she knew by heart, were the last to fade. I remain grateful to her and to my father (my first teachers), and to the university instructors who enlarged my knowledge of poetry: among the dead, Sister Marie Barry, I. A. Richards, Douglas Bush, Reuben Brower, Northrop Frye, and Rosemond Tuve; among the living, Morton Berman and John Kelleher. Their minds formed mine, and I hear their voices when I read the poems they taught me.

In affection and admiration, I have dedicated this book to Joan Levine. We met in 1960 as young mothers at Cornell, and we were colleagues for many years in the Department of English at Boston University. Evenings of talk and laughter we have spent together are now so many as to be innumerable; because many of our conversations were about the *Sonnets*, I feel her presence throughout this commentary.

Finally, I must thank Shakespeare himself, whose poems have kept me company for so many decades. His envoi to the young man of the *Sonnets* seems strangely applicable to himself:

[Thou] hast by waning grown, and therein show'st
Thy lovers withering, as thy sweet self grow'st.

The culture and rhetorical practice that gave rise to the Renaissance sonnet have almost disappeared, yet the intense lyric energy stored in Shakespeare's poems, made visible I hope in this Commentary, gives me confidence that the *Sonnets* will remain intelligible, moving, and beautiful to contemporary and future readers.