



Persecution, Plague, and Fire: Fugitive Histories of the Stage in Early Modern England

Ellen MacKay

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The theater of early modern England was a disastrous affair. The scant record of its performance demonstrates as much, for what we tend to remember today of the Shakespearean stage and its history are landmark moments of dissolution: the burning down of the Globe, the forced closure of playhouses during outbreaks of the plague, and the abolition of the theater by its Cromwellian opponents.

Persecution, Plague, and Fire is a study of these catastrophes and the theory of performance they convey. Ellen MacKay argues that the various disasters that afflicted the English theater during its golden age were no accident but the promised end of a practice built on disappearance and erasure—a kind of fatal performance that left nothing behind but its self-effacing poetics. Bringing together dramatic theory, performance studies, and theatrical, religious, and cultural history, MacKay reveals the period's radical take on the history and the future of the stage to show just how critical the relation was between early modern English theater and its public.

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