

Shakespeare and the Idea of Early Authorship

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This is an essay about early Shakespeare and loss.¹ It attempts to put some kind of order on a span of several years when Shakespeare is first writing plays, or parts of plays, in a commercial environment with fellow professionals. It discusses a period of time, the mid to late 1580s and early 1590s, for which much information about Shakespeare and other working dramatists is lost. It asks, how do you write about that kind of loss? And, what sort of data-sets do you hold up to the blank spaces of those years, knowing only the likelihood of Shakespeare's activity, to enable plausible deductions about his early working life? In what follows, I consider how the early canon has been categorized and written about, situate the documentary evidence for Shakespeare's first forays into writing in the context of surviving evidence about theatrical activity in the 1580s, contextualize Shakespeare's overall career in the light of those of his peers, and, finally, consider some of the defining features of Shakespeare's earliest writings.

Shakespeare and Juvenilia

These IUVENILIA (or these *youth-pastimes*,)
 Set forth in homely and vnpolish't *Rhimes*,
 Let none despise: For, whatsoere they seeme
 They haue their *fate*, their *use*, & *esteeme*.²

George Wither (1588–1667) is the first recorded English author to use 'juvenilia' as a title description for writings completed while still young.³ Wither made his literary debut in 1612, at the age of twenty-four, composing an extravagant set of elegiac writings upon the death of Prince Henry.⁴ By the time Wither published his *Juvenilia* (1622), he was in his mid-thirties. In the address to the reader, quoted above, Wither describes these writings or '*youth-pastimes*' as sometimes 'childish' and declares them the product of 'what *Nature* could impart,/ E're he had Time, or Meanes, to

compasse *Art* (sig. ¶^{r-v}). Such *diminutio* is commonplace in prefatory material of the period, but Wither's *apologia* for the immaturity of the subsequent materials rings slightly untrue. The works included had all been, as the title-page openly records, 'heretofore imprinted', and the earliest work included is the set of Henry elegies. The latest work included, *Fidelia* (1615), was published three years later, by which time Wither was at least twenty-seven years old. Composing his address to the reader only six or seven years later, Wither appears to have experienced an extraordinary period of personal development; his 'early' works can scarcely be separated chronologically in his lifetime from those of his new-found maturity.⁵

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries mark the age in which literary precocity was most celebrated. As Laurie Langbauer observes, '[young] people with resources have always written, but this [meaning 1750–1835] was . . . the period when juvenile writers formed a recognizable writing presence'.⁶ The authors Langbauer describes, including Thomas Chatterton, Leigh Hunt, and Jane Austen, either published early in life or had their early writings preserved and later published. Other examples abound. Percy Shelley was expelled from Oxford aged nineteen for his incendiary *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811). Mary Shelley began writing *Frankenstein* (published 1818) in her late teens. John Keats's earliest extant writing, 'Imitation of Spenser', was composed while he was still a teenager. Alfred Lord Tennyson described the poems he published in 1830 at the age of twenty-one as 'juvenilia'.⁷ The Brontë children wrote fantasy fiction as teenagers, of which most is lost, inventing a fictional land named 'Glass Town'. Literary precocity continues to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with figures such as Lewis Carroll, Virginia Woolf, Anne Frank, *et al.*⁸ The prodigious James Joyce composed an elegy for Charles Stuart Parnell at the age of nine, 'Et tu, Healy', of which but a snippet remains.⁹ Daisy Ashford wrote her first story at the age of four, and her first novel, *The Young Visitors, or, Mr. Salteena's Plan*, at nine years old.¹⁰

In Shakespeare's lifetime, young writers were also producing significant works, and I shall later note the literary precocity of Anthony Munday, Thomas Middleton, and Francis Beaumont, but the idea of celebrating youthful literary endeavour in this way was somewhat alien to that culture. Of the texts that survive from child writers in the period, very little found its way into print. As Kate Chedgzoy observes, 'mostly it has survived in family archives'.¹¹ In her childhood and early teenage years, Elizabeth I translated devotional writings by Marguerite de Navarre (*Le Miroir de l'âme*) and Katherine Parr, as well as the parts of works of reformist theology by Jean Calvin (*Institutio Christianae*

Religionis) and Bernardino Ochino (*Che Cosa è Christo, & per che vienne al mondo*). Chedgzoy notes further examples in Jane Lumley's English translation of Erasmus' *Iphigenia*, a manuscript verse by William Paget and George Berkeley, and Rachel Fane's manuscript dramatic writings.¹² Lucy Munro has discussed the early-life productivity of mid-seventeenth-century authors such as Abraham Cowley and Thomas Jordan ('the Infant-Poet of our Age').¹³

For Shakespeare, like most early modern authors, we have little record of his *first* literary endeavours. Of Shakespeare's surviving writing, the work with the earliest hypothesized date is Sonnet 145. It features a perceptible pun on his wife's name in the poem's final couplet:

I hate, from **hate away** she threw, (Hathaway)
And sau'd my life saying not you. (Anne (?))¹⁴

This sonnet, uniquely for Shakespeare written in tetrameter rather than pentameter, may represent an early experimental effort that Shakespeare kept and, perhaps notably, included within the final group of sonnets, 127–154, that have been dated to the early 1590s. If we date Sonnet 145 to the year or so of Will and Anne's courtship, betrothal, and marriage, 1581–2, Shakespeare wrote this in his late teens. The evidence supporting such a dating is plausible but any conclusion about its date is necessarily speculative.¹⁵ Beyond this poem, what follows are several years of silence for Shakespeare.

That silence, the 'lost years', is frustrating but not unusual for this specific period of the 1580s. There are many gaps in our knowledge for the decade in which Shakespeare first began writing professionally for the stage. Only thirty-two plays performed by London boy and adult companies in the 1580s survive (see Table 1.1).¹⁶ The survival rate is poor, and we know this because the dramatic output of the 1580s can be supplemented in several ways. Perhaps most importantly there are surviving plays from the 1580s and 1590s that are near impossible to securely date; Table 1.1, though curated with all due care, may err with some of its inclusions and exclusions.¹⁷ Had Shakespeare begun writing plays professionally in the early to mid-1580s, we could not be surprised that what he wrote did not survive given the attrition rate. But at least with those thirty-two plays we have a text to work with. The *Lost Plays Database* records a further thirty-six lost plays performed by London boy and adult companies from the decade. Some caveats apply here, as the individual dating and authorship of certain of the works included is often conjectural. Warnings aside, it is clear that many more plays were lost from the 1580s than survive; the 'lost plays' in

Table 1.1 *Surviving London playhouse plays from the 1580s¹*

	Date of Composition, c.	Author(s)	Title	Date of First Publication
1	1581	Robert Wilson	<i>The Three Ladies of London</i>	1584
2	1582	Anon.	<i>The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune</i>	1589
3	1583	John Lyly	<i>Campaspe</i>	1584
4	1583	Anthony Munday (?)	<i>Fidele and Fortunio</i>	1585
5	1584	George Peele	<i>The Arraignment of Paris</i>	1584
6	1584	John Lyly	<i>Sappho and Phao</i>	1584
7	1584	John Lyly	<i>Gallathea</i>	1592
8	1586	Anon.	<i>The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth</i>	1598
9	1587	Christopher Marlowe	<i>1 Tamburlaine</i>	1590
10	1587	Thomas Kyd	<i>The Spanish Tragedy</i>	1592
11	1587	Robert Greene	<i>Alphonsus, King of Aragon</i>	1599
12	1587–8	Christopher Marlowe	<i>2 Tamburlaine</i>	1590
13	1587–8 ²	Anon.	<i>King Leir and His Three Daughters</i>	1605
14	1588	Anon.	<i>Soliman and Perseda</i>	1592
15	1588	Christopher Marlowe	<i>Dido, Queen of Carthage</i>	1594
16	1588	William Shakespeare	<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>	1623
17	1588	Robert Wilson (?)	<i>The Threes Lords and Three Ladies of London</i>	1590
18	1588	John Lyly	<i>Endymion, the Man in the Moon</i>	1591
19	1588	Thomas Lodge	<i>The Wounds of Civil War</i>	1594
20	1588	Anon.	<i>The Wars of Cyrus</i>	1588
21	1588	John Lyly	<i>The Woman in the Moon</i>	1597
22	1588	Anon. and William Shakespeare	<i>Arden of Faversham</i>	1592
23	1588	George Peele	<i>The Battle of Alcazar</i>	1594
24	1588–9	Christopher Marlowe	<i>Doctor Faustus</i>	1604
25	1589	Thomas Lodge and Robert Greene	<i>A Looking Glass for London</i>	1594
26	1589	John Lyly	<i>Midas</i>	1592
27	1589	George Peele; William Shakespeare ³	<i>Titus Andronicus</i>	1594
28	1589	Robert Greene	<i>Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay</i>	1594
29	1589	Anon.	<i>The True Tragedy of Richard III</i>	1594
30	1589	John Lyly	<i>Mother Bombie</i>	1594

Table 1.1 (*cont.*)

	Date of Composition, c.	Author(s)	Title	Date of First Publication
31	1589	Anon.	<i>The Troublesome Reign of King John</i>	1591
32	1589	Christopher Marlowe	<i>The Jew of Malta</i>	1633

- 1 Information is derived primarily from *DEEP: Database of Early English Playbooks*, ed. Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser (<http://deep.sas.upenn.edu>) but modified with dates from Wiggins, *Catalogue*, and further modified by new dates and new considerations related to Shakespeare's works in Taylor and Loughnane, 'Canon and Chronology'.
- 2 Wiggins (*Catalogue*, #838) offers a range of dates of 1586–94 for the play, but notes that the 'treatment of the Messenger establishes that the play must be later than *The Spanish Tragedy* [. . .] and earlier than *Arden of Faversham*'. Wiggins dates *Arden of Faversham* to 1590, but see Taylor and Loughnane, 'Canon and Chronology', for our 'late 1588' dating of the play. If Wiggins is correct about the Messenger, and if we are correct about an earlier date for *Arden of Faversham*, then *King Leir and His Three Daughters* would belong to late 1587 or early 1588.
- 3 See Loughnane, 'Re-editing' for the nature of Peele and Shakespeare's co-authorship of *Titus Andronicus*.

the *Database* are those for which we have some form of documentary evidence, however slight.

