



EDMONDSON, Paul; WELLS, Stanley (eds.). *All the Sonnets of Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 299 p.

Janaina Mirian Rosa

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), Florianópolis, Santa Catarina / Brasil
janainamrosa@yahoo.com.br

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7265-3367>

Significant features of William Shakespeare's sonnets and the innovative goals of editors Paul Edmondson e Stanley Wells are highlighted in the introduction of *All the Sonnets of Shakespeare*. The editors point out that the poems printed in 1609, entitled *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Never Imprinted*, have already been translated into several languages and have influenced an array of artistic productions. Additionally, the existence of other sonnets written by the Bard is emphasized, more specifically in relation to the ones that are inserted in the plays. This can be seen, according to Edmondson and Wells, as a meaningful trait of the English poet, since Shakespeare brought innovations to the dramatic text by constructing dialogues with sonnets. The variety of functions that such poems can present in the plays is also commented. For instance, they can activate a comic moment or disclose personal information, as well as structure prologues and epilogues. After the discussion of the aforementioned remarks, the aim of this analyzed work is then revealed, which has to do with the compilation of all the sonnets written by Shakespeare that have survived, encompassing the ones printed in 1609, the sonnets inserted in the plays, some other sonnet variations, and a few other poems which were attributed to Shakespeare in *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599). Most importantly, this edition undertakes, as the editors explain, the pioneer task of organizing the poems chronologically, that is, by taking into account the order the sonnets were written, thus ensuring a fresh perspective in the approach to such poems.

Additionally, the introduction to *All the Sonnets of Shakespeare* offers clarifications in relation to the origins of sonnets in literature and when Shakespeare started the writing of his own sonnets. In order to briefly trace

the origins of such poetic works in literature, Edmondson and Wells mention the Italian writers Dante Alighieri and Francesco Petrarch as the creators of the fourteen-line sonnets, later commenting on the work of English writers in artistically developing these poems. The journey comes to an end with the indication of the structure that can be identified as the Shakespearian Sonnet, composed of fourteen lines divided into groups of four lines, which are called quatrains, and a couplet with a specific rhyming sequence. The editors also speculate about the moment in which Shakespeare initiated the writing process of his sonnets, which could have happened when the Bard was a boy at school. Edmondson and Wells come to this assumption through the analysis of sonnets 153 and 154, which were published in *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Never Imprinted*. The content and origins of these two poems are investigated, and the results lead to the idea that there is this possibility that Shakespeare started to write sonnets early in his childhood. Furthermore, the editors specify which sonnets were included in this analyzed edition from the published volume *The Passionate Pilgrim*, highlighting the fact that its printer, William Jaggard, did not have Shakespeare's authorization to incorporate such poems in the aforementioned collection. Most certainly, these discussions contribute to the contextualization of the sonnets selected by Edmondson and Wells, which therefore enrich the understanding process of these poems.

Other intrinsic characteristics of Shakespeare's sonnets, such as publication purposes, themes, and the order of the poems are also explored by the editors. Edmondson and Wells, when commenting on the poems published in *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Never before Imprinted*, call attention to the fact that such sonnets were not produced in a short period of time. On the contrary, it probably took the Bard twenty-seven years to write them. Moreover, as the editors explain, although these poems by Shakespeare demonstrate the influence of previous classical readings, they mostly channel personal reflections, which therefore denote, along with the fact that Shakespeare spent a great deal of time to write the poems, an unwillingness to reveal these sonnets to the public, as well as a certain lack of monetary purposes with their publication. In relation to thematic issues, Edmondson and Wells comment that these sonnets present an array of themes, although they became prominently known for their romantic observations. Thus, a great variety of topics concerning the joys and adversities of romance

are well explored in several sonnets. As for the discussion concerning the authenticity of the order of these poems, the editors mention that there is a general agreement which indicates that the order in which they are presented in *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Never before Imprinted* is not the order they were actually written by Shakespeare. Edmondson and Wells then point out that the poems display the Bard's creative and organized working abilities, and they are not supposed to be presented in a general sequence, although there is the existence of small sequences, as they can be characterized as a collection. Above all, Edmondson and Wells emphasize that, even though the person who arranged the order of the poems is unknown, they do not have any reason to question their authenticity, and therefore ascertain that Shakespeare is the author of these sonnets. Surely, such aspects underline the importance of the poetic work of Shakespeare. Besides, the new order of poems proposed by the editors, which includes sonnets from other writings of Shakespeare, offers a wider perspective of themes and contexts that can be encountered in the English poet's sonnets.

Edmondson and Wells also tackle the issue of individuality when commenting on *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Never before Imprinted*, as well as the subject related to the layout of this analyzed edition. According to the editors, the attempt to arrange a plausible narrative in the investigation of such sonnets that would unveil reasonable facts from Shakespeare's life is a questionable path to be taken. Instead, Edmondson and Wells concentrate their efforts in understanding the poems through a more personal perspective, that is, the sonnets would be the result of the Bard's intimate thoughts and emotions which were derived from experiences and circumstances that happened in his life. The inclusion or reference to a person named Will in some of the poems, as the editors point out, reinforces the discussion regarding the influence of personal and intimate features in the sonnets. Concerning the innovative layout of this analyzed edition, Edmondson and Wells explain the several features of their diversified display of the poems. Due to the aforementioned fact that this edition chronologically gathers Shakespeare's sonnets from varied sources, the editors clearly inform the probable date in which the poems were written. Furthermore, in relation to the poems in *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Never before Imprinted*, Edmondson and Wells clarify that the numbers that appear above each sonnet, and therefore identify them, are removed from their original location, as they

are placed in explanatory notes on the same page the sonnets are printed in *All the Sonnets of Shakespeare*. Such notes, as the editors point out, offer a variety of information to the reader, which include the editors' own views on the meaning and disposition of the sonnets, and explore the diversity of the recipients of the poems, as well as the connections among the other sonnets. The edition ends with the gathering of the paraphrases of all the poems, which, according to Edmondson and Wells, has the bold purpose of offering clarity of content. The editors, however, also encourage the readers to produce their own interpretation of the sonnets, as their paraphrases are not supposed to serve as a definite guide for the understanding of the poems. Undoubtedly, a distinctive approach to Shakespeare's sonnets can be found in this volume as it proposes an inventive perspective regarding the discussion of aspects and presentation of the sonnets, inspiring readers to appreciate even more such captivating poems.