

Helen M. Ostovich, Holger Schott Syme, and Andrew R. Griffin, eds.
Locating the Queen's Men, 1583–1603: Material Practices and Conditions of Playing.

Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009. xiii + 269 pp. index. bibl. \$99.95. ISBN: 978-0-7546-6661-5.

Like the Queen's Men themselves, which formed in 1583 by consolidating a variety of theatrical talents from older playing companies, *Locating the Queen's*

Men recruits and synthesizes the individual strengths of theater history, literary criticism, and repertory studies, producing a multidisciplinary account of one of the most influential troupes in the period. Organized into four thematic groups, the sixteen essays address performance conditions “In and Out of London,” the Queen’s Men’s “Repertory on Page and Stage,” the company’s objectives in “Figuring Character,” and dramaturgical issues arising “From Script to Stage.” The reigning questions that inform the volume include the gauging of commercial success in the playhouse independently of that in the printinghouse; the foregrounding of particular company playing-styles as an alternate heuristic to author-focused studies; the reassessment of itinerant playing as a deliberate and advantageous company trademark, as opposed to an unwelcome contingency brought about by events such as theater closures; and the exploration of the “ideological and practical work” (15) that the company performed for their patron Queen Elizabeth when touring the realm. Building on Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean’s *The Queen’s Men and Their Plays* (1998) as well as on the Shakespeare and the Queen’s Men conference at the University of Toronto in October 2006, the book challenges scholars of early modern drama to reimagine some of the categories that govern research in theater history and literary criticism, not entirely to supplant traditional lines of inquiry, but rather to locate critical blindspots that repertory studies might help to remedy. The collection shows just how critically productive “a renewed focus on local, situational, or political specificity” (1) can be for scholarship in this field.

One of the most fruitful ways that the contributors produce this “New Specificity” is by reading plays within very precise historical, political, and/or theatrical conditions. Lawrence Manley, for example, maps familial alliances in *The True Tragedy of Richard the third* onto a 1588 reunion between Henry Stanley, Earl of Derby, and his son Lord Strange, for which occasion the Queen’s Men performed at the Stanley residence called New Park. Similarly, Paul Whitfield White examines what we might call micropolitical struggles between university and town authorities in Cambridge concerning who had the jurisdiction to disallow playing, while Tiffany Stern argues that the performance conditions and popular reputation of the Curtain playhouse would have activated otherwise inaccessible dramatic meanings in three particular plays that were staged there. These and other essays tend to be inhospitable places for sweeping claims about early modern drama, but this is a principal strength of the project because it privileges local and situated meanings, which may contribute to larger insights within the field but which are certainly not isomorphic with those insights. As many of the contributors demonstrate, such scholarship often requires highly imaginative thinking and important reassessments of the historical evidence in order to unlearn some of our conventional habits of thought about the drama.

In a few sections, however, such rethinking of conventional ideas can ring a little too hypothetical or appear undersubstantiated — as William N. West observes in his essay, “this kind of research necessarily shades into more or less convincing speculation” (203) — yet even in these instances the contributors

usually emphasize the exploratory character of their arguments, which are meant to prompt further rethinking and not to settle on any final answers. Despite the suspension of critical disbelief that some of the essays ask of the reader, the volume offers quite compelling theater history, such as in the essays by Barbara D. Palmer, David Kathman, and Eleanor Rycroft; some theoretically sophisticated work, particularly Ian Munro and Brian Walsh; and numerous discussions of Queen's Men plays that seldom take centerstage in the scholarly record, like *The Famous Victories of Henry V*: see, for example, Palmer, Richard Dutton, Karen Oberer; *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*: see Oberer, Tara L. Lyons; *The True Tragedy of Richard III*: see Manley, Walsh; *The Three Ladies of London*: see Munro, Alan C. Dessen, Lloyd Edward Kermode; *Three Lords and Three Ladies of London*: see Munro, Kermode; and other plays, on which see especially Stern, Roslyn L. Knutson, and Dutton; and even jigs: see West. The final essay by Peter Cockett — who was the textual, historical, and intellectual “facilitator” (235) for the revived Shakespeare and the Queen's Men productions of *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, and *King Leir* — is an excellent account of the theater and research experiment of staging these plays in 2006. In addition to the editors' introduction, the book includes a collected bibliography and an extensive index, which enhance accessibility. Overall, *Locating the Queen's Men* is as exciting for the kind of work that it should inspire in the future as it is for the work that it performs on the past.

JONATHAN WALKER
Portland State University