Those dramatists perhaps most often associated with London theatre of the 1580s, Lyly and Marlowe, account for more than one-third of the surviving plays (twelve of the thirty-two). At least, that is, in terms of the works surviving in some version. Table 1.1 documents a situation in which certain 1580s works by certain dramatists survive, but these dramatists' bodies of work may be radically over- or under-represented by what has survived. There can be little doubt about the importance of Lyly and Marlowe for 1580s drama. If you are a student of that decade, you must continually take recourse to these totemic figures. And yet, when their surviving work accounts for more than one-third of all of the 1580s drama still available to read and perform, it would be difficult to avoid them, or to construct another critical narrative about their significance for this period. By the standards of those authors, the *early* early Shakespeare cupboard seems pretty bare. But as author or co-author of three of the surviving thirty-two playhouse plays, Shakespeare is not an entirely insignificant presence.

Twenty of the thirty-two surviving plays can be reasonably or firmly dated to the last two years of the decade. It is within these twenty-four months that Shakespeare is also supposed to emerge as a dramatist for the first time. The coincidence of Shakespeare's emergence and the proliferation of extant drama is surely suspicious. Can it be that Shakespeare only began to first write for the playhouses in the exact year or so for when we have a significant number of surviving plays by other dramatists? Or, if we are feeling generous towards the author's early craft, does the popularity of Shakespeare help drive the commercialization of printed drama? Either or both scenarios may be partially correct, of course. But much more plausible is that plays written by Shakespeare in the 1580s have been lost along with everyone else's. The silence that surrounds Shakespeare's transition into writing plays is a condition of that historical period, and not something particular to him.

When that silence is broken for Shakespeare is another matter. There are a series of unknown dates for when Shakespeare first moves to London, first becomes involved with the theatre profession, and first writes a play, and this sequence of firsts need not run in that order. Then there is the other, more tangible, moment of broken silence: the date when Shakespeare's earliest surviving play or part of play was written. Gary Taylor and I ('Canon and Chronology') propose that *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is Shakespeare's earliest surviving play, offering a 'best guess' of early 1588 for its composition. Given the lack of external evidence for its date of composition, we offer an unusually large possible date range for the play of 1586 to 1598. Narrowing in, however, we present a range of internal evidence (echoes and allusions; vocabulary, metrical, and stylistic tests; cast size) to support an early date, and a date earlier than any other surviving play. Still, it is implausible to think that Shakespeare writes *nothing* in those five, six, or more years of silence before our working chronology begins. Or, perhaps more significantly, it seems implausible to think that *everything* Shakespeare writes in the 1580s survives. This is wishful thinking; the 'Complete Works' of Shakespeare is certainly incomplete, and the period in which works were most likely lost is the early part of his career. This is for two reasons: first, as we have seen, because the rate of attrition for surviving plays from the 1580s is so high, and, second, because Shakespeare's own company bought and owned his plays from 1594 and those involved with the publication of the 1623 Folio collection, co-sharers in this company, possess exemplary credentials as witnesses of his dramatic output. I am not suggesting, *à la* E. A. J. Honigmann, that we push back extant plays into the mid-1580s.¹⁸ Rather, that when we think of

‘early Shakespeare’, we should allow for the possibility, if not probability, that he began writing plays professionally somewhat earlier than 1588 and that the early dramatic canon is incomplete.

In this vein, it is worth noting that what scholars have described as Shakespeare’s ‘lost years’ – that is the date range for which we have no external evidence for Shakespeare’s activities – actually extends a full seven and a half years from the baptism of the twins (in February 1585) to the *Groats-worth* allusion (in September 1592). Scholars have felt little hesitation in writing about Shakespeare’s activities, c. 1590–2. After all, the *Groats-worth* allusion cannot be based on nothing. Why not the late 1580s and before? How else can we account for the completion of all of the plays mentioned by Francis Meres? By 1598, when Meres notes his appreciation for twelve or thirteen¹⁹ of Shakespeare’s plays (including the lost *Love’s Labour’s Won*), he excludes a further six plays in which Shakespeare had contributed to by this time – *Arden of Faversham*, *Edward III*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and the three parts of *Henry VI* – all of whose original composition precedes the narrative poems.²⁰ In ten or so years dating back to 1588, Shakespeare thus produces at a rate of about two plays per year (1.9 *per annum*), a rate that would only slightly decline over the succeeding fifteen years (some twenty-four plays at 1.6 *per annum*). If the starting date was 1590 rather than 1588, as Wiggins’s chronology implies, Shakespeare would have been producing plays at a rate that far exceeds his later practice (2.375 *per annum*).²¹ The latter period of the ‘lost years’, c. 1588 to 1592, is therefore not exactly silent.

The earlier period, before 1588, is where the evidence falls under a hush. On 27 November 1582, a special licence was granted by the consistory court of Worcester to allow the marriage of Will and Anne Hathaway, their first daughter Susanna is christened on 26 May 1583, and Hamnet and Judith are christened on 2 February 1585. Shakespeare’s whereabouts in the early years of his marriage are unknown; the birth of the twins only assures us that he and Anne were together, crude though that might seem, sometime in mid-1584. (The newly-weds had, as S. Schoenbaum notes, no place to call their own until 1597, and Anne probably lived with her in-laws on Henley Street.)²² The intervening period, the thirty or so months from early 1585 to c. late 1587, is most perfectly silent. This period, and the years before that follow his marriage, tracks Shakespeare from his teenage years to his early twenties. This is the corresponding period, age-wise, in which Munday (*The Mirrour of Mutabilite* (1579), aged nineteen), Middleton (*The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphrased* (1597, aged seventeen), and Beaumont (*Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* (1602), aged seventeen) emerge

as authors of promise. The bar is not set with these authors (as we will see below), and personality and personal circumstance play their role in each case, but the key point is that Shakespeare's first surviving works are plausibly not his earliest.

Although 'early Shakespeare' as a descriptor has had some critical currency, Shakespeare's earliest extant writings have been rarely classified as juvenilia.²³ For other authors of the period, this has not been the case. The Oxford *Collected Works* of Middleton, for example, has a special section at the back of the edition for that author's 'juvenilia', including four works written in his late teens and early twenties.²⁴ Marlowe, as ever, is the more interesting case in point. The early part of Shakespeare's career, at least as suggested by Power and I in this volume's Introduction, covers seven or more years. Marlowe's entire career in writing plays (1587 to 1593) covers roughly the same time period and number of years. Born a couple of months before Shakespeare, the beginnings of their professional writing careers overlap almost exactly. As Tom Rutter suggests, Marlowe's relative youth when he dies (aged twenty-nine) makes the idea of 'late Marlowe' incongruous.²⁵ But, at the earlier side of the Marlowe chronology, editors and critics such as Paul Menzer, distinguish between the 'juvenilia' of his translations of Ovid and Lucan, associated with the poet-dramatist's time in Cambridge (though with no evidence to support this dating), and his later more accomplished works.²⁶ Indeed, the categorization of *Dido, Queen of Carthage* as juvenilia has been protested vigorously.²⁷ Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith, pushing this line of thinking about Marlowe's relative youth a little further, suggest that 'Marlowe's literary canon is all essentially juvenilia'.²⁸ If *all* of Marlowe's extant works can be thought of as juvenilia, and all of Marlowe's writing career coincides with that of early Shakespeare, then why have critics been so reluctant to label anything Shakespeare writes early as juvenilia?

Perhaps one reason for the dismissal of the category of 'juvenilia' in Shakespearean criticism is that his personal circumstances make the idea of immaturity seem a little absurd. By the time Shakespeare first makes some noise, or by the time the surviving evidence allows him to be heard, c. 1588, he is already someone with responsibilities for a wife and three children, many years removed from the dalliance of youth; his eldest, Susanna, is by then five years old. (Marlowe, as a point of comparison, had recently been awarded his MA from Cambridge.) We should not, however, equate age with experience or vice versa; an individual can be experienced in different ways. The early period of the 'lost years', crucial as it must have been for Shakespeare both personally and professionally,

is where the critical construct of 'early Shakespeare' begins. A paucity of evidence has created a surfeit of speculation about how Shakespeare achieved his 'break', anachronistic though that may seem, in the business of performance. We lack a narrative that makes sense for how someone last seen in a market-town in Warwickshire reappears in London as an emerging dramatist of note.

