

the merry world deftly interrogates the interplay between various forms of popular culture in the period.

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*Untimely Deaths in Renaissance Drama: Biography, History, Catastrophe.*  
Andrew Griffin.

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*Untimely Deaths in Renaissance Drama* compellingly demonstrates how Renaissance dramatists drew from and participated in methodological conflicts in early modern English historiography. It posits the early modern stage as a “historiographical laboratory” where playwrights experimented with narrative formulas both dramatic and extradramatic to make sense of life and death, the latter represented by heterogeneous visions (including providential, magical, mythographic, antiquarian, and humanistic) of historical causality. Paradoxically, these formulas become clearest when examining narrative failure, such as “untimely death,” a fatality that occurs before it should according to the conventions of historical, biographical, and dramatic narrative forms. Such kinds of narrative abruption or disruption resist explanation and reveal much about early modern historical culture.

*Untimely Deaths* focuses on narrative abruption in four historiographically sophisticated plays by Shakespeare, Middleton, Marlowe, and Tourneur. Chapter 1 explores *Richard II*'s interrogation of the potential causes of Richard's death, deemed “untimely” by Bolingbroke in the play's closing lines. *Richard II* reproduces early modern historiography's overabundant and conflicting explanations for Richard's demise, which variously plotted Richard's biography in terms of secular humanism's great-man model, a tragic *de casibus* trajectory, providence, or chance. *Untimely Deaths* characterizes *Richard II* as a “problem tragedy” that dramatizes conflicts between these different approaches to historical interpretation without settling on any.

Chapter 2 demonstrates Middleton's synthesis of different historiographic modes in his city comedy *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. As the City of London's first chronologer, Middleton directly participated in contemporary London historiography, a practice that deeply informs *A Chaste Maid*. *Untimely Death* helpfully observes that recognizing the play's affinity with urban historiography resolves much of its apparent incoherence. Chapter 3 investigates early modern drama's engagement with mythic histories, arguing that Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage* speaks to the period's growing skepticism about Britain's Trojan origins. The most important facet of this myth was the *translatio imperii*, whereby Troy and Rome's imperial greatness was transferred to Britain through its foundation by Brute, Aeneas's grandson. *Untimely Deaths* proposes that *Dido* reimagines the *translatio imperii* as a story of “traumatic repetition,” and lays bare its

human costs. In *Dido*, the epic history of nations confronts the tragic biography of individuals; arguing that criticism has widely misinterpreted the relationship between epic history and tragedy in both Virgil's *Aeneid* and Marlowe's play, *Untimely Death* demonstrates that Marlowe's innovation is to reframe Dido as a victim of epic, not of tragic *hamartia*. Dido's death, then, is not explicable according to the logic of tragedy; for Marlowe, her death is "irredeemably untimely," "because history for Marlowe, following a narrow stream of historiographical trends, is fundamentally shapeless" (32).

Chapters 1, 2, and 3, foreground Shakespeare's "historical agnosticism," Middleton's "historical syncretism," and Marlowe's "historical scepticism," respectively, through their engagements with extradramatic historiographic forms. Chapter 4 explores drama's direct participation in early modern historiography with a reading of Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy*. The play includes a set piece that dramatizes the Siege of Ostend (1600–03), a three-year military operation against Spain that ended in England's surrender and the deaths of 100,000 people, including 20,000 English soldiers. Detailed and historically accurate, *The Atheist's Tragedy's* set piece attempts to make sense of this catastrophe by positioning it within the narrative logic of revenge tragedy, with its reliable, satisfying administration of vindictive justice. In so doing, the play counters the pervasive impression of the military disaster's senselessness, producing instead a consoling vision of historical order. In its conclusion, *Untimely Deaths* shifts its focus from dramatic emplotment to biography, considering how Ben Jonson negotiated his mid-career success with his relatively long life. That Jonson peaked with the *Works* in folio (1616) and "overlived" his prime has been suggested by early modern and modern critics. *Untimely Deaths* demonstrates Jonson's preemptive rejection of such interpretations by positioning his late works as the culmination of his career that reflect on the fullness of his life as a whole.

*Untimely Deaths* makes a major contribution to the field of early modern historiography, demonstrating that not only the history play proper but also the dramatic genres of comedy and tragedy played a central role in early modern historical culture, through plays that recognize, articulate, and seriously intervene in the culture's manifold methodological conflicts.

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*Stages of Loss: The English Comedians and Their Reception.*

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George Oppitz-Trotman's *Stages of Loss: The English Comedians and Their Reception* elucidates the emergence and development of theater characterized by travel and festivity in