

## SHAKESPEARE AND THE IDEA OF LATE WRITING

According to the idea of 'late style', in their last few years, certain great artists, writers or composers enter a rejuvenated phase of serene, abstract, archaic or childlike creativity, a phenomenon held to result from the proximity of death. Gordon McMullan reads late style, however, not as a transhistorical phenomenon but as a critical construct, taking Shakespeare as his exemplar. He maps the development of the idea of 'late Shakespeare' from the later eighteenth century to the present, showing the mismatch between what he calls the 'discourse of lateness' and the actual conditions of production and of authorship in early modern theatre and suggesting the generativity of the idea of late Shakespeare for late work by subsequent writers (notably, James and Conrad). In the course of his analysis, he addresses subjects from gerontology to anti-Stratfordianism and from art history to eschatology, highlighting the negotiations required to sustain the discourse of lateness and demonstrating the ongoing productivity of 'late Shakespeare' for the self-fashioning of actors, directors and critics. In the process, he offers the first full critique of the idea of late style, which will be of interest not only to literature specialists but also to art historians and musicologists and to anyone curious about the relationship of creativity to old age and death.

GORDON MCMULLAN is Professor of Shakespeare and Early Modern Drama at King's College London. He taught at the University of Newcastle from 1989, moving to King's in 1995. He has been a Leverhulme Fellow (2002–3) and has held visiting fellowships at the Huntington Library, the University of Newcastle NSW, and the Humanities Research Centre of the Australian National University. His books include *The Politics of Unease in the Plays of John Fletcher* (1994), the Arden Shakespeare edition of *Henry VIII* and *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England* (co-edited with David Matthews, Cambridge, 2007). A founding general editor of Arden Early Modern Drama, he has acted as textual consultant to RSC productions and has spoken about Shakespeare and theatre on BBC radio.

SHAKESPEARE AND  
THE IDEA OF LATE WRITING

*Authorship in the Proximity of Death*

GORDON McMULLAN



Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-0-521-86304-9 – Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing  
Gordon McMullan  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,  
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of  
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521863049](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521863049)

© Gordon McMullan 2007

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions  
of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take  
place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2007  
Reprinted 2009  
First paperback edition 2010

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-0-521-86304-9 Hardback  
ISBN 978-0-521-15800-8 Paperback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence  
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this  
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will  
remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-0-521-86304-9 – Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing  
Gordon McMullan  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

*In memory of  
Sasha Roberts (1966–2006),  
Shakespearean and salsa dancer*

## Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page ix</i>
Introduction	I
1 Shakespeare and the idea of late writing: authorship in the proximity of death	24
1.1 <i>La dernière période</i>	24
1.2 Late style in the wake of war: Neumann, Broch, Adorno	32
1.3 The shapes of lateness	42
1.4 Late Shakespeare	50
1.5 Shakespeare and the idea of late writing	60
2 The Shakespearean caesura: genre, chronology, style	65
2.1 A question of genre	66
2.2 A question of chronology	78
2.3 A question of style	104
3 The invention of late Shakespeare: subjectivism and its discontents	127
3.1 ‘Dramatick perfection’: Malone and the establishment of a chronology	128
3.2 Inventing late Shakespeare from Coleridge to Dowden	136
3.3 The backlash: (post)subjectivism from Strachey to Bond	160
3.4 ‘A certain mastery’: Henry James and the elusive late Shakespeare	168
4 Last words/late plays: the possibility and impossibility of late Shakespeare in early modern culture and theatre	190
4.1 Premodern endings	193
4.2 The Shakespearean swan song	202
4.3 Last words	215
4.4 Late style and the conditions of theatrical production in early modern London	225

5	How old is 'late'? Late Shakespeare, old age, <i>King Lear</i>	259
5.1	Old-age style	260
5.2	Old-age style without old age	271
5.3	Shakespeare's middle years	284
5.4	'I have a journey, sir, shortly to go': <i>King Lear</i> as a late play	294
5.5	Kings and desperate men	314
6	<i>The Tempest</i> and the uses of late Shakespeare in the theatre: Gielgud, Rylance, Prospero	318
6.1	Theatre of complicity	320
6.2	Lateness and the mid-life crisis	327
6.3	Performing late selfhood: Gielgud, Prospero, Shakespeare	331
6.4	Authorship and authenticity: Rylance, Prospero, Shakespeare	337
6.5	Postscript: late style in Australia: Bell, Prospero, Shakespeare	350
	<i>Notes</i>	354
	<i>Index</i>	394

