

David McInnis and Matthew Steggle, eds. *Lost Plays in Shakespeare's England*

David McInnis and Matthew Steggle, eds. [Lost Plays in Shakespeare's England](#) *Early Modern Literature in History*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. xiv, 296 p. ISBN 9780333714720. UK £60.00 (hardcover).

The topic of the lost plays of the early modern period is becoming, finally, of increasing interest. Projects such as the online [Lost Plays Database](#), which collects information for lost plays in England from 1570 to 1642, have in the last few years promoted important discussions in the field. It is out of such projects that scholars have realised that much of the past literature on lost plays is antiquated in its categorisation of plays and in its treatment of the documents in which references can be found. The problem of designating a play as "lost" is that the distinction is so often false or misleading. A lost play might be known by a reference in extant plays or commonplace books, in the diaries of contemporaries, in account books or inventories, and in the form of marginalia, summaries, single-sentence references or by a note on the title. The designation of a play as simply "lost" therefore serves to unduly flatten the playing field: a play mentioned in passing is not the same beast as a play that has been summarised, mentioned in commonplace books, and found in inventories of stock or props, yet we are coerced into seeing both as inherently the same through their shared fate.

The collection of thirteen essays edited by David McInnis and Matthew Steggle, *Lost Plays in Shakespeare's England*, seeks to redress the way in which such plays are categorised, identified, and discussed in order to improve scholarly knowledge of playwrights' and playing companies' overall dramatic output. As a starting point they argue that some 543 extant plays cannot be representative of the high loss rate of play manuscripts "which might (possibly) be anything up to 2,500 plays, of which (possibly) some 744 are identifiable as lost. They also note that survival rates do not take into consideration manuscripts representing the different stages of writing and production" which in part means that many versions of extant plays are also lost. What, then, of the "invisible drama" that must have played such an important part in the shaping of early modern drama, dramatic genres, dramatists, and audiences?

The first five essays in the volume discuss the nature of a lost play. William Proctor Williams asks if there are "degrees of being lost" (17) and goes on to suggest new, descriptive, categories for lost plays, as "class 0" (play mentioned once but not by author or original performer; all subsequent references drawn from this one mention), "class 1" (play mentioned in two or more contemporary records; such mentions would have required the existence of a full manuscript), and "class 2" (play mentioned in significant ways; may have been held in the past in a known repository). Roslyn L. Knutson critiques the designation of "cur" (such as "cur-Hamlet") as preventing such plays from having a legitimate place in the early modern theatrical marketplace. Andrew Gurr discusses the problems of a lost play's imagined content and what the mere title of a lost play might (or might not) tell us about what it contained. Matthew Steggle suggests that we need to rethink how we confidently talk about extant plays as "surviving," for, he argues, all early modern plays are largely lost, as so many early drafts and other forms of copy, distinct from the extant play, have not survived. John H. Astington argues that many extant plays might in their categorisation benefit from being split into the components of their documentary history (such as the "good" and "bad")

quartos of *Hamlet*) in order to best describe the full range of the performance and reception of plays.

The next seven essays focus on working with lost plays. David McInnis offers the backstage plot of *Fortune's Tennis* as a case study of the methodology, aims and limitations of working with lost plays. Misha Teramura takes on Thomas Heywood's suggestion that plays provide audiences with an education in English history by categorising lost plays in Philip Henslowe's diary. Specifically, she looks at the plays concerned with Brute, the great-grandson of Aeneas. In a similar theme, Paul Whitfield White collects and assesses the Lord Admiral's lost Arthurian plays. Lawrence Manley looks at the collective repertory of the Lord Strange's Men, including their lost plays. Michael J. Hirrel discusses the influence of Thomas Watson on the evolution of early modern drama, even though none of his plays are extant in English. Christopher Matusiak seeks out the artistic conversations that engaged playwrights and players through tracing the recurrence of stage friars in lost plays. Christi Spain-Savage examines the line in *Merry Wives of Windsor* concerned with the old woman of Brentford in relation to a lost play, *Friar Fox and Gillian of Brentford* (1599). The final essay is by Martin Wiggins, author of the *British Drama* catalogue: a multi-volume project that includes the cataloguing of known lost plays. This essay ensures that the volume goes full circle by building on ideas forwarded by William Proctor Williams, and concerns ways in which research might move forward. Wiggins points out that most lost plays are not lost in that they are not extant, but in that they are not *known* to be extant before identifying ways in which a researcher might find these lost plays – including finding a suitable archive, looking everywhere possible, and not being satisfied with what is found.

In all, this is a glorious volume that does justice to the burgeoning interest in so-called lost plays, with not a weak contribution in sight. This volume will serve to partner any focussed look at specific lost plays, as well as the broader catalogues and databases published in recent years.

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