

Lost Masterpieces of Euro-American Drama: Ten Plays

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Introduction

Much has been made of the gains of the multicultural reconstruction of the canon of world drama, but what about the works that have been abandoned to make room for the new ones? *Lost Masterpieces of Euro-American Drama: Ten Plays* brings together a number of plays that have been dropped from (or never included in) the major anthologies of world drama over the past ten to twenty years, in order to examine the consequences of the new canonization for our understanding of the development of dramatic form.

The recent interpolation of new or recent works into the canon of great dramatic literature has been executed at the cost of knowledge, thereby raising vital questions about the study of theater and drama in the twenty-first century. While other anthologies ostensibly present a comprehensive overview of both the evolution of the Western dramatic tradition and the influences on it from other traditions, these texts in fact often neglect strategic moments in European, as well as American, theater history. Central to the revision of the canon, for example, has been the devaluation of comedy—particularly farce—as a genre (represented in *Lost Masterpieces of Euro-American Drama* by nearly half of the plays) and thus the implicit denial of its importance to an understanding of the major dramatic genre of our time, tragicomedy. Less central, but nonetheless significant, has been the undervaluing of verse drama as practiced by poets like T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats, one of whose works is included here.

Perhaps most crucial to this canonical revision has been the devaluation of the middle class as an appropriate subject for dramatic treatment, particularly during the eighteenth century when that social class became prominent on stage for the first time. Indeed, mid-

dle-class drama goes all the way back to Greek New Comedy, and the first bourgeois or domestic tragedies were written, not in the eighteenth century, but in the late-sixteenth-to-early-seventeenth century when Shakespeare was still alive. The sentimental tradition in drama, inspired by the middle class and still the dominant strain today in conventional plays and movies as well as on television, may be traceable, for some, to the sentimental “corruption” of Restoration comedy by writers like Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Brinsley Sheridan in the late eighteenth century. But that tradition is detectable much earlier in the same century in a comedy such as Colley Cibber’s *The Careless Husband* (1704) or Richard Steele’s *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), as well as in bourgeois tragedies from 1592 (the anonymous *Arden of Feversham*) and 1603 (Thomas Heywood’s *A Woman Killed with Kindness*).

Key to the revision of the canon has been not only the exclusion of such sentimental comedies and tragedies, but also the exclusion of plays from the Italian Renaissance and from the Romantic movement (not to speak of the reduction of the Russian achievement to a single play by Anton Chekhov). Equally as important, no contemporary play collection acknowledges the fact that modern drama begins, not with Ibsen, but much earlier in Germany with works by Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz, Heinrich von Kleist, Christian Dietrich Grabbe, and Friedrich Hebbel (not to speak of Georg Büchner)—who themselves were followed by the similarly underrepresented Germans Gerhart Hauptmann and Frank Wedekind. Finally, *Lost Masterpieces of Euro-American Drama* concludes with a play from around the middle of the twentieth century, obviously not because the editor thinks that good plays have not been written since then, but rather because he again wishes to avoid the mistake of other anthologies: irresponsibly to declare a play “great” or aesthetically “representative” before the dust has settled around it, so to speak; or to engage, almost unwittingly, in the selecting of dramas for inclusion on the basis of their current social and political standing.

The plays included in *Lost Masterpieces of Euro-American Drama* reveal a wealth of dramatic material for production as well as the classroom, while the accompanying prefaces explore the impor-

tance of each work within the old canon and raise questions about the cultural implications of its exclusion or replacement. And, although the editor appreciates other anthologies' efforts to contextualize the reading-cum-reception of dramatic works through the inclusion of critical and theoretical essays, he believes such choices may in some instances limit or skew interpretation, or otherwise gesture inadequately towards questions of theater history and theatrical production. Moreover, there is inevitably a trade-off between the room such writing takes up in a volume (not to mention the cost of permissions) and the number of dramatic works the editor can include. By removing all such critical and theoretical writings from this anthology, and by limiting each play's bibliography to only the best or most representative analytical pieces, the editor has made room for ten plays, most of which are full-length.

As a result, *Lost Masterpieces of Euro-American Drama* should become an essential complementary or supplemental anthology for theater history, literature, and theory or criticism courses (graduate as well as undergraduate) that seek to conduct a truly comprehensive survey of dramatic form—one that is temporal and geographic in scope as well as artistic. This collection of plays should be of interest, as well, to any educated person engaged in the debate over what should be studied—and why—in our ever-expanding global culture.

With regret, I now list fifty of those plays that, for financial reasons only, could not be included in this anthology, but which have been systematically dropped from other, much larger anthologies over the past several decades for all the wrong reasons—those associated with gender, race, class, sexuality, and hemisphere.

- The Searching Satyrs*, by Sophocles (5th century B.C.)
- The Grouch*, by Menander (321-291 B.C.)
- The Mandrake*, by Machiavelli (1518)
- The Portrait*, by Scala (1575-1600)
- The Faithful Shepherd*, by Guarini (1590)
- Arden of Faversham*, anonymous (1592)
- The Cave of Salamanca*, by Cervantes (1615)
- The Changeling*, by Middleton & Rowley (1622)

The Trickster of Seville, by Tirso de Molina (1625)
The Illusion, by Corneille (1636)
Turcaret, by LeSage (1709)
The Conscious Lovers, by Steele (1722)
The Beggar's Opera, by Gay (1728)
The False Confessions, by Marivaux (1737)
Miss Sara Sampson, by Lessing (1755)
The Father of a Family, by Diderot (1758)
The Soldiers, by Lenz (1776)
Prince Friedrich of Homburg, by Kleist (1811)
Jest, Satire, Irony, and Deeper Significance, by Grabbe (1822)
Woe from Wit, by Griboyedov (1824)
Little Tragedies, by Pushkin (1830)
Leonce and Lena, by Büchner (1836)
Ruy Blas, by Hugo (1838)
A Month in the Country, by Turgenev (1850)
An Italian Straw Hat, by Labiche (1851)
A Bitter Fate, by Pisemsky (1859)
The Thunderstorm, by Ostrovsky (1859)
Tarelkin's Death, by Sukhovo-Kobylin (1869)
Boris Godunov, by Pushkin (1870)
Engaged, by Gilbert (1877)
The Intruder, by Maeterlinck (1890)
The Weavers, by Hauptmann (1892)
La Ronde, by Schnitzler (1896)
Cyrano de Bergerac, by Rostand (1897)
The Lower Depths, by Gorky (1902)
A Flea in Her Ear, by Feydeau (1907)
From Morn to Midnight, by Kaiser (1912)
The Magnanimous Cuckold, by Crommelynck (1921)
The Plough and the Stars, by O'Casey (1926)
Pantagleize, by Ghelderode (1929)
The Captain of Köpenick, by Zuckmayer (1931)
Awake and Sing!, by Odets (1935)
The Family Reunion, by Eliot (1939)
The Little Foxes, by Hellman (1939)
The Time of Your Life, by Saroyan (1939)

Corruption in the Palace of Justice, by Betti (1944)
The Trial of the Innocents, by Terron (1950)
The Visit, by Dürrenmatt (1956)
The Entertainer, by Osborne (1957)
Saved, by Bond (1965)

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