## *Acknowledgements*

I have been fortunate, writing this book, both in the friends who encouraged me and in the institutions that supported me. Successive heads of the Department of English at King's College London – John Stokes, Ann Thompson and Clare Lees – have endorsed my requests for research leave, thereby prompting the generosity of four institutions: King's itself; the Leverhulme Trust, which gave me an invaluable period of sustained library time at the outset; the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which funded a crucial semester's leave at the end; and the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University in Canberra, which offered the perfect writing environment. I'd like also to thank librarians in three places: the National Library of Australia in Canberra; the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC, where in a visit of a few days I benefited from the advice of Georgianna Ziegler and Erin Blake; and the incomparable British Library in St Pancras, especially Barbara Ryglowska and the staff in Rare Books, the venue for the bulk of my work on this project.

My individual debts are substantial and I hope the reader will forgive a lengthy set of acknowledgements. First of all, I'd like to thank Sarah Stanton at Cambridge University Press, who has been magnificently supportive throughout, coping calmly with RAE-induced angst. I want too to thank the anonymous readers for the Press for their support and also Rosemary Williams for her precise and generous copy-editing. I'd also like to thank colleagues both at King's – Clare Brant, Richard Kirkland, Alan Marshall, Clare Pettitt, Max Saunders, Ishtla Singh, Anna Snaith, Mark Turner, Shamoan Zamir and, above all, Sonia Massai – and at other University of London colleges – Tim Armstrong, Rachael Gilmour, Helen Hackett, Tom Healy and Sue Wiseman – for their patience in face of my tendency to turn all conversations into seminars on late style. And I'd like especially to thank Richard Proudfoot, who poured out valuable suggestions. I also wish to thank colleagues elsewhere who listened

to versions of chapters, especially at Keele University (where I spoke on Julie Sanders's invitation) and also at the Universities of Cambridge, Melbourne, Nevada at Reno, Newcastle, Newcastle NSW, Oxford, Queensland, St Andrews, Sussex, Sydney and Tasmania. Ceri Sullivan e-mailed regularly with ideas and moral support. Juliane Wunsch provided translations of German material on late style. Bettina Schergaut, Clare McManus, Howard Marchitello, Sam Smiles and Jim Shapiro read chunks of the final draft and gave advice: naturally, I blame them for every error that remains. I'm grateful, too, to the following: Katherine Baxter, A. R. Braummüller, Martin Butler, Tom Cain, Kate Chedgzoy, Warren Chernaik, Chris Clark, Marilyn Corrie, Line Cottagnies, Nicky Cotton, Anisha Dasgupta, Allison Deutermann, Tim Dolin, Gareth Edwards, Keir Elam, Markman Ellis, Ruth Evans, Jennifer Forsyth, Michael Gamer, Anne Goldgar, Susan Green, Paul Hamilton, Judith Hawley, Philip Horne, Alice Hunt, J. Paul Hunter, Annie Janowitz, David Johnson, John Jowett, Margaret Kean, M. J. Kidnie, James Knowles, Courtney Lehmann, Sara Lodge, Raphael Lyne, Gail Marshall, Sermin Meskill, Glenn Most, Subha Mukherji, Irene Musumeci, Kate Newey, Ladan Niayesh, Michelle O'Callaghan, Francis O'Gorman, Kevin de Ornellas, Simon Palfrey, Mike Pincombe, Adrian Poole, Bryony Randall, Sophie Ratcliffe, Kellie Robertson, Miri Rubin, Lacy Rumsey, Marie Rutkoski, Jim Shapiro, Cathy Shrank, Catherine Silverstone, Boika Sokolova, Patrick Spottiswoode, Adam Steinhouse, Alison Stenton, Emma Sutton, Gary Taylor, Suzanne Trill, John Watkins, Valerie Wayne and George Younge. Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel kindly invited me to speak at one of their Huntington theatre-history conferences, where Roy Ritchie was his usual vastly hospitable self. Russ McDonald generously let me read *Shakespeare's Late Style* in typescript. Margreta de Grazia went out of her way to help me secure funding for the last months of writing. In 2003, I examined a PhD thesis on the late plays by Jonathan Hartwell of the Shakespeare Institute and I would like to record my debt to his extraordinary endnotes and bibliography. And if it hadn't been for David Bergeron's superb teaching on the 'Late Shakespeare' course I took when on a graduate exchange programme at the University of Kansas in 1984–5, I would surely never have written this book.

