Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean. *The Queen's Men and their Plays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. xvii, 253.

Philip Henslowe lent his nephew Francis £15 in May 1594 (we think 1594) 'to laye downe for his share to the Quenes players when they bro*c*ke & went into th*e* contrey to playe', and about a year later, 1 June 1595, a further £9 'to laye downe for his hallfe share wth the company w^{ch} he dothe playe wth all' – which might be the same Queen's Men (E.K. Chambers) or not (W.W. Greg).[1] Most theatre historians have o'erhastily understood Henslowe's first note and, with the metropolitan bias virtually assured by the professional theatre's London success during the 1590s, have supposed the Queen's Men then basically washed up. And if they were not finished in 1594, it was also once the fashion to see the company declining even earlier, from September 1588 when Richard Tarleton died.

Not so, as Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean's informative and sometimes speculative book shows. What many of us have been slow to remember about sixteenth-century English professional theatre is the cultural, financial, and even political significance of touring. Founded in 1583 as a huge company with twelve senior actors and defunct upon Elizabeth's death twenty years later, the Queen's Men toured almost from the start (41) and often, it seems, as two groups pursuing separate good weather itineraries: 'The usual interpretation of this practice has been to take it as evidence of a failing company, but we must read the evidence differently.. . . The largest company ever formed in the professional theatre had the resources to divide and it may have occurred to some minds that income would approximately double as well' (44). Double and redouble, since Records of Early English Drama (REED) data, deployed convincingly and often here (see also Appendix A), show the Queen's Men earning at least twice, often three times, the fees municipalities and other entities paid competing companies on tour. Measured by known touring revenues, the company's success changes little in 1594: 183 venues recorded on the road, 1583–93; 140 for 1594–1603 (66). Some of their provincial venues survive for analysis (67–83): Leicester Guildhall, Norwich and York Common Halls, Sherborne Church House, the High Great Chamber at Hardwick Hall, for example. Back in London for the winter and the holiday court-season, the Queen's Men seem to have sought to monopolize as many suburban and city playing places as they could (48), at least partly, I suspect, as a competitive move to deny other companies venues. As it happened, the peripatetic feature of the Queen's Men's history dominated their existence, and they never achieved even a semi-permanent residence in a purpose-built

theatre. When they left London in 1594, apparently never to return as a performing company, they left the capital to insurgent theatre-based companies, particularly the duopoly of Lord Admiral's and Lord Chamberlain's Men.

So much, then, for the Queen's Men's future. What of their origin? Why did Francis Walsingham, backed (one presumes) by the privy council and the queen, instruct Edmond Tilney, 10 March 1583, to cull the best actors from the contemporary aristocratically sponsored companies to form the Queen's Men? Andrew Gurr claims '[t]here is no tangible evidence about what prompted' these actions, and he is correct.[2] McMillin and MacLean offer hypotheses: 'political considerations' (9); control over the 'expanding theatre industry' (13); 'public relations between crown and people' (23); intelligence/spying (27). These suggestions are so capacious and so generally phrased as to provide hypothetical explanations for historical events much larger than the company's founding, and none, so far as I can see, explains why 10 March 1583.[3] Again, McMillin and MacLean stress (3) that '[s]uch questions cannot be answered directly'.

Take 'public relations', for example. Aristocrats and gentry had long sponsored acting companies as a vehicle of local, regional, and court-based patronage, influence, and prestige. By forming the Queen's Men, the Crown was in some ways taking a leaf from Leicester's or Warwick's or Derby's or Sussex's book. And if the 'public relations' at stake were various policies (foreign affairs, matters of religion), rather than aristocratic ambition and display, then these licensed travellers throughout the kingdom might not only influence 'public opinion' (23), a dicey concept at this date, they could see and hear things of political interest to Walsingham, head of Her Majesty's spy service.

The formation of the Queen's Men roughly coincides with, actually culminates, a solidifying of the role of the Master of the Revels and hence the lord chamberlain's authority over the theatre industry. McMillin and MacLean summarize how that founding was also an act of control:

> The central government's idea of control was not to close the playhouses but to reduce the companies that could act in them, the reduction being accomplished by creating an all-star troupe which could not help but curtail the attractiveness of the other companies at the same time as it spread the queen's name through the country. ... In 1583, the court schedule became monopolized with the consolidation of the children's companies and the formation of the Queen's Men, and at that point the central government seemed ready to take charge of this burgeoning actors' industry and send it along calculated directions. (17)

