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SHAKESPEAREAN ARCHEOLOGY: MAGNITUDE AND RECONSTRUCTION OF LOSS

(David McInnis, *Shakespeare and the Lost Plays, Reimagining Drama in Early Modern England*, Cambridge University Press, England, 2021, 223 pgs.)

Proving, despite the prevailing opinion, that Shakespeare is an inexhaustive source for research, David McInnis, an associate professor of Shakespeare and Early Modern Drama at the University of Melbourne, crafts this monograph as an attempt to reconstruct the plays that have been lost with time, as well as provide an estimate of the number of such plays. Furthermore, he uses this reconstruction to shed light on Shakespeare's work contemporary to the plays, offering new perspectives for understanding some of Bard's most important, formative, and persisting work. This research heavily relies on McInnis's previous work, where he cooperated on the creation of the Lost Plays Database (LPD), which aids the research in the field of lost plays. McInnis provides probable versions of the plays of Shakespeare's era, supported by the factual data that remains from documents of the time, and previous works of Shakespeare and early modern English theatre scholars in the field of the lost plays.

The book spans across 223 pages containing an introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion, which are supported by two figures illustrating the metaphors utilized by the author, as well as three tables that offer comparative data that the research is centered on and several lists. The extensive and comprehensive literature listed offers further, convincing, argumentation to McInnis's hypothesis. In the introduction, McInnis explains his method of research, stating that the main focus is on contextualizing Shakespeare within this body of lost plays, focusing on the interrelationships of the surviving and lost plays, and how that may have influenced Shakespeare's writing. He approaches this vague examination through the metaphor of Rubin's Vase – an image that examines the figure-ground perception and relationship – identifying the surviving plays as the vase, while the lost plays constitute the ground (two faces on the picture) that offset the shape of the vase. Through this metaphor, McInnis counts 744 plays

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that can be traced and declared lost and points out that there are, presumably, many more that cannot be traced and, with certainty established within this category.

One of the first, and arguably most important things that McInnis points out and works on refuting is the presumed reason the plays get lost through time. Namely, the previously established opinion was that the plays disappear due to their poor quality. However, McInnis illustrates his point by laying out the comparative data that shows that some of the lost plays have performed either a successful average or better than the surviving plays. One of the most pertinent and exhaustive sources of this data is Philip Henslowe's inventory book, which contains the plays performed from 1592 to 1597 and the detailed inventory of playbooks, each play's earnings, and expenses for costumes and scenography. Utilizing research mainly done by Wiggins and Knutson, and the data from Henslowe's book, McInnis aims at establishing the lost repertory of Lord Chamberlain's Men – the author points out that the survival rate of the Lord Chamberlain's Men's plays is high, compared to other companies of the period, but he is interested in the approximate ratio of the lost plays associated with that survival rate. For McInnis, this ratio is extremely vital for the whole fabric of, not just Shakespeare, but modern English drama as a whole, as it sets off a background for understanding and interpreting the surviving plays.

A problematic fact that arises through McInnis's research is that Henslowe's book is not always factually correct – there are plays that we know of that do not appear in the book, one play may be logged in under several different names, misspelled entries that cannot be accounted for with utmost certainty. This proves significant when McInnis exemplifies how the majority of Admiral's Men's repertory is lost. Based on his and previous research, McInnis provides a table in which he compares his estimate of Admiral's Men's lost repertory to estimates of Greg, Gurr, and Wiggins. This example just further illustrates McInnis's point of magnitude of the lost repertory of Lord Chamberlain's Men and solidifies McInnis's insistence on the non-definitiveness of this process (throughout the whole book McInnis refrains from referring to his research as either complete or definitive; the border of his metaphorical Rubin's vase is as McInnis states fuzzy). The importance of the Admiral's Men's lost repertory and how it reflects on Shakespeare's repertory lies in McInnis's treatment of the field as a whole – while today these plays constitute an important part of global literature as classics, McInnis approaches it from the then-contemporary perspective where these plays are part of everyday culture and life. Not only does that frame his research in more solid terms, but it also refutes the previously mentioned notion that the surviving plays were the only quality plays. The interrelationships of not just the plays of different acting companies, but the interrelationships of the acting companies themselves, provide a more complex and more detailed framework for new possible interpretations of Shakespeare's work which opens a new window

