

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



New Resources for Performance History: Digital Newspaper Archives and Modern Productions of *Gorboduc*

Jessica L. Winston
Idaho State University
winsjess@isu.edu

Studies of English Renaissance drama in modern performance focus on Shakespeare in professional productions, such as those at the Globe or the National Theatre. Traditionally, little attention has been paid to performances of other early modern plays, or even performances of Shakespeare beyond major companies. In recent years, scholars have begun to recover modern performance histories of plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries and to investigate Shakespeare in university, regional, and amateur productions, and in global contexts.¹ Yet the modern performance history of Tudor drama – those sixteenth-century plays composed before the rise of professional companies in the 1580s – remains to be explored. One reason lies in the plays' absence from the repertoire of professional companies, but another concerns the difficulty of discovering other, more far-flung productions.

With the recent development of digital newspaper archives, it is now possible to locate modern performances of Tudor plays in university, regional, and broadcast venues. These databases consolidate hundreds of national and regional newspapers in one place, and often contain intuitive functions to search, clip, and save articles. Such databases have not yet been widely utilized by scholars of early modern drama in performance, even in research on Shakespeare. With them, however, one can locate productions of

¹ For some milestone examples, see Michael Dobson, *Shakespeare and Amateur Performance: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Pascale Aebischer and Kathryn Prince (eds.), *Performing Early Modern Drama Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Andrew Hartley (ed.), *Shakespeare on the University Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and the section on 'Global Shakespeare' in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Performance*, ed. by James C. Bulman (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 423–640.

even relatively obscure Renaissance plays from the mid-nineteenth century onward, often in out-of-the way, even surprising locales. The most notable of these databases are *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers* (from the Library of Congress) and the *British Newspaper Archive* (a joint project of the British Library and findmypast). There are also commercial sites such as Newspapers.com and the AccessNewspaper Archive, as well as databases for researching specific newspapers, such as the *Guardian and Observer Digital Archive*, or specific regions, such as the Wyoming Newspaper Project.

Research into the modern reception of *Gorboduc* illustrates the usefulness of these databases to the field of performance history. First performed in 1562 at the Inner Temple and Whitehall and again at Dublin Castle in 1601, *Gorboduc* is widely understood to have no history of post-Renaissance production.² Scholarly editions of the play do not discuss modern performances. The play also does not appear in Karin Brown's 2012 list of modern professional productions of non-Shakespearean drama, or Jeremy Lopez's corresponding lists of early modern plays in academic and amateur settings.³ Yet a search of digital newspaper archives indicates that the play has been performed in whole or in redacted form multiple times in modern times in professional, university, and amateur productions.

The following handlist provides the first compilation of modern productions of *Gorboduc*. All but the two were discovered through searches in consolidated digital newspaper archives.

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² On the initial performances, see Jessica Winston, 'Expanding the Political Nation: *Gorboduc* at the Inns of Court and Succession Revisited', *Early Theatre: A Journal Associated with the Records of Early English Drama* 8.1 (2005), 11–34. On the Dublin performance, see Chris Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 1.

³ Karin Brown, 'Professional Productions of Early Modern Drama in the UK and USA, 1960–2010', in *Performing Early Modern Drama*, ed. by Aebischer and Prince, pp. 178–217. Jeremy Lopez, 'Performances of Early Modern Drama at Academic Institutions since 1909', in *Performing Early Modern Drama*, ed. by Aebischer and Prince, pp. 218–224; and Lopez, 'Performance of Early Modern Plays by Amateur and Student Groups since 1887', in *Performing Early Modern Drama*, ed. by Aebischer and Prince, pp. 225–227.

1888–1892

British-born American actress Catherine Reignolds Winslow (1836–1911) performs selections from *Gorboduc* as part of a multi-week series of dramatic lectures and readings on early English drama. She gave the readings multiple times, including:

- 23 Jan 1888: Hawthorne Rooms (Boston);⁴
- 20 March 1889: Berkeley Lyceum (West 44th St., New York City);⁵
- February 24, 1891, Cambridge School (20 Mason Street, Cambridge, MA). Sponsored by the English Club of the Harvard Annex;⁶ and
- 31 October 1892, Pierce Hall (Copley Square, Boston). Sponsored by the New England Women's Press Association.⁷

1906

University of Wyoming Alumni group presents scenes from *Gorboduc* and *The Spanish Tragedy* in mid-June 1906.⁸