Yet another, perhaps, more significant reason for the lack of a Shakespearean juvenilia is that critics seldom seek to categorize anything Shakespeare wrote in a perceptibly negative way. In the history of Shakespeare criticism, only two plays have regularly drawn the label of 'juvenilia': *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Titus Andronicus*. For the former, Alexander Pope, noted that that play is 'suppos'd to be one of [Shakespeare's] first', and sought to distance the dramatist from certain passages in the play. Observing that one of the scenes (1.2) is 'compos'd of the lowest and most trifling conceits', Pope assumed that such passages had been 'interpolated by the Players'.²⁹ Samuel Johnson noted that 'in this play there is a strange mixture of knowledge and ignorance, of care and negligence'.³⁰ The play's earliness has been stressed by more recent commentators. Geoffrey Bullough thought the play a 'dramatic laboratory in which Shakespeare experimented with many of the ideas and devices which were to be his stock-in-trade and delight for years to come'.³¹ Stanley Wells, writing in 1963 of the 'failure' of the play, notes that 'the basic technical failure of the play . . . arises from the fact that Shakespeare is still a tyro in dramatic craftsmanship: he has not yet learned to manipulate more than a few characters at once'.³²

Similarly, bashing *Titus Andronicus* has been an easy game for centuries, with now-familiar critical tirades offered up by Edward Ravenscroft ('rather a heap of rubbish than a structure'), Edmond Malone (a 'spurious piece'), and Edward Capell ('a very bundle of horrors, totally unfit for the stage').³³ The play has undergone somewhat of a critical rehabilitation since the mid-1990s, indebted to the incisive editorial and critical work of Jonathan Bate and John Kerrigan and the directorial achievement of Julie Taymor. Interestingly, Bate's edition made the somewhat radical move of dating the play to 1594, much later than previous editors, defying scholars who 'suppose that is a very early work, a piece of crude and embarrassing juvenilia'. If written in 1594 (and entirely by Shakespeare, as Bate claimed then), when Shakespeare was thirty years old, the play could not be considered as juvenilia, and could barely be considered 'early'. The re-dating of the play's composition to later in Shakespeare's life and career is therefore implicitly connected to the play's merit. Indeed, a noted early enthusiast for

Shakespeare's works, John Dryden, considered it a 'miracle to see a first good Play' by any dramatist. Thus, for Dryden, Jonson did not begin with *Volpone* and Fletcher (and Beaumont) did not begin with 'Arbaces' (meaning *A King and No King*). Dryden incorrectly thought that 'Shakespeare's own muse [his] *Pericles* first bore| The Prince of *Tyre* was elder than the Moore [meaning *Othello*]', an analysis that appears to be primarily based upon his estimation of those plays' respective merits.³⁴ We see, then, in these examples how play merit is equated with, or explained by, its stage of composition in both the overall life and the career of the author.

Literary and Dramatic Careers

We can, I think, attempt to better situate Shakespeare's early and overall career in the context of those of his peers. Shakespeare writes for the stage for about twenty-six years, or around half of his life. While this might seem like a long career, how can we know this? Once more returning to the comparison with Marlowe, who is the outlier of the two poet-dramatists? Marlowe, retired on a dagger's point in Deptford aged twenty-nine, or Shakespeare, producing new works consistently over the space of a quarter century before returning to Warwickshire aged fifty? Quantifying and analysing the data that survives for dramatists working across the period may help to elucidate what constituted a 'normal' working life and career.

In the data presented in the tables that follow, several rules and caveats must be applied: as discussed earlier, plays have been lost from throughout the period (and especially from the 1580s, when many of these dramatists might have first begun); dramatists do not always write consistently, producing new plays year on year; many dramatists had other occupations beyond writing; the specific dating for many plays is uncertain, although, typically, the dating parameters can be firmly established; records for birth, baptism, death, and so on are not always available. Also, 'peers' is a necessarily capacious category; I have only included those dramatists who were writing professionally when Shakespeare was also, and for whom we have surviving plays.³⁵ One final rule is that they must each have authored or co-authored three plays that can be identified firmly.³⁶

Beginning on a rather macabre note, Table 1.2 details the average life expectancy for the twenty-three candidate authors, who are arranged alphabetically, with their maximal (in terms of calendar year when specific

Table 1.2 Average life expectancy

Author Name	Life	Length of Life (maximal)
Beaumont, Francis ¹	<i>bap.</i> 24 August 1584– <i>d.</i> 6 March 1616	32
Chapman, George	1559/60– <i>d.</i> 12 May 1634	75
Chettle, Henry	<i>c.</i> 1560 (1557–63)– <i>d.</i> 1603	43 (?) (40–6) ²
Daborne, Robert	<i>c.</i> 1580– <i>d.</i> 23 March 1628	48
Day, John	1573/4–1638/9	66 (64)
Field, Nathan	<i>bap.</i> 17 October 1587–1619/20	33
Fletcher, John	<i>b.</i> 20 December 1579– <i>d.</i> 29 August 1625	45
Ford, John ³	<i>bap.</i> 12 April 1586–1653	67 (?)
Heywood, Thomas	1573– <i>buried</i> 16 August 1641	68
Jonson, Ben	11 June 1572– <i>buried</i> 11 August 1637	65
Kyd, Thomas	<i>bap.</i> 6 November 1558– <i>buried</i> 15 August 1594	35
Lyly, John	1553?– <i>buried</i> 30 November 1606	53
Marlowe, Christopher	<i>bap.</i> 26 February 1564– <i>d.</i> 30 May 1593	29
Marston, John	<i>bap.</i> 7 October 1576– <i>d.</i> 24 June 1634	57
Massinger, Philip	<i>bap.</i> 24 November 1583– <i>buried</i> 18 March 1640	57
Middleton, Thomas	<i>bap.</i> 18 April 1580– <i>buried</i> 4 July 1627	47
Munday, Anthony	<i>bap.</i> 13 Oct 1560– <i>buried</i> 9 August 1633	72
Nashe, Thomas	<i>bap.</i> November 1567– <i>d.</i> <i>c.</i> 1601	34
Peele, George	<i>bap.</i> 25 July 1556– <i>buried</i> 9 November 1596	40
Rowley, William ⁴	1585?– <i>buried</i> 11 February 1626	41(?)
Shakespeare, William	<i>bap.</i> 26 April 1564– <i>d.</i> 23 April 1616	52
Tourneur, Cyril ⁵	1580?– <i>d.</i> 28 February 1626	46 (?)
Webster, John	1578–80?– <i>buried</i> 3 March 1638(?)	60
	Average life expectancy	50.7 (SD: 13.9)

- 1 For evidence of Beaumont's date of baptism, see Hilton Kelliher, 'Francis Beaumont and Nathan Field: New Records of Their Early Years', *English Manuscript Studies 1100–1700* 8 (2000), 1–42.
- 2 Chettle's date of birth is unknown, but he was apprenticed to the printer Thomas East for a period of eight years beginning in 1577. The rule in London at the time was that an apprentice must be aged at least fourteen years old and no older than twenty-one. The tendency was, however, for apprentices to begin in their mid-teens. It seems unlikely that Chettle would enter into an apprenticeship aged nineteen or twenty. I have split the difference here, supposing that Chettle entered at age seventeen. Choosing the 'maximal' age in this case would have skewed the numbers based on an unrealistic appraisal of his life situation. For apprentice ages, see Douglas Hay, 'England, 1562–1875: The Law and Its Uses' in Douglas Hay and Paul Craven, eds., *Masters, Servants, and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1562–1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,

Table 1.2 (cont.)

- 2004), 59–116, esp. p. 65. Hay notes that ‘In England, age distinctions were critical for apprenticeship’ (65). For Chettle’s biography, see Emma Smith, ‘Chettle, Henry (d. 1603×7)’, ODNB; online edn, September 2004.
- 3 It is not known when John Ford died. As Michael Neill notes in his ODNB entry for the dramatist, ‘it seems likely Ford was dead by 1653, when *The Queen, or The Excellent of her Sex*, now generally accepted as his, was issued anonymously’. But Ford could have died at any time after his signed dedication to *The Ladies Triall* (1639). Michael Neill, ‘Ford, John (bap. 1586, d. 1639×53?)’, ODNB; online edn, October 2007.
 - 4 As David Gunby notes in his ODNB entry for the author, ‘Nothing is known of his parentage, place of birth, or early life, and his date of birth is conjectural.’ David Gunby, ‘Rowley, William (1585?–1626)’, ODNB; online edn, September 2013.
 - 5 There are no records for Tournour’s birth or baptism. His earliest work, *The Transformed Metamorphosis*, is published in 1600.

dates are unknown) approximate length of life.³⁷ Marlowe, Beaumont, Field, Kyd, and Nashe stand out as tragic early deaths; Chapman, Day, and Munday have noteworthy longevity. Shakespeare, who likely celebrates his fifty-second birthday just the day before his death, is closest to the mean. A standard deviation of almost fourteen years indicates the great variation in life expectancy in the period.

Next, in Table 1.3, I include some dating parameters for these men’s literary careers. Six authors merit special mention. I have opted to include lost works based on the evidence of Meres’s *Palladis Tamia*. Namely, this includes Jonson’s ‘unidentified tragedy’ and Heywood’s ‘unidentified comedy’, because these must certainly have existed at some point as Meres alludes to them.³⁸ For Peele and Marlowe, I have included works which were likely completed while they attended university. Whether these should count as professional writing is subject to debate, as is their respective date of composition in both cases, but I did not want to inadvertently shorten a writer’s literary career. For Kyd, I have included an unidentified play from the early 1580s; Thomas Dekker’s *A Knight’s Conjuring* seems to associate the ‘industrious Kyd’ with an earlier generation of writers, Thomas Watson and Thomas Achelley, distinguishing these from Marlowe, Peele, and Nashe.³⁹ (The distinction made is interesting, not least because of the close personal relationship of Watson and Marlowe.) Finally, for Shakespeare, I start with *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*; the fourteen lines of Sonnet 145 need not demand our attention unnecessarily (he could, after all, have written a pun about his wife’s maiden name at any point, notwithstanding the ceaseless speculation about the state of his marital affairs).

