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Knutson, Roslyn L., David McInnis, and Matthew Steggle, eds. *The Lost Plays Database*

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See table of contents

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The Lost Plays Database.
Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 2009. Accessed 30 October 2018.
lostplays.folger.edu.

The *Lost Plays Database* is an open source Wiki that catalogues what we know about lost plays from the early modern theatre. It is fast becoming an invaluable resource to the student or scholar interested in the period's drama. The editors—Roslyn L. Knutson, David McInnis, and Matthew Steggle—not content to join the ranks of those who decry how little remains from the period's theatre, have curated a database that shows just how much can be learned from the study of that which is lost. Rather than adhere to a lost/not-lost binary, the database offers degrees of "lostness": it is "a continuum, not an absolute state."[1] Such a fact is made clear by the entries in the database. Readers can peruse entries with several thousand words, like the one for the *Late Murder in White Chapel, or Keep the Widow Waking*, or be met with a red link, signalling a blank page for an entry, meaning information about plays like the anonymous *Pontius Pilate* appears agonizingly out of reach. This is no criticism: before the editors undertook their work, all lost plays were effectively empty database entries. And the last major word on lost early modern plays had been C. J. Sisson's *Lost Plays of Shakespeare's Age* in 1936.

The database has recently migrated from lostplays.org to being hosted on the Folger Shakespeare Library's site. Those familiar with its old home will note a quiet move away from the Wikipedia-style appearance for the site. The "deep red hues of wax seals" chosen to signal the site as a "scholarly research tool" remain though, as does the search-bar and side-bar.[2] Entries themselves follow a uniform style with a "Contents" box at the top of each page, hyperlinked to find each section in an entry. Records contain sections like "Historical Records," "Theatrical Provenance," "Probable Genre(s)," "Possible Narrative and Dramatic Sources or Analogues," "References to the Play," "Critical Commentary," and "For What It's Worth." Each is a gold mine, often replete with pictures, links,

1. David McInnis and Matthew Steggle, "Introduction: Nothing Will Come of Nothing? Or, What Can We Learn from Plays That Don't Exist?," in *Lost Plays in Shakespeare's England*, ed. David McInnis and Matthew Steggle (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 11.

2. Roslyn L. Knutson and David McInnis, "*The Lost Plays Database*: A Wiki for Lost Plays," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 24 (2011): 47.

and references. In particular, "For What It's Worth" deals in exactly the kind of cautious-but-necessary speculation required when dealing with plays for which no main playtext survives.

Taken together, these sections build up as full a picture possible of any given lost play. When pertinent to discussion, the database provides extensive quotations from relevant works. This provides the user with ample context for the details under consideration without having to look them up elsewhere. Another service to the user is the provision of live links to texts stored in the Internet Archive. The editors favour W. W. Greg's edition of the theatre impresario Philip Henslowe's diary, for example, because it is in the public domain and is fully digitized on the Internet Archive site.

Browsing the site can be as enlightening as reading individual entries, and the database's structure allows one to do this in several ways. Entries can be browsed by "Play Titles," viewed under each letter of the alphabet, by "Years," with each title assigned to a single year, by "Dramatists," viewed by playwright, and by "Auspices," where records are ordered first by type of acting company or type of playing venue, and then by specific company or specific playing venue. Collaborative plays appear under the entry for each known author. Examining entries under the first three of these options yields a neat table where one can order entries by one of the other browsing options. That is, when browsing by selecting someone from the "Dramatists" section, one can view the plays attributed to them, and order corresponding records by "Play Title," "Year," or "Auspices." The best way to do this is to browse by play title, and then first letter, because users are then met with the fullest data table to order. Such a browsing structure is a boon for the theatre historian interested in, say, repertory study or authorship study. There is no opportunity to examine metadata wholesale, however. That is, users cannot browse all the entries in the database on a single page. This seems a shame for the researcher interested in taking a big-data approach to the records of theatre history.

