

Tiffany Stern, ed. *Rethinking Theatrical Documents in Shakespeare's England*. The Arden Shakespeare. London: Bloomsbury, 2020. Pp 287. Hardback \$100. ISBN: 9781350051348. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350051379>.

Roslyn L. Knutson, David McInnis, and Matthew Steggle, eds. *Loss and the Literary Culture of Shakespeare's Time*. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. Pp 266. Hardback \$109.99. ISBN: 9783030368661. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36867-8>.

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Two volumes released in 2020 expand and reify how we study the relationship between early modern English performance and its documentary leavings. Responding to Tiffany Stern's ground-breaking *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (2009), *Rethinking Theatrical Documents in Shakespeare's England* is the result of a Folger Shakespeare Library Symposium that brought together book and theatre historians to explore ways of simultaneously keeping in view page and stage, articulating the rich complexities of their conjoined relationship. Likewise, *Loss and the Literary Culture of Shakespeare's Time* continues the methodological discussion inaugurated by David McInnis and Matthew Steggle's *Lost Plays in Shakespeare's England* (2014) to consider a continuum of the paratexts of lost plays, poems, ballads, and other lost things. Viewing the early modern English entertainment marketplace as an 'media ecosystem', to use Steggle's phrase, together the volumes elicit an edge effect, demonstrating the great diversity of new questions that can be asked in that region where two adjacent ecosystems — lost and unknown, print and performed — overlap (174).

An invaluable contribution of *Rethinking Theatrical Documents* is its expansion of both what constitutes the stuff of plays and how such play stuffs were manipulated. Lucy Munro offers a self-help manual for aspiring Jacobean playwrights, drawn from the letters of Robert Daborne to Philip Henslowe in the early seventeenth century. In what will become an essential teaching text illuminating how a play went from conception to performance, the chapter also models techniques for using epistolary evidence beyond attribution. Crucially, letters themselves are always performative: 'they are directed towards the ultimate performance of the plays they help to propel into existence, and the financial and aesthetic rewards that performance will bring' while simultaneously 'performances in themselves,

aiming to produce short-term financial gain in the shape of advances or loans' (18). As essential is the argument Holger Schott Syme proffers that repertory scheduling may have been driven by a need to manage the labour and exhaustion of playing company personnel. If comedies tended to distribute number of lines spoken across an ensemble while tragedies concentrated that work in one or two leads, then generic diversity enabled companies to spread that workload in two dimensions: across a week of playing and amongst its members. Such an argument is not only commensurate with the growing body of scholarship around distributed cognition promoted by Evelyn Tribble and others, but also provides an embodied framework for later performance collectives and their rehearsal practices, among them David Garrick.¹ James J. Marino neatly offers a pairing to this premise by illustrating the practical limits of play-text revision: what could and could not be easily added, revised, or removed given the parameters of cue-script design and part-based memorization. Accounting for players' working practices, Marino launches a new way of approaching textual variants by considering the greater ease of revising single parts and speech middles as opposed to riskier changes to cues, stichomythic dialogue, and wholesale truncations that might impede doubling. All three chapters provide new, essential first principles for how scholars invested in performance narrate the stuff of playmaking.

Sitting comfortably in that foreshore between the seeming sea of documents and sands of performance are those contributions most visual in their evidence. My own delight at Steggle's detailed discussion of title- and scene-boards is a useful reminder of the ways in which theories of a bare stage, now widely discounted, still loom. Using the Blackfriars Playhouse at the American Shakespeare Center as a canvas, Steggle employs archival extrapolations to superimpose examples of these painted signs used to convey plays' titles and locations. Crucial is the observation that these 'multiple written signs, at different heights' had a meaningful 'spatial relationship to one another', operating in their micro-ecosystem as a 'hierarchy' of written information around the playing area (121, 111). If such reconstructions rely on the assumption that paratexts preserve traces of theatrical practice, Claire M.L. Bourne extends this question to printed playbooks themselves. She surveys a range of techniques — from typographic parenthesis and capitula to typeface and symbols — wherein *mise-en-page* is mobilized to accord with 'non-lexical stage business' (195). Laura Estill then productively and powerfully dismantles these hierarchies altogether through the lens of dramatic extracts, reifying our sense of plays as conglomerations of parts with songs, prologues, backstage-plots, and scene-boards among them. Articulating centuries of Shakespeare-centric habits of cataloguing, Estill provides a survey of major extract catalogues culminating

in a call for collaboration between archivists and scholars to improve catalogue entries. She additionally provides a catalogue of the many digitization endeavors now underway in commensurate areas, with the *Database of Dramatic Extracts (DEx)* and the *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts (CELM)* as key resources of overlooked evidence of play-reading.

