

“Lost Plays and Source Study”

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In their Introduction to this volume, Dennis Britton and Melissa Walter describe the trends in Shakespeare criticism that have seen source study gradually marginalized in favor of more theoretically-focused methodologies. Although they suggest that the poststructuralist turn implicitly began this decline, inasmuch as the death of the author signaled (quite rightly) a loss of faith in the merits of reconstructing authorial intentions, for theater historians the decentering of authorship has been productive in ways that foster an alternative appreciation of source study. The repertory studies of such esteemed scholars as Bernard Beckerman, Roslyn L. Knutson, Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean, Lawrence Manley, Lucy Munro and others have reoriented our perspective of London commercial theater such that the playwright's role is seen as only one aspect of a much larger, more complex matrix.¹ Playing companies become the organizing principle, with what McMillin calls “company style” being the focus:² plays, in this view, are the essential commodity of a company and how that company acquires, performs and revives the plays in its repertory in response to playgoer demand and the offerings of other companies is paramount. Players, playgoers and even playhouses have important roles in our understanding of the highly competitive theatrical marketplace of Shakespeare's London. W. David Kay urges scholars to treat Shakespeare as a “creative actor-playwright” rather than author, in the hope of producing a more “theatrically-oriented source study,”³ and a repertory studies approach would take this insight even further, focusing less on the actor-playwright and more on the theatrical context of the company for whom he wrote. In other words, I'm suggesting that we should reconceptualize source study as a means of further understanding how and why a company

offered the plays it did for performance. What did companies (rather than playwrights) respond to, either by emulating or overwriting their own and their competitors' repertoires?

To begin to answer this question, we need to think about lost plays alongside those that survive. As Martin Wiggins has recently reminded us, the all-too-sobering statistics reveal that the significant majority of plays produced in this context, at this time, are now lost, and with them a good number of potential source-texts for the drama that has survived. Of the plays written for the London commercial playhouses between 1567 and the closure of the theaters in 1642, only 543 playtexts survive in either print or manuscript form. By contrast, traces of approximately 744 lost plays are identifiable in diary entries, Stationers' Register accounts, and other historical documents.⁴ These figures say nothing of the still larger number of plays that have sunk without so much as a ripple.⁵ Clearly the absence of an extant playscript poses problems for establishing direct use of a lost play as a linguistic source for a surviving play. Noting linguistic echoes between texts has been important to both traditional and newer approaches to source study, but it is not the only approach to source study. As an extreme test case, working with lost plays forces scholars to address questions of evidence handling and hypothesis construction that the best work in source studies is already at least implicitly attuned to: how else can fairy tales, oral narratives, and the like be meaningfully incorporated into discussion of a given play's "discursive con-texts"?⁶ Nowhere is Richard Levin's caution against the uncritical acceptance of "positive evidence" borne out more soberingly than in the realm of repertory studies and theater history, where the staggering loss of playtexts poses a daunting challenge to the diligent scholar hoping to rule out "negative evidence" (i.e. evidence that an adduced parallel is not, in fact, unique, but occurs somewhere other than the claimed source).⁷

To study lost plays as possible sources for surviving drama requires a range of modalities of source study; depending on the nature and extent of the historical evidence

bearing witness to these plays' one-time existence, we can learn different things about the likely relationship of lost plays to surviving plays. Much of this work – like much of the present chapter – would have been difficult if not unthinkable even a decade ago, but the proliferation of scholarly digital resources including *Early English Books Online (EEBO)* and *British Literary Manuscripts Online* has provided access to and new ways of reading the historical evidence pertaining to lost plays. These digitization projects facilitate access to facsimiles of primary material but also (in the case of the *Text Creation Partnership* branch of *EEBO*, for example) to alternative ways of using this material. The study of lost plays consists of discovering historical references to performances or play titles (in diaries, state papers, college records, the Stationers' Register, and other sources) and the investigation of what those references actually import. "Belin Dun", "Vayvode", "Doctor Lambe" or "Henry the Unable" were all once household names – or at least meant enough that people would pay to see dramatizations of their lives and exploits – but are now mostly forgotten. Recovering their stories is possible but relied previously on an extensive memory, virtually limitless time for research, and access to institutional libraries with holdings on par with that of the British Library. Typically there are no early modern books devoted entirely to such characters, or obviously named after such characters; rather, their narratives are embedded in larger collections: histories, miscellanies, poetry and prose, jests, ballads, tomes and ephemera. Scouring an index like the Short Title Catalogue is therefore unlikely to yield promising leads, but entering a keyword into a digital search engine is not only more likely to produce hits in a full-text database, it is also likely to be capable of offsetting the challenges posed by the variability of early modern spelling and the mis-transcriptions of hasty or forgetful diarists.⁸

Locating an obscure reference to an eponymous character or a sensational event by using these new technologies is an important first step, but interpretation of this data requires

