

Lost Plays in Early Modern England
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“Heywood and the Hercules Plays”

Earlier commentators suggested that the *1* and *2 Hercules* presented by the Admiral's Men in 1595-96 were the same as the *Silver* and *Brazen Ages* published by Heywood in 1613. This theory was rejected in 1931 by A M Clark, Heywood's most important biographer, but there have been arguments for and against since. A number of factors suggest that Heywood did write *1* and *2 Hercules*. Heywood was probably writing for the Admiral's in 1595. His poem *Oenone and Paris* published in 1594 contains two stanzas describing the Hercules-Omphale relationship that are clearly echoed in *The Brazen Age*. The role of Hercules strongly resembles that of Tamburlaine and could well have been written for Edward Alleyn. There are contradictions between the *Golden* and *Silver Ages* suggesting that the latter was written earlier, except for the first act. This act continues the *Golden Age* material and seems grafted on to the *Silver Age*. The rest of the *Silver Age* and the *Brazen Age* do not follow Caxton's *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* (republished 1607), which strongly influenced Heywood's *Troia Britanica* (1609) and the other *Ages* plays. The popularity of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1593) among upper-class readers may be reflected in the strongly Ovidian tone of the *Silver* and *Brazen Ages*, and the pattern of audience attendance of *1* and *2 Hercules* may reflect a vogue among upper-class audience members. However, the published *Silver* and *Brazen Ages* clearly were significantly revised from the *Hercules* plays performed fifteen years earlier.

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“Mad Cow Disease: King Lear, Nebuchadnezzar, and Other Forked Animals”

An aging and embittered monarch wanders out into the wilderness where, deprived of his crown by his children and eventually his sanity, he devolves into a pitifully bestial existence. One might be forgiven for mistaking this for a terse synopsis of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. But it also neatly traces the precipitous narrative arc that befalls the Old Testament tyrant Nebuchadnezzar, the title and eponymous protagonist of a lost play performed by the Admiral’s Men in 1596. While scholars catalogued all the myriad sources Shakespeare cobbled together to create the play, Lear’s descent into madness in the wilderness is absent from all of these texts. It seems, therefore, a fair assumption that Shakespeare modeled the episode on the heath on the portrayal of the Babylonian tyrant in the lost play. When Lear beholds the death of Cordelia, early audiences may have heard echoes of Edward Alleyn’s “bellowing” in sub-human abjection in his role as Nebuchadnezzar. The paper will reconstruct *Nebuchadnezzar* to read it and *King Lear* as ecological *de casibus* tragedy.

More broadly, it aims to theorize a repertory approach to early modern drama by synthesizing the old methods of source studies and theatre history with ecomaterialism, “media ecology,” and Bruno Latour’s notion of the Actor-Network. In addition to spotlighting the cross-references to *Nebuchadnezzar* in *Lear*, the paper examines representations of religious tyrants, Eastern conquerors, and bears in the Admiral’s repertoire to showcase the benefits of this approach, which I call repertorial ecology, for the recovery of lost plays. Complicating the outmoded metaphor of a “war” between the theatres, repertorial ecology implies not simply conflict but circulation, adaptation, transformation, and symbiosis and thus supports recent research by Roslyn Knutson and Andrew Gurr that the duopoly system nurtured camaraderie as well as competition.

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“What is lost in plays, besides titles?”

I will begin with a fairly general survey of what titles we know are of plays for which we have no full text, and go on to look at what titles might signify, and at how many surviving plays might have lost their best texts, or been revised into new forms. I will end by considering some plays that could have changed their titles, but that might still survive under a different name.

