Introduction

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Forms of History

To the student of British history, the dates that bookend this volume – 1557 and 1623 – might seem strange. Both fall aslant of period markers that would indicate the year a monarch's reign began or ended: Queen Elizabeth I ascended the throne in 1558, and King James I died in 1625. Our dates, like those for the other volumes in this series, suggest a different notion of how we might think about historical and literary epochs. Rather than choosing traditional regnal dates as period markers, we have selected the publication dates of two landmark texts. 1557 is the year that the early printed anthology of secular poetry called Tottel's Miscellany was published; 1623 is the publication year of the First Folio, a major collection of plays associated with Shakespeare. Choosing these dates to demarcate the volume's purview signals our sense that literature shapes social, political, religious, and economic phenomena as much as it reflects them.

Emphasizing that literary texts can actively intervene in what we call "history" (the social, political, religious, scientific, ethnic, economic, and material conditions of a particular time) diverges from some past critical models. "Old Historicism," as pre-1980s practice is sometimes called, tended to present events (such as the Spanish Armada of 1588) as a stable interpretive background for literature: history's meaning was a given, and while imaginative texts might refer to historical events, plays and poems did not alter history's course.[1] The "New Historicism" that became dominant in the 1980s sought to consider literature and history – both understood as made from texts, or the "discursive" formations of documents and performances – as mutually constitutive.[2] One consequence of this

[1] See for instance E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture: A Study of the Idea of Order in the Age of Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942).

[2] See the special issues of *Genre*, subtitled *The Forms of Power and the Power of Forms in the Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, *Genre* 15.1–2 (1982). In practice, the best historically invested literary

movement was greater interest in history beyond elite politics, in the lives of common people and of everyday objects.[3] The concept of the historical accordingly expanded to encompass institutions (like schools), technologies (like handwriting), and non-literary texts (like maps). Broad notions of "discourse" allowed exploration of patterns and structures in many things besides imaginatively invested writing, such as law books or conduct manuals. New Historicist approaches opened up innovative contexts for considering poems, plays, paintings, and other art forms.[4] But much New Historicist scholarship still understood literature to passively reflect its historical environment, rather than actively forming it.

By emphasizing 1557 instead of 1558, and 1623 instead of 1625, we aim to examine the period from the point of view of literary production. This perspective positions our project within ideas often called "historical formalism." Broadly, this approach considers the ways that literature and history mutually influence one another. Historical formalism studies the *forms* of both social and textual relationships, rather than treating history as somehow unpatterned, or "given," with texts alone constrained by form (through genres like tragedy, still life, or sonnet). Rather than conceptualizing literature and history as foreground and background (*pace* Old Historicism), or as text and context (*pace* New Historicism), historical formalism posits a feedback loop between them. Historical formalism highlights the shaping cultural work of epistemology, the ways in which the world is cognitively organized and experienced. (See for instance chapter 11 in this volume, by Liza Blake, on lyric and science.) With this emphasis on epistemology, literary genres become not inert modes of division and classification, but active categories that give meaning to experience, thereby influencing political choices that in turn have material consequences. Conversely, the ever-shifting material environment affects

criticism of eras before the official "New Historicism" (in the U.S.) and "Cultural Materialism" (in the U.K.) drew on a similar sense of mutual influence; see for instance Rosalie Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre Theory in the Renaissance*, ed. Barbara Lewalski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), and Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

[3] Influential examples include Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); and Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

[4] See for instance Louis Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender, and Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), and Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

political formations that lead to the invention or re-casting of literary genres.