care, vigilance and some healthy skepticism. Scholarly investigations to date have been hampered by two factors. First, the ephemerality of lost plays means that as a subject matter, they are usually relegated to footnotes rather than examined in a sustained manner, and consequently the scholarship on lost plays is virtually invisible. Second, the fact of these plays' non-survival is typically regarded as evidence of inferiority (if something was worth preserving, it would have been preserved); but one need only consider the fact that at least two plays by Shakespeare ("Love's Labours Won" and "Cardenio") have been lost to realize how spurious this logic is (unless we assume these Shakespearean dramas were irredeemably awful). The *Lost Plays Database* (www.lostplays.org), edited by Roslyn L. Knutson, Matthew Steggle and me, exists to address both of these concerns. It brings together the snippets of relevant scholarship, it reproduces the historical records, and it raises the profile of lost plays as a legitimate avenue of scholarly inquiry. It is completely open-access, and most importantly it is collaborative. Individual scholars contribute snippets of information to an entry, drawing on their expertise and discoveries, and this in turn encourages others to augment existing entries with further details: the sum is greater than the scattered parts. As we fill in the blanks, our picture of early modern English dramatic activity grows and a clearer sense of what the commercial companies were offering in their repertoires emerges. The result is a denser web of relationships between individual plays than an old-fashioned source study of linear transmission would allow. Within the context of repertory analysis, attending to lost plays is therefore vital: demonstrating Shakespeare's use of Saxo Grammaticus for *Hamlet* has obvious value for author-centric studies, but Shakespeare's company was competing with other London-based commercial companies who had staged (or were about to stage) such lost "Danish" plays as "The Tanner of Denmark" (Strange's, 1592), the anonymous "Hamlet" (Admiral's or Chamberlain's, by 1594), "Cutlack" (Admiral's, 1594), "1 & 2 Earl Godwin and his Three Sons" (Admiral's, 1598), and "A

Danish Tragedy” (Admiral’s, 1602).⁹ If we restrict ourselves to textual links in surviving texts, we stand to miss vital theatrical contexts that inspired or influenced the commercial production of a given play.

Lost plays can be seen to participate in broader influential movements, and this is especially true at the level of genre and subject matter. Through systematic attention to records of lost plays in Henslowe’s diary, for example, Misha Teramura and Paul Whitfield White have demonstrated (respectively) the Admiral’s Men’s significant investment in Trojan mythology and Arthurian legend in their repertory of the 1590s.¹⁰ In much older analyses, Shakespeare’s baffling treatment of Chaucer’s poignant *liebestod* material in *Troilus and Cressida* has been addressed in terms of Shakespeare’s alternative debt to (and possibly a desire to distance himself from) Henry Chettle and Thomas Dekker’s lost “Troilus and Cressida” (1599), the backstage plot for which is extant, and provides a detailed scene-by-scene account of that play’s contents.¹¹ Shakespeare’s exploration of religious apostasy and resistance to the Turks in *Othello* has likewise been regarded by E. A. J. Honigmann as a possible response to a lost play, the “The True History of George Scanderbeg” from the Oxford’s Men repertory of c.1601: “Scanderbeg, a renegade Christian, led Turkish armies against Christians, and *Othello* could have been written as a counter-attraction, with a Moor starring as a Christian against the Turks.”¹²

In the rarest of cases, we may of course stumble upon a clear textual source for episodes in Shakespeare’s plays. The lost “Hester and Ahasuerus” play noted by Henslowe as having been performed at the playhouse in Newington in June 1594 appears to survive in a German translation, *Comoedia von der Königin Esther und hoffertigen Haman* (published in Leipzig in 1620).¹³ As Wiggins notes, it contains a shrew-taming subplot in which “the clown’s wife is forced to say that black is white in order to avoid her husband’s violence,” and this appears to be “the source of the sun/moon incident in *The Taming of the Shrew*.”¹⁴

More common are those obscure references in Shakespeare's work that might profitably be explicated through reference to lost plays.¹⁵ Christi Spain-Savage has compellingly argued that the Admiral's "Friar Fox and Gillian of Brentfort" play (1599) influenced Shakespeare's decision to disguise Falstaff as "Gillian of Brainford" in the 1602 quarto version of *Merry Wives of Windsor*.¹⁶ Perhaps the depiction of the eponymous protagonist of the lost "Tamar Cham" plays (Strange's 1592; Admiral's 1596) inspired Benedick's offer to fetch "a hair off the great Cham's beard" in *Much Ado About Nothing*, though Shakespeareans tend not to gloss the possible debt to a stage representation of the Cham – like most editors, Claire McEachern (Arden 3) and Sheldon P. Zitner (Oxford) refer readers of their critical editions of the play to Mandeville and Marco Polo for the exotica described by Benedick (curiously, the pygmies he mentions are also featured in the final scene of "1 Tamar Cham").¹⁷

A further possibility when looking to lost plays for clues about a dramatist's inspiration is the repetition and variation of recognizable motifs within drama. That dramatists, including Shakespeare, drew on other plays when composing their own is well known. *King Lear* offers a useful case study of the way different companies and playwrights dealt with related dramatic material, in terms of the differences as much as the similarities.¹⁸ Cordelia's death would not have been foreseeable for early audiences of Shakespeare's tragedy, because within living memory they had seen the Lear story dramatized by the Queen's Men as a chronicle history with a happy ending. The anonymously authored *King Leir* (which is still extant) was performed on the 6th and 8th of April 1594 during the brief period when the Queen's Men and Sussex's Men performed together, but was evidently older than that, for it was not marked as a new play on these occasions.¹⁹ *Leir*'s presentation of the trial-of-love scene and its consequences differs significantly from Shakespeare's: a feature of the Queen's Men play is that comedy is frequently mixed with seriousness.²⁰ Instead of a nihilistic tragedy, it gives us a playful romance with a disguised king, ending in marriage. A

prominent motif of the Queen's Men *Leir* – the division of the kingdom – was featured in a lost Queen's Men play too, though, and taken in conjunction with further analogues, including Tamburlaine's division of territory amongst his weak sons, begins to take on the appearance of a "theatergram" or variable dramatic unit.²¹ As Louise George Clubb has noted in her study of early modern English borrowings from Italian drama, the creation of drama entailed drawing on pre-texts in such a way that "demanded the interchange and transformation of units, figures, relationships, actions, *topoi*, and framing patterns, gradually building a combinatory of theatergrams that were at once streamlined structures for svelte play making and elements of high specific density, weighty with significance from previous incarnations."²² Accordingly, when looking for sources, we should be looking for variation and synthesis, not necessarily similitude. The fragmentary records pertaining to lost plays frequently offer us this level of detail.