1928-1929

Students at the Hull Municipal Training College perform the play (13 December 1928), with an almost all female cast, under the direction of Dr A.E. Parsons. Repeat performance on Wednesday, 27 February 1929.⁹

1947

Mr Harold Green presents readings from pre-Shakespearean and Shakespearean drama for an audience of 50-60 people at the Nottingham People's Theatre on 21 January 1947. The reading included extracts from plays including *Everyman*, *Gorboduc*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, and *Richard III*. Part of a series for members of the theatre studying the history of British drama.¹⁰

1949

Laboratory Theatre of the Carolina Players, under the direction of W.P. Covington, presents an adapted, one-hour production of *Gorboduc* on the campus of University of

⁴ 'Table Gossip', *Boston Sunday Globe*, 22 January 1888, p. 13.

⁵ 'The Dramatic Stage', *New York Times*, 21 March 1889, p. 4.

⁶ 'The English Dramatists: A Course of Readings by Mrs. Erving Winslow', *Boston Post*, 23 February 1891, p. 4.

⁷ 'Mrs. Winslow's Readings', *The Cambridge Tribune*, 15 October 1892, p. 2.

⁸ 'University', *Laramie Boomerang*, 7 June 1906, p. 4.

⁹ "'Mail' Mems' and 'An Old Time Tragedy: Ancient Play Revived by Hull Students', 14 December 1928, *Hull Daily Mail*, p. 3; 'To the Editor', 22 February 1929, *Hull Daily Mail*, p. 11; "'Mail" Mems, *Hull Daily Mail*, 23 February 1929, p. 2; "'Mail" Mems', *Hull Daily Mail*, 26 February, 1929, p. 4.

¹⁰ 'Nottm. Readings from Old Plays', *Nottingham Journal*, 22 January 1947, p. 6.

North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The first performance took place at Gerard Hall (29 January 1949) at a meeting of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference, with a repeat performance at Graham Memorial Hall (6 February 1949).¹¹

1956-1957

BBC Radio's Third Programme airs a 35-minute redaction of *Gorboduc* as part of *The First Stage*, a multipart series on the development of English drama. Produced by Raymond Raikes, and directed by John Barton, this production featured James Dale as *Gorboduc*.¹² The series, which first aired in November 1956, was rebroadcast periodically until September 1957. *Gorboduc* appears in an episode on the Universities and Inns of Court, which also included a production of *Gammer Gurton's Needle*. In 1970, Dover Publications published the series in the United States as a set of long play record albums. The set was reviewed in the *New York Times*.¹³

2008

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre produces a staged reading of *Gorboduc* at the Globe under the auspices of the Read Not Dead series. Directed by Oliver Senton, with Martyn Read as *Gorboduc*, this 1 hour, 45-minute production exists as a recording in archives of Shakespeare's Globe.¹⁴

2013

The Globe Shakespeare Theatre produces a staged reading of *Gorboduc* in collaboration with the Inner Temple, again under the auspices of the Read Not Dead series. Performed in the Parliament Rooms of the Inner Temple. Directed by Oliver Senton, this production featured amateur actors drawn from law students and barristers. Peter Kirwan consolidates these and other details in a helpful review on his blog *Bardathon*.¹⁵ While there is no known recording, still photos are available through Savannah Photographic (U.K.).¹⁶

¹¹ 'Historical Manuscript Meet Gets Underway Here Today', *Daily Tar Heel*, 26 January 1949, p. 1; 'Playmaker Lab to Give Tragedy', *Daily Tar Heel*, 4 February 1949, p. 1; Vestal C. Taylor, 'Entertainment Guide: Cries of Discontent', *Daily Tar Heel*, 8 February 1949, p. 2.

¹² 'Third Programme Ten Years Old', *Manchester Guardian*, 25 August 1956, p. 2; 'Early English Drama: B.B.C. Series of Monthly Performances', *The Times* (London), p. 4.

¹³ Thomas Lask, 'Early Theater on Disks', 28 October 1962, section X, p. 18.

¹⁴ Barbara Wooding, 'Gorboduc', *Marlowe Society Research Journal* 5 (2008), pp. 1–6.

< www.marlowe-society.org/pubs/journal/journal.html >.

¹⁵ Peter Kirwan, 'Gorboduc (Shakespeare's Globe Read Not Dead) @ The Parliament Room, Inner Temple', *Bardathon*, 28 April 2013. <blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/bardathon/>.

¹⁶ Savannah Photographic: <savannahphotographic.zenfolio.com/p381136316>.

