

Acting Companies and Their Plays in Shakespeare's London. Siobhan Keenan. The Arden Shakespeare. London: Bloomsbury, 2014. x + 272 pp. \$32.95.

This book is a general treatment of five aspects of theater history: acting companies, playwrights and playwriting, stages and staging, audiences, and patrons and patronage. It is refreshingly current; indeed, it could not have been written twenty-five years ago because the scholarly landscape in theater history has changed so radically. The format for each chapter is an overview of the topic, with subdivisions and illustrative case studies. Given the narrow topic (theater history), the bibliography is extensive; it is also current, in that most of the secondary scholarship has publication dates in the 1980s or later. In terms of its own audience, this book seems pitched to undergraduates, but Keenan provides enough specific detail as complement to the broad overview to serve as a solid introduction to theater history for scholars in graduate programs.

The chapter on acting companies draws heavily on information in Philip Henslowe's diary (as it should), but it is egalitarian in not focusing inordinately on the two best-known companies, the Lord Admiral's Men and the Chamberlain's Men. Keenan skillfully uses less familiar companies such as the Queen's Men to raise recently popular debates, such as whether troupes had a company style. One subsection addresses venues, raising the profile of provincial playing places in accord with the collective scholarship of the REED project (Records of Early English Drama). The case study of this chapter — Lady Elizabeth's Men — is particularly apt because the company is not well known to nontheater historians, yet its business in the Jacobean period addressed the variety of problems of entrepreneurial leadership, shifting personnel, repertorial competition, scrambling for venues in and outside London, survival through plague disruptions, and inattentive patronage.

The chapter on playwrights and playwriting (which includes the move into print) studiously avoids the impression that there was Shakespeare, then there was everyone else. It draws on documents to address playwrights' relationship with companies and the finances of playwriting as profession. It also comments on the preparation of plays for the stage, one step of which was securing the imprimatur of the Master of the Revels. Its case studies are two King's Men's plays: *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* and *King Lear*. This pairing enables commentary on manuscripts, dramatic analogs, and the layers of revision in multiple print versions.

The chapter on stages and staging considers not only the venues of the period, but also features of performance. Keenan provides a short history of the outdoor playhouse,

beginning with the Red Lion. There is not much here on London inns, but there are specifics on architecture and the size of the London stages. Keenan examines the problems raised by theatrical documents, such as the plots, in a broader discussion of staging practices and customs. The case studies are *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair*; although both plays are by Ben Jonson, they offer contrast by having been played in different indoor and outdoor playhouses as well as at court (i.e., Blackfriars; the multipurpose Hope).

The chapters on audiences and patronage are particularly interesting in showing how conflicted scholarship remains on key questions. For audiences, those questions are who attended plays and whether audiences segregated themselves according to class. The case studies of *The Valiant Scot* and *A Jovial Crew* focus on shifting topicality as a measure of audience reception over time. For patronage, the question is how engaged patrons were in the daily affairs of their companies. The case studies of *A Game at Chess* and *The Late Lancashire Witches* suggest in different ways that companies often ignored or challenged political positions of their patrons in the selection of repertory offerings.

Summary is harder to do than it appears. Keenan successfully qualifies generalizations with specifics. Although she repeats various old saws such as James Burbage's plans to install the Chamberlain's Men in Blackfriars in 1596, she counters with recent alternative opinions. Furthermore, she resists inventing new narratives. One could fault the case studies for ignoring the 1580s and 1590s by making post-Elizabethan choices, and endnotes should always have page numbers in the running titles, but this book succeeds in the most important way, which is to provide an up-to-date overview of theater history in the early modern period.

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