At over two decades, early modern literary careers were long, perhaps longer than most readers might expect. The longevity of the careers of

Table 1.3 Average career length (all writing)

Author Name	Earliest Work (date)	Age	Latest Work (date)	Age	Career Length Maximal (works)
Beaumont, Francis	<i>Salmacis and Hermaphroditus</i> (1602)	17–18	<i>Masque of the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn</i> (1613)	27–8	11
Chapman, George	<i>The Shadow of Night</i> (1594)	34–5	<i>A Justification of a Strange Action of Nero</i> (1629)	69–70	36
Chettle, Henry	<i>Greene's Groats-worth of Wit</i> (?; 1592)	32	<i>England's Mourning Garment</i> (1602)	42	10
Daborne, Robert	<i>A Christian Turned Turk</i> (1612) ¹	32	<i>The Poor Man's Comfort</i> (1616) ²	36	4
Day, John	<i>The Conquest of Brute</i> (1598; lost)	24–5	<i>Peregrination Scholastic, or Learning's Pilgrimage</i> (1630–8) ³	56–7 – 64–5	41 (31)
Field, Nathan	<i>A Woman is a Weathercock</i> (1609)	22	<i>The Fatal Downy</i> (1619/20)	32–3	11 (10)
Fletcher, John	<i>The Woman Hater</i> (1606)	27	<i>The Noble Gentleman</i> (1625)	46	19
Ford, John	<i>Fame's Memorial</i> (1606)	20	<i>The Lady's Trial</i> (1638?)	52	32
Heywood, Thomas	<i>Onone and Paris</i> (1594)	21	<i>Nine the most Worthy Women of the World</i> (1640)	67	46

Table 1.3 (cont.)

Author Name	Earliest Work (date)	Age	Latest Work (date)	Age	Career Length (works)	Maximal
Jonson, Ben	Unidentified tragedy (1596; range 1594–8)	24 (22–6)	<i>The Sad Shepherd</i> (1633; incomplete)	61	37 (35–8) ⁴	
Kyd, Thomas	Unidentified play (1583)	25	<i>Cornelia</i> (1594)	35	10	
Lyly, John	<i>Euphues</i> (1578)	25	<i>Love's Metamorphoses</i> (1590)	37	12	
Marlowe, Christopher	<i>Amores</i> (1583) ⁵	19	<i>Hero and Leander</i> (1593; incomplete)	29	10	
Marston, John	<i>Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image</i> (1598)	22	<i>The Entertainement at Asbly</i> (1607)	31	9	
Massinger, Philip	Unidentified play (1613)	30	<i>The Fair Anchoress of Pausilippo</i> (1640; lost)	57	27	
Middleton, Thomas	<i>The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphrased</i> (1597)	17	<i>Farrago</i> (1626–7)	46–7	30 (29)	
Munday, Anthony	<i>Mirror for Mutability</i> (1577)	17	Additions to <i>Survey of London</i> (1618)	58	41	
Nashe, Thomas	<i>The Anatomy of Absurdities</i> (1588)	21	<i>The Hospital of Incurable Fools</i> (1600)	33	12	
Peele, George	<i>The Tale of Troy</i> (1580–1)	24–5	London Lord Mayor's Pageant (?) ⁶ (1595)	39	15 (14)	

Rowley, William	<i>The Travels of Three English Brothers</i> (1607)	22	<i>A Cure for a Cuckold</i> (1624)	39	17
Shakespeare, William	<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i> (1588)	24	<i>The Two Noble Kinsmen</i> (1613–14)	49–50	26 (25)
Tourneur, Cyril	<i>The Transformed Metamorphosis</i> (1600)	20	<i>Arraignment of London</i> (1613)	33	13
Webster, John	<i>Caesar's Fall</i> , and/or <i>Two Shapes</i> (1602; lost) ⁷	22–4	<i>Appius and Virginia</i> (1626–7)	46–9	27 (22)
AVERAGES		23.5		45.1	21.6
		(SD: 4.8)		(SD 12.9)	(SD: 12.6)

- 1 As S. P. Cerasano notes, Daborne was involved with the theatre from at least as early as 1610 'when he was a patentee for the Children of the Queen's Revels at the Whitefriars Playhouse'. It is likely that *A Christian Turned Turk* is not his first work, but there is no other evidence available to determine this. S. P. Cerasano, 'Daborne, Robert (c.1580–1628)', ODNB; online edn, September 2004; updated version, January 2009.
- 2 Daborne later took up holy orders, and one piece of non-literary writing survives from his later years: a sermon preached at Waterford Cathedral in February 1617 and which was published in London in 1618 (STC# 6183).
- 3 It is impossible to know when this work was first written. Surviving only in manuscript (BL, Sloane MS 3150), as Anthony Parr notes in the ODNB entry for the author, Day observes that 'I boast not that gawdie spring of credit and youthful flourish'. It is plausible that Day wrote this at any point in his later life (by the 1630s he was in his late fifties and early sixties), so the maximal 'career length' here might be significantly inflated. Anthony Parr, 'Day, John (1573/4–1638?)', ODNB; online edn, September 2004.

- 4 The lower upper limit of 38 (and not 39, as suggested by 1598 for the upper limit of the date for the unidentified tragedy) is due to the dating of Jonson's earliest surviving work and play to 1607, *The Case Is Altered* (see Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #1072 for that play's dating and its connection to Nashe's *Lenten Staff*). I have opted for 1594, the centre point of the plausible dating parameters, as the most likely date for Jonson's early lost tragedy; a purely maximal count, here, would of course extend his professional writing career another two years.
- 5 The dating of Marlowe's verse translations, not published until 1592, is notoriously tricky. If we assume that they were written while Marlowe was still at Cambridge, as most scholars do, then some time before his 1594 BA exams and graduation (though he was hardly a devoted student), or his frequent excursions from the university in 1595, seems most plausible. For further information about his time at Cambridge, see Charles Nicholl, 'Marlowe, Christopher (*bap.* 1564, *d.* 1593)', ODNB; online edn, January 2008.
- 6 Peele, impoverished and living in dire straits at this point, is still obviously attempted to procure a living from professional writing in submitting a tender for this performance. It is unknown whether or not the tender is successful. If it was, as Wiggins notes (*Catalogue*, #1016), it would have been performed on 29 October 1595 as part of the Lord Mayor celebrations. Another, slightly later piece of writing can also be attributed to Peele, though this was composed in special circumstances. On 17 January 1596 Peele sent via his elder daughter a presentation copy of *The Tale of Troy* to William Cecil, Lord Burghley as a request for patronage (Reid Barbour, Peele, George (*bap.* 1556, *d.* 1596)', ODNB; online edn, September 2004. For this he wrote a new dedication to Burghley complaining of his worsening conditions.
- 7 There are two payments recorded to the same team of collaborators, one week apart (22 and 29 May 1602), for, respectively, *Two Shapes* and *Caesar's Fall*. W. W. Greg assumed that the plays were one and the same, with simply alternative titles (W. W. Greg, ed. *Henslowe's Diary*, Part II 'Commentary' (London: A. H. Bullen, 1908), 222 (no. 236)). Wiggins (*Catalogue*, #1338), pointing out the unusually high cost of the combined payments for one play, and the incongruous nature of the two titles, supposes that they are payments for separate plays. The matter is unresolvable so I have allowed for both possibilities in recording the work(s).

Munday and, especially, Heywood are extraordinary. For those with shorter careers, there typically tend to be pressing reasons that writers stopped. Marlowe, Beaumont, Field, and Nashe are each cut off in their prime, the first killed, the others by disease. Kyd and Peele both come to a sorry end: seemingly unsuccessful in their attempts to extend their careers, both die penniless. Beaumont fares a little better. A prodigy by modern standards in completing and publishing *Salmascis and Hermaphroditus* (1602) in his late teens, he quits professional writing in his late twenties either due to illness or, more happily, because he no longer needs an independent income following his marriage to an heiress.⁴⁰ He simply dies young. Tourneur appears to opt for a career in military service. Marston also quits the stage and becomes a cleric, perhaps in the fallout to the *Eastward Ho!* controversy. So, too, Daborne joins holy orders, making a remarkable transition to a later life in steady employment having spent his youth chased by debt. Middleton, who has a longer-than-average career is likely compelled to quit writing for the stage after the *Game at Chesse* furore (for which he may also have suffered great physical punishment). But, ever productive, he remains writing almost up until his death. Shakespeare is again fairly average; his earliest works date almost exactly to the mean of first composition, he retires slightly later than the mean, and the length of his writing career is easily within the standard deviation.

Table 1.4, which gives data for the play-writing career of these authors, is more revealing. Shakespeare's career in writing plays is ten years longer than average. Shakespeare's overall dramatic career, at twenty-six years, is at the outer limits of the standard deviation; he starts earlier than average and ends significantly later. Writing plays in the period, it is shown, is the province of men in their late twenties and thirties. Beaumont and Field are unusual in starting out in their early twenties; if Shakespeare also began writing plays in the 'lost' period described above – the thirty or so months from early 1585 to c. late 1587 – he would have been young by contemporary standards, but the examples of Beaumont and Field show that this is possible. Shakespeare's staying power is more unusual if not exactly exceptional. While no outlier in writing into his late forties/early fifties (so too did Chapman, Day, Fletcher, Ford, Heywood, Jonson, and Massinger), the extended nature of his career in writing plays is noteworthy. Although easily eclipsed by the startling longevity of Heywood and Jonson, the careers of those men are shown to be outliers in the same way that those of Tourneur and Daborne (and George Wilkins, for that matter) seem absurdly short: only four other dramatists, Day, Massinger, Middleton, and Webster, similarly write plays for a quarter century or so.