As counterweight to the methodological ballast of the volume are more notional explorations of play stuffs. For example, András Kiséry approaches dramatic extracts as a variant form of colloquial commonplacings, seeing them as evidence to a range of motives for note-taking from plays. Sonia Massai and Heidi Craig consider the possible effects of play revivals, playhouse closures, and industry trends on the rates of publication of prologues and epilogues in printed books. Stern herself considers the extent to which the inclusion of not only snatches but sustained performances of ballads in plays were an intentional aspect of playhouse marketing, reaching beyond the performance event to include locations of singer-balladwrights around the playhouses. Sarah Wall-Randell takes what on the surface seems a quite literal line of inquiry, books as stage props, and demonstrates their complexities when the specific part played by a book must be made legible. When not merely a metonym for scenes of study or solitude, what is being asked of a prop when a play specifically calls for prayer-, law-, school-, or magic-books, or even specific works such as Ovid or the Qur'an? Wall-Randell thus extends the possible use-value of the as-yet hypothetical troupe library as a store of possible plots and props. Exploring the aspect of theatre least scripted, least textual, and least documentable, Richard Preiss considers the extemporaneity of the clown as potentially a crucial safeguard against catastrophe precisely because the role was never doubled but could fill dead air, circumvent state censorship, or suture a scene fracturing around a dropped cue. 'If clowning was perpetual rehearsal, [and] rehearsal is the perpetual theme of clowning', we are invited to consider improvisation as an entry-level rather than specialized skill of early modern performance (75).

Such a premise, however, implies that performance necessarily precedes print, as does the organization of the volume, broken as it is into three sections oriented to the performance event where documents are before, of, or after. All the more crucial, then, is its conclusion, by Roslyn Knutson and David McInnis, who pivot to the lost, absent, and forged documents with which any attempt to narrate the contours of Renaissance drama on page or stage is entangled. Positioning all archives as situated on a continuum of lostness rather than on either side of an 'extant' dividing line, Knutson and McInnis offer a stance by which to consider gaps in the historical record 'more shrewdly, as well as to be open to resources that

have not yet exhausted their information on the early modern theatrical marketplace' (250).² They take aim at assumptions about wished for or presumed repertory lists, at the ability to chart or articulate influence between playwrights, and extoll the lesser-loved caches of provincial, parish, court, government, and family documents. (We may well be on the precipice of new will-based discoveries with the relatively recent publication of two sourcebooks.)³ In its wake the range of explorations offered by *Loss and the Literary Culture of Shakespeare's Time* seem all the more necessary.

A thread running through both *Rethinking Theatrical Documents* and *Loss and the Literary Culture of Shakespeare's Time* is an anxiety about theatrical historical methods specific to the problems of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, cautioning against the 'desirable academic traits' of 'expertise, confidence, and certainty' to the point that, as William Ingram worries, method inexorably and inescapably reduces 'to discourse, and discourse often reduces in turn to rhetorical deftness, which means that, in practice, information becomes inseparable from its presentation' (132). The study of lost plays is, of course, an inoculation to such critiques of positivism that increased digitization of archives, tools, and ultimately access evokes. Stemming from a series of Shakespeare Association of America seminars attending to theatre history, *Loss and the Literary Culture* responds to the rapidly developing online resource, the *Lost Plays Database*, begun in 2009 at the University of Melbourne and then rehomed in 2018 with the Folger Shakespeare Library. With now a decade of endeavor led by Knutson, McInnis, and Steggle at the *LPD*, this new volume explores not only a continuum of lostness, but also how to explore these texts in terms of theory, method, and application.

A suite of essays models the new kinds of questions afforded by methods required by the nature of lost plays and their paratexts. Scholars of medieval and classical literature have long developed strategies for negotiating their archival gaps and interrogating historiographies that position stories of loss and rediscovery as that of villain and hero. Kara Northway explores the appropriation of the classical practice of posting *si quisses* in early modern life: the posting of notices on doors within high-traffic areas such as in churches or outdoor public areas to advertise lost items. Following the paratexts charting lost plays such as the *Wild-Goose Chase*, Northway reveals culturally-specific beliefs about the perceived responsibility and consequences for losing a play. Offering the longest piece in an already substantial volume, Ian Donaldson demonstrates the crucial intersections between the art and book collecting worlds, where loss is leveraged to inflate commercial value and thus serves as a useful index for shifting cultural strategies in negotiating status through acquisition and display. In a bravura interdisciplinary

whodunnit of death masks, lost Shakespearean miniatures, and writerly ‘circles’ comprising Ben Jonson, George Herbert, and Andrew Marvell, Donaldson demonstrates how narratives of loss are necessarily intertwined with counter-narratives of discovery. To this point, Paul Werstine challenges the assumption of the single, standardized prompt book to conjecture what we might learn by considering the multiple copies of a playhouse manuscript existing simultaneously at a given moment. Alexandra Hill takes the brief further by providing a near step-by-step process of how one might discover lost literature — plays, poems, and chapbooks — by way of the Stationers’ Company Register. By articulating the overlapping factors that can contribute to survival, how to explore without the aide of author name, and how to account for contemporaneous events, these essays sketch not only the scope of what remains to be discovered, but also how one might enter that dig.

A volume on lost plays and their paratexts inevitably includes ‘finds’, to employ another archaeological term, by application of these evolving methods, tools, and databases. In excavating ‘Palamon and Arcyte’, Jeanne H. McCarthy suggests that shows, masques, court, and amateur performance may not have relied on fully scripted texts, and that other methods of part-based rehearsal may have also been in regular use. Conjecture based on titling practices among other paratexts enables Paul White to illustrate a possible increase in biblical drama across several company repertories of the late sixteenth century, an inverse reading of the extant playtexts that has been inclined to think of public theatre as disproportionately secular. Developing work by June Schlueter and others on performances of English drama in Germany, McInnis and André Bastian offer an English translation of a play surviving only in German that enriches our sense of the 1590s repertory as consistently engaged with questions of troubled youth.⁴ Kris McAbee, like Stern in *Rethinking Theatrical Documents*, re-centers broadside ballads as a crucial limit case to narratives of loss. Rather than conceiving of the ballad as ‘forever verging on obsolescence’, ballads as a form come with the promise to ‘regenerate in “excellent new” forms’, and ‘whose material loss leads to eventual re-emergence’ and reproduction as evidenced by ‘The Merry Maid of Middlesex’ (96–7). In keeping with his career of demonstrating the importance of building biographies of individual players and poets, David Kathman manages to provide possible playing company attributions to two lost plays while recovering the life of William Smith and the centrality of the Merchant Taylors’ Livery Company in early English theatre-making. Such granular discoveries set in motion sea-changes in fields such as Shakespeare studies.

Most evocative, however, are those contributions that seek out the theoretical edges and implications of studying lost plays. In a close consideration of the 'r'n'wd' quires of Shakespeare sonnets, Misha Teramura articulates the elegiac temperament of current theatre history, where while 'we long for authorial intention and presence ... the text constantly reminds us that this presence is elusive and, at times, irrecoverable' (35). To cope, Steggle provides an extended articulation of what is to be gained from framing the surviving records of early modern theatre paleontologically, where extant materials are fossils and thus 'inherently proxies for a missing original' performance, or, 'in the language of literary criticism, they are metaphors' (175). Distinguishing between the hard and soft parts of the fossil record, those documents most and least likely to survive, titles become teeth, dialogue bones, playing companies are mudslides, and paratheatrical entertainments jellyfish, whose trace fossils only preserve the fact that this activity happened, but not the specifics of the thing itself. In so doing we are able to account for preservation biases that Lucy Munro and Emma Whipday take as their *raison d'être*. In a performance-based research workshop at the London Shakespeare Centre in 2017, scholars and artists brought together archival materials from a seventeenth-century Star Chamber trial, two little-known domestic tragedies, and new documentary evidence in order to reinstate the lost voice of disadvantaged women like Anne Elsdon through verbatim theatre strategies. Rather than recreating or performing any specific text, dialogue from several court records, dramatic texts, and other documents were transcribed and then arranged by a playwright in order to evoke new questions scholars might ask of early modern texts. Bringing together commitments of feminist theory and restorative justice, the project re-entered the most lost aspect of lost play studies: the potentials afforded by performance. Such practice-as-research endeavors are exactly the kind of unique species of study the overlap of two disciplines make possible, specially adapted to the conditions of a transition zone. On the heels of these innovative volumes the field of early English theatre history, its fragmentologists and documentarians alike, seems primed to spend future energy mudlarking in the foreshore of embodiment and performance.

Notes

- 1 Evelyn B. Tribble, *Cognition in the Globe: Attention and Memory in Shakespeare's Theatre*, (New York, 2011).
- 2 Such an approach to dramatic archives as on a continuum of lostness rather than easily divided seems to be at the crux of another forthcoming volume, Claire M.L. Bourne, ed., *Shakespeare / Text: Contemporary Readings in Textual Studies, Editing and Performance*, Arden Shakespeare Intersections (London, 2021).
- 3 E.A.J. Honigmann and Susan Brock, eds, *Playhouse Wills, 1558–1642*, 2nd edn, The Revels Plays Companion Library (Manchester, 2015); Stephanie Appleton and Mairi Macdonald, eds, *Stratford-upon-Avon Wills, 1348–1701*, 2 vols, (Dugdale Society, 2020).
- 4 For example, see June Schlueter, 'English Actors in Kassel, Germany, during Shakespeare's Time,' *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 10 (1998), 238–61; 'Re-reading the Peacham Drawing,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 50.2 (1999), 171–84, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2902185>.