

Spring 2011

Review of Ostovich, Helen, Holder S. Syme, and Andrew Griffin, eds. "Locating the Queen's Men, 1583-1603." Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009.

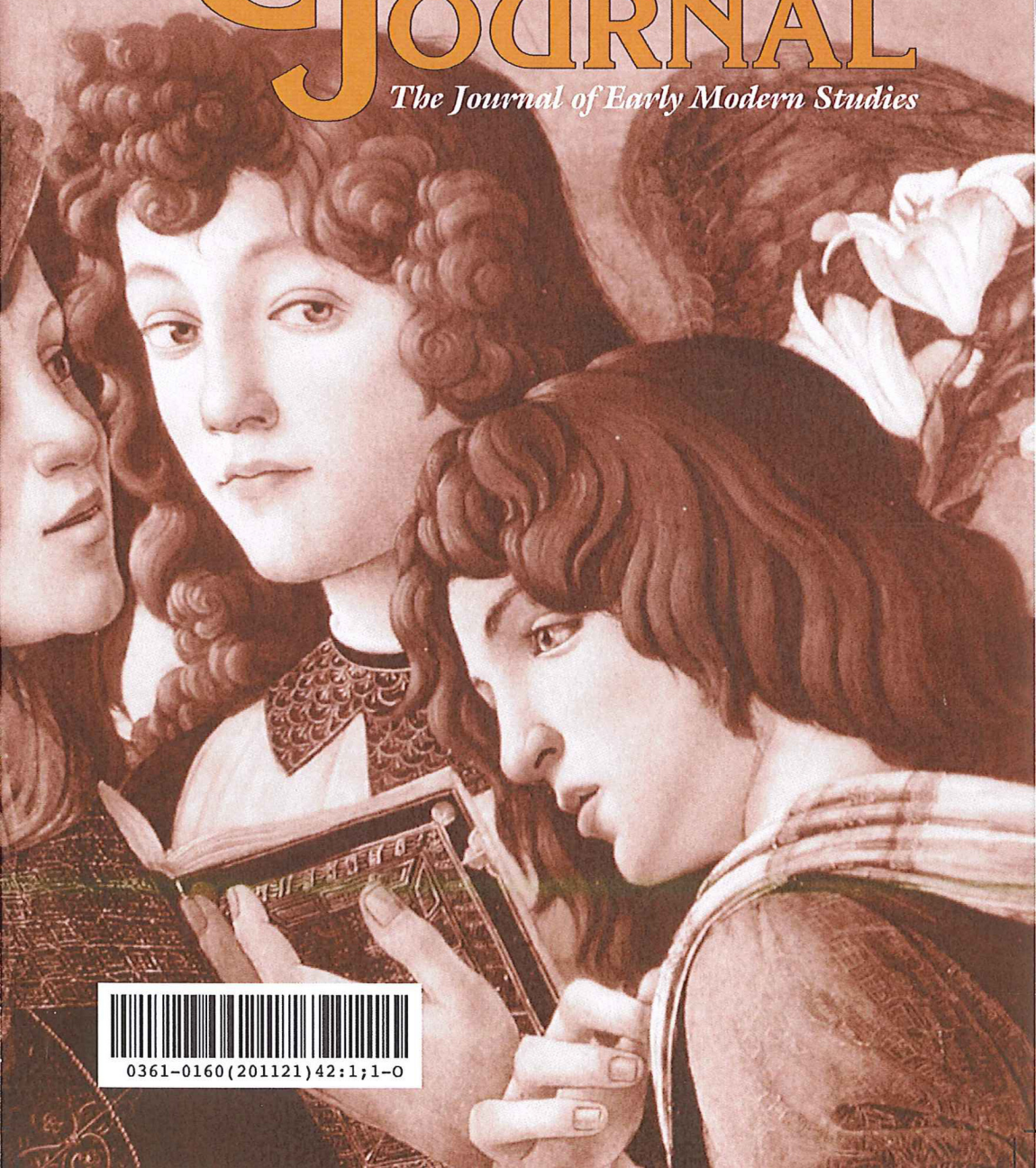
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THE