Table I.4 Average career length (plays)

Author Name	Earliest Play (date)	Age	Latest Play (date)	Age	Career Length Maximal (plays)
Beaumont, Francis	<i>The Woman-Hater</i> (1606)	21–2	<i>The Captain</i> (1612) ¹	27–8	6
Chapman, George	<i>The Blind Beggar of Alexandria</i> (1596)	36–7	<i>The Tragedy of Chabot</i> ² (1611–12)	51–3	16
Chettle, Henry	Unidentified play 1592 (range 1588–98) ³	32 (28–38)	<i>Lady Jane Shore</i> (1603–4)	43–4	12 (6–15)
Daborne, Robert	<i>A Christian Turned Turk</i> (1612)	32	<i>The Poor Man's Comfort</i> (1616)	36	4
Day, John	<i>The Conquest of Brute</i> (1598; lost)	24–5	<i>Come See a Wonder</i> (1623; lost)	49–50	25
Field, Nathan	<i>A Woman Is a Weathercock</i> (1609)	22	<i>The Fatal Dowry</i> (1619/20)	32–3	11 (10)
Fletcher, John	<i>The Woman Hater</i> (1606)	27	<i>The Noble Gentleman</i> (1625)	46	19
Ford, John	<i>The Witch of Edmonton</i> (1621) ⁴	35	<i>The Lady's Trial</i> (1638?)	52	17
Heywood, Thomas	Unidentified comedy 1596 (range 1594–8)	23 (21–5)	<i>Love's Mistress</i> (1634)	61	38 (36–40) ⁵
Jonson, Ben	Unidentified tragedy 1596 (range 1594–8)	24 (22–6)	<i>A Tale of a Tub</i> (1633) ⁶	61	37 (35–8) ⁷
Kyd, Thomas	Unidentified play (1583)	25	<i>Cornelia</i> (1594)	36	11
Lily, John	<i>Campaspe</i> (1583)	30	<i>Love's Metamorphoses</i> (1590)	37	7
Marlowe, Christopher	<i>Tamburlaine</i> (1587)	23	<i>The Massacre at Paris</i> (1593)	29	6
Marston, John	Unidentified play (1599) ⁸	23	<i>The Wonder of Women, or The Tragedy of Sophonisba</i> (1605) ⁹	29	6
Massinger, Philip	Unidentified play (1613)	30	<i>The Fair Anchoress of Pausilippo</i> (1640; lost)	57	27

Middleton, Thomas	<i>Caesar's Fall</i> , and/or <i>Two Shapes</i> (1602; lost)	22	<i>A Game at Chess</i> (1624)	44	22
Munday, Anthony	<i>Fidèle and Fortunio</i> (1583) ¹⁰	23	<i>The Set at Tennis</i> (1602; lost)	42	19
Nashe, Thomas	' <i>Harey the vij</i> ' (1592) ¹¹	25	<i>The Isle of Dogs</i> (1597; lost)	30	5
Peele, George	<i>The Arraignement of Paris</i> (1584)	28	<i>The Old Wife's Tale</i> (1592) ¹²	36	8
Rowley, William	<i>The Travels of Three English Brothers</i> (1607)	22	<i>A Cure for a Cuckold</i> (1624)	39	17
Shakespeare, William	<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i> (1588)	24	<i>The Two Noble Kinsmen</i> (1613–14)	49–50	26 (25)
Tourneur, Cyril	<i>The Atheist's Tragedy</i> (1610–11)	30–1	<i>The Arraignement of London</i> (1613; lost)	33	3 (2)
Webster, John	<i>Caesar's Fall</i> , and/or <i>Two Shapes</i> (1602; lost)	24–6	<i>Appius and Virginia</i> (1626–7)	46–9	25 (24)
AVERAGES		26.3 (SD: 4.4)		42.4 (SD: 10.3)	16.0 (SD: 10.2)

1 The Fletcher–Beaumont collaboration *The Maiden's Tragedy* has often been considered Beaumont's last play, but *The Captain*, another Fletcher collaboration, was performed in the same Christmas season 1612–13. Sir George Buc's licensing of a second *Maiden's Tragedy* on 31 October 1611 implies that there was an earlier *first* tragedy of the same name, which would push this *Maidem* play somewhat earlier in date. But that assumes that this 'first' *Maiden's Tragedy* is one and the same with the Fletcher–Beaumont play. See Wiggins (*Catalogue*, #1650) for further discussion.

2 A possibly later lost play entitled *The Fatal Love* is attributed to Chapman in the destroyed MS list of plays of John Warburton. As Wiggins notes (*Catalogue*, #1712), 'the title does not sound very much like that of a Chapman tragedy' (who favours tragic titles with the name of the tragic protagonist), and, if even by Chapman, could date anywhere between 1596 and 1613.

3 Like Jonson and Heywood above, Chettle is also mentioned by Meres among those best for comedy. He is certainly patching up plays in the 1590s and, at least according to Meres, writing his own plays. The first firm play attribution to him is not until 1598: *The Famous Wars of Henry I and the Prince of Wales*, co-authored with Drayton and Dekker as recorded in Henslowe's record books. See Roslyn L. Knutson, 'Henry Chettle, Workaday Playwright', *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 30 (2017), 52–64.

4 Passages of *The Laws of Candy*, co-authored by Massinger and Fletcher, have also been attributed to Ford. Wiggins (*Catalogue*, #1932) casts some doubt upon the linguistic evidence, but notes that 'there is a striking amount of verbal overlap with Ford's later work (though even more with the Massinger canon)', at once opening and closing an adaptation hypothesis.

- 5 Heywood offers a particular problem for his 'latest' play date. Towards the end of his (long) life and career, Heywood endeavoured to revise several of his earlier works. Should the dates for this revision be considered as play-writing activity? Or should we just include new works? I favour the latter position here, though it would be easy to defend either side. As detailed by David Kathman (ODNB), Heywood continued to be enormously busy writing until the end of his life. Above I primarily count the date for his last new dramatic work, *Love's Mistress*, first performed in 1634, but I offer a date range that extends to his revision of *If you Know not me, you Know Nobody* in 1639 (and encompasses the lower date of Wiggins's date range for the unidentified comedy). See David Kathman, 'Heywood, Thomas (c.1573–1641)', ODNB; online edn, September 2004.
- 6 *A Tale of a Tub* is presented as 'new' in May 1633. Earlier scholars thought it a very early work by Jonson, but Anne Barron has argued compellingly for its mature status. Anne Barron, *Ben Jonson: Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Ian Donaldson, 'Jonson, Benjamin [Ben] (1572–1637)', ODNB; online edn, September 2004.
- 7 See endnote 46.
- 8 The 1599 date records a payment to Marston in Henslowe's account books; the dramatist's career may have begun earlier, and it has been proposed that Marston got his start in revising *Historiastix* for a performance at the Inns of Court in Christmas 1598. Little evidence supports this, and, in any case, Marston's professional career does not appear to have begun until the next year.
- 9 Wiggins dates *Eastward Ho* to 1605 but places it slightly earlier. Despite the furore over the play, it seems unlikely to have been the reason Marston quit writing for the stage. As James Knowles notes, Marston appears to have married his wife in that year (see evidence for this in ODNB).
- 10 The translation is attributed to Munday, though this ascription necessitates our allowing for the writer to make a remarkably short transition from his anti-theatrical stance in *A Second and Third Blast of Retreat* (1580) to producing new material for the stage. (Then again, he did transition from an actor to an anti-theatrical propagandist in the late 1570s, so such *volte face* cannot be ruled out.) The next earliest surviving dramatic work by Munday is *John A Kent, John a Cumber*, which must post-date 1595. Here I accept the *Fidele and Fortunio* attribution, but hopefully new attribution work on that play might settle the matter of the translator's identity. See David M. Bergeron 'Munday, Anthony (bap. 1560, d. 1633)', ODNB; online edn, September 2004; revised version, May 2007.
- 11 This is the original version of the play later adapted by Shakespeare, now known as *Henry VI, part one*; I here adopt the name for this play first recorded in Henslowe's Diary on 3 March 1592 (R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert, eds., *Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 16). See Taylor and Loughnane, 'Canon and Chronology', 513–17, for the evidence for this position on the play. Nashe's other surviving early play, *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, is also dated to 1592 (Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #941).
- 12 For the canon and chronology of Peele's works, see Loughnane, 'Re-editing'.

This data, broadly speaking, grants some insight into how Shakespeare's overall career fits (or does not fit) into a pattern of professional play-writing in the period. While I noted that Shakespeare's overall career is just about within the standard deviation for the period (26 (1588–1614) within range of 16 plus 10.2), so too is his entire early career (6–7 (1588–1594) within range of 16 minus 10.2). So too, incidentally, is Marlowe's entire career. The early period of Shakespeare's career alone is, then, not especially short in this context. It is over this period, taking Shakespeare into his thirties, the peak age as established for dramatists working in the period, that he will gain continuous experience in the composition of plays and that will lead to his institution as lead dramatist for a newly formed company in 1594. Working backwards, then, with such a model of age linked to experience in mind, when we arrive at the beginning of Shakespeare's career we should find the play written by the least experienced dramatist. Here we return to the nexus of experience, age, and merit, and how this has informed the idea of early Shakespeare.