into possible Shakespearean research, as well as possible themes and plots of the lost plays. Specifically, the relationship between Lord Chamberlain and Admiral's Men is crucial, as McInnis explains it with an economist neologism "coopetition" – cooperation of competition. This reflected on their repertoires and by extension enabled McInnis to perform a reconstruction of the lost plays from the 1594–1598 period. One such reconstruction is *Hester and Ahasuerus*, the only, according to McInnis's sources, Biblical play on the Lord Chamberlain's Men's repertory. The author manages to give a probable narrative structure of the play excavating it from the repertory list of its performance: it was followed by *The Taming of a Shrew*. He combines the topicality inferred from the repertory with the surviving German variation of the play since plays were often translated to German for continental performances, as well as the Biblical story of Hester and Ahasuerus (Xerxes I). From this excavation, McInnis deduces that *Hester and Ahasuerus* is not a Biblical play per se, but, following the logic of topicality, it presents more similar to *The Taming of a Shrew*. This is the practical side of McInnis's method that he utilizes throughout the book as a tool not only to reconstruct the lost plays but to interpret Shakespeare's surviving ones as well; McInnis observes *Hamlet* as a part of the Danish Matrix and *Henry V* as a romance comedy. As far-fetched as it may sound, McInnis provides compelling argumentation for these interpretations focusing on the inter-fluence of the repertory that in combination with the practical logic of his reconstruction yields possible versions of the lost plays

Since the chapters follow the chronological development of Shakespeare's company, McInnis does not skip the importance of the political circumstances in the late-Shakespearean era. As the dynasty and the monarch changed, it seemed imperative that the Lord Chamberlain's Men had to change too. That change did not stop just at the name of the company, it influenced the entire repertory of the dramatic scene of England; plays changed from Tudor-centric to Stuart-centric. Furthermore, in this period Lord Chamberlain's, now King's, Men acquire an opportunity to perform at the Blackfriars Theatre, which offered new possibilities in terms of the performance itself, as well as a new, versatile repertory. This new climate brought on a controversy regarding the lost plays, as the two that McInnis examines are directly tied to the King and the political affairs of his reign. The first, which is today known as "the tragédie of Gowrie", supposedly centered around an attempted abduction of King James I, and the second was simply known as a tragedy of the Spanish maze. For the second, McInnis offers the following possibilities – the protagonist may be Sir Copley who was exiled from England as a Catholic, it could be another play that metaphorically examines the Gunpowder Plot, or that it was a part of diplomatic negotiations with Spain (and this is why McInnis claims it could not have contained the anti-Spanish sentiment). However, not to mar the objectivity of his writing, McInnis ultimately concludes that the records of this time are particularly scarce. The closest McInnis can broach the topic

is in general terms, knowing that the tragicomedies were the most popular with the audience (which he illustrates with another Rubin's graph).

Continuing in the vein of tragicomedies, McInnis does not miss to attempt and reconstruct perhaps the most famous Shakespeare's lost play – *Cardenio*. The author himself admits that the scientific community has an inexplicably large fascination with this play; still, he does not abstain from – perhaps understanding that a book on lost plays is not such without *Cardenio* – examining the play and its possible origins. The only surviving trace of this play is the proof that it was performed in court twice, and no other records of it or for it survive. The scientific consensus, according to McInnis, is that the play is most likely derived from Cervantes, and it follows the love story between Cardenio and Lucinda. McInnis deduces that it was likely a dramatized narrative from *Don Quixote*, perhaps more to appeal to the audience's demands than the Spanish sentiment.

The final chapter is dedicated to a rather important, faulty tendency of literary historians – ascribing any unsigned play to Shakespeare; after Shakespeare's death, many a pseudo-Shakespeare play appeared. Sifting through these, McInnis proves, is an arduous task that further complicates research of the lost plays. Following the logic of “if there is a part two, there must be a part one, but if there is a part one, there need not be a part two” McInnis shows that Shakespeare became a world-class marketing trick in the field of the lost plays, and demonstrates it with the case of *Henry I* and *Henry II* plays. Namely, *Henry I* was licensed for the King's Men and written by Robert Davenport, but a registry counts two plays – *Henry I* and *Henry II* – written by both Davenport and Shakespeare. However, upon further inspection, it became apparent that those do not belong to Shakespeare. McInnis lists another play – *Eurialus and Lucretia* – that is constituted as lost and belonging to Shakespeare. However, it was later uncovered that it was not written by Shakespeare. It was an erotic prose romance written by Aeneas Sylvius. This tendency – and, as mentioned, a marketing trick – further conflates an already complex field and makes the recovery – if possible – of the lost plays more difficult.

When concluding his research, McInnis stresses how important it is that this field of research never ossifies. The lost plays constitute an important part since the original playgoers have seen both metaphorical vase and face, and McInnis insists on regarding the research from a temporal point of view. Both the surviving and lost plays were created simultaneously, thus forming a relationship about which today we can only speculate. Though he sometimes digresses into a wide scope, McInnis provides a comprehensive picture of the late 16th/ early 17th century, which is necessary when research this speculative is performed. His focus is not only on Shakespeare, and sometimes may even strike as not related to Shakespeare at all, but is centered around the mass opus that has been lost to time. McInnis's book is an important and comprehensive dive into that mass opus, that for its goal does not have the definitive declaration – McInnis is not

so brazen as his predecessors – of the magnitude of the loss, but rather, as he states, “tracing the contour” of the metaphorical vase and opening a door into a new field of research that has been neglected and viewed as irrelevant.

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