Henry Peacham (the man responsible for the Longleat MS sketch of *Titus Andronicus*) remembered seeing the famed clown Richard Tarlton steal the show in a deathbed scene in the mid-1580s, when Tarlton was associated with the Queen's Men:

Sometimes among Children the Parents have two hopefull, and the third voyd of all grace: sometimes all good, saving the eldest.

I remember when I was a School-boy in *London*, *Tarlton* acted a third sons part, such a one as I now speake of: His father being a very rich man, and lying upon his death-bed, called his three sonnes about him, who with teares, and on their knees craved his blessing, and to the eldest sonne, said hee, you are mine heire, and my land must descend upon you, and [*sic*] I pray God blesse you with it: The eldest sonne replied, Father I trust in God you shall yet live to enjoy it your selfe. To the second sonne,

(said he) you are a scholler, and what profession soever you take upon you, out of my land I allow you threescore pounds a yeare towards your maintenance, and three hundred pounds to buy you books, as his brother, he weeping answer'd, I trust father you shall live to enjoy your money your selfe, I desire it not, &c. To the third, which was *Tarlton*, (who came like a rogue in a foule shirt without a a [*sic*] band, and in a blew coat with one sleeve, his stockings out at the heeles, and his head full of straw and feathers) as for you sirrah, quoth he) you know how often I have fetched you out of *Newgate* and *Bridewell*, you have beene an ungracious villaine, I have nothing to bequeath to you but the gallowes and a rope: *Tarlton* weeping and sobbing upon his knees (as his brothers) said, O Father, I doe not desire it, I trust in God you shall live to enjoy it your selfe.²³

The youngest child is the black sheep, in a motif familiar from folklore, but his waywardness is comical. The Queen's Men twice produced a "division" scene that ultimately ended in mirth; when Shakespeare's play was performed, the frame of reference brought to it by playgoers familiar with the Queen's Men's repertory would have included the expectation that such divisions need not end in tragedy. In the 1998 fictional film *Shakespeare in Love*, the comedy of "Romeo and Ethel the Pirate's Daughter" morphs into an unexpected tragedy of "Romeo and Juliet"; it seems that with *King Lear*, Shakespeare actually made such a change to genre. Traditional source-hunting would not consider the lost *Tarlton* play a "source" for *King Lear*, but Henry Peacham (for one) may well have recognized the opening scene of *Lear* as a variant of the division-of-kingdom theatergram which he had seen *Tarlton* perform two decades earlier, and could even have situated this version on a continuum alongside *Leir* and *Tamburlaine* (both of which, incidentally, were printed/reprinted in 1605; the likely year of *Lear*'s composition).²⁴ By acquiring Shakespeare's *King Lear* for their

repertory, the King's Men were knowingly engaging with their competitors' offerings and deliberately subverting playgoer expectations to an extent that is not fully appreciable unless attention is given to lost plays.

The Tempest, which stubbornly refuses to yield clues to its primary source text, might similarly be approached by recourse to the theatergrams and motifs of lost plays; although Shakespeare came to romances relatively late in his career, his audience's familiarity with the genre stretched back decades. Cyrus Mulready has begun to call attention to the extent to which playgoers' expectations would have been conditioned by the large group of plays he calls "stage romances" (to distinguish them from their prose counterparts) and draws on Helen Cooper's suggestion that audiences were "deeply familiar with the tropes and motifs of a 500-year-old tradition" of romance writing.²⁵ Mulready contends that "the continued attention to Shakespeare's 'late plays' as romances has led to neglect for the rich history of romance adapted to the stage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."²⁶ Although he makes mention of lost stage romances like "Herpetulus the Blue Knight and Perobia" (1574) or "The History of the Solitary Knight" (1577), Mulready chooses Greene's *Orlando Furioso* (c. 1591) and the relatively recently rediscovered *Tom a Lincoln* (c. 1607-16) as the basis for "evidence of what audiences saw (and perhaps expected) when romance came to the stage."²⁷ Recovering the likely narratives of lost plays increases our awareness of the variables at play in the romance theatergrams deployed by Shakespeare in *The Tempest*. The entries in Henslowe's diary show, for example, that an anonymously authored "Chinon of England" was performed as a new play by the Admiral's men on 03 January 1596, receiving fourteen performances in total.²⁸ Greg and others have suggested that the lost play may have been based on Christopher Middleton's *The famous historie of Chinon of England* (London, 1597) whilst still in manuscript form.²⁹ Amongst other things, Middleton's romance includes a witch (Europa, not Sycorax); an "ayrie Spirit" (cf. the airy Ariel); a beautiful daughter

(Cassiopea, rather than Miranda) exiled to a wilderness “far from the resort of men”; a fool (Chinon) imprisoned in a rock (cf. Caliban styed in a “hard rock,” 1.2.344); a cannibal in the Arabian desert; and an island where harpies (cf. Ariel, clad “like a harpy,” 3.3.52SD) guard a golden book.³⁰ Traditional source study is unlikely to regard the lost “Chinon” as a source for *The Tempest*, but as Clubb observes, source studies are typically “resistant ... to historicizing synthesis,” whereas a focus on theatergrams potentially enables us to place “Chinon” on a continuum of stage romances including Shakespeare’s play.³¹ What other variants of the use of magicians, witches, rocky imprisonments, and exiles to barren locations might turn up in the narratives of lost plays, and how might these help us better appreciate Shakespeare’s unique reconfiguration of such elements?

