INTRODUCTION

Beginning with Shakespeare

Rory Loughnane and Andrew J. Power

> Beginning in the middle, starting thence away
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, Pro. 28)

Most dedicated readers of Shakespeare have formed some hypothesis about the poet-dramatist's early working life and his beginnings in the theatre industry. From John Aubrey's 'schoolmaster in the country', to Nicolas Rowe's deer-poaching escapade, to S. Schoenbaum's opportunist would-be actor, various proposals have been made for how, when, and why young Shakespeare left Warwickshire and ended up in London.[1] And yet the simple fact remains that we have only one piece of documentary evidence for Shakespeare's existence between 1585, when his and Anne's twins were christened in Stratford-upon-Avon, and 1592, when he was allusively referred to in print. This document, John Shakespeare's 1588 bill of complaint against John Lambert relating to property in Wilmcote, identifies William as son and heir to John and Mary. Such a proceeding would not have required the eldest son's presence in Stratford; it tells us nothing about his whereabouts or activities. No more, no less, is documented. But, as the chapters in the present collection each attest, there is still much we can discover about how Shakespeare first sought to make his mark in London's burgeoning theatre scene.

Shakespeare had a long and productive writing career, anachronistic though the idea of a 'writing career' might seem, by comparison with his dramatist peers. His earliest extant dramatic writing cannot be much earlier than 1588, and his subsequent writing career spans a quarter-century or more, until late 1613 or early 1614. This is a career in writing plays that is roughly ten years longer than the average for other comparably active dramatists of his time.[2] His canon of extant writing is formidable, including over forty plays, two long narrative poems, several shorter poetic pieces, and 154 sonnets; one recent estimate puts the number of words in the uncontested canon at over three-quarters of a million.[3] Attempting to

divide and conquer this enormous canon, critics have historically emphasized affinities within works from certain periods during Shakespeare's career. Thus, later generations of Shakespearean scholars have inherited pre-conceived subdivisions in the canon, such as a 'lyric phase', 'tragic phase', and the 'late romances', which augment and refine the generic divisions of the First Folio. These tags are in ways helpful in distinguishing certain works and aligning others, but such narrative-driven categorization tends towards an over-generalization about what exactly Shakespeare was writing during each period. For example, Shakespeare's second history cycle begins in his 'lyric phase', and *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well that Ends Well* break his great tragic cycle between *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, while in the period of his 'late romances' he also writes in the genres of tragedy (*Coriolanus*) and history (*All Is True*). So, the size and great variety of the extant canon, as well as the extended nature of Shakespeare's career, create problems for periodic summarizations of his authorial preoccupations and development. Each observed cluster forces parts of the greater picture from view.

The temporally bound cluster of works discussed in this collection, 'early Shakespeare', seems at first less artificial, less myopic. Early Shakespeare does not cherry-pick by style (lyric) or genre (tragedy, romance); it simply records that the works in question were written 'early' in Shakespeare's career in the same way that we might discuss the 'late' works written at the end of his career. But early Shakespeare, as a category, still poses problems for critical appraisal. As this Introduction sets out, and as each of the contributors to this collection makes evident, the early canon of Shakespeare's writing is defined by its variability in terms of its mode of composition, textual transmission, and generic, thematic, and linguistic innovation. The early canon defies reductive critical generalization: the extant writings from the earliest part of his career are marked as much by their variability as their vitality.

This Introduction first outlines the grounds for this collection's dating parameters for 'early Shakespeare'. As we note, there is no problem, in theory, in labelling a work, or set of works, 'early' or 'late', but, empirically, it prompts the question of what constitutes 'earliness' or 'lateness', and forces us to consider how such a label might condition our responses as critics to these works. Next, we consider the many variables in play in the early canon, discussing these with relation to value ascription for these works. Then, echoing the Prologue's speech in *Troilus and Cressida* quoted above, we reflect upon how most readers of Shakespeare begin somewhere in the middle of the collected works, with super-canonical works like

Twelfth Night and *Hamlet*, before, if ever, working to the margins of the canon where most of the early works reside. We conclude with brief summaries of each of the collection's chapters, noting how each contributor sheds significant new light upon this crucial part of Shakespeare's career.

