

A Bibliography of Books on Shakespeare's Sonnets in order of publication date
prepared by Stephanie Hopkins Hughes (1999)

1899. Samuel Butler. *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered*. London: Jonathon Cape, 1927.

Butler was more a writer of fiction than an academic, which lends his opinions a certain weight. However, he was writing before the bulk of the definitive research had been done. His book offers an insight into how the question was seen a hundred years ago.

1910. George Bernard Shaw. Preface. *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*.
<http://eserver.Org/drama/>

As a creative writer himself, Shaw is very enjoyable when he is describing Shakespeare. His opinions on the identities of the Fair Youth, etc., are limited by the incomplete research of the time.

1949. Leslie Hotson. *Shakespeare's Sonnets Dated*. London: Rupert Hart-Davis.

Hotson is one of the most interesting of the Shakespeare scholars. He's a good writer himself, very entertaining, and filled with information. His dating scheme, however (late '80s with *Sonnet 107* referring to the Armada in '88) is an example of the kind of conjecture offered by the best scholars before replicated dating tests brought consensus.

1952. Edward Hubler. *The Sense of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Princeton: PUP.

A fifties academic, Hubler takes no stand on the background story but has valuable insights on the poet's attitudes and the predominant themes of the Sonnets.

1955. G. Wilson Knight. *The Mutual Flame*. London: Methuen.

Always an interesting and sensitive commentator on Shakespeare, Knight writes chiefly from a psychological viewpoint. He takes no stand on identities.

1960. John Vyvyan. *Shakespeare and the Rose of Love: a Study of the early plays in Relation to the Medieval Philosophy of Love*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Perhaps the third most important book on this list. Goes into detail on the connections between Jean de Meun's thirteenth-century classic on the theme of

Courtly love, the *Roman de la Rose* and Shakespeare's belief as expressed in all his works that romantic/sexual love is sacred and can lead to salvation.

1960. C.L. Barber. "An Essay on *Shakespeare's Sonnets*." *William Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1987. Originally the Introduction from *The Laurel Shakespeare: The Sonnets*.

Although Barber feels the true story of the *Sonnets* can't be known, he gives a marvelous explanation of their eternal appeal, comparing the way Shakespeare follows his preferred structure to a figure skater performing classical turns and jumps. Extremely informative.

1962. Leslie Fiedler. "Some Contexts of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*." *The Riddle of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Fiedler examines the *Sonnets* in the context of *Love's Labors Lost* and *Venus and Adonis*, tracing themes to be found in all three, such as the division of love into good love (the Youth's) and bad love (the Dark Lady's).

1962. Northrup Frye. "How True a Twain." *The Riddle of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

One of the most entertaining pieces I've ever read on Shakespeare, witty, informed and wise. A sample: "Instead of acquiring a wife and transferring his beauty to a successor, the youth has acquired the poet's mistress and transferred his patronage to a second poet."

1962. Claes Schaar. *Elizabethan Sonnet Themes and the Dating of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Copenhagen: Lund.

An in-depth examination, often line by line, of connections between *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, the other sonnets of the period and *Edward III*, with many references to other studies and to earlier sonnets in French and Italian, and thereby dating the *Sonnets* to 1592-96. Utterly convincing.

1963. John Dover Wilson. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Cambridge: CUP.

Wilson's book was widely read. However, because he adhered to E.K. Chamber's dating of the plays, he was forced to date the *Sonnets* late, which then forced him to accept Pembroke as the Fair Youth. Too bad he hadn't read Schaar before writing this.

1968. G.P.V. Akrigg. *Shakespeare and the Earl of Southampton*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.

A biography of Southampton that includes a chapter on the *Sonnets*. Akrigg is among those who replicated the stylistic tests of Isaac and Davis, confirming their dates.

1972. R.J.C. Wait. *The Background to Shakespeare's Sonnets*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Interesting because it contains a considerable amount of historical detail which he uses to make points about the events behind various sonnets.

1972. Tetsumaro Hayashi. *Shakespeare's Sonnets: a Record of 20th-Century Criticism*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.