A movie released at the time our volume was in process, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015), illustrates the kind of dynamic that interests us. The *Star Wars* films play out a feedback loop with American political, cultural, technological, and artistic history. The advent of silent film at a particular moment in the development of the United States led to the creation of the film Western (which, itself, borrowed elements from popular nineteenth-century novels, like James Fenimore Cooper's). The Western both celebrated American geographical expansion and appropriated the ancient Manichean ethos of good versus evil, which could be easily portrayed in silent-film aesthetics: bad guys wore black, good guys wore white. These binary visual cues lent themselves to the black-and-white technological limitations of early television sets when the Western was adapted for TV in the 1950s, and the binary ethical frame also fit America's mood at the time. In the 1970s, the Western was in turn appropriated for the expanding special-effects capabilities of cinema, in George Lucas's 1977 *Star Wars*. The movie's costuming carries forward the black-and-white visuals and moral iconography of the earlier film era. Darth Vader, the villainous henchman of the evil emperor, strides dramatically in his gleaming black mask and helmet and billowing black cloak; Princess Leia, the true-hearted leader of the valiant resistance, wears robes of pure white. Subsequently, the film's trope of the "Evil Empire" was taken up as a powerful political metaphor during the Cold War by Ronald Reagan (himself a former actor from early Westerns turned Republican President of the United States). A generation later, the incoming Republican White House advisor Stephen K. Bannon again enlisted the Star Wars idiom by calling himself "Darth Vader."[5] This looked back to the Reagan era at the same time as it innovatively reversed earlier iconography to make the old black mask the sign of the new White House. In this weaving of art, technology, story, and politics, where does history end and art begin? How does art give shape to what we call "real life," and how do actual events and material conditions influence the emergence of a textual form?

In the sixteenth century, we might consider analogous transactions in the historical and cultural flow of the sonnet. Francesco Petrarch, a fourteenth-century Italian cleric and classicist, developed this new poetic form,

[5] Michael M. Grynbaum, "Trump Strategist Stephen Bannon Says Media Should 'Keep Its Mouth Shut,'" *New York Times*, 26 January 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/01/26/business/media/stephen-bannon-trump-news-media.html?_r=0, accessed 16 July 2018.

which suited contemporary philosophical developments. The form became part of an elite, trans-European coterie culture, circulating in manuscript and letters and imported to England in the early sixteenth century by an emerging order of ambassadors. The new technological conditions of printing led to Richard Tottel's publication in 1557 of a book of poetry that helped popularize sonnets for a new reading public and a commercialized print environment (as discussed by Catherine Bates in chapter 1). The popular dissemination of a formerly elite genre contributed to the self-fashioning of a queen, Elizabeth I, who exploited the amorous dynamics of the sonnet sequence as a political strategy, thereby prompting her courtiers to respond in kind. This courtly play reinforced the popularity of sonnets and furthered demand for their publication. The form then became interpolated in the plays written for the new professional theaters, where they influenced broader constructions of amorous relationships. This contributed to gender stereotypes such as the "cold mistress" – a model that itself further interacted with the medical theories of the day that distinguished between female and male physiology on the basis of temperature. Like the Reaganite example above, this phenomenon of the Elizabethan sonnet illustrates the thorough inter-imbrication of art, language, authority, identity, culture, knowledge, and politics.

The investigations in this book seek to explore these kinds of issues, in different ways and on different scales. The volume understands forms of experience and forms of textuality as related and mutually influential. We take it as "the work of form to make order" out of "all shapes and configurations, all ordering principles, all patterns of repetition and difference," whether or not those happen between the covers of a book.[6] Accordingly, our contributors reveal the fruits of posing parallel questions of ideological and literary forms in contexts like the mutual influence of English romance and early modern gender (Andrew Hadfield, in chapter 7), or of royal processions and Shakespearean comedy (Tom Bishop, in chapter 14). We might say that this book explores ways that forms form uses, and uses form forms, or that "'use' and 'form' are versions of each other."[7] Thinking of "form" as both noun and verb not only expands our approach to texts, but helps us to fully recognize how context can be as excitingly dynamic, interpretable, and multiple as texts can be. Any given context (say, a particular church pulpit, as discussed in chapter 20 by Lori

[6] Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 3.
[7] Group Phi, "Doing Genre," in *New Formalisms and Literary Theory*, ed. Verena Theile and Linda Tredennick (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 54–70 (p. 62).

Anne Ferrell) encompasses multiple and competing temporalities, spatial organizations, and social uses. This volume invites its readers to take "context" and "text" as equally dynamically productive.