Volume XLII, No. 1
Spring 2011

SIXTEENTH CENTURY JOURNAL

The Journal of Early Modern Studies



0361-0160(201121)42:1;1-O



Locating the Queen's Men, 1583-1603. Ed. Helen Ostovich, Holder Schott Syme, and Andrew Griffin. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009. 269 pp. \$99.95. ISBN 978-0-7546-6661-5.

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This anthology includes essays by sixteen contributors from the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. The editors are two Canadians and one American. One of the contributors is a theatrician (Canadian), while all the others are literary scholars ranging in expertise from graduate students to distinguished professors. The quality of the research and clarity of writing vary accordingly. The editors divide the essays into four groupings: issues of touring; text; characters; and staging, followed by an extensive bibliography and index. This anthology serves as a scholarly response to *The Queen's Men and Their Plays* by Scott McMillan and Sally Beth MacLean (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Research in the past decade has provided more valuable material for interpretation, and these contributors continue, expand, contradict, and reinterpret McMillan and MacLean's theses.

The editors provide a very useful introductory essay to the book, immediately acknowledging that literary scholars' intensive work in the realm of textual analysis has led them to embrace and grapple with questions of theatre history. They recognize the limitations of that work, however, noting that the Queen's Men is an extraordinarily elusive troupe to study, since it did not have a London "home" theatre. Nevertheless, the editors assert that the ever-increasing body of archival evidence about the Queen's Men presents a more complicated story than previously supposed. The editors' confidence is undermined, though, by their repeated assertions about the paucity of extant evidence to draw confident conclusions about any aspect of the Queen's Men. In spite of this caution, they boldly claim that the few shards of evidence that do exist—especially those uncovered since the publication of McMillan and MacLean's seminal work—open up multiple interpretations to challenge the settled version of history long established by theatre historians.

The various individual contributors forge ahead recklessly with disdain for their colleagues in the field of theatre history and with tenuous conclusions based on very limited evidence. Most of the essays include apologies for the many "ifs," "maybes," "convincing speculation," "limited facts available," and "conjectural nature" of their hypotheses. Richard Dutton takes the most extreme position in his justification by saying that he can establish nothing with certainty, but neither can anyone else who might have a different interpretation of the evidence (144). The reader might excuse these writers for their overreaching, since this anthology is a collection of papers presented at scholarly conferences. We can sense these scholars are taking the occasion of a public forum to throw out some ideas for consideration, where their colleagues can comment and respond. Unfortunately, the editors apparently did not ask the contributors to bolster their conjectures and speculations with any further reworking or evidentiary support for the published versions of their papers.

There are a few notable exceptions—essays that build on solid evidence and careful argument. In "On the Road and on the Wagon," Barbara Palmer uses the available evidence

to offer a new understanding of company touring, circuit, performance venues, and playing spaces. Lloyd Kermode uses solid historical research in “Usury on the London Stage: Robert Wilson’s *Three Ladies of London*” to elucidate the evolving attitudes about usury in early modern England. Eleanor Rycroft draws reasoned conclusions about the understanding of gender identity in her “Facial Hair and the Performance of Adult Masculinity on the Early Modern English Stage.” Peter Cockett’s description of his applied research project (“Performing the Queen’s Men: A Project in Theatre Historiography”) provides intriguing insight into the sophistication (or lack thereof) of early modern performance. He catalogs all the agonizing compromises and inspiring discoveries that theatricians make every time they embark on rehearsing a script for public performance. His work parallels the almost revolutionary discoveries that have been made at the reconstructed Globe theatre in London, where architecture of the early modern era, for example, forces twenty-first-century theatricians and audiences to engage the texts in more intimate ways (at least certainly not