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“Isle of Dogs, Summer’s Last Will, and the Liminal Author”

Co-authored by Ben Jonson and Thomas Nashe and performed in early 1597 at the newly-established Swan Theater, *The Isle of Dogs* is a kind of dramatic antimatter, the presence of which is only detectable as a series of outcomes: because of its “seditious and slanderous matter” the theaters were to be dismantled, Nashe’s papers were to be raided, a trio of offending actors—Jonson, Gabriel Spencer, and Robert Shaw—were imprisoned, and the Swan was not relicensed as a public theater. My paper will suggest that another outcome of *Isle* is an enhanced view of early modern notions of the author, a view achieved through a reading of Nashe’s *Summer’s Last Will and Testament* (published 1600). *Summer’s Last Will*, I argue, stages an actor’s attempted coup of a playwright’s work, thus reenacting (as it were) the players’ transgressions against “that infortunate, imperfit Embrion of my idle houres,” as Nashe identifies *Isle* in his *Lenten Stuffle* (1599). While Nashe’s claims of being wronged must be taken with a grain of salt, the nature of his disavowal nonetheless implies a sense of possession that is transgressed by the actors. Nashe’s relationship to *Isle*, then, comes to represent the early modern professional writer’s tenuous claims to textual authority. In reading the extant *Summer’s Last Will* alongside the remnants of the lost *Isle of Dogs*, I want to situate Nashe among the writers—Jonson, chief among them—who help us discern the outline of the professional, possessive author that grows out of early modern English writing.

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“A Play Perhaps Not Lost:
Henslowe’s ‘Mahomet’ and *Alcazar*’s Performance Chronology”

The play that Henslowe calls “Mahomet” quite probably is George Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar*. Henslowe’s Diary reflects two performance runs of “Mahomet” by the Lord Admiral’s Company, the first between August 1594 and February 1595, the second beginning in August 1601. Performances of *Alcazar* in 1601, Martin Wiggins has shown, would well have fit then current theatrical trends. Good reasons also show that *Alcazar* was in fact performed by the Lord Admiral’s in 1594 and early 1595. And no play reflected in Henslowe’s daily records of performances then, other than “Mahomet,” can be *Alcazar*. Thus the Lord Admiral’s probably performed *Alcazar* both in 1594-95 and 1601. Nevertheless, much of the evidence which shows that “Mahomet” was *Alcazar* indicates as well that the famous stage plot of *Alcazar* originated neither from the 1594-95 nor the 1601 performance runs. The plot was instead prepared in November 1598, in anticipation of a performance run to begin in December. That run did go forward. But it did so without Edward Alleyn’s participation, participation which the plot had anticipated. The plot should thus be dated to late 1598, around the time that the much-too-much-maligned Sir Walter long ago put it. The Lord Admiral’s performed *Alcazar*, then, each time in revival, in 1594-95, 1598-99, and 1601.

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“Jugurtha: Lost and Found”

I’m interested in looking into a play that has been termed "lost" by a number of scholars, including Jerzy Limon, Yoshiko Kawachi, and Sylvia Wagonheim. The title is intriguing because the play was apparently acted ca. February 1600 by the Lord Admiral’s Men at the Rose and subsequently at the first Fortune, which opened in the autumn of 1600. John Astington has suggested that Edward Alleyn acted the role of the protagonist. The play was revived in 1624. Edmund Gayton in 1654 seems to allude to the play; if so, the allusion suggests the continuing popularity of the play in the 1630s, 1640s and even later. I anticipate a speculation about what happened to William Boyle’s drama.

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“Ur-Plays: Exercises in Making Stuff Up”

In textual studies, the designation “Ur” indicates a lost original from which subsequent texts are derived. In theater history, an Ur-play may be real, in the sense that there is evidence of its existence from performance records and/or allusions to its distinguishing features. Or it may be a phantom, in the sense that scholars perceive discrepancies in textual or theatrical evidence and consequently imagine a prior play which (if it existed) would resolve the discrepancies. The purpose of this essay is to review selected scholarship on Ur-plays and deduce from that matter object lessons for those currently attempting to assemble documentary evidence and scholarly opinions on lost plays.