In some cases, textual analysis of lost plays *is* possible, albeit in a limited capacity: fragments, usually in manuscript (but very occasionally in print) exist for a handful of the plays whose scripts are otherwise lost. “The Stately Tragedy of the Great Cham” (Folger MS X.d.259) and the “Play of Oswald” (British Library MS Egerton 2623) are two such fragments.³² Only two quarto leaves (four pages) of the “The Stately Tragedy” exist, and the critical consensus seems to favor a seventeenth century date, primarily on the strength of the fragment’s reference to “Tobacco” as “now well known.”³³ Although it may have been written as a closet drama – the scribe draws attention to his use of blood-like red ink, but also includes elaborate stage directions – it is clearly informed by the commercial theater, in particular, by the work of Marlowe. The obvious debt is to the *Tamburlaine* plays and the eastern conqueror mode they inaugurated: the “mighty Cham” Velruus (or Velraus) and his wife Drepona are responding to the Tartarians’ attacks on their “fronter townes” and are plotting revenge in the last passage of the fragment.³⁴ The general participation in a Tamburlainean mode could have been inferred from the title alone, if that were all that had survived. Less predictably, the hundred or so lines of text reveal that *Faustus* also appears to

be a source for this lost play, which opens with an eastern priest figure (Bagous the Brachman) entering into a diabolical pact with the “deuill” Aldeboran who appears “in a flash of fier.”³⁵ Unexpected revelations like this are a salient reminder of the limits of conjecture when working with minimal evidence: if only the title had survived, our assessment of the play’s Marlovian inheritance would be incomplete. Cynics might object that this conflation of Tamburlaine and Faustian traditions is the anomalous work of an amateur playwright, and is not therefore indicative of writing practices for the London commercial theater. But although it may be tempting to dismiss the play as a rough work of an amateur, the fragment could just as easily be the work of a professional, who might equally be expected to use neat italic hand, ruled pages, and speech headings in preparing a formal or presentation playtext.³⁶ In either case, what’s interesting is the blatant attempt to capitalize on the success of previously dramatized subject matter. This particular lost play offers surprising evidence of the extent to which dramatists consciously engaged with well-known plays as source material, and is compatible with the business strategies of the commercial companies. In its blatant appropriation of Marlowe’s distinctive work it may not be typical, but as an extreme example of a playwright responding to fare from the public playhouses, it remains indicative of a usually more conservative tendency to emulate commercial drama rather than to be “original” in the modern sense of creativity.

The “Oswald fragment” (as Paul E. Bennett called it) or the “Play of Oswald” (as Wiggins prefers) is also only four pages (two folio leaves), but contains substantially more text than the “Stately Tragedy.”³⁷ The manuscript has suffered damage both from water and (worse) from John Payne Collier, who forged an allusion to Shakespeare at the end of the manuscript and who failed to record the provenance of the text before “sticking the leaves into his scrap-book the wrong way round,” as Greg snidely observes, “so that in each case the text begins on the verso.”³⁸ The fragment belongs to the end of the play. The Duchess enters

astonished, holding the hand of a young man named Oswald, ostensibly unknown to the Court. The Duchess's husband, Duke Ethelbert, examines the man closely, especially his distinctive jewels. This prompts Ethelbert to recount how his ambitious uncle had attempted to seize power for himself by killing Ethelbert's first-born son:

My wife had a first son, but my lewd [uncle],
Should I die heirless, thinking mine his own,
Poison'd that child; a second blest her womb;
That too was marked for death ere it knew life;
He meeting with the world was in one night
Secretly in the swathing clathes conveyed
Into Northumberland out of Mercia;
To mock the tyrant she gave out it died,
The nurse that kept it likewise lived not long,
But how nurse juggled, how my boy was lost,
I'm sure this cock and crucifix I tied
To a small chain of gold about his neck
With my own fingers... (f.37a)

In the lead up to the imminent revelation of Oswald's true identity as the Duke's son, students of *Cymbeline* may already be recalling Belarius's "dangerous speech" in the denouement of that play (5.4.314), where he reveals that "his" sons Polydore and Cadwal are really Cymbeline's sons, the princes Guiderius and Arviragus. In both *Cymbeline* and the "Play of Oswald," a dangerously ambitious family member plots and attempts the murder of the rightful heirs: the Queen plans to poison Imogen and kill Cymbeline in order to install Cloten, her own son from a former marriage, on the throne; Ethelbert's "cunning" and "lewd" uncle poisoned Ethelbert's firstborn son, resulting in the second-born (Oswald/Eldred) being

“Secretly in the swathing clathes conveyed / Into Northumberland out of Mercia” (f.37a), much as Cymbeline’s sons were wrapped “[i]n a most curious mantle” and removed from their true family’s custody (5.4.362).³⁹ In both plays, the inherent nobleness of the unsuspectingly high-born exiles is readily discernible however; Imogen meditates on the greatness of spirit possessed by the men who are ultimately revealed to be her brothers, likening their cave to a court (3.7.79-84), and Belarius continues to be surprised by the irrepressible regality of the boys he knows to be princes: “’Tis wonder / That an invisible instinct should frame them / To royalty unlearned” (4.2.177-79). Oswald’s insight into inherent nobility is expressed more crudely, and with bathos, but remains a variation on the theme:

I knew there was noble
blood in me, for I am in debt, and full of
other such noble qualities, can drink hard,
spend bravely, and love a sweet girl. (f.37^a-38^b).