The Idea of Early Shakespeare

One of the earliest commentators on the overall Shakespeare canon was quick to join the dots between Shakespeare's age at the date of composition and the relative merits of the work in question. In the preface to Abraham Cowley's *Poems* (1656; WING C6683), the poet reflects upon the misfortune of authors whose *Works* are 'stuffed out' with 'counterfeit pieces' or works of less merit. Cowley laments that unscrupulous stationers, driven by greed and 'content to diminish the value of the *Author*', include additional works so as to increase the price of the books:

This has been the case with *Shakespear, Fletcher, Iohnson*, and many others; part of whose *Poems* I should take the boldness to prune and lop away, if the care of replanting them in print did belong to me; neither would I make any scruple to cut off from some the unnecessary yong *Suckars*, and from others the old withered *Branches* . . . (sig. (a)2^r)

Cowley identifies two potential problem areas in authors' canons: the 'unnecessary yong *Suckars*' created in youth, and the 'old withered *Branches*' produced in old age. This early commentator's implied correlation in value between the works of young and old age, explicitly linked to the works included in Shakespeare's First Folio, is now fascinating to consider in the context of the history of subsequent Shakespearean criticism. After all, his late plays have long been venerated by critics. Gordon McMullan has written about late Shakespeare and 'the privileged place that

the idea of late writing occupies in the critical imagination'.⁴¹ The early works, dismissed early as qualitatively worse, have not found a place in the critical imagination in the way the late works have. We might ask, within such a framework, what place could early writing occupy?

For Shakespeare, the question is especially fraught because, as we have seen in the case of *Titus Andronicus*, there is some dispute about which of his works were composed earliest. Edmond Malone first set out to establish a chronological order for Shakespeare's works; his was also the first attempt, as McMullan observes, to 'read the life and the work in direct relation to one another' (130). This had the effect of establishing discrete chronological sub-periods within the longer writing career. For McMullan, Malone contributed to the 'invention' of the idea of a 'late Shakespeare', embraced by later critics such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Edward Dowden. At the same time, although it has never been discussed as such, Malone contributed to the invention of 'early Shakespeare', in both the specific chronological sense, these works were composed 'early' in Shakespeare's career, and in the broader discursive and interpretive sense, these works are read as products of Shakespeare's early creativity and craft.⁴² Borrowing terminology used elsewhere (that 'which [has] been named', as he notes) Malone put in contrast Shakespeare's 'early compositions', anything written before 1600, and his 'late productions', anything post-dating that year.⁴³

Malone's decision to divide Shakespeare's career periodically was to be influential. Coleridge divided Shakespeare's career into five 'eras', the first of which includes Shakespeare's poetry, his 'first sketch . . . probably planned before he left Stratford . . . *Love's Labor Lost* [sic.], several other plays now generally considered late (*Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*), and several plays now dated to the mid-1590s at latest (*Titus Andronicus*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*).⁴⁴ The first 'era' ends, Coleridge suggests, with *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Dowden (1877) divided Shakespeare's career into four 'periods':

. . . first, from about 1590 to 1595–6, years of dramatic apprenticeship and experiment; secondly, from about 1595–6 to 1600–1601, the period of the English historical plays and the mirthful and joyous comedies; thirdly, from 1601 to about 1608, the period of grave or bitter comedies and of the great tragedies; last, from about 1608 to 1611 or 1613, the period of the romantic plays, which are at once grave and glad, serene and beautiful poems . . .⁴⁵

McMullan, who traces the influence of Dowden's adoption of the periodic life-structure model for Shakespeare, has argued that the romantic

idea of Shakespeare's late writing can be seen as a critical construct at odds with the conditions and contexts of early modern dramatic authorship. But what of the idea of early writing? Is it too a critical construct? If so, from its beginnings with Malone, 'early Shakespeare', though its contents are contested, operates as a sort of shorthand for works considered qualitatively inferior to those which are written later, and the explanation offered for their relative inferiority is both Shakespeare's youth and inexperience. But this ready alignment of merit and authorial biography is shown to be demonstrably unstable. Coleridge, an expert reader of the Shakespeare canon, thought that *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline* were juvenilia ('his laid-by Labor of Youth'), only first performed once Shakespeare had gained 'celebrity as [a] Poet' (i.e. after the publication of *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*) and theatrical weight as a 'manager' in his company (the Lord Chamberlain's Men). Here, Coleridge attempts to explain away what he perceives as the relative merits of these late tragicomedies by recourse to the author's age and biography. For Coleridge, as for Malone, 'early Shakespeare' equates to inferior Shakespeare.

Unlike with the chronologies of Malone and Coleridge, all of the works considered 'early' by Dowden are now generally accepted to date to the mid-1590s at the latest: *Titus Andronicus* and *1 Henry VI*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *2 and 3 Henry VI*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Dowden constructs a narrative for the early years:

The first [period], which I named *In the workshop*, was the period during which Shakspeare was learning his trade as a dramatic craftsman. Starting at the age of twenty-four or twenty-six, he made rapid progress, and cannot but have been aware of this. The works of Shakspeare's youth – experiments in various directions – are all marked by the presence of vivacity, cleverness, delight in beauty, and a quick enjoyment of existence. If an industrious apprentice, he was also a gay and courageous one.⁴⁶

This is the first attempt to outline and define an idea of early Shakespeare by reference to a chronology for the extant works. Dowden's 'starting at the age of twenty-four or twenty-six' corresponds with his dating parameters for the earliest play in his chronology: *Titus Andronicus*, 'touched by Shakspeare' (i.e. only written in part by Shakespeare), 1588–90. Dowden is struck by the 'rapid progress' made by Shakespeare over this period, for though he is tentative in his praise for *Titus Andronicus* and *1 Henry VI*,

both products of co-authorship in Dowden's view, he lauds both *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Comedy of Errors*, and, perhaps surprisingly, praises *Two Gentlemen of Verona* as the best of these early works. (This was not typical of early scholarship about the play.) Each of the plays in the early, early period is seen, however, to be still somewhat deficient in ways; even the broadly praised *Two Gentlemen of Verona* is thought to be 'in parts slightly worked out' (68). Dowden's thoughtful readings of the early works – *Love's Labour's Lost* is 'a dramatic plea on behalf of nature and of common sense against all that is unreal and affected' (63) – attest to his ability to qualitatively evaluate these plays against the rest of the extant canon. However, Dowden's readings are innately bound up with his own convictions about the chronology of Shakespeare's works and how we might read the works biographically. Thus, *Love's Labour's Lost*, which Dowden places first in the chronology, is 'precisely such an one as a clever young man might imagine, who had come lately from the country' (63). This reading is instructive in two interconnected ways: first, his evaluation of the play and its merits are tied up with the chronology he offers, and, second, the chronology he offers and what it implies about Shakespeare's age and experience is tied up with his evaluation of the play and its merits. Just as the Romantics ahistorically romanticized Shakespeare's romantic late period, Dowden here constructs an idea of young Shakespeare, innocent yet sharply intelligent, protesting against things 'unreal and affected', who fits the mould of someone 'in the workshop' who 'made rapid progress'. A narrative of early Shakespeare is thereby constructed from the chronology he proposes, one where, stylistically and dramaturgically, the poet-dramatist is to speedily develop and mature from his innocent, inexperienced state in first writing *Love's Labour's Lost*. The only problem for Dowden's narrative is that *Love's Labour's Lost* was written *c.* late 1594 or early 1595, by which time Shakespeare had already composed or contributed to eight or more plays.

My goal here is not to assault this critical tradition with the benefit of hindsight, but rather to highlight how in the history of scholarship about the early canon there has been a persistent connection made between merit (or demerit) and chronology: the earlier the work, the lesser the value. While this connection seems to make sense at an intuitive level – that an author improves perceptibly over time – we have seen examples where works have been positioned early in Shakespeare's chronology, such as *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *Love's Labour's Lost*, because of their perceived lesser value. The connection is therefore not intuitive, or at least it has not been for expert readers of Shakespeare in earlier generations. There

is then a longstanding idea of early Shakespeare that, notwithstanding the works identified as early, is equated with lesser merit. Hermann Ulrici, who persisted with the idea that *Pericles* was a 'youthful production', characterized the works of Shakespeare's early period as exhibiting 'a certain youthful awkwardness, harshness, and immoderation'.⁴⁷ For Ulrici, 'the young poet has not yet succeeded in gathering the multifarious threads into one centre' (222–3). This is the critical construct of early Shakespeare, the space where the veneration of Shakespeare and his greatest works meets the quandary posed by how to describe his minor works; age and inexperience, real or perceived, helps to explain away the lesser lights of the canon.

But there is also a very real 'early Shakespeare' quite apart from the critical construct. Shakespeare did write plays and poetry in the late 1580s and early 1590s and at least some of these works survive. We are now in a position where, broadly speaking, the overall parameters for Shakespeare's chronology are largely agreed upon (see Chapter 2); there is much greater disagreement about which works Shakespeare wrote or co-wrote, and the identity of his co-authors. For all readers of this generation, there is less need for such intuition about which works are 'early'. Here is the list of plays, and their dates, that Taylor and I propose Shakespeare wrote by the end of 1594:

The Two Gentlemen of Verona (1588)

Arden of Faversham (1588)

Titus Andronicus (1589)

2 *Henry VI* (1590)

3 *Henry VI* (1590)

The Taming of the Shrew (1591)

Edward III (1592)

Richard III (1592)

Comedy of Errors (1594)

Love's Labour's Lost (1594)

Studies by Martin Wiggins and Douglas Bruster and Geneviève Smith, while differing on some dates, each put the composition of these same ten plays in the same 1588–1594 period; the starkest difference between any one play date is *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, which Wiggins dates to 1594.⁴⁸ We can, then, begin to write with some authority about what Shakespeare *actually* wrote during the period designated as 'early'.