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I propose to discuss 'the tanager of Denmarke,' a play that was, according to Henslowe's diary, 'ne' with Lord Strange's Men on 23 May 1592. The play's debut was the third most profitable performance in the company's 134 days at the Rose, ranking just behind the debut performances of 'harey the vj' and 'the tragedy of the gvyes,' yet in 52 subsequent performances the play was not repeated. Perhaps 23 May 1592 was a particularly fine day on which high expectations for 'the tanager of Denmarke' met with particularly sharp disappointment. But we know from the playhouse manuscript of *Sir Thomas More* – as we also know from the titles of 'lost' plays like *The Isle of Dogs* – that a bar to further performance or publication could in some cases be the result of a play's potentially sensational interest to audiences.

The subject of 'the tanager of denmarke' remains to this day unidentified. No Danish tanner (if 'tanner' is the word Henslowe meant) has been found, save for the tanner who, according to the gravedigger in *Hamlet*, 'will last you nine year' in the grave. By analogy with 'The Tanner of Tamworth,' the comic figure who, as promised on the title-page of Heywood's *The first and second partes of King Edward the Fourth* (1600), spends 'mery pastime' with the Yorkist king, it has been suggested that 'the tanager of denmarke' was 'a craft play' or a 'gild or citizen's play.'¹ But whereas the tanner of Tamworth, had the text of *Edward the Fourth* not survived, would still be attested in non-dramatic sources, a tanner of Denmark is untraceable.

In view of this apparent dead end, I think it worth mentioning that there is an extant play, involving Denmark, if not tanners, for which a plausible attribution to Lord Strange's Men has been made. The play most commonly called *Edmond Ironside*, a theatrical manuscript dating, according to its editor Randall Martin, to the early 1590s but containing evidence of revision for revival by a later company, possibly the Lady Elizabeth's Men circa 1622-24, is a play with apparent links to Shakespeare's works for Lord Strange's Men and to *A Knack to Know a Knave*. Looking at paleographical issues as well as possible evidence from Nashe's *Pierce Penilesse* and other contemporary documents, I will offer some (admittedly, long-shot) reasons for guessing 'the tanager (or tamer) of Denmarke' could be *Edmond Ironside*.

¹ Roslyn L. Knutson, 'Playing Companies and Repertory,' p. 185, and Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company, 1594-1613*, p. 43. See also *Lost Plays Database*, 'The Tanner of Denmark' (http://www.lostplays.org/index.php/Tanner_of_Denmark_The).

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"Iphis and Iantha; or A Marriage without a Man"

My paper takes as its starting point a play Shakespeare may or may not have written and in any case is no longer extant: *Iphis and Iantha, or A Marriage without a Man*. According to the 1660 Stationers' Register, this lost play, probably erroneously attributed to Shakespeare, was licensed in 1613. Though critics are perhaps right to doubt the Shakespeare connection, Ovid's tale of Iphis and Ianthe was widely known during the Renaissance, adapted for the stage not once but several times, most memorably in Lyly's *Gallathea* and Benserade's *Iphis et Iante*; what's more, the tale's representation of same-sex friendship transforming into opposite-sex marriage influenced numerous Renaissance plays, among them Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. But whereas all other adaptations of Iphis and Ianthe stage a metamorphosis wherein one female friend becomes a man, thereby enabling a heterosexual marriage, *Iphis and Iantha* posits "*A Marriage without a Man*." My paper ponders the implications of this refusal to heterosexualize Iphis and Ianthe's relationship. In a culture that had no conception of heterosexuality or homosexuality (to say nothing of gay marriage!), how would Renaissance playgoers have made sense of the performance and solemnization of a same-sex marriage? And given that marriage was often understood as a hierarchized social arrangement that subordinated women to men, to what extent would a marriage between women be doubly transgressive? My aim, then, is to show how *Iphis and Iantha* might help us rethink a priori assumptions we have made about Renaissance understandings of gender and sexuality.