The parallels continue, with the circumstances and criteria for positive identification in *Cymbeline* closely resembling those in the “Oswald fragment”:

CYMBELINE	Guiderius had Upon his neck a mole, a sanguine star. It was a mark of wonder.
BELARIUS	This is he, Who hath upon him still that natural stamp. It was wise nature’s end in the donation To be his evidence now. (5.4.364-69)

Guiderius has a birthmark that matches the “cinque-spotted” one Giacomo so famously spies on Imogen’s left breast earlier in the play (2.2.37-38). Siblinghood is thus established on the basis of the analogous moles. In the recognition-scene from the “Play of Oswald,” the Duchess recognizes Oswald as the son she had named Eldred, and Ethelbert confirms Oswald’s identity to his own satisfaction by examining not just the distinctive jewels (the “cock and crucifix” – presumably a Catholic device in the play’s pre-Reformation England – he tied to “a small chain of gold” about the boy’s neck), but his distinctive birthmarks: “the print / Of a ripe mulberry” on his neck and “[t]he talon of an eagle on this arm.”⁴⁰ Oswald compares his eagle birthmark with one that his mother also apparently has, exclaiming, “A whole eiry of eagles! So, so, sire; ’tis here, / [...] *et haec Aquila*, both he and she!”. In a modest example of how electronic collaboration can advance the study of lost plays, after I drafted the initial *Lost Plays Database* entry for this fragment, Matthew Steggle positively identified this garbled Latin tag as a quotation from the popular Renaissance teaching text, Lily’s *Short Introduction to Grammar*, where “aquila” (eagle) is given as an example of gender-ambiguous or “epicene” nouns:

[T]he joke is clear - Oswald lapses into Latin, and then spoils the effect by observing that ‘Haec aquila’ could denote a male or a female eagle. It is a bathetic scrap of schoolboy learning, puncturing the seriousness of this recognition-scene.⁴¹

The revelation of identity was fortunately timed, for it turns out the woman Oswald was about to marry was actually his sister. No such accidental incest is likely in *Cymbeline* – Imogen, unlike the wandering Oswald/Ethelred, is a woman, and therefore prudently disguises herself as a boy (Fidele) whilst travelling to Milford Haven; it is in this guise that she unwittingly meets her brothers – but the potential for disguised and dispersed siblings to form an attraction *is* registered on an almost metatheatrical level when Guiderius declares, “Were you a woman, youth, / I should woo hard” (3.6.66-67).

Beyond the similarities in the structure and details of the recognition scene (another theatergram popular in the commercial theater, and a device that Shakespeare also exploited in *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, and elsewhere), the generic experimentation of the “Oswald fragment” is noteworthy as a probable precursor to Shakespeare’s late plays. Shakespeare scholars have long noted that the collaboratively written *Henry VIII, or All is True* revisits historical material through a romance lens, and thus marks a turn in Shakespeare’s handling of history, away from the *Henry V* model, which itself had been developed in response to the providential, chronicle history form associated with the Queen’s Men in the 1580s.⁴² The “Oswald fragment” mixes *Cymbeline*-style romance (the prince raised pseudonymously in exile, eventually returning and being identified) with ostensibly Anglo-Saxon history. In the plot described above, which occupies the bulk of fol.37^{b-a}, we have several pseudo-historical personages. An Ethelbert was king of Kent, a convert to Christianity, and uncle to “Sigebert kyng of Essex” (there is a “Sibert” listed in the stage directions), with whom he began the foundations of St Paul’s cathedral in London. After he was killed in battle, his daughter married Edwin, the first Christian king of Northumberland. After his grandson was killed, Osricus and Eufrius reigned until they were succeeded by their brother Oswald, who reigned in Northumberland for 22 years, his son becoming the last king of the Britons. Even with so limited a textual fragment surviving, the “Play of Oswald” enlarges our pool of historical romance plays and our number of identity-revelation theatergrams. Although it is not yet possible to confirm its date with any certainty, scholars have tentatively assigned it to the turn of the century (i.e. preceding Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*), and the roughness and bathos with which it treats the elements of the identity-revelation theatergram’s components helps us clarify Shakespeare’s refinement of those elements in his own play.

What might such digitally enabled work on lost plays and source studies teach us about our own habits of writing and thinking?

First, and most obviously, working with such fragmentary data can be disturbingly similar to taking a Rorschach test. If we want to find a source for Shakespeare, the temptation is to see that possibility wherever we look, even when the evidence is inconclusive: if dates are indeterminate, we might confuse inferiority with either imitation *or* primacy relative to what Gary Taylor calls the “singularity” of Shakespeare.⁴³ Subjective judgments about quality are rarely a reliable indicator of chronology so much as of the critic’s own unspoken bias. A better approach to dating might utilize the keyword search function of large textual databases such as *EEBO-TCP*, to establish the time period in which distinctive words flourished: an *EEBO-TCP* search for the word “mockado”, for example (a kind of cloth) currently yields 18 hits in 15 texts, between 1578 and 1641.⁴⁴ The reference to a “mockado hart” in the “Oswald fragment” is therefore consistent with the date range of a Renaissance play. The phrase “plummets hanging” yields even fewer hits: six in total, with three of these being John Marston’s *The Malcontent* (1604, twice) or a quotation of it (in 1685).⁴⁵ *EEBO-TCP* has amassed an impressive corpus of texts (44,323 as of February 2014)⁴⁶ but it is not a complete record of everything written in England, and whilst these keyword-search experiments are helpful in strongly suggesting a date range consonant with the flourishing of the London commercial playhouses, dating the fragment with the degree of precision needed to establish it as a source for Shakespeare is not yet possible.⁴⁷

One reason for preferring to see the “Oswald fragment” as sharing a theatergram with *Cymbeline* rather than necessarily being a source is that perceptions of the fragment’s crudeness and dating of its distinctive words cannot guarantee that it preceded Shakespeare and was available to him as a source in the traditional sense. But creating a dialogue between the two moments remains a worthwhile enterprise because it creates a more vivid dramatic

context for each, and is mutually illuminating. We may not yet know which company performed the play (if it was performed), who wrote it, or when, but the parallels between “Oswald” and *Cymbeline* suggest they were known to each other, and that the formulaic ending was worth repeating and varying. A company may have repeated its own successes with the theatergram, or it may have attempted to emulate the success of a rival. Critics might argue that the version in “Oswald” is inferior, and was thus either copied and “improved” by Shakespeare or was a poor-man’s attempt to imitate Shakespeare. But it is at least *a priori* possible that the bathos in “Oswald” implies a deliberate parody of Shakespeare; that *Cymbeline*’s ending met with derision.