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With the rise of the digital humanities, early modernists have developed and are finding new ways to utilize digital tools to contextualize and interpret early modern texts. As Matthew Steggle has demonstrated, projects such as the Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership (EEBO–TCP) provide fresh ways to contextualize works, even as they raise further methodological questions and challenges.¹⁷ Like EEBO–TCP, consolidated newspaper databases are a new and powerful tool for performance history research, but they too have limitations. Most obviously, references in newspapers are only a starting point for research, necessitating further investigations into the production, reception, and social meanings of a particular performance, not to mention the development of theories and methods keyed to non-Shakespearean drama.¹⁸

More practically, even searches across multiple databases may not create a complete record. To compile the above list, it was necessary to search multiple databases, and the Read Not Dead productions did not come up in these.¹⁹ Furthermore, *Gorboduc*'s distinctive title helped, since most of the results were references to the play (if not the play in performance), with only an occasional irrelevant hit, such as the reference to King Gorboduc in *Twelfth Night*. It would take more time to research a play with a common phrase in the title or variant spellings. During the research on *Gorboduc*, I found references to *Gammer Gurton's Needle* with the first word spelled 'Grammer' and 'Gammar' and *Ralph Roister Doister*, spelled with a 'y' instead of an 'i'.

Despite these limitations, digital newspaper archives are a significant resource, and they provide a means to begin to integrate two fields that are largely separate in early modern studies today — Tudor studies and performance history. Over the past fifteen years, scholars have productively reframed the field of Tudor literature, demonstrating the subtle and dramatic ways that these works contributed to the period's religious and political transformations.²⁰ Yet Tudor studies remain largely historicist, and editions

¹⁷ Matthew Steggle, 'The Cruces of *Measure for Measure* and EEBO-TCP', *The Review of English Studies*, 65 (2014), 438–455.

¹⁸ On the need for new approaches to non-Shakespearean performance, see Emma Smith, 'Performing Relevance/Relevant Performances: Shakespeare, Jonson, Hitchcock', in *New Directions in Renaissance Drama and Performance*, ed. by Sarah Werner (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 147–161. Peter Kirwin also explores this issue in 'Not Shakespeare and The Shakespearean Ghost', in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Performance*, ed. by Bulman, pp. 87–103.

¹⁹ The Read Not Dead productions turned up in searches in the MLA Database and through an internet search engine.

²⁰ See for example, Kent Cartwright, *A Companion to Tudor Literature* (Wiley-Blackwell 2010); Cathy Shrank and M. Pincombe, 'Doing Away with the Drab Age: Research Opportunities in Mid-Tudor

and scholarly studies rarely address modern performance reception in the way that is now common in research and teaching on Shakespeare.²¹ Some current projects have begun to reframe Tudor texts in relation to the modern and contemporary contexts and performance. For example, Harriet Archer and Paul Frazer's *Gorboduc Project* explores the play in relation to contemporary issues of political devolution and regional political agency.²² The Early Drama at Oxford project includes new stagings of dramas originally performed at the university, 1480–1650.²³ Digital newspaper archives can propel research in Tudor drama further in this direction. With them, it is possible to find, and thus to begin to document and analyze the reception and indeed continued relevance of Tudor drama, particularly from the mid-nineteenth century onward. Beyond Tudor studies, digital newspaper archives are a valuable tool for scholars seeking to record and explore the reception of other non-Shakespearean Renaissance plays, as well as for those seeking to research further into Shakespeare in amateur, regional, university, and indeed global performance.

Literature (1530–1580)', *Literature Compass* 7.3 (2010), 160–76; Cathy Shrank and Mike Pincombe (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature, 1485–1603* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Greg Walker (ed.), *Oxford Anthology of Tudor Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²¹ On the historicist orientation of Tudor studies see, Pincombe and Shrank, 'Doing Away with the Drab Age'. On the absence of performance history in studies of non-Shakespearean drama, see Smith, 'Performance Relevance/Relevant Performances', esp. pp. 151–152. For an example of the integration of performance into Shakespeare-focused research and teaching, see the *Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd edition, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt et al., (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), which unlike previous editions, contains a list of notable performances and a performance note on each play, and the *New Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), which also contains a brief list of important performances of each play.

²² Harriet Archer and Paul Frazer, *The Gorboduc Project: Divisions of Empire – Territory, Politics and Performance*. <gorboducproject.com>.

²³ Early Drama at Oxford. <edox.org.uk>.