Shaping Categories

The markers of 1557 and 1623 are thus intended not only to provide chronological orientation but also to signal a methodological point of view. We are keenly aware that these dates carry their own arbitrariness. Indeed, thinking through the limitations of using publication dates as historical touchstones is part of the intellectual work of this volume. For one thing, privileging these publication-oriented dates elides the fact that for much of the period we are considering, print is not the dominant mode of circulating poetry, nor the way most people experienced drama, nor the primary way the faithful engaged with sermons.[8] We could note that many of John Donne's poems were enormously influential in the 1590s and early 1600s, when they circulated as they were recopied into myriad manuscripts; the fact that they were not printed until 1633 does not mean they were not made "public" to a wide audience.[9] Tottel's Miscellany notwithstanding, print was not the default medium for lyric.[10] Since early modern poetry was in transition between manuscript culture and print culture, and early modern drama was in transition between oral culture and print culture, the canonical status of both Tottel's Miscellany and the Shakespearean First Folio speaks more to the modern valuations of literary scholarship, which privileges publication history, than to the scene on the ground in early modern England. This is only one incidence of early modern poetic categories jarring against our own. To cite another: we now consider Petrarchan sonnets a cornerstone of the lyric tradition, but this was not necessarily self-evident to early moderns. While we can point to Tottel's Miscellany of 1557 as a publishing "first," one could equally argue – as Lucía Martínez Valdivia does in chapter 16 – that this conventional "origin" anachronistically ignores the widely influential collection of psalmic poetry in English first published by Sternhold and Hopkins nine

[8] See Arthur Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Robert Weimann, *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon*, ed. Peter McCullough, Hugh Adlington, and Emma Rhatigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[9] Arthur Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).

[10] Harold Love, *The Culture and Commerce of Texts: Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998).

years earlier, in 1548. Retaining 1557 as an important date in the conceptual organization of this volume, while also qualifying its authority, is intended to remind us that narratives of history depend upon useful fictions, that explanatory categories shape our objects of knowledge as much as they reveal them, and that every story we tell is incomplete.

Looking to the "First Folio" of "Shakespeare's" plays printed in 1623 as a decisive moment in dramatic history is similarly problematic. That volume, properly entitled *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories & tragedies*, long held definitive status as the collected works of a single author. But the First Folio is not the authoritative rendition of the Shakespearean canon we sometimes imagine. The plays associated with Shakespeare collected by the actors Henry Condell and John Heminges did not include all the works we currently attribute to Shakespeare, nor was Shakespeare the only playwright with a hand in all the plays in the First Folio, nor did Shakespeare – who, after all, had been dead for seven years – have anything to do with its publication.[11] In fact, there were printed anthologies of Shakespearean plays before the First Folio, configured very differently from author-centered collections.[12] The idea that a volume of literary texts could be organized based on authorship – a categorizing scheme that would become dominant, and that marks current publishing practices – was a recent development at the time of the First Folio. To trace the history of our own author-centric understanding of literary history, we should look not to 1623, but to 1616. In that year the king published *The Workes of the most high and mightie Prince, James I*, and the commoner Ben Jonson published his own *Workes of Benjamin Jonson*. This was the first time a man of letters had thought that poetry, prose, and dramatic works from a single pen should be printed together, united by the identity of the author.[13]

Perhaps even more significant was Jonson's decision to include plays written for the public commercial theater in the category of literary "works," thereby elevating English drama as an art form. Jonson's publication of his *Workes* in 1616, with its bold and even arrogant implication

[11] See Gary Taylor, "Making Meaning Marketing Shakespeare 1623," in *From Performance to Print in Shakespeare's England*, ed. Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 55–72.

[12] Zachary Lesser, "Ghosts, Holes, and Rips: The Pavier Quartos Re-examined" (lecture, University of Delaware, Newark, DE, 29 November 2016). Additionally, see Zachary Lesser and Peter Stallybrass, "The Canonization of Shakespeare in Print, 1623," in *Shakespeare and Textual Studies*, ed. Margaret Jane Kidnie and Sonia Massai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 105–33.