Second, in our haste to comprehend and categorize, we might inadvertently reduce complexity and ambiguity rather than acknowledge and celebrate it. It’s a simple but salient point: because the surviving drama is the minority, it should not be used as the only basis for hermeneutics. It cannot, as a matter of principle, be treated as necessarily typical, and it may not therefore form a normative rule for comparison. It may, in fact, have survived precisely because it was anomalous (in style, subject matter, quality or another aspect altogether), and a miraculous recovery of the lost corpus might completely recalibrate our expectations of what early moderns valued in plays. When drawing connections between a lost play and its next of kin, attempting to absorb the novelty into the known canon runs the risk of ironing out dissonance in the new example, where it should instead prompt a reconsideration of the familiar. David Kathman’s compelling re-dating of the backstage plot of a lost play known as “The Second Part of the Seven Deadly Sins” – from c.1590-91 and the Strange’s Men to c.1597-98 and the Lord Chamberlain’s Men – provides just such a prompt: should we query why late 1590s audiences would be interested in an “old-fashioned morality-style play”, or should we reconsider whether such subject matter really was passé by the turn of the century after all?⁴⁸ To approach the problem from a different angle, if a critic wanted to argue that

The Tempest were about the New World and that its oblique approach to the topic were the only way the bare London stages could proceed, the argument would founder on the inconvenient fact that the lost “New World’s Tragedy” (Admiral’s, 1595), “Conquest of the West Indies” (Admiral’s, 1601), and “Plantation of Virginia” (unknown, 1623) all seem much more explicitly engaged with the Americas.⁴⁹

Third (and a related point), to recover the likely subject matter of a lost play known by title or description necessarily involves conjecture about the sources available to the dramatist (not to mention conjecture about the likely use that dramatist may have made of those sources). Just because Shakespeare apparently favored Holinshed for historical material need not guarantee that all dramatists did; if a narrative is available in Holinshed and another source, do we perpetuate an undeserved legacy for Holinshed if our reconstruction of likely narrative prioritizes details found in his *Chronicles*? Does this inadvertently reinforce the dominance of a few key historians when study of the lost majority of early modern drama might be an opportunity to break this hegemony? Until recently it was assumed that the lost play of “Sir John Mandeville” (Strange’s, 1592) was based on one of the numerous editions of Mandeville’s *Travels* (a fictional account of the author’s adventures, presented as if having an autobiographical/historical basis), but this episodic, ostensibly eyewitness account of foreign lands would hardly furnish a narrative, and the consensus is now that William Warner’s *Albion’s England* (1596) contains a redaction or analogue of the lost play: hardly a self-evident / intuitive conclusion.⁵⁰ Likewise, in analyzing a lost play whose author had previously demonstrated familiarity with the same subject matter – for example, Michael Drayton, whose *England’s Heroical Epistles* (1597 and numerous subsequent editions) includes a number of stories also dramatized in plays that no longer exist – do we assume that “self-sourcing” entails *replication* or *complication* of the previous use?⁵¹ The methodological danger of making assumptions about likely sources for lost plays should, in turn, heighten our

awareness of the assumptions implicitly built into our conjecture about sources for surviving plays.

With these caveats in place, there are a variety of ways in which attention to lost plays might profitably enhance source studies: by emphasizing the importance of the native dramatic tradition for playwrights' inspiration; by potentially solving ambiguous cruces and allusions; by offering precedents in form and subject matter that a dramatist would need to engage with when writing his own play; and by urging consideration of dramatic units (theatergrams) smaller even than scenes, where we should expect to find variation, not simply similitude.

Throughout this essay, titles of extant plays are provided in italics; titles of lost plays are distinguished through the use of quotation marks. I would like to thank Alex Thom for providing research assistance and Matthew Steggle for reading a draft of this paper.

¹ ~~Bernard~~ Beckerman, *Shakespeare at the Globe, 1599-1609* (New York: Macmillan, 1962); ~~Roslyn Lander~~ Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company, 1594-1613* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1991); ~~Scott~~ McMillin and ~~Sally Beth~~ MacLean, *The Queen's Men and their Plays*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); ~~Lawrence~~ Manley and ~~Sally Beth~~ MacLean, *The Lord Strange's Men and their Plays*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); ~~Luey~~ Munro, *The Children of the Queen's Revels: A Jacobean Repertory Company* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

² ~~Scott~~ McMillin, *The Elizabethan Theatre and The Book of Sir Thomas More* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 9.

³ ~~W. David~~ Kay, "Shakespeare's Transformative Art: ~~Theatrical Paradigms as Sources in~~ *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Macbeth*," 000.

⁴ ~~See David~~McInnis and ~~Matthew~~Steggle, “Introduction: *Nothing* Will Come of Nothing? Or, What can we Learn from Plays that Don’t Exist?” *Lost Plays in Shakespeare’s England*, ed. ~~David McInnis and Matthew Steggle~~ (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1-14; esp. 1-2.

