

It was doubtless to Shakespeare's personal relations with men and women of the Court that his sonnets owed their existence.xcviii.) At times a youth is rebuked for sensual indulgences; he has sought and won the favour of the poet's mistress in the poet's absence, but the poet is forgiving (xxxii.–xxxv. The short descriptive titles which were then supplied to single sonnets or to short sequences proved that the collection was regarded as a disconnected series of occasional poems in more or less amorous vein. It was not till the spring of 1593, after Shakespeare had secured a nobleman's patronage for his earliest publication, 'Venus and Adonis,' that he became a sonneteer on an extended scale. His occasional reference in the sonnets to his growing age was a conventional device—traceable to Petrarch—of all sonnetteers of the day, and admits of p. 86no literal interpretation. Sonnet cvii., in which plain reference is made to Queen Elizabeth's death, may be fairly regarded as a belated and a final act of homage on Shakespeare's part to the importunate vogue of the Elizabethan sonnet. Meres, writing in 1598, enthusiastically commends Shakespeare's 'sugred [89b] sonnets among his private friends,' and mentions them in close conjunction with his two narrative poems. Shakespeare's 'Sonnets' ignore the somewhat complex scheme of rhyme adopted by Petrarch, whom the Elizabethan sonnetteers, like the French sonnetteers of the sixteenth century, recognised to be in most respects their master. In literary value Shakespeare's sonnets are notably unequal