If we judge by the quantity of recent studies of English drama from the mid-seventeenth to the early eighteenth century, the field is flourishing. We have a new comprehensive account of the long-neglected drama written during the English Civil Wars, Commonwealth, and Protectorate (Randall, Winter Fruit); an extensive critical reading of the entire corpus of the drama produced in the last four decades of the seventeenth century (Hughes, English Drama); a new book on Restoration comedy (Canfield, Tricksters and Estates); two studies of the politics of Restoration drama, the first focusing on the oeuvre of Thomas Otway (Munns, Restoration Politics and Drama), the second discussing all the plays of the Exclusion Crisis (Owen, Restoration Theatre and Crisis); an investigation of dramatic plagiarism in relation to changing conceptions of gender and authorship (Rosenthal, Playwrights and Plagiarists); and a collection of essays on women and gender in Restoration drama (Quinsey (ed.), Broken Boundaries). Unfortunately quantity is no proof of quality. These new books do indeed contain some very good work. The overall standard is, however, distinctly, and disturbingly, uneven.

The drama of the period 1642-60 has attracted little scholarly attention since the pioneering studies by Leslie Hotson (The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage, 1928) and by Alfred Harbage (Cavalier Drama, 1936). Both Lois Potter (Secret Rites and Secret Writing: Royalist Literature, 1641-1660, 1989) and Nigel Smith (Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660, 1994), discuss dramatic literature at some length, but Dale B. J. Randall's Winter Fruit is the first full-scale treatment of the subject in more than half a century. Randall's is a survey of relatively unfamiliar territory, and its chief virtue is that it offers a reliable guide to little-known and little-studied texts, some surviving in printed form, others only in scribal copies. His exhaustive account of the latter, of manuscript drama by James Compton, third Earl of Northampton, by Mildmay Fane, Earl of Westmorland, by Cosmo Manuche, and by many anonymous writers and translators of plays, is particularly welcome. As a reference work, Winter Fruit is unlikely to be surpassed for years to come: its coverage is extensive, its scholarship conscientious and trustworthy. Unfortunately Randall is unable to provide a viable conceptual framework within which to discuss the wealth of material he had so meticulously amassed and researched. This is evident in the rather arbitrary organization of the book as a whole and of its constituent chapters. The apparently chronological ordering implicit in the opening chapters on late Caroline drama and on the closure of the theatres gives way to generic and thematic concerns: chapters on dramatic pamphlets, drolls and other popular shows, masques, tragedies, comedies, and tragicomedies, coexist uneasily with those on representations of tyranny, and of soldiers and wars. The structure of the book is further weakened by miscellaneous chapters on the influence of the pastoral mode; on translated plays; on publication and republication of pre-Civil War scripts; and on the playwriting of the various members of the Cavendish family. Rather than advancing an original argument or engaging with...