⁵ There are a variety of ways of estimating the total dramatic output for the period; most extrapolate from the limited data we have for one playhouse (e.g. the extensive records of the Rose playhouse, in the form of Henslowe’s diary) to postulate an equivalent number of plays for other venues or companies. It would be reasonable to assume, for example, that the Chamberlain’s Men had a repertory of roughly the same size as the Admiral’s Men, but in the absence of historical records, this remains intelligent guesswork. We might assume the Chamberlain’s lost a number of plays but we can’t reconstruct them in the way we can for the Rose playhouse, so these plays aren’t counted in the 744 ‘lost’ plays cited above.

⁶ For a recent account of the challenges of positing fairy tale / folklore sources, see ~~Ciara~~ Rawnsley, “Behind the Happily-Ever-After: ~~Shakespeare’s Use of Fairy Tales and *All’s Well That Ends Well*~~,” *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 2 (2013): 141-58”; for examples of source studies premised on oral reports see, e.g. ~~Arthur F.~~Kinney’s study of “oral narratives,” including the London preacher Henry Smith’s sermon on Jonah, in “Revisiting *The Tempest*,” *Modern Philology* 93.2 (1995): 161-77, 165. “Discursive con-texts” is a term developed in ~~Francis~~Barker and ~~Peter~~Hulme’s post-structuralist response to *The Tempest*’s absorption of history, in their “‘Nymphs and reapers heavily vanish’: The Discursive Con-texts of *The Tempest*,” ~~*Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis (London: Methuen,~~ 1985), 191-205.

⁷ ~~Richard~~Levin, “Negative Evidence,” *Studies in Philology* 92.4 (1995): 383-410.

⁸ *EEBO-TCP* has various search function capabilities such as the wildcard function (which enables users to enter a truncated form of a word and search for all terms beginning with that

stem), the variant forms function (which takes a keyword like “jealous” and returns hits for “iealous”, “iealousy”, etc.), or the proximity function (in which the search reports results of two words within a specified distance of each other).

⁹ See the entries for these titles in the *Lost Plays Database*, ed. Roslyn L. Knutson, David McInnis and Matthew Steggle (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 2009+) <www.lostplays.org>.

¹⁰ See Misha Teramura, “Brute Parts: From Troy to Britain at the Rose, 1595-1600,” and Paul Whitfield White “The Admiral’s Lost Arthurian Plays,” in [McInnis and Steggle](#), *Lost Plays in Shakespeare’s England*, 127-47 & 148-62.

¹¹ See, e.g. Geoffrey Bullough, “The Lost ‘Troilus and Cressida,’” *Essays and Studies* 17 (1964): 24-40 (esp. 39-40), and Ann Thompson, *Shakespeare’s Chaucer: A Study in Literary Origins* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1978), 32.

¹² E. A. J. Honigmann, “The First Quarto of *Hamlet* and the Date of *Othello*,” *Review of English Studies* 44 (1993): 217.

¹³ *Henslowe’s Diary*, ed. R. A. Foakes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 21.

¹⁴ Martin Wiggins, “Where to Find Lost Plays,” [McInnis and Steggle](#), *Lost Plays in Shakespeare’s England*, 265.

¹⁵ See Meredith Beales’s chapter on “microsources”, “XXX”, 000.

¹⁶ Christi Spain-Savage, “Reimagining Gillian: *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and the Lost ‘Friar Fox and Gillian of Brentfort,’” in [McInnis and Steggle](#), *Lost Plays in Shakespeare’s England*, 229-52.

¹⁷ Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing* (Arden 3), ed. Claire McEachern (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 2.1.246 and note; see also *Much Ado*, ed. Sheldon P. Zitner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2.1.264-7n.

¹⁸ On the need to analyze the omissions as well as borrowings from source texts, see ~~Jean R. Brink, “What does Shakespeare leave out of *King Lear*?”; *King Lear: New Critical Essays*, ed. Jeffrey Kahan (New York: Routledge, 2008), 208–30~~, esp. 208–9.

¹⁹ *Henslowe’s Diary*, ed. Foakes, 21.

²⁰ The anonymous Leir is grieving his queen’s death (there is no mystery over “Mrs Lear”), and needs to retire from his public role; the trial of love has a purpose: Cordella will speak best, and Leir will make her prove it by marrying his favoured suitor; he becomes anxious to learn who does love him most, though; Gonorill would leap to her death if asked, Ragan would marry as her father directed (which should be Cordella’s role); Cordella is subsequently turfed out, and wanders the countryside in poverty; France, disguising himself to catch a glimpse of Leir’s beautiful daughters, stumbles upon Cordella and takes her in.

²¹ On Shakespeare’s probable Marlovian inheritance, see ~~Mark Hutchings, “The End of *II Tamburlaine* and the beginning of *King Lear*,” *Notes & Queries* 47.1 (2000): 82–86~~.

²² ~~Louise George-Clubb, *Italian Drama in Shakespeare’s Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 6~~.

²³ ~~Henry Peacham, *The Truth of our Times*, *Revealed out of one Mans Experience, by way of Essay* (London, 1638), 102–5~~.

²⁴ On the playbook dates, see *DEEP: Database of Early English Playbooks*, ed. Alan B.

Farmer and Zachary Lesser. ~~Created 2007. Accessed 5 June 2015.~~

~~<<http://deep.sas.upenn.edu>>~~. On the date of *Lear*, see ~~Martin Wiggins, *British Drama, 1533–1642: A Catalogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1486~~.

²⁵ ~~Cyrus Mulready, “Romance on the Early Modern Stage,” *Literature Compass* 6.1 (2009): 113–27~~, 114.

²⁶ Mulready, “Romance,” 116.

²⁷ Mulready, “Romance,” 116.