What are the defining features of these early works? McMullan asks: 'is late style primarily a phenomenon of ageing' [and] 'is late style involuntary, something that, as it were, descends upon a creative individual out of the

blue at a certain stage of his life?' (61). Might the same questions be asked of early writing and early style? Are these not also a phenomenon of ageing and cognitive development? In concluding, I want therefore to focus especially on the eight plays written by 1592 and the break for the plague poems. There will be no grand narrative offered, simply a summary of what he does and does not do and what we can reasonably infer from this.

The history genre is clearly dominant (50 per cent), but there are also two comedies and two tragedies. There is also remarkable range in terms of setting – Italy, France, London and rural England, ancient Rome – and source material – the writings of Ariosto (*Two Gentlemen*), Holinshed and other chronicle histories (*Arden* and the histories), Jorge de Montemayor (*The Shrew*), and, among others, Ovid, Livy, and Seneca (*Titus Andronicus*). Range is, I think, a key thing to consider here. Rather than deem the approach scattershot, the plays completed in Shakespeare's early career reveal an author with an extraordinary command over an extraordinary range of material. The effect of this is lessened when drawn out over a twenty-six-year career; of course, it just makes good sense that Shakespeare wrote across genre, period, and form, in having a hand in forty-plus plays. But, if one accepts the modified chronology, in the four or five years covering 1588 to late 1592, Shakespeare demonstrates an ability to write in each of the major genres – English history, continental comedies, and tragedy (Roman and familial) – which would define his subsequent career. As a point of comparison, Marlowe, whose entire dramatic career (c. 1585–93) corresponds almost exactly with this period, focuses nearly exclusively on tragedy, with his generic experimentations in history (his contributions to the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Edward II*) tending towards the tragic *rota fortunae* narrative (think, Jack Cade in the garden or Edward in his cell). Similarly, John Lyly wrote what might be considered comedy almost exclusively (see Chapter 7 for Lyly's generic experimentation).⁴⁹ George Peele, who demonstrates his range in tragedies such as the *Battle of Alcazar*, histories such as *Edward I*, and comedies like *The Old Wife's Tale*, might be the best comparison to early Shakespeare. But in a period when generic range was not a given, Shakespeare, the '*Johannes factotum*' identified in *Greene's Groats-worth of Wit*, was somewhat of an outlier among his distinguished peers. And, even allowing for the comparison in terms of generic diversity, Peele had a failed career, dying rejected and penniless in the mid-1590s. Whatever one thinks of Shakespeare's early plays, and few would dispel the dramatic merits of *2 Henry VI*, *The Shrew*, and *Richard III*, what stands out here is Shakespeare's willingness to experiment.

This claim offers nothing new: Dowden had identified experimentation as a defining feature of the early canon. What has now changed is that the co-authored *Arden of Faversham* and *Edward III* are also included, and that further co-authors have been identified in at least five of the eight plays. In his practices as co-author, Shakespeare again demonstrates a willingness to experiment. This does not necessarily reflect well upon him. While it is clear that others were willing to work with Shakespeare, the nature of his early forays into co-authorship probably invited the invective of the 'beautified with our feathers' remark. While there is little doubt that *Arden of Faversham* and *Edward III* are the fruits of what we might consider 'normal' dramatic collaborations in the period – in that two or more dramatists worked together, dividing the play between them, to produce a composite work – the case is significantly murkier for *Titus Andronicus* and the *Henry VI* plays. For the former, Shakespeare most likely took over an incomplete script by George Peele, and the two men probably never worked together collaboratively.⁵⁰ Peele is one of the aggrieved noted in *Groats-worth*. It is plausible to imagine that Shakespeare never gave Peele due credit for his share, whether financially or otherwise. The other two mentioned in the tract, Marlowe and, almost certainly, Thomas Nashe, were involved in the composition of one or more of the *Henry VI* plays. It is now proposed that Shakespeare reworked all three of the *Henry VI* plays in the mid-1590s after the formation of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Who can tell the nature of Shakespeare's involvement in composing the first versions of these plays? But, however one chooses to interpret the opaque allusions in *Groats-worth*, there is little doubt (a) that it refers negatively to Shakespeare, (b) that this negativity relates to how Shakespeare has used the writings of others, and (c) that the others implicated are working dramatists in the late 1580s and early 1590s, all of whose writings are present within plays later ascribed in full to Shakespeare (in the 1623 Folio). After the plague outbreak of 1592–3, and following the death of Marlowe, Shakespeare appears not to have collaborated with others until either *The Tragedy of Sejanus* (c. 1603) or the revision of *Sir Thomas More* (c. 1603–4), a gap of more than a decade in either case. Either something went very right – that is, that Shakespeare had the opportunity, security, and/or confidence to continue to write plays alone – or very wrong – that is, that his experience in early collaboration and co-authorship was not something he wished to continue. Most likely, the truth falls somewhere in between.

Early in his career, Shakespeare experiments with genre. He is productive. He writes for various companies, and his plays are performed at various venues. He is willing to work with others, though he might not always play fair in doing so. He borrows liberally, seeking advantage

through the writings of others. His early plays, even his comedies, are almost invariably dark in tone, tending towards moments of electrifying tension. His first two comedies include scenes of attempted rape (*Two Gentlemen*) and domestic abuse (*The Shrew*); his first two tragedies showcase one of the most infamous cases of murder in early modern England (*Arden of Feversham*) and scenes involving sexual assault, dismemberment, and cannibalism (*Titus Andronicus*). His first histories take on the reign of the king at the centre of the Wars of the Roses (*Henry VI* plays), leading up to the notorious usurpation of the crown and murder of the princes (*Richard III*), before turning to the reign of one of England's most-beloved kings, vanquisher of the French, and father to a cult hero (*Edward III*). To spell this out, Shakespeare's earliest surviving plays are typified by their tendency towards sensation and controversy. Like Marlowe, he is someone who writes plays that will be noticed, or, perhaps better still, he writes plays that cannot be ignored. Writing in 1875, Dowden thought that Shakespeare 'began, if not timidly, at least cautiously and tentatively'; he imagined him as 'obliging and free from self-assertion; he is waiting his time; he is not yet sure of himself'.⁵¹ This idea of early Shakespeare seems to me wrong, or at least at odds with what Shakespeare wrote at this time. Shakespeare's early career, if it can be reduced to anything meaningful from the surviving materials, is a study in ambition.

Notes

1. I am deeply grateful to several colleagues for their feedback about parts or the entirety of this essay when in draft format, including Kate Chedzoy, Sarah Dustagheer, Andrew Hadfield, Andy Kesson, Roslyn L. Knutson, Andrew J. Power, Catherine Richardson, and David Rundle.
2. George Wither, *Iuuenilia* (London, 1622; STC# 25911), sig. ¶^r.
3. The term *iuuenilia* existed in Ancient Rome as neuter plural adjective for 'youthful', without any specific literary connotations. However, Ovid, *Tristia* 2.339 (and cf. 4.10.57) does use the phrase *iuuenalia carmina* to mean his youthful poems. But when *iuuenilia/iuuenalia* was used in classical Latin as a substantive, it would mean more generally 'youthful things'. In early modern Latin usage, an author is much more likely to talk of *primitiae* (translated as 'first fruits'), which has strong literary connotations, but does not suggest early age (*puer/adulescens/iuuenis*). The first collection to be titled 'juvenilia' was by Marc-Antoine Muret, printed in 1552. For more on the origin of the category, see Kirk Summers 'The Origins of the Title of Muret's "Juvenilia"', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 10:3/4 (2004), 407–15. I am grateful to David Rundle for his several insights about this terminology.

4. Of course, many poets mourned the death of Henry, including Webster, Tourneur, and Heywood, but Wither set a new bar for expressing grief: along with forty-five elegies, Wither included a macabre dialogue between the spirit of the dead prince and the figure of Great Britain, and a Latin–English ‘Sonnet of Death’. See George Wither, *Prince Henries obsequies or Mournefull elegies vpon his death vvith a supposed inter-locution betweene the ghost of Prince Henrie and Great Brittain* (London, 1612; STC# 25915).
5. There may be a better explanation for Wither’s repackaging of his ‘early’ works in this way. Wither was probably motivated to issue a new collection of his works as competition to Thomas Walkley’s *The Workes of Master John Wither*, published in 1620 (STC# 25890). This unauthorized edition contains several works also to be found in Wither’s *Juvenilia*, including the popular *A Satyre and Epithalamion*. See Michelle O’Callaghan, ‘Wither, George (1588–1667)’, ODNB; online edn, May 2014.
6. Laurie Langbauer, *The Juvenile Tradition: Young Writers and Prolepsis, 1750–1835* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
7. As one biographer observes, such a label seems unjust ‘in some cases’ for a collection that includes the ‘great poem . . . “Mariana”’, Christopher Ricks, ‘Tennyson, Alfred, first Baron Tennyson (1809–1892)’, ODNB; online edn, May 2006.
8. See Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster’s collection, *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
9. The one-time existence of this poem was confirmed by Joyce and Joyce’s brother, Stanislaus. See www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/a-ghost-story-james-joyce-s-lost-poem-1.1363055.
10. The novel was not published until 1919. See Hugo Brunner, ‘Ashford, Margaret Mary Julia [Daisy] (1881–1972)’, rev. ODNB; online edn, September 2004.
11. Private communication. I am grateful to Kate Chedgzoy for her feedback about this subject.
12. For Lumley, Paget, and Berkeley, see Chedgzoy, ‘Make Me a Poet, and I’ll Quickly Be a Man: Masculinity, Pedagogy and Poetry in the English Renaissance’, *Renaissance Studies* 27 (2013), 592–611. For Fane’s MS writings, see Chedgzoy, ‘Playing with Cupid : Gender, Sexuality and Adolescence’ in Diana E. Henderson, ed., *Alternative Shakespeares* (London: Routledge, 2007), 138–57.
13. The description of the poet, cited in Munro, appears before a dedicatory poem by ‘J. B.’ to Jordan’s *Poetical Varieties, or Variety of Fancies* (London, 1637; STC# 14677), sig. B1^v. See Lucy Munro, ‘Infant Poets and Child Players: The Literary Performance of Childhood in Caroline England’ in Adrienne E. Gavin, ed., *The Child in British Literature – Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 54–68.
14. Andrew Gurr, ‘Shakespeare’s First Poem: Sonnet 145’, *Essays in Criticism* 21 (1971), 221–6; Stephen Booth, *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