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“‘That Olde Hag Gillian of Braineferd’:
Rethinking the Cultural Significance of a Lost Play”

My paper will analyze the cultural significance of a lost Admiral’s Men play, *Friar Fox and Gillian of Brentford* (1599), by specifically examining the personage of Gillian from the title. Gillian, a corpulent innkeeper living in the town of Brentford, was already a cultural icon when this play was performed, first appearing in Robert Copland’s 1562 bawdy poem *Jyl of Brainfords Testament*. Gillian makes later appearances as the inspiration for Falstaff’s disguise in Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and in Thomas Dekker and John Webster’s *Westward Ho*, yet, surprisingly, these works allude to her as a deceptive cunning woman rather than a merry innkeeper. My contention in the paper is that *Friar Fox and Gillian of Brentford* perhaps discursively transformed Gillian from innkeeper to cunning woman, thus influencing these later plays and changing perceptions about the town of Brentford. *Friar Fox and Gillian of Brentford*’s date also suggests its commonality with a group of other lost Admiral’s Men plays staging conjurers, wise women, and witches—*The Witch of Islington* (1598), *Mother Redcap* (1598), and *Black Joan* (1598). By rethinking this lost play’s status as a witch play, I hope to shed light on its cultural impact on later works and the place of Brentford itself.

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“Lost Arthurian Plays”

Among the many lost plays identified by title in *Henslowe’s Diary* are five that indicate subject matter figuring in the legends of King Arthur and the round table. They are (ordered chronologically as they appear in *The Diary*) *Chinon of England* (14 performances between January 1595/6 and November 1596), *Valteger* (12 performances between Dec 1596 and April 1597), *Hengist* (recorded once in June 1597, though possibly the same play as *Valteger*), *Uther Pendragon* (7 performances between April and June 1597), and *The Lyfe of Arthur, King of England* (for which Richard Hathaway was paid £5 in April 1598). Given that *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (1588) is the only other known (and the only extant) play of Elizabeth’s reign on an Arthurian topic, what is one to make of this extraordinary run of Arthurian drama by the Admiral’s Men in the mid-1590s? What conclusions can we draw about their subject matter from contemporary non-dramatic sources? Do these plays represent a short-lived trend of that decade and, if so, what accounts for it? Alternatively, are they the “tip of the iceberg,” so to speak, a fraction of a large number of plays on the topic, as seems to be suggested by Stephen Gosson’s assertion in the early 1580s that the round table legends “haue been thoroughly ransack to furnish the Playe houses in London” (*School of Abuse*)? And if that is the case, is it significant at all that there are comparatively few Arthurian references in the plays of Shakespeare, staged by the Admiral’s Men’s rival company during the 1590s? (Interestingly, the best known of those references, both to Merlin, in *King Lear* and *1Henry IV*, appear to be derisive.) In addition to addressing these questions, I think it might be productive to consider these plays in the context of the heated Elizabethan controversy over the historical veracity of Arthur and the well-documented propaganda promoting the Tudor monarchs (and their Stuart successors) as direct royal descendants of the once and future king.

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“Where to Find Lost Plays”

Most effort in the study of lost plays seeks ways to maximize the available information about them, and to collate it with other sources, with a view to presenting the fullest possible hypothetical reconstruction of their content. But occasionally, and with luck, lost plays become ‘found plays’. This paper will survey the finds of recent decades, up to and including the discovery in November 2012 of a quasi-dramatic text associated with Ben Jonson. It will describe a group of plays which paradoxically are both lost and extant, and will present a group of extant dramatic fragments which are both unidentifiable and almost certainly from lost plays whose titles are known to us. Whether it will successfully develop new paradigms for archival work in the field is a matter which will only become clear when the paper is written.

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“What’s A Lost Play?: Toward a Taxonomy of Lost Plays”

When W. W. Greg chose the Greek letter theta, the letter ancient Greeks used on their ballots when voting for a sentence of death, as the prefix for the numbers of the lost plays in his *Bibliography of the English Printed Drama*, he perhaps established our general attitude toward lost plays. Just as there are no degrees of being dead, we have tended to think that there are no degrees of being lost. Of course, when we consider this more closely we know that is not actually true for lost plays, but it may go some way to explain why they have been insufficiently investigated. In my paper I will make an attempt at establishing a taxonomy of lostness using, where possible, real examples and, occasionally, examples of how the lost becomes the found. It may be the case that a better description of the kinds of lostness might assist us in finding some lost plays, or at least knowing that they are forever lost.