

Shakespeare in America: film and television, popular music, burlesque theatre, multicultural adaptations, cartoons and comics, t-shirts and neckties, household bric-a-brac, and much more. 'Many academics', they say, 'take pride in their Shakespeare kitsch'! Is this Shakespeare, or even Shakespeare in America? Perhaps not, but it does offer a perspective on American popular culture that could be carried further.

Martin Wiggins, in association with Catherine Richardson. *British Drama 1533–1642: A Catalogue. Volume I: 1533–1566*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp li, 500.

PETER HAPPÉ
University of Southampton

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This is the first volume of a large-scale undertaking that may, I understand, eventually run to ten volumes and as such is likely to be valuable in many different ways and to have many years of life ahead of it. The introduction, laying out the guiding principles, indicates that it is a work *sui generis*, intended to complement the achievements of other scholars rather than to supersede them. The project presents information about a very large corpus of 'plays' in a systematic way giving 'a consistently detailed body of information in standard format about the whole of English Renaissance drama' (vii.). At a later stage the authors envisage a searchable electronic edition.

The 440 plays in volume one are arranged in chronological order by years, using both positive information where available and educated speculation where the evidence is less than conclusive to give a 'best guess' for the date. This will facilitate a historical perspective since it allows some insight, however limited, into the nature of drama year by year. With the help of some typographical ingenuity, each entry gives information, if it has been found, under six categories that are explained in the introduction: Identity, Fiction, Literary, Theatrical, Historical, and Evidence. These comprise a wide variety of very detailed information and will be valuable for research in many different directions. For example, the Theatrical category offers information about each play's requirements as a theatrical artefact. These include original and implied stage directions, details on staging, assumptions about the audience,

sound effects and music, properties, scenery, costumes, and make-up. The source for these different types of information may be the actual text, as far as it survives, but also includes archival information where it can be assumed to apply to each particular play, as in lists of expenditure or eye-witness accounts. In the other categories, which inevitably sometimes overlap, detail about the nature and development of the texts and their language abounds. The authors find space for discussion of particular problems such as the relationship between different versions of the same play as well as for necessary speculation about details that are uncertain and require interpretation or reevaluation. Detailed information about early textual and staging history furthers the chronological aspects of the *Catalogue*. The authorial intention is not to provide a bibliography for this corpus of plays on the grounds that such information is available elsewhere. Instead, bibliographical references work here to justify the information provided.

Without any doubt this accumulation of information is an exceptionally valuable contribution for researchers because it covers such a wide range and also because it addresses critically many difficult features that arise in the study of the drama of this period. These include matters concerning date, authorship, and the status of texts. Questions may arise, however, over two aspects: the reliability of the information recorded and the authors' decisions about what is included and what is left out. Both of these topics are consciously explored in the introduction and are clearly a matter of authorial concern. The work here shares twin difficulties with the REED project. The past is a moving target and is partly a construct of those who seek to recall it, largely because the information that can be adduced from sources is selective as well as fragmentary, and also because perspectives keep changing. Secondly, accumulation of information in catalogue form risks being superseded or rendered inaccurate by the work of later investigators or collectors. These problems are likely to be offset in part by the development of the electronic edition.

As far as the accuracy of the material is concerned, it has not been possible to check all the information provided — a task that might take nearly as long as the eleven years spent so far in the compilation of this catalogue. The following comments are therefore based upon looking in detail at a limited sample of the material. In the plays I have selected, I have been able to confirm that a very high proportion of the information presented is supported by the texts. However, among these I have checked I have found a few items that might be altered. In Bale's *King Johan*, for example, the details of the

presumed doubling scheme need reconsideration. The author raises a question about an inconsistency in it that is explicable in quite a different way from that proposed here. Some doubts about the date of the original version of the play have also been raised, suggesting that it originated rather earlier than 1538. The subsection for Place, under the section for Setting, ought to note that some of the action takes place in Rome, since there is nothing to suggest that the Pope came to England. But the meticulous attention to detail does allow the chronology of Bale's plays, lost or extant, to emerge rather more clearly than was previously thought.

