



Dramatic Extracts in Seventeenth-Century English Manuscripts: Watching, Reading, Changing Plays

Laura Estill

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Throughout the seventeenth century, early modern play readers and playgoers copied dramatic extracts (selections from plays and masques) into their commonplace books, verse miscellanies, diaries, and songbooks. *Dramatic Extracts in Seventeenth-Century English Manuscripts: Watching, Reading, Changing Plays* is the first to examine these often overlooked texts, which reveal what early modern audiences and readers took, literally and figuratively, from plays. As this under-examined archival evidence shows, play readers and playgoers viewed plays as malleable and modular texts to be altered, appropriated, and, most importantly, used. These records provide information that is not available in other forms about the popularity and importance of early modern plays, the reasons plays appealed to their audiences, and the ideas in plays that most interested audiences.

Tracing the course of dramatic extracting from the earliest stages in the 1590s, through the prolific manuscript circulation at the universities, to the closure and reopening of the theatres, Estill gathers these microhistories to create a comprehensive overview of seventeenth-century dramatic extracts and the culture of extracting from plays. *Dramatic Extracts in Seventeenth-Century English Manuscripts: Watching, Reading, Changing Plays* explores new archival evidence (from John Milton's signature to unpublished university plays) while also analyzing the popularity of perennial favorites such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The study of dramatic extracts is the study of particulars: particular readers, particular manuscripts, particular plays or masques, particular historic moments. As D. F. McKenzie puts it, "different readers [bring] the text to life in different ways." By providing careful analyses of these rich source texts, this book shows how active play-viewing and play-reading (that is, extracting) ultimately led to changing the plays themselves, both through selecting and manipulating the extracts and positioning the plays in new contexts.

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