I would like to offer warm thanks too to Ian Donaldson and his colleagues in Canberra, especially Caroline Turner and also Leena Messina and Judy Buchanan, for their hospitality during my time as a Visiting Research Fellow at the HRC in winter 2006. I hugely appreciated conversations there with my fellow fellows and especially with Tim Duff



*Acknowledgements*

xi

and Ann Jones. Particular thanks go to Kylie Message for tolerating my wittering about rosellas and currawongs and to Alison Procter for the fish song and that roo. Thanks also to Kate Flaherty, Penny Gay, John Potts, Jeni Porter and Mitchell Dean in Sydney; Rohan Mead, Tania de Jong, Paul Salzman, Stephanie Trigg, Joel Trigg and Mark Williams in Melbourne; and Philip, Jenna and Sylvia Mead in Hobart.

My mother, Muriel McMullan, has had to be very patient with me while this book was in progress, as has my aunt, Hilda Brooks, a talent they have both spent the last forty-five years honing. I may not always succeed in showing them that I'm grateful, but I am.

Julia Banister made the late phase of this book far more fun than it should have been.

In loose given-name alphabetical order, thanks must also go to Allison Sneider for chardonnay in Houston; to Amanda, Adrian and Louis O'Callaghan for greyhounds and (finally) Cru; to Bernhard Klein for Augustiner and that game at the Westfalenstadion; to Bettina Schergaut for TWA; to Clara Calvo for flamingoes and de Lempicka; to Clare McManus for Anfield tickets and faith in Rafa and Stevie G; to David Kastan (and to Jane and Marina) for Forest and Fino; to David Matthews (who detests verbose acknowledgements sections) and Anke Bernau for FMCs above Canal Street; to Emily Wade for kayaking in Austin and that tan suitcase in DC; to Eric Rasmussen for sixty-one lunchbags and lunch at *Le Manoir*; to Farah Karim-Cooper for tapas and for being the perfect collaborator on the King's/Globe MA; to Gill Plain and James McKinna for coping with the espresso explosion; to Lynne Vallone and Howard Marchitello for blue birds, green snakes and G&Ts; to Ina Habermann and to Bernhard and David for silent storms, leech-gatherers and Faugères; to Jane Kingsley-Smith for helping me distinguish varieties of wren; to Jonathan Hope and Jennifer Smith for getting the tides right off Campbeltown; to Jonathan Sawday and Ruth Evans for Whitsundays sailing; to Karl Horton and Naomi Fiss for smoked salt, Zuni and (controversially) atavism (grim); to Larry Scanlon for Complete Moral Collapse; to Lucy Munro for B&F at the White Bear; to Paula de Pando, who lives in Triana, where it never rains, for the best bread-and-butter in the world; to Peter and Annie Holbrook for dinner at Anise and lunch in New Farm; to Peter Shaw and Michael Croft for a bottle of 'Bonzo' and for Michael's glorious cooking (I did mention Stravinsky, Peter, so you won't have to 'tweak my academic nose'); to Rohan Mead and Tania de Jong for shacks and shells on the Mornington Peninsula; to Sam Smiles for guiding me through the minefield; to Sonia Massai for transforming life on the

Strand (and to Cosimo Pacciani for Fiorentina and a *bistecca alla fiorentina*); to Suzanne and Philip Gossett for *Boris Godunov* in Florence, *La Clemenza di Tito* in Sydney and *saltimbocca* on the Via Panisperna; to Tiffany Stern for Glyndebourne, Rex Stout and this book's structure; and, unalphabetically, to Roxy Beaujolais and her staff (especially Terry and also Tom Paine) for making The Seven Stars ('Because they are not eight') the best pub in London.

What a sociable book it turned out to be.

*London and Canberra, 2001–2006*