Those directions appear strikingly in chapter 2, 'Protestant Politics: Leicester and Walsingham', and in a discussion of the Queen's Men and the Marprelate controversy in chapter 3. Following Patrick Collinson, the authors distinguish an earlier, pre-mid-1570s Protestant movement willing to use 'art, drama, and music as methods of propaganda' from a later radical attack on acting and the theatre *toto caelo*: '[b]y 1583, the cultural rift that had been opening within radical Protestantism for about a decade would have seemed dangerous' (30).[4] Thus, the Queen's Men are here represented as both compromise and counter-strike, 'an acting company bearing the queen's name and performing plays of such English and Protestant moderation as could displease only those reformers opposed to playing itself' (32). And here the patriotic content of the company's known repertory, especially the English history play, and the plays' emphasis on 'truth and plainness' support the claim. So, paradoxically, does the nicely judged point that 'the Martin [Marprelate] row [dated here variously as 1589–91 and 1588–90] was a stylistic battle, and ... the style at issue' was the Queen's Men's 'own ... [now] in hardened and gross terms' (53). My only question about this portion of the argument concerns the claim that 'the extent of their [the company's] career in the provinces should be recognized as a measure of their success in spreading a court-sponsored culture through the realm' (34). Rather, that career measures an attempt, not necessarily an accomplishment.

This volume is almost mathematically balanced between the two halves of its title, and chapter 4, 'The Queen's Men in print', turns decisively to *their plays*, considering first which printed plays may be securely assigned to the company's repertory – nine in all – and then arranging them not by order of composition/first performance but by 'their dates of first reaching the publishing industry' (93), i.e., 'the dates by which they were first entered in the Stationers' Register or were first published' (100). So arranged, the nine registered/printed plays fall into three groups: pre-1594 (2 plays); 1594 (5); post-1594 (2). If hypothetical minimum casting charts are made for the plays (see Appendix B), those charts exhibit a surprising pattern: in pre-1594 plays, 15 and 17 actors, respectively, are required (100, later 109, revised to 17 and 18); in 1594 plays, 14 actors; in post-1594 plays, 10 actors. Looking at non-Queen's Men's public plays published in 1594 (there are ten), the authors compile minimum casts ranging from 10 (*Knack to Know a Knave*) to 23 (*1 Contention of York and Lancaster*).

From the striking uniformity of the 1594 plays' casting requirements, the authors take a large step in an attempt to explain some textual oddities, especially prose speeches printed as verse in *The True Tragedy of Richard III*

and *Famous Victories of Henry V*. Since both texts also display auditory errors (e.g., 'dissent' for 'descent'), the proposed origin of these texts is 'dictation in the play house, with actors reciting their parts' (114) when the company found it necessary 'to rearrange a "large-cast" play for a smaller number of actors' when the company divided to tour (115). A similar, though less vividly drawn, proposal is made in Kathleen Irace's *Reforming The 'Bad' Quartos: Performance and Provenance of Six Shakespearean First Editions* (Newark, 1994). McMillan and MacLean's speculation really arises from prose-as-verse and what appear to be mishearings of spoken words; these features are then joined with the notably uniform casting requirements of five Queen's Men's plays to bring us back to touring and its texts (see especially 119). A less flamboyant speculation, not addressing the touring-text issue, would be that these texts were prepared for the printing-house to avoid the company's losing control over a manuscript containing Tilney's licence.

Be it further noted that there is nothing unique to the Queen's Men about the massive registration in 1594. As Peter Blayney has shown, first-time registration had two peaks, 1585–1604; one was the span December 1593–May 1595 (27 plays, including the five Queen's Men's plays discussed here) and May 1600–October 1601 (also 27 plays).[5] Blayney's convincing explanation for the first peak is the industry's desire to (re)advertise its wares following the theatres' reopening after a long plague-closure, 1592–3. Among the post-1594 plays, *Old Wives Tale* and its possible casting pattern generates some excellent literary-theatrical interpretation on the value of doubling Erestus and Sacrapant (110) and doubling some of Jack's burial party with the Harvest-men: 'Having churchyard characters who talk about burial turn suddenly [and visibly to the audience] into Harvest-men who sing about fruition is part of the play's beauty' (112).

McMillin and MacLean's chapter on 'Dramaturgy' contains what must be the most sympathetic criticism Robert Wilson's work has ever received. They stress 'medley' – Wilson's word – as key to genre, language and versification, and acting style. For instance, '[a]ttention [in *Three Lords and Three Ladies of London*] focuses on objects, costumes, the gestures of actors, and patterns of stage movement; to these elements, spoken language tends to be subordinate' (125). Despite the company's size, they continued the traditional doubling system and hence continued and developed 'a system of acting by brilliant stereotype. ... The unmistakable sign is crucial to this system – the gesture no eye can misread, the accent no ear can misunderstand' (127). Returning to their earlier point about the company's emphasis on 'truth and plainness' as a

way of expressing official doctrine and countering more radical Protestant protests, the authors detect 'narrative overdetermination' (133–8) in their plays, a quality that sometimes works against their characteristic theatrical literalism.