Dating Early Shakespeare

In *Late Shakespeare, 1608–1613* our choice for a range of dates for the 'late period' was traditional. Shakespeare writes his contribution to his final play, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, in late 1613 or early 1614 – the reference to 'our losses' in the prologue plausibly alludes to the burning down of the original Globe on 29 June 1613 – and this final collaborative play debuted at either Blackfriars (in late 1613) or the newly rebuilt Globe (*c.* June 1614).[4] There is, therefore, an obvious terminus, but at the earlier part of the range, there is no such obvious marker. We set out the conservative position that a range of personal and professional changes in Shakespeare's life made 1608 a turning point of sorts in his career. We gathered the plays to the historical and social moment of professional circumstances rather than arguing for a consistent generic, thematic, or tonal shift in the 'late plays'. But, as with any artificially-imposed division of an author's working life into parts, the demarcation could invite criticism. Our position was that the works discussed in this period were 'late' in the overall career of the poet-dramatist, but that there was nothing intrinsically 'late' about them (in terms of style, mood, tone, etc.) other than their order in the overall chronology. Less traditional was that collection's claim that we needed a broader conception of the late plays than had heretofore been admitted. We, thus, put into dialogue *all* of the plays that post-date 1608. Seeking a more inclusive agenda, we drew *Coriolanus* and *All Is True* into dialogue with the late romances; these were, after all, written in the same 'late' period as *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*.

The present collection sets out the period 1588–1594 as constituting 'Early Shakespeare'. The early date in this range reflects the recent chronology proposed by Gary Taylor and Rory Loughnane (2017), who argue that Shakespeare's contributions to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Arden of Faversham*, and *Titus Andronicus* were undertaken in the late 1580s.[5] 1588 is most often associated with the late summer failure of Spain's invading fleets; it was also a year of some importance for London's theatre industry. The death of the legendary comic actor Richard Tarlton that September, although already retired from the stage, must have been sorely felt by the

industry. It is also likely the year that *Doctor Faustus* and *The Battle of Alcazar* debuted. And the year before was arguably of even greater significance for Shakespeare's early career. Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and the two parts of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* were most likely first performed in 1587. While the former would exert a lasting influence on Shakespeare's writings in revenge tragedy, the Marlowe plays are also vital. Though *1 Tamburlaine* was a theatrical triumph and helped establish Marlowe's reputation, the legacy of *2 Tamburlaine* is more significant for Shakespeare: it opened up the possibility that a history (of sorts) written for the public playhouses could be successfully played in parts.[6] But, beyond any of these external factors, our starting date reflects the year from which we believe Shakespeare's earliest extant writings date.

We choose 1594 as a dating terminus for *Early Shakespeare* for many reasons. It is the year in which Shakespeare's plays are acquired and performed by the newly formed company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men. It is the year in which Shakespeare joins this company, perhaps as a forming member before 3 June 1594 (when the name of the company is first recorded by Philip Henslowe, the theatre impresario and proprietor of the Rose) or as a later addition before December 1594 (a March 1595 record in the Accounts of the Chamber notes that he was one of three payees the preceding December, along with William Kempe and Richard Burbage).[7] This year also marks the first sustained period of performance at the playhouses for several years. Lawrence Manley and Sally-Beth MacLean observe that high mortality rates in the city forced the closure of the playhouses for long stretches of time between mid-1592 and mid-1594, including, most likely, closures for all but a month or so between 23 June 1592 and January 1594.[8] During this period, Shakespeare turned his hand to writing narrative poetry. A dedication to Southampton in *Venus and Adonis* (Q1 1593: STC# 22354), the 'first heire of [his] invention', marks Shakespeare's 'first public appearance as a literary author'.[9] Printed again in 1594, the poem was an instant and lasting success, reprinted ten times in Shakespeare's lifetime. 1594 also marked the first publication of *The Rape of Lucrece* (STC# 22345), where Shakespeare is once more identified as author in another dedication to Southampton. Before 1594, only one extant play in which Shakespeare had a hand had reached print – *Arden of Faversham* (1592; STC# 733); in 1594, two more plays now attributed in part to Shakespeare were published: *Titus Andronicus* (STC# 22328) and *The First Part of the Contention* (STC# 26099), an alternative version of *2 Henry VI*, first published in the 1623 Folio collection.[10] None of these play publications identify Shakespeare as an

author, and, to a wider reading public at least, he would have been better known as a poet at this stage of his career.

The period of plague outbreak saw the deaths of Christopher Marlowe (*d.* 30 May 1593) and Robert Greene (*d.* 3 September 1593); the pox claimed the lives of neither man, with Marlowe famously slain in Deptford, and Greene dying, according to Gabriel Harvey at least, 'of a surfett of pickle herringe and rennish wine' (*Four Letters and Certain Sonnets*, 1592; STC# 12900.5, sig. $A4^{r}$). Both dramatists were implicated in the *Groats-worth of Wit* (STC# 12245) furore of 1592; the tract's title-page attributes the work to Greene, while Marlowe is largely praised therein. The familiar needling of Shakespeare as an 'upstart Crow, beautified with [other dramatists'] feathers' (sig. $F1^{v}$) needs little recounting here (see Chapters 1–3 for its connection to Shakespeare), but it is still striking that Shakespeare switches to another mode of writing in its immediate aftermath. Given the plague closures, this may, of course, have been more out of necessity than desire or other personal circumstances. Notwithstanding, this period of sustained poetic composition allows the dust to settle on these accusations: both Thomas Nashe and Henry Chettle, the latter now-suspected primary author of the tract's most scurrilous accusations, disavow its contents and deny authorship in late 1592.[11]