[13] Joseph Loewenstein, *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

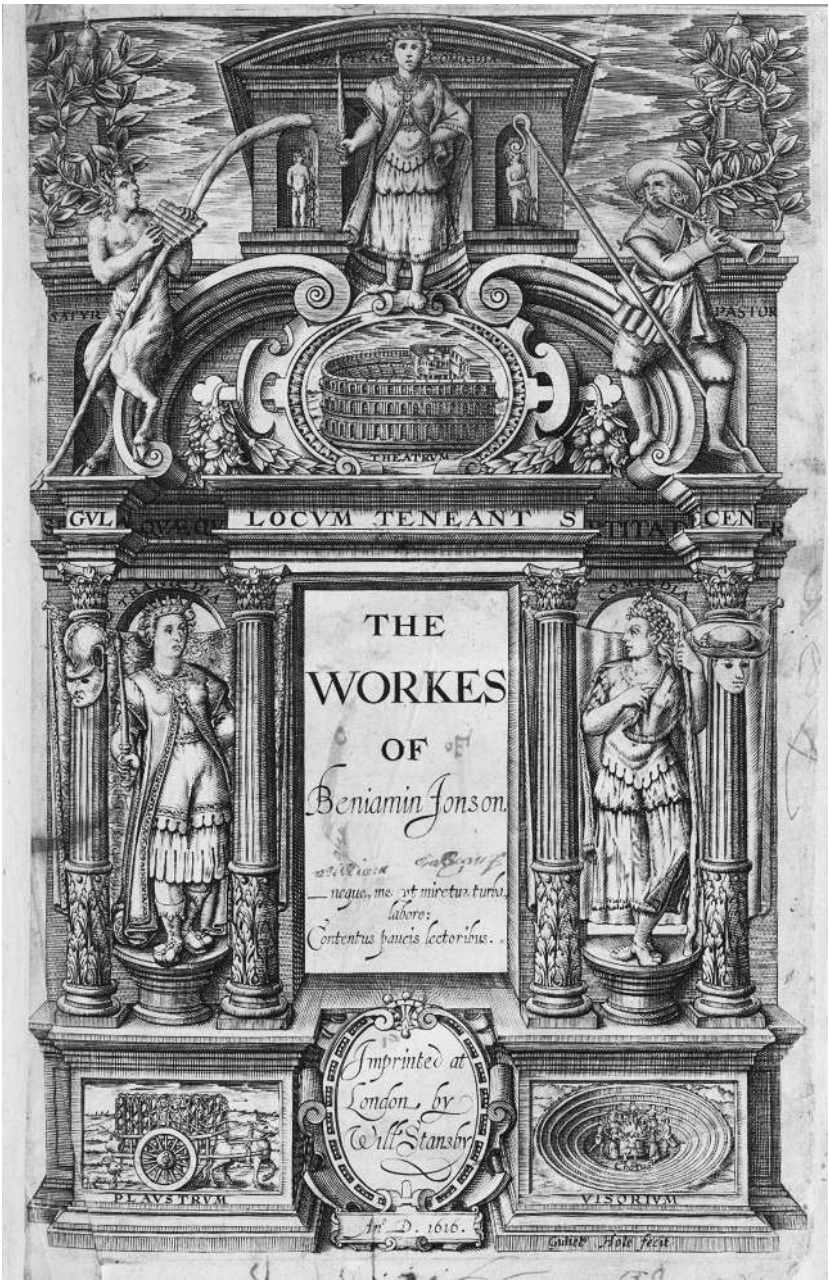

Figure 0.1 Frontispiece, *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson* (1616)

that common plays were worthy of preservation, paved the way for the Shakespearean Folio of 1623.

While the years 1557 and 1623 do not seamlessly account for historical facts, we contend they serve a useful function nonetheless by signaling emergent models of drama, publication, and authorship. The First Folio may have retrospectively acquired more significance for print history than it commanded in its own time. But, as readers historically situated in the present day, we understand context, and the "historical" part of "historical formalism," in ways indebted to the 1623 Folio having become a period marker. If partially anachronistic, emphasizing 1623 avoids limiting texts' significance by, in Paul Armstrong's words, "reducing meaning to 'meaning then.'"[14] Armstrong cautions that "privileging the contexts governing the moment of production is to rob the situation of writing of its historicity by suppressing its futurity."[15] This collection seeks a deep and broad historicity by attending to encounters among readers, texts, and social formations both past and present. This over-layered sense of history can be seen in chapter 3 when Lois Potter sets Shakespearean plays among the morality plays that were popular at the time (and also suggests that modern-day critics read in ways indebted to medieval moral allegories), or when Sheila Cavanagh shows the affinities of Mary Wroth's prose romance and the modern genre of magical realism, in chapter 17. These approaches not only invigorate the notion of "historical" scholarship, but also find meaning in mismatch – as well as congruence – between early modern thought and our own.

The dates in our title, then, can be understood as earnest, ironic, and paradoxical. They at once signal the importance of specific moments in literary and cultural history and simultaneously undermine the stability of those dates as meaningful indicators. Acknowledging the discomforts of our category markers – and watching new connections emerge in the flickers of their ambiguity, incompleteness, or dissonance – illuminates what is important to our study: ways that historical formations and textual forms become legible through the provisional boundaries they establish *and* through the inevitable renegotiation of those limits as they chafe against one another. We understand history, then, not only in relation to form, but *as* one of the forms that distinctively creates early modern English literature.

