

Lord Strange's Men and Their Plays. Lawrence Manley and Sally-Beth MacLean. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014. xi + 476 pp. \$65.

As an in-depth examination of a little-understood company and period of theater history, this study is not just welcome, but overdue. Beyond inherent reasons for interest, Manley and MacLean state that “one of [their] aims in this book is to reexamine and to add to the grounds for a direct association between Shakespeare and Lord Strange’s Men,” and that “another is to provide the fullest possible account of Shakespeare’s fellows at an earlier stage in their career” because “they clearly had a profound influence on Shakespeare’s own career” (2). They nonetheless maintain that their “primary conviction” is that the company “holds an intrinsic interest” (3). That is so here, however, due to their place as “key theatrical innovators” who played “an important transitional role” (3) in the development of the professional theater. Notably, the authors assert “the distinctively literary nature” of the company’s repertory drawn from “classical and contemporary continental sources . . . in contrast to older techniques of narration, commentary, or allegorization” (5) in order to posit an implicitly modern “acting style that replaced stereotypical markers of status and allegorical personification” with “the experience of individual consciousness in duress” (6). This provocative book, then, attributes a distinctive, innovative influence to this company.

This magisterial work includes a preface, introduction, ten chapters, five appendixes, endnotes, bibliography, and an index. The first two chapters deal with backgrounds of the company’s patron and actors; the next two with attribution of plays; chapters 5 through 7 with “company style”; chapter 8, provincial touring; chapter 9, potential links to Shakespearean plays not attributed to the company by contemporaries; and chapter 10, the ongoing interest in drama of patron Ferdinando Stanley’s descendants after his death.

A few chapters especially stand out for illuminating theater history in this thorny period. Chapter 1 explores the substantial Strange/Derby family tradition of patronage and the backgrounds of company members, including veterans of Leicester’s Men and, probably, Lathom Household Book mentions of “unnamed players” (36) who performed with Lord Strange in attendance. Chapter 2 then offers a compelling overview of the company’s history in London between 1589 and 1593, ranging from its lead role in staging anti-Puritan entertainments during the Martin Marprelate controversy, the Cross Keys Inn as a favored venue, the significance of re-dating of

petitions regarding restraint on Strange's Men performing at the Rose Theatre to 1590, and discussion of the Rose playing space before and after its expansion in 1592. Chapter 7's readings in geopolitical and religious contexts and chapter 8's mining of documents on Strange's Men's touring are equally enlivening.

Much of the book is devoted to speculation on repertory. Chapter 3 takes up "the problem of reconstructing repertory" (73) posed by this company for whom "there are only three plays with possible title-page attribution to the company" and "ten titles among the twenty-seven listed by Henslowe [in his accounts for the Rose from 1592 to 1593] that can potentially be aligned with surviving texts" (72): *The Battle of Alcazar*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, *The First Part of Ieronymo*, *The Jew of Malta*, *The Massacre at Paris*, *Orlando Furioso*, *John of Bordeaux*, *1 Henry VI*, *A Knack to Know a Knave*, and *The Looking Glasse for London*. Chapter 4 argues for further attribution of extant plays not listed in Henslowe's records for Strange's Men — including a play with an unambiguous title-page attribution (*Fair Em*), one with a "possibly ambiguous" (104) attribution (*Titus Andronicus*), and several neither attributed to the company nor in Henslowe's records (2 and 3 *Henry VI*, *Richard III*, *Sir Thomas More*, and *John a Kent and John a Cumber*) — before speculating about "an additional sixteen to eighteen plays now lost" (125), mentioned in Henslowe's accounts.

Chapter 5's claims of innovation rest upon the authors' emphasis that the several known affiliated playwrights were not "artisanal" writers but were from "a new generation of highly educated" authors (160). Manley and MacLean concede that "Lord Strange's Men are not unique" in this respect (160), but they insist upon a relatively "high profile of 'literary' authorship in the company's repertory" (162). Their conclusion is that a repertory created by "bookish figures" and "extensively indebted" to "the literate traditions of Senecan tragedy and from Italian novella" (172–73) resulted in "innovation, distinguishing the repertory from the medleys, moral plays, and chivalric romances of the Queen's Men" (173).

Central to the bold claims in this chapter and the next are *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*, "both linked with the Lord Strange's Men, both possibly originated by them" (173) — tenuous connections. As the authors concede, *Titus Andronicus* "is not recorded among the 129 performances of Lord Strange's Men at the Rose in 1592–93," it is "marked as 'ne' upon the first of its three performances by Sussex's Men at the Rose on 23 January 1593/94," and its title page in 1594 ambiguously states "*As it was Plaide by the Right Honourable the Earle of Darbie, Earle of Pembrooke, and Earle of Sussex their Seruants*" (107). But the authors fail to mention the widespread Senecanism that prompted university wit Thomas Nashe to complain in his preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon* (1589) of the commercial fad for "English Seneca," where Senecan translations were copied "line by line and page by page." In chapter 6 the authors find that Strange's Men's parts "were less in the nature of type-cast 'lines'" (205) than their forebears and contemporaries, aiming at impersonation of "new modes of selfhood" (212) via novel representations of "inner life" (214). This argument, too, rests on the assumption that developments spurred partly by Senecanism can be attributed to this company.

Qualifying claims to the company's "intrinsic interest," chapter 9, which the authors repeatedly promote in previous chapters, argues for attribution of Shakespeare's 2 and 3 *Henry VI* and *Richard III* to Lord Strange's Men based on mentions of the Stanley family. Here, although the authors demonstrate differences in treatment of controversial moments of history involving the Stanleys, that the more favorable versions reflect patronage by Lord Strange is not clear; adding and removing potential controversial topicality when something took on relevance in new contexts was a regular practice.

The book amasses an exhaustive case over its 475 pages. One wonders, however, if some of the engagement with minutia relating to the riskiest arguments might have been curtailed. On a few occasions, the focus is so myopic that the authors do not anticipate challenges. Occasional overeager moments are useful reminders that, for all Henslowe's records can tell us, we lack the records from other companies necessary to make truly meaningful comparisons. If the Queen's Men become a convenient foil here as "artisanal forebears," the known overlaps and handoffs with them and with the contemporary Pembroke's and Sussex's Men challenge claims to distinctiveness and innovation. Ultimately, this book may represent an apex of repertory studies, as its authors have succeeded in producing the definitive work in this area thus far. Add to that the fact that the wealth of documentary evidence brought to light here illuminates this enigmatic period in a way few previous efforts have. This stimulating work is therefore necessary reading — all the more so because its many fresh documentary discoveries and provocative claims will be debated for decades to come.

ROBERT HORNBACK, *Oglethorpe University*