

Matthew Steggle. *Digital Humanities and the Lost Drama of Early Modern England: Ten Case Studies*

Matthew Steggle. [*Digital Humanities and the Lost Drama of Early Modern England: Ten Case Studies*](#). Farnham, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2015. x, 200p., ill. ISBN 9781409444145. US \$110.00 (hardback).

In [*Digital Humanities and the Lost Drama of Early Modern England: Ten Case Studies*](#), Matthew Steggle applies his characteristic talent for original argument and detailed research, well established through his studies of dramatic personation (1998) and Richard Brome (2004), to yet another area, lost plays. He considers the new resources that we can use to reconstruct the principal features of their plots and staging.

The study's brilliance, and relevance to book-historical scholarship, emerges out of its two central propositions: often a play's title can be read as a document of performance (cum Tiffany Stern), and even a partial or a non-authorial title can signal elements of a play's story, if not particular plot devices, historical period, and location; and the new research approaches encouraged by lookups on [EEBO-TCP](#) and *Google Books* (spelling-normalized queries, dictionary files, proximity operators, wildcards, and truncation) ought to be paired up with the documentary evidence at hand (the disembodied titles) to substantiate digital searching as a valid, if frequently unexamined, Digital Humanities subfield.

Steggle proceeds to make this case with a body of evidence from three historical sources in mind: the collection of account records, property costs, and play investments kept by the theatrical entrepreneur and impresario Philip Henslowe, informally known as Henslowe's *Diary*; the licencing records for legalized performance in England between 1623 and 1673, maintained by George Buck and Henry Herbert, Masters of the Revels, known as Herbert's *Office Book* (reconstructed from isolated, surviving fragments); and the Stationers' Registers, of which no introduction is required for readers of *SHARP News*. Investigating, through close readings, ten such titles, he effectively demonstrates a number of prior occasions of reductive or erroneous "lumping," "splitting," or the creation of "ghost plays," for which modern search tools provide better answers.

For example, Steggle shows that *Richard the Confessor* is a saints play rather than a royal history play, despite the title's appearance in Henslowe above "William the Conqueror" (43-60). He determines this to be the case owing to the result frequency of "Richardi confessi" and similar collocations on EEBO. From here he is able to localize the drama to the region where Richard lived (Chichester, West Sussex, England) and to historicize it within the epoch of that Richard's life (c. 1197-1253).

Another great example is that of the play formerly known as *Henry the Una* (c. 1619), and which now, thanks to Steggle, can be properly titled *Henry the Unable* (119-32). Steggle recognizes "Henry the Una" as a truncated title from a charred leaf of paper originating from Herbert's lost *Office Book*. In this exceptional case, Steggle is not only able to identify the historical personage of that unfortunate sobriquet, Henry IV of Castile, great-grandson of John of Gaunt and half-uncle of Catherine of Aragon, but he is able, from the full title, to present a solid case for ascribing the play to William Rowley, putting

it in the Princeâ€™s Menâ€™s repertory, and giving it an approximate date of composition in the mid-1610s (after Englandâ€™s notorious impotence sex-scandal of Frances Howard and Robert Devereux).

Most brilliantly, this book offers some very clever approaches for reconstructing the use of historical stage properties, an aspect of performativity that is generally overlooked due to the authorial habit of noting minimal direction in performance texts. In supposing the play recorded as â€œbellendonâ€• to be, in actuality, a dramatic account of the life and death of the infamous â€œBelin Dunâ€• (Dunstable, England; 13th century?), a robber, viciously executed, known for evading capture through underground tunnels, Steggle clarifies that a property entry in Hensloweâ€™s *Diary*, one for â€œBelendon stable,â€• denotes a representation of a subterranean hideout, not a table (77-88; esp. 87).

Similarly, by showing that a bizarre, illegible entry in Henslowe, â€œAlbere Galles,â€• refers to a siege play of the city of SzÃ©kesfehÃ©rvÃ©r (Latin place name, *Alberegalis*), Steggle elucidates the otherwise-disconnected prop-purchases that Henslowe made immediately before, and around the time of, the title-entry (101-17; esp. 110-12). In retrospect, Hensloweâ€™s purchases of lances, a flag, and several other items, serve to justify Steggleâ€™s ingenious interpretation.

In short, Steggleâ€™s monograph is a keenly-argued, rigorously-researched study, advocating and demonstrating how to use emergent technologies, and growing textual repositories of searchable plays, to answer age-old questions about particular lost plays. Although many of its examples are esoteric â€“ a testament to Steggleâ€™s exceptional knowledge of his subject matter â€“ its methodologies, and underlining philosophical assumptions of the powers and relevancies of searching, are universal. Read what Steggle has to say, more than once.

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