[14] Paul Armstrong, "In Defense of Reading: Or, Why Reading Still Matters in a Contextualist Age," *New Literary History* 42 (2011): 87–113 (p. 94).
[15] Ibid.

Transitions

Any use of date ranges – whether 1557–1623, or a different bounded reach – divides historical time into segments, implying perceptions of change versus continuity. This brings us to the concept of "transition" at the heart of this series. On the one hand, historical boundaries indicate a stretch of time understood to display a certain degree of sameness. "Periodization," writes Caroline Levine, "is an abstract, transhistorical organizing principle that is used to reveal rooted and local historical specificity."[16] Yet historiography tends to emphasize difference. David Perkins argues that critics "require the concept of a unified period in order to deny it, and thus make apparent the particularity, local difference, heterogeneity, fluctuation, discontinuity, and strife that are now our preferred categories for understanding any moment of the past."[17] It could be said that all history, and all literature, is in transition all of the time. The study of "transition" is therefore not distinctive to any given historical moment, and the term threatens, in its expansiveness, to devolve into historiographical futility.

But the specific ways that different cultural moments understand and express transition – a complex interplay of sameness and change – *are* distinctive. For instance, the particular early modern English sensibility that registers in many of the texts being studied in this volume paradoxically embraces the new while insisting on the immutable. Frequently, texts proclaiming an aversion to change undertake rampant literary experimentation. In a notable example, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* is a radical poetic innovation – an allegorical English national epic – written in a faux-archaic language that claims historical continuity with a medieval past through its freshly invented idiom (as discussed in chapter 12, by Sarah Wall-Randell, on romance and print). This experiment in stylized archaism was old and new, a sign of both change and persistence. Spenser took his cue, in part, from the real-life monarch that his *Faerie Queene* mythologizes: Queen Elizabeth's own motto was *semper eadem*, "always the same," which she asserted even as her aging body incontrovertibly altered. This contradiction can be both dialectically accurate – things changed *and* stayed the same; the role of the monarch persisted *even as* the queen's "body natural" aged and perished – and cannily appreciated, with the spirit of irony shared by many readers in Elizabeth's day and in our own.

[16] Levine, *Forms,* 55.
[17] David Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 64.

Despite the intellectual risks of positioning "transition" as a primary historiographical value, and despite early moderns' own frequent (if sometimes contradictory) insistence that they were faithfully following tradition, material and literary circumstances did change, profoundly and rapidly, in early modern England. To begin with the literary: by 1623, England had seen the meteoric rise of the commercial theater in London, the creation of a vigorous market for printed texts, the normalization of print as a medium of official communication, and the emergence of writing as a commercially viable undertaking. The essay, the prose romance, the printed sermon, the sonnet cycle, and the printed playbook had become established genres. Printed newsletters could be purchased by an information-hungry public, and the English church had established for parishes throughout the land an order of worship whose phrases are still uttered by congregations today. In 1557, there was none of this. True, worldly young men had taken to translating Petrarch's sonnets; both courtiers and ordinary people enjoyed popular drama; and the printing press was producing a trickle of publications each year. But the tremendous, rapid alterations in the world of letters about to take place could not have been imagined. The transformation of the literary scene happened at a speed and on a scale that arguably would not happen again at such a rate until the second half of the twentieth century brought both television and the Internet.

The period witnessed tremendous change in social and political terms as well. In 1557, the population of greater London was around 75,000; by 1623, it was well over 200,000, and on its way to 400,000 by 1650.[18] In 1557, England was both geographically and politically at the margins of Europe; by 1623, not only was England itself a power to be reckoned with, but was united with Scotland through Queen Elizabeth's successor, her nephew James Stuart (King James VI of Scotland, who became King James I of England in 1603). In 1557, the English could only read about New World exploration by other Europeans; by 1623, Francis Drake had circumnavigated the globe, Walter Raleigh had been to the Amazon, English settlers had made homes in Jamestown and Plymouth, and (as Daniel Vitkus discusses in chapter 8) the English were trading in India. Many of these ventures did not end well, but nonetheless they expanded English horizons from predominantly local identities, to the rise of a national consciousness, to global engagement.[19]

[18] Francis Sheppard, *London: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 126.
[19] Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).