15. And the poem is too short to produce a convincing determination on either a specific date or about its authorship. See Francis X. Connor's conclusions about sample size in 'Potential Shakespeare: The Poetic Apocrypha and Methods of Modern Attribution' in *NOS Authorship Companion*, 107–22.
16. As I am only including plays performed in the London playhouses, I exclude Thomas Hughes's *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, performed before Elizabeth I at Greenwich on 28 February 1588.
17. One apt example, George Peele's *David and Bethsheba*, could, as Martin Wiggins notes, be dated anywhere between 1584 and 1594. Wiggins offers a best guess of 1590 but, noting the play's five-act structure, which he observes is abandoned after 1590 in commercial theatre, he would place Peele's play at the 'cusp' of this development. That is, 1590 is much more likely to be the upper point in the dating limit, and the play could just as easily have been composed in the late 1580s as the mooted terminus date of 1590. Only a detailed analysis of Peele's surviving works could help establish their relative priority, but even that would leave residual uncertainties as none of the plays in the Peele canon are fixed chronologically. The issues with dating Peele's play, in terms of first composition, completion, and first performance, each of which might be different, are symptomatic of broader concerns in dating surviving early modern plays.
18. E. A. J. Honigmann, *Shakespeare: The 'Lost Years'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).
19. Meres's reference to *Henry the 4* (sig. Oo2^v) might plausibly refer to both parts of that play. Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia* (London, 1598; STC# 17834).
20. Shakespeare may or may not have been involved in the original composition of *1 Henry VI*; see Taylor and Loughnane, 'Canon and Chronology', 513–17, which proposes that Nashe, Marlowe, and another first wrote the play and that it was later revised by Shakespeare (c. 1595).
21. I am including *Arden of Faversham* and *Edward III* here because they were included in my counts. Wiggins dates these plays, respectively, to 1590 and 1593, though he does not record Shakespeare's co-authorship of the former (*Catalogue*, #846). For *Edward III*, he notes that 'some scenes [are] probably by William Shakespeare' (#952).
22. S. Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 76.
23. For foundational work on 'early Shakespeare', see: F. P. Wilson, *Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953); Alfred Harbage, 'Love's Labour's Lost and the Early Shakespeare', *Philological Quarterly* 41:1 (1962), 18–36, A. C. Hamilton, *The Early Shakespeare* (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1967); Emrys Jones 'Reclaiming Early Shakespeare', *Essays in Criticism* 51:1 (2001), 35–50; and David Bevington, 'The Early Shakespeare' in Arthur F. Kinney, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
24. The four works described as juvenilia are, in chronological order, *The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphrased* (1597), *Microcynicon: Six Snarling Satires* (1599), *The*

- Ghost of Lucrece* (1600), and ‘Simon Smellknavé’ (1601), adapted by Middleton in *The Penniless Parliament of Threadbare Poets*.
25. Tom Rutter, *The Cambridge Introduction to Christopher Marlowe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 93.
 26. Paul Menzer, ‘Marlowe Now’ in Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith, eds., *Christopher Marlowe in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 357–65: ‘As for the poems, they are all juvenilia – smutty Ovidian translations, a witty though unfinished epyllion, a counter-imperial Lucanian epic, and pastoral fantasies about horny shepherds’ (363).
 27. See, for example, Roma Gill, ‘Marlowe’s Virgil: Dido Queene of Carthage’, *Review of English Studies* 28:110 (1977), 141–55, p. 142; and Sara Munson Deats, *Sex, Gender and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997), 89–90.
 28. Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith, ‘Introduction’ in Bartel and Smith, eds., *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, 1.
 29. Alexander Pope, *The Works of Mr William Shakespeare*, 6 vols. (London, 1725), 1: 155.
 30. Samuel Johnson, in *The Plays of William Shakespeare . . . to which are added notes by Sam Johnson* (London, 1765). Johnson did, however, praise the play’s use of maxims, and contended that ‘few [of his other plays] have more lines or passages which, singly considered, are eminently beautiful’ (180 n.).
 31. Geoffrey Bullough, ‘The Two Gentlemen of Verona’ in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1964), 1: 203–11 (p. 210).
 32. Stanley Wells, ‘The Failure of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*’, *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 99 (1963), 161–73.
 33. Edward Ravenscroft, ‘To the Reader’ to *Titus Andronicus* (London, 1687), sig. A2^r; Edmond Malone, *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare*, ed. Edmond Malone (London, 1790), 10: 377; Edward Capell, ‘Introduction’, *Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*, 10 vols. (London, 1767–8), 1: 41.
 34. *Miscellany Poems* (1684; WING D2314) sig. V2^v. The corrupt extant text of the co-authored *Pericles* (with George Wilkins) may help explain Dryden’s judgement, but the play is certainly written later than *Othello*. For the dating of *Othello* (1604) and *Pericles* (1608), see Taylor and Loughnane, ‘Canon and Chronology’, 553–4, 569–71.
 35. Hence, no James Shirley or Richard Brome, whose first works date to the 1620s; but John Ford is included as he was writing professionally as early as 1606, even though his first play, *The Witch of Edmonton*, only dates to 1621. Philip Massinger just sneaks in with his earliest work, an unidentified play, recorded in 1613.
 36. This takes out the incongruous figure of George Wilkins (*d.* 1618), Shakespeare’s one-time co-author; we simply know too little about his (very) short-lived career and his overall life and times. This also rules out Gervase Markham (one extant play) and Edward Sharpham (two extant plays). I have included Cyril Tourneur, for whom we have only extant play

in full, because we have firm information about two other plays he wrote or co-authored. Doubtless some will find issue with these criteria and caveats. Markham and Sharpham could have been included, as could have, for that matter, such dramatist as Henry Porter, Lewis Machin, and William Sampson. A line had to be drawn in the sand somewhere, and the objective is to get a representative sample of dramatists working in this period; we simply know more about the life, output, and careers of some than others.

37. Information for dates of birth and/or year of baptism, burial, and death are taken from entries in the ODNB.
38. Meres lists Jonson as among those best for tragedy. Jonson's two surviving tragedies, *Sejanus* and *Cataline* post-date Meres's work, so at least one early tragedy is lost. There are no extant pre-1598 comedies by Heywood. Either would be the author's first known play, and as Meres seems unlikely to simply invent this, I have followed Wiggins in including his dating parameters for these lost works. But for the maximal count, I have not taken the lower date estimate (which is simply the earliest possible) and instead used Wiggins's estimate, which takes into account the writers' other activities. This is an imperfect way to proceed, but, again, if I simply included the earliest known play, then this would misrepresent two authors who evidently had already established reputations as dramatists working in certain genres. Heywood offers further problems with the date for his latest play, as discussed below.
39. The passage in Dekker also suggests that Kyd, Watson, and Achelley wrote for the Queen's Men, formed in March 1583 (at least it notes that they wrote plays in which John Bentley, a note Queen's Men actor, performed in). All in all, Kyd may well have been writing plays before 1583, but his dramatic career almost certainly did not begin in 1587 with *The Spanish Tragedy*.
40. See Philip J. Finkelpearl's *Court and Country Politics in the Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) for the theory that Beaumont retired due to illness rather than his marriage.
41. Gordon McMullan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing: Authorship in the Proximity of Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2.
42. On Malone and the idea of early Shakespeare, see Lucy Munro, 'Young Shakespeare/Late Shakespeare: The Case of Pericles', *Actes des congrès de la Société française Shakespeare* 34 (2016): <http://journals.openedition.org/shakespeare/3668>
43. Edmond Malone, An Attempt to Ascertain the Order in which the Plays Attributed to Shakspeare Were Written, in Samuel Johnson and George Steevens, eds., *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, 6 vols. (London, 1778), vol. 1.
44. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1808–1819: On Literature*, ed. R. A. Foakes, 2 vols. in Kathleen Coburn, gen. ed., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: Routledge, 1987), 1: 373–4.
45. Dowden first outlined his ideas dividing Shakespeare's life into distinct periods in *Shakspeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1875), especially in Chapter II, 'The Growth of Shakespeare's Mind and Art', 37–83; he develops this thesis further in the above-quoted

- Shakspere* in the Literature Primer series (London: Macmillan and Co., 1877), 47–8.
46. Dowden, *Shakspere* (1877), 58.
 47. Hermann Ulrici, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art: History and Character of Shakspeare's Plays*, trans. L. Dora Schmitz, 2 vols. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1876), 1: 222–3. Originally printed in German in 1869.
 48. Wiggins, *Catalogue, passim*; Douglas Bruster and Geneviève Smith, 'A New Chronology for Shakespeare's Plays', *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 31:2 (2016; advance online publication 2014), 301–20.
 49. Lyly's *Love's Metamorphosis* (c. 1590; see Wiggins, *Catalogue*, #841), while still comic, might be better described as an allegory in pastoral form.
 50. See Loughnane, 'Re-editing'.
 51. Dowden, *Shakspere* (1875), 53.