There are other, broader, shifts in the makeup of the dramatic scene *c.* 1594, a generational shift perhaps. There are no dramatic writings extant by John Lyly, Thomas Kyd, Thomas Watson, or George Peele after 1594, while other dramatists of note appear to be emerging around this period: George Chapman, Thomas Heywood, and Ben Jonson are all mentioned by Francis Meres as dramatists of note in *Palladis Tamia* (1598).[12] Finally, 1594 is the year in which Shakespeare turns thirty, an incidental biographical fact that may have been of greater or lesser significance to the man himself. All in all, 1594 seems to us a juncture between the early part of Shakespeare's career and what was to come next, but we acknowledge the tenuous nature of any line drawn in the sands of an hourglass.

Value and Variables in the Early Canon

Simply setting a date range does not resolve all attendant issues for consideration of the early works. In fact, the difficulties attendant in setting parameters for what constitutes 'early', however artificial, are secondary to the difficulties posed in identifying which works belong to that category and their order within. Edmond Malone offered the first working chronology for the Shakespeare canon. His wordily titled essay, 'An Attempt to

Ascertain the Order in which the Plays attributed to Shakespeare were written', was first published in the ten-volume *Plays of William Shakespeare*, edited by Samuel Johnson and George Steevens (1778). For the early part of Shakespeare's career, he assigns the following plays and dates: (1) *Titus Andronicus* (1589); (2) *Love's Labour's Lost* (1591); (3) *1 Henry VI* (1591); (4 + 5) *2* and *3 Henry VI* (1592); (6) *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (1592); (7) *Locrine* (1593); (8) *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1593); and (9) *The Winter's Tale* (1594).[13] While the dates for the late plays *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale* deviate furthest from modern consensus, Malone's treatment of the date for *Love's Labour's Lost* is perhaps the most revealing about his attitude towards Shakespeare's early writing, or, indeed, towards early writing in general. There is no external evidence to support an early, early date (Meres mentions it in 1598), and Malone instead relies upon his reading of the internal evidence and his own evaluation of the play's merits:

> The frequent rhymes with which it abounds, of which, in his early performances he seems to have been extremely fond, its imperfect versification, its artless and desultory dialogue, and the irregularity of the composition, may all be urged in support of this conjecture. (280–1)

It is now largely recognized that Shakespeare's preponderance towards rhyme belongs to a slightly later period than Malone suggests. The 'lyric phase', marked by a more poetically playful verse, seems decisively influenced by what preceded it: Shakespeare's composition of two long erotic epyllia. His use of rhyme, for instance, in the earliest phase of his career – as in *Two Gentlemen*, *Taming of the Shrew*, and *Richard III* – is comparably low.[14] Few would now dismiss *Love's Labour's Lost* as 'artless and desultory', but likewise few think it Shakespeare's earliest comedy.[15] The point here is not to denigrate Malone's efforts in dating the works, but to call attention to his conjunction of early composition and diminished value. Malone identifies what he dislikes in *Love's Labour's Lost* as its 'internal marks of an early composition'. We see then from even this first study of chronology that earliness for Shakespeare carries connotations of reduced worth, under-development, and immaturity (see Chapter 1 for further discussion).

The contents of the early canon, as several chapters in this collection attest, have been contested seriously in recent years. *Titus Andronicus* is now almost fully rehabilitated as a pillar of the Shakespeare canon, and Peele's presence as co-author is now uncontested. *Edward III* is now commonly accepted into the canon, with several editions of the play in print attributing parts of the play to Shakespeare.[16] The three chapters that

discuss *Arden of Faversham* in this collection, one specifically about Shakespeare's early habits of authorship (Jackson, Chapter 5), contribute to a growing body of criticism and attribution work (not always separate tasks) that identifies Shakespeare as co-author of this early tragedy. Indeed, given the play's proposed date of 'late 1588', it may be Shakespeare's earliest surviving tragedy.[17] Shakespeare's co-author or co-authors in composing *Edward III* and *Arden of Faversham* are as yet undetermined, although Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Watson, respectively, appear plausible contenders.[18] The now-greatest debate centres on the *Henry VI* plays. A growing body of evidence suggests Marlowe's presence as co-author in each part, while Thomas Nashe is widely accepted as the primary author of the opening Act of *1 Henry VI*.[19] The picture of his early career as collaborator and co-author, still incomplete, continues to be filled in.

Beyond issues of canon and chronology, it has been a struggle to produce a coherent idea of 'early Shakespeare' because there are so many significant variables in play in terms of genre, form, company(ies), theatrical space(s), cast size, and route to publication. (Table I.1 synthesizes these for the reader.) The earliest part of his career can be defined by its variety. Claims have been made for Shakespeare's involvement with, among other companies of the 1580s and early 1590s, the Queen's Men, Pembroke's Men, Strange's Men (i.e. later Derby's Men), and Sussex's Men.[20] Ultimately, however, there is no verifiable connection between Shakespeare's company association and when/what he is writing until he joins the Chamberlain's Men.[21] Intermittently he works in certain patterns of genre and form, perhaps – a history cycle (though this need not have been planned beyond two parts originally), two long narrative poems – but over the seven-year period here denoted as 'early', there is little that coheres the set. This ability to write across genre and form, to cater to the various needs of different companies and audiences, can be seen as a mark of, or harbinger for, success (as Chapter 1 suggests); a less generous viewpoint might identify the sort of failure of focus often associated with youth. The description of young Shakespeare as 'an absolute *Johannes factotum*' in *Groats-worth* (sig. F1^{v}) seems especially pertinent in this context: it is at once an appreciable slight about, and recognition of, Shakespeare's shape-shifting ability as a 'Jack-of-all-trades' dramatist. Others saw then what we can still appreciate now.

With only negligible external evidence about Shakespeare's activities in the late 1580s and early 1590s, we are reliant upon the printed textual witnesses for works originally composed in this period. The new constituents of the canon, *Arden of Faversham* and *Edward III*, do not offer many

Table I.1 *Early Shakespeare in print and perfor*

Title	Genre	Co-Author	Date	Early Company/ies	Playing Space	Cast boys-
The Two Gentlemen of Verona	Comedy	Solo(?)	1588	?	?	8–2–
Arden of Faversham	Tragedy (English Domestic)	Anonymous	1588	?	?	11–3–
Titus Andronicus	Tragedy (Roman)	George Peele	1589	Derby's Men (i.e. Strange's Men); Pembroke's Men; Sussex's Men	? (*Titus & Andronicus* performed at Newington Butts[3])	13–4–
2 Henry VI	History	Marlowe and Anonymous	1590	?	?	Q: 18 F: 21-
3 Henry VI	History	Marlowe and Anonymous	1590	Pembroke's Men	?	O: 14 F: 15-
The Taming of the Shrew	Comedy	Solo(?)	1591	? (*A Shrew* performed on 11 June 1594 by Admiral's Men and Chamberlain's Men;	? (*A Shrew* performed at Newington Butts)	F: 11- (Q: 1

				A Shrew title-page ascribes the play to Pembroke's Men)		
Edward III	History	Anonymous	1592	?	'played about the City of London' – indicating performance within the city walls	15–1
Richard III	History	Solo	1592	? Strange's Men? Pembroke's Men?[4] (1597 title-page records recent performances by Chamberlain's Men)	?	Q: 2 F: 18
Venus and Adonis	Epic Narrative Poem	Solo	1593	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lucrece	Epic Narrative Poem	Solo	1594	n/a	n/a	n/a
The Comedy of Errors	Comedy	Solo	1594	Chamberlain's Men	Gray's Inn; The Theatre?	11–4

Table I.1 (*cont.*)

Title	Genre	Co-Author	Date	Early Company/ies	Playing Space	Cast boys-
Love's Labour's Lost	Comedy	Solo	1594	Chamberlain's Men	The Theatre?	11–6-

1 *1 Henry VI* is omitted from this table because of the likelihood that Shakespeare's contribution
The play represented by Folio *1 Henry VI* is commonly associated with the performance of a p
Philip Henslowe's 'Diary' or account book. Henslowe marked the play as 'ne' in his account b
Roslyn Knutson, 'Henslowe's Naming of Parts: Entries in the Diary for Tamar Cham, 1592–3
Queries 30:2 (1983), 157–60). The play debuted to exceptionally large audiences on 3 March 15
Bankside. For the argument that Shakespeare's contributions to *1 Henry VI* date to *c.* 1595, see
Chronology', 516–17.

2 These figures are taken from Andrew J. Power's systematic study of casting in the NOS *Critica*
alternative versions of Shakespeare's plays are forthcoming by the same author in the *New Ox*

3 This play recorded in Henslowe's *Diary* has always been identified as Shakespeare's (and Peele
Teramura, in a paper given at the Marlowe Society of America conference, presented evidence
witness the play title *Titus & Andronicus*. This includes five separate appearances in one of these
C, D, and F). It may be a dittographical error (&/and for *And*ronicus), repeated often, but Ter
includes a possible source for another play in Edward Hellowe's 1574 translation of Anthony of
famous story of Androcles and the Lion, where the emperor is named Titus and the Androcles c
to Teramura for his permission to cite this paper.

4 See the summary of evidence for these company attributions in Taylor and Loughnane, 'Can