



# **The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers, and Readers in Early Modern England (Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book)**

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## **The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers, and Readers in Early Modern England (Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book)**

*The Book of the Play* is a collection of essays that examines early modern drama in the context of book history. Focusing on the publication, marketing, and readership of plays opens fresh perspectives on the relationship between the cultures of print and performance and more broadly between drama and the public sphere. Marta Straznicky's introduction offers a survey of approaches to the history of play reading in this period, and the collection as a whole consolidates recent work in textual, bibliographic, and cultural studies of printed drama.

Individually, the essays advance our understanding of play reading as a practice with distinct material forms, discourses, social settings, and institutional affiliation. Part One, "Real and Imagined Communities," includes four essays on play-reading communities and the terms in which they are distinguished from the reading public at large. Cyndia Clegg surveys the construction of readers in prefaces to published plays; Lucy Munro traces three separate readings of a single play, Edward Sharpham's *The Fleece*; Marta Straznicky studies women as readers of printed drama; and Elizabeth Sauer describes how play reading was mobilized for political purposes in the period of the civil war.

In Part Two, "Play Reading and the Book Trade," five essays consider the impact of play reading on the public sphere through the lens of publishing practices. Zachary Lesser offers a revisionist account of black-letter typeface and the extent to which it may be understood as an index of popular culture; Alan Farmer examines how the emerging news trade of the 1620s and 1630s affected the marketing of printed drama; Peter Berek traces the use of generic terms on title pages of plays to reveal their intersection with the broader culture of reading; Lauren Shohet demonstrates that the Stuart masque had a parallel existence in the culture of print; and Douglas Brooks traces the impact print had on eclipsing performance as the medium in which the dramatist could legitimately lay claim to having authored his text.

The individual essays focus on selected communities of readers, publication histories, and ideologies and practices of reading; the collection as a whole demonstrates the importance of textual production and reception to understanding the place of drama in the early modern public sphere.

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