A bibliography of books of and about the *Sonnets*. I am still looking for one that's more up-to-date.

1974. Martin Green. *The Labyrinth of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. London: Skilton.

A fascinating study of the sexual puns in the *Sonnets*. Once they're pointed out it's impossible to ignore them or that they must have been intentional.

1977. Stephen Booth. "Commentaries on the Sonnets." *William Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1987. Originally from *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Yale UP.

An example of the best kind of criticism. Goes into three of the *Sonnets* in detail, bringing a great deal of fascinating information and scholarship to bear, supplying the reader with much that can be used to read the rest of them. But no comments on the backstory.

1979. Kenneth Muir. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. London: George Allen & Unwin.

The second most useful book for this study. Muir goes into detail on all the facets of the problems he sees with the issues covered in this paper. His logic, common sense, absence of personal agenda and attention to detail give his opinions added weight.

1979. A.L. Rowse. *The Poems of Shakespeare's Dark Lady*. New York: Potter.

Annoyingly opinionated, but facts are facts, and Rowse deserves much credit for uncovering the facts about Emilia Bassano Lanier. His reasons for her purpose in publishing should be taken seriously. It includes her poem and its potent feminist introduction.

1982. Robert Giroux. *The Book Known as Q*. New York: Atheneum.

As a former senior editor with Farrar, Straus and Giroux, the author is a professional reader, not an academic, which gives him a certain freedom in his thinking perhaps. Absolutely the best and most complete book on the subject—the one to read if there's no time for more. He includes a section where he lists the poems in terms of their topics (35-43)—helpful in determining the events that may have inspired them.

1984. A.L. Rowse. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. London: Macmillan. Third edition (original 1962).

All the sonnets with his interpretation of each. Absurdly opinionated as always, but, as an historian (of sorts), Rowse is at least willing to deal with the story. His dedicatée (Mr. W.H.) is William Hall and his Rival Poet is Marlowe; he follows the mainstream in everything else. Includes a blurb on Emilia Lanier as the Dark Lady.

1985. Thomas M. Greene. "Pitiful Thrivers: Failed Husbandry in the Sonnets." *William Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Ed. Harold Bloom. Originally from *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey H. Hartman. Methuan.

An essay that examines the way Shakespeare combines sexual and economic imagery—dense terminology but offering useful insights.

1985. Howard Felperin. "Towards a Poststructuralist Practise: a Reading of Shakespeare's Sonnets." *William Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Ed. Harold Bloom. Originally from *Beyond Deconstruction: The Uses and Abuses of Literary Theory*. Howard Felperin.

Lit crit twaddle. One sentence, chosen at random: "A rhetoric that derives its performative capability from its disturbance of conventional usage has itself become conventional usage, thereby requiring a further disturbance to maintain its mimetic advantage." If one must translate, one would prefer having to translate the French, Latin and even Greek that the Victorians loved to quote without translating. That at least offers some reward.

1987. Joseph Pequigney. *Such is My Love*. Chicago: UCP.

Promotes the view that the *Sonnets* are love poems celebrating a fully sexual relationship between two consenting males. Offers a satisfying argument that they were published in the order as written.

1993. Martin Green. *Wriothesley's Roses*. Baltimore: Clevedon.

An in-depth look at Southampton's family history including the most detailed biography of his grandfather, the First Earl, I've yet seen. Well-documented, thoroughly researched, and convincing.

1993. Susanne Woods, ed. *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. Oxford: OUR

A critical study of Lanier's work, this book also provides information on her life not available elsewhere, including her foster-child relationship with the Countess of Kent. Woods ignores the Dark Lady theory.

1995. David Lasocki and Roger Prior. *The Bassanos: Venetian Musicians and Instrument Makers in England, 1531-1665*. Ashgate.

Primarily about the family, but with a detailed chapter on Emilia Bassano's claim to Dark Ladyship.

Articles and lectures

1964 W.H. Auden. "On the Sonnets." BBC broadcast.

1989 Peter Moore. "The Rival Poet of Shakespeare's Sonnets." *The Shakespeare Oxford Society Newsletter*. Fall 1989: 8-12.