²⁸ *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. Foakes, 33-37, 47, 54. The title also appears in the booksellers Richard Rogers and William Ley's list, "An exact and perfect Catalogue of all Playes that are Printed," appended to Thomas Goffe's *The Careless Shepherdess* (London, 1656). See the *LPD* entry for "Chinon of England".

²⁹ ~~W. W.~~ Greg, ed. *Henslowe's Diary, Part II: Commentary*, (London: A. H. Bullen, 1908), 178.

³⁰ ~~Christopher~~ Middleton, *The famous historie of Chinon of England...* (London, 1597), sig.H2; sig.H3.

³¹ Clubb, *Italian Drama*, 3. The theatergrams apparently present in "Chinon" may in turn have been inspired by Italian pastoral as traced by Robert Henke in *Pastoral Transformations* (University of Delaware Press, 1997), 56-60.

³² See the entries for each in the *Lost Plays Database*, ed. ~~Roslyn L.~~ Knutson, ~~David~~ McInnis and ~~Matthew~~ Steggle (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 2009) <www.lostplays.org>, which includes photographic reproductions of the Folger manuscript.

³³ Folger MS X.d.259, p2. ~~G. E.~~ Bentley cautiously follows this logic (*The Jacobean and Caroline Stage* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967], V.1345); ~~G. R.~~ Proudfoot thinks "a date within the first two decades of the [17th] century may seem likely enough" ("Five Dramatic Fragments," *Collections, Volume IX. The Malone Society*. [Oxford: OUP, 1971 (1977)], 65); and Wiggins does not include this title in the volumes of his *Catalogue* covering the sixteenth century.

³⁴ Folger MS X.d.259, p4. On this vogue for Tamburlaine-esque drama, see ~~Peter~~ Berek, "Tamburlaine's Weak Sons: Imitation as Interpretation before 1593," *Renaissance Drama* 13 (1982): 55-82.

³⁵ Folger MS X.d.259, p2.

³⁶ ~~Grace Ioppolo, *Dramatists and their Manuscripts in the Age of Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton and Heywood: Authorship, Authority and the Playhouse* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006, rpt.2008), 84.~~

³⁷ ~~Paul E. Bennett, “The Oswald Fragment and ‘A Knack to Know a Knave’,” *Notes and Queries* 196 (1951): 292-93; Wiggins, *Catalogue*, 1260.~~

³⁸ ~~W. W. Greg, “A Dramatic Fragment,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 7.3 (1904): 153-55,~~
148. Citations from the “Play of Oswald” are by folio number, and correspond to Greg’s transcription.

³⁹ Citations from *Cymbeline* given parenthetically are from Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, ed. Roger Warren (~~Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998~~).

⁴⁰ The cock and crucifix likely alludes to Peter’s repeated betrayal of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and the crucifixion that followed as a direct consequence; that the pendant includes a crucifix rather than a cross suggests Catholicism. William Winstanley, for example, notes these specific connotations in his *The new help to discourse or, Wit, mirth, and jollity...* (1680):

Qu. *Wherefore on the top of Church-steeple is the Cock set upon the Cross, of a long continuance?*

An. The Papists tell us, it is for our instruction; that whilest aloft we behold the Cross, and the Cock standing thereon, we may remember our sins, and with *Peter* seek and obtain mercy. (60)

The significance of the imagery may well have been established earlier in the play, in the lost portion.

⁴¹ See the “For What It’s Worth” section of the “Play of Oswald” entry in the *Lost Plays Database*.

⁴² See, for example, **Dimitry Senyshyn’s contribution to this volume, 000-000.**

⁴³ ~~Gary~~ Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present* (New York: ~~Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989~~), 374.

⁴⁴ The “mockado” example comes from Matthew Steggle (personal correspondence).

⁴⁵ Results of an EEBO-TCP search for “plummets hanging” are: Thomas Elyot, *Bibliotheca Eliotae* (1542); Lambert Daneau, *True and Christian friendshippe* (1586), Marston, *The Malcontent* (1604: STC 2nd ed. 17481 and 17479); Edward Stillingfleet, *Origines sacrae, or, A rational account of the grounds of Christian faith* (1662); and Edward Phillips commonplacing Marston in *The mysteries of love & eloquence* (1685).

⁴⁶ The list of TCP full text works currently available in EEBO is available as an excel spreadsheet to download from the “About EEBO and the Text Creation Partnership” page of EEBO-TCP.

⁴⁷ On the advantages and limitations of EEBO, see ~~Ian~~ Gadd, “The Use and Misuse of *Early English Books Online*,” *Literature Compass* 6:3 (2009): ~~680–92~~.

⁴⁸ ~~David~~ Kathman, David, “Reconsidering *The Seven Deadly Sins*,” *Early Theatre* 7.1 (2004): ~~13–44~~, 34.

⁴⁹ See the *Lost Plays Database* entries for these titles.

⁵⁰ On the earlier thinking, see ~~C. W. R. D.~~ Moseley’s two articles, “The Lost Play of Mandeville,” *The Library* 25 (1970): ~~46–49~~ and “The Metamorphoses of Sir John Mandeville,” *Yearbook of English Studies* 4 (1974): ~~5–25~~. For the new consensus, see ~~Lawrence~~ Manley and ~~Sally Beth~~ MacLean, *The Lord Strange’s Men and Their Plays* (~~New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014~~), 133–34 and Wiggins, *Catalogue*, 911.

⁵¹ I owe the use of the delightful term “self-sourcing” to Mark Houlahan, who uses the formulation in his chapter for this book, “**The Curious Case of Mr. William Shakespeare and the Red Herring: *Twelfth Night* in its sources**” 000-000.