Better suited to both literalism and the company's acting style was a medley of verse-forms: 'The "medley" serves literalist theatre because it does not establish a dominant language, but rather creates a feeling for the impromptu – as though there will be a style for anything that comes up' (144). As the authors accurately say, 'This is the basic style of the Tudor interludes carried into the 1580s and 1590s', with *The Old Wives Tale* the most sophisticated of the company's exemplars. (Were there time for digression, *The Arraignment of Paris* (Chapel Children, published 1584) might have proved an instructive comparison.) Blank verse, rhetorical, metaphorical, and open-ended, was the coming verse-form, and though the 'Queen's Men used the pentameter ... they never learned the advantages to be had in the quality of the "blank" ...' (145). Pride of place here goes to the discussion of the fourteener, to us a clumsy or comic metre and certainly one that 'requires brilliant control from an actor, particularly because it calls attention to its own performance, and the actor has to keep pace' (148). In tribute to a comment on p. 150, one can only observe: the authors in their zeal the verse-form to defend and praise are not above a little fun in hopes a laugh to raise.

'Marlowe and Shakespeare', the final chapter, uses *Selimus* and *The Troublesome Reign of King John* to argue that the Queen's Men conducted an 'anti-Marlowe' campaign in their plays and that their dramaturgy 'differs in recognizable ways from the dramaturgy which Shakespeare, Marlowe, and others established in the 1590s' (163). One strand of argument thematizes Marlowe's style and particularly his blank verse: '*Selimus* demonstrates the degeneration of a world of rhetoric into a world of violence, and Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* is not hard to detect behind the degeneration' (158) and 'If it is necessary for these poets [writers of *Selimus*] to write mediocre blank verse, the virtue is that the mediocre blank verse is a stage in the moral degeneration that this aspiring conqueror brings about' (159). Another argument develops the claim that Shakespeare 'by producing his own versions of four' Queen's Men's plays (*Troublesome Reign, Leir, True Tragedy of Richard III, Famous Victories*) 'was helping to write the most prestigious company of the 1580s into eventual obscurity at the same time he was helping to make the Chamberlain's Men ... the premier organization of the 1590s' (165). The authors conclude that theatrical heritage and acting predisposition along with royal patronage and religio-political aims made it 'one of the more predictable outcomes in literary

history' (167) that the Queen's Men should pioneer the English history play. Some of those same elements also made them 'a company better suited to theatres than to publication' (169) and in a short two decades, 'a matter for history'.

This excellent book offers that history in rigorous analysis and inventive speculation. It combines imaginative use of REED's treasure trove with critical and theatrical acumen. Marlowe, Shakespeare, their dramaturgies, and rhetorics still live. They have become our assumptions about and norms for 'Elizabethan drama', but the Queen's Men came first, with a long tradition, and were not soon nor easily driven from the country even though they surrendered the city.

A.R. BRAUNMULLER

Notes

1 *Henslowe's Dairy*, R.A. Foakes and R.T. Rickert (eds) (Cambridge, 1968), 7, 9. These loans are mentioned in *The Queen's Men*, 195.
2 Andrew Gurr, *Shakespearian Playing Companies* (Oxford, 1996), 196.
3 I think there are several reasons why early 1583 was a fraught time for the Crown: the collapse of the Alençon marriage negotiations (he left London on 1 February 1582) and anxiety about Jesuits and missionary priests entering England. On the latter possibility, see Proclamations 655 and 660 in P.L. Hughes and J.F. Larkin (eds), *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, 3 vols (Yale, 1964–9) and *A Declaration of the favourable Dealings of hir Majesties Commissioners for the Examination of certain Traitours* (1583). *A Declaration* concerns Edmund Campion and others; it closely follows an account Thomas Norton sent Francis Walsingham on 27 March 1582 (see Conyers Read, 'William Cecil and Elizabethan Public Relations' in S.T. Bindoff et al (eds), *Elizabethan Government and Society* (London, 1961), 37).
4 Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London, 1988), 98 and 112, is more circumspect than McMillin and MacLean.
5 Peter W.M. Blayney, 'The Publication of Playbooks', *A New History of Early English Drama*, John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds) (New York, 1997), 383–422, esp 385–7.