In order to illustrate the kind of doubts that may arise for readers of this volume, I would like to detail a few more queries. Some uncertainty arises about what happens to the gay coat of Wit in *Wit and Science*. The weapon called 'mall' used by Tediousness could be mentioned, and Ignorance's hood has fool's ears. The 'Other Characters' section of the entry for Jasper Heywood's *Thyestes* could be enlarged to include several more names. The content of prologues might be described more fully, especially when they are concerned with dramatic form and theory, as in *Thyestes*. Further questions might be raised over the mystery cycles. Even if they did originate as part of medieval culture, the modifications or recreations of their texts and the many performances they received might still make them part of theatrical and historical criteria for inclusion in the drama of the sixteenth century. I am surprised that there are no references to John S. Farmer's series of Tudor Facsimile Texts. These items are a reminder that the wealth of information provided here is not set in stone, that another compiler might have perceived them differently, and that users of this collection ought to be vigilant and take responsibility for the conclusions they derive from it.

The chronological limits of the *Catalogue* are discussed in the introduction and this may betray some authorial unease at what lies just outside an admittedly arbitrary limit in each case. Wiggins describes the chosen dates as representing 'meaningful conjunction(s) of national and theatrical history'. As far as 1533 is concerned, the break with Rome may be seen as sufficiently historical but it is rather difficult to see the 'theatrical' aspect of the choice. It has the awkward effect of excluding the dramatic works of John Skelton (whose *Magnyfycence* was printed in 1530) and John Rastell, both of whom contributed significantly to the development of interludes in the sixteenth century. It also leaves out a considerable number of court entertainments produced for Henry VIII and for Cardinal Wolsey, some of which were distinctly political in nature and had a bearing on the developing Reformation

in the second and third decades of the century. This date, moreover, excludes some of the plays of John Heywood, who commented on the Reformation from a Catholic point of view and now seems to have done a great deal towards the development of the interlude as a political instrument. As far as Heywood is concerned, a degree of doubt exists around the dates of some of his plays, especially *John John*, which has been found to contain additions to the translation from the French source aimed at drawing attention to the pregnancy of Queen Anne Boleyn in 1533. One might ask why this, and perhaps other works, are left out when there is a plausible case for inclusion.

1642, the closing date, admits rather less in the way of doubt because the closing of the theatres was undoubtedly both a theatrical and historical occurrence. Recently, however, we have seen a reconsideration of drama in the following years and during the Commonwealth, and, as the introduction here notes, some theatrical figures like James Shirley did survive to the Restoration. At one point these limits are described as 'porous'. For both of them one might query why a specific cut-off date was necessary at all given the sharp consequence of a strictly observed boundary that inevitably interrupts continuities and tends to allow little for uncertainties. The aim stated in the first quotation above, systematically to treat 'the whole of English Renaissance drama', may not be quite sustainable when there is chronological uncertainty about what such a whole actually is. Insistence upon these limits does not significantly benefit the enterprise. As I have suggested, it looks as though this project is going to be a valuable part of drama scholarship for a long time, but I fear that there will always be a peripheral uneasiness about what might have been left out. One might hope, however, that such uneasiness will lead to further creative enquiry.

The introduction addresses the definition of drama, and here the approach is not unnecessarily exclusive. The position adopted is open-minded, and although some characteristics of drama are laid down there is no exclusive insistence upon any single one. Indeed the introduction actually says, 'In most cases it is obvious whether or not a work is dramatic'. The implication is that drama is detectable by the presence of some or all of a number of characteristics. The further consideration of the 'borderline' forms in dialogues, civic pageants, and tilts allows a generous entry and by this means the *Catalogue* is enriched. Especially valuable is the inclusion of details about court entertainments.

Such an open entry is probably the greatest benefit of this work, for it puts before the reader a wealth of information about varieties of dramatic form in

this period. This broad collection will help to build up a reliable impression of the era's dramatic life and its complexities. Through it the dramatic skills of the period's practitioners will be perceivable and many other questions about topics including location, genre, language, and cultural context will also be clarified. If the work is as accurate as I have reason to suppose it is, the work of many readers and researchers will be stimulated and made more fruitful by it.