The editors ought to be commended for the volume of material present on the site. The Wiki style means it is not all the editors' job to populate the database, either: others can add information about lost plays. The database is not, like some wikis, open for public editing, though. Would-be contributors must express their interest to the editors and supply answers to questions about their scholarly background before being allowed to edit. Though such a process doubtless deters the casual contributor whom larger wikis, like Wikipedia, rely

on, this quality control measure ensures the site's content remains of a high quality, useful to scholars. Browsing the list of contributors—a list available on the site found under "Contributors"—shows that plenty of major and emerging theatre historians have joined the main editors in supplying material.

Entries are created and edited using Wiki markup, the same markup language as is used to encode entries in Wikipedia. This markup is used by the open source MediaWiki software to format the database's pages. Though doubtless new to some contributors, Wiki markup is easy to learn, with extensive guidelines published on Wikipedia. The MediaWiki software will also format elements of HyperText Markup Language (HTML). Users can view a page's markup via the "View Source" option found by clicking the document icon in the top right corner of pages. Often, reference to this is enough to see how some formatting is achieved and might be implemented elsewhere.

Most of the editing appears to belong to the named editors. "Recent Changes" in the site's left-hand menu shows that at the time of writing (October 2018), Knutson, McInnis, and Steggle are responsible for twenty-nine of the thirty-six non-minor edits in the last thirty days. Changes are logged and can be viewed from this page, or by using the "History" option under the document icon in the top right corner of the page when viewing a play's entry. As with Wikipedia, the *Lost Plays Database* allows users to view previous versions of a page, compare earlier/later versions of a page, and see which contributor made which edits. Such openness is laudable, and one wonders whether it might become requisite if lost plays ever find themselves the subject of heated academic disagreement: edit logs of possible edit wars will be most useful if they do.

Before heated disagreements, though, there must be research generated. As the homepage tells us, "The *Lost Plays Database* is a wiki-style forum for scholars to share information about lost plays in England, 1570–1642. Its purpose is to add lost plays to scholarly discussions of early modern theatrical activity." The editors highlight the research applications to which the database has been put. An "LPD-derived publications" page—linked on the homepage— lists published research about plays in the database. As with editing, the named editors are overwhelmingly represented, but then perhaps they should be the ones benefitting most from their labours. The collection *Lost Plays in Shakespeare's England*, edited by McInnis and Steggle, for instance, is at once a vital intervention that encourages scholars to refocus attention on lost plays and a blueprint for showing how they might do it.

The *Lost Plays Database* is exactly what the digital scholar needs to tackle a subject in the twenty-first century: an open, dynamic resource, rich in scholarly content, that throws much new light on a forgotten topic.

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McGann, Jerome, project dir.
Juxta. **Open-source tool and web service.**
Applied Research in Patacriticism (ARP), Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, 2012. Accessed 31 March 2018. juxtasoftware.org/.

At its heart, *Juxta*—in all its iterations and just as the website advertises—is a tool for collation. A user uploads or creates a number of files representing various witnesses of a text. *Juxta* then compares the differences between these representations and displays them for the user in the form of neat, easily understood visualizations. It has had a great deal of success as a tool for both scholarship and pedagogy, and it is incredibly useful as such.

Looking more closely, however, there are some points of concern. The juxtasoftware.org site gives the impression of being abandoned, with a page of recent posts that are simply the number "1" alongside a date. The "Recent Tweets" section has nothing since 2013. The juxtacommons.org companion site *seems* much more up-to-date, but this may just be an artifact of not having any sort of dating, thus avoiding the impression of posts being "old." Based on this perception, I assume users are intended to utilize the *Juxta Commons* site (which I will refer to as "*Juxta*" from here on out) in the future and that the older, standalone tool is provided simply as a courtesy. This is borne out when a user goes to the "download" page on the *Juxta* software site, which indicates that the offline version is a "legacy" piece of software. While I appreciate the desire to avoid having to update two separate codebases (as evidenced by the two separate .git repositories for *Juxta*—github.com/performant-software/juxta-desktop and github.com/performant-software/juxta-service, respectively), the decision to deprecate the offline version of *Juxta* is a shame. A standalone tool can be used both off and online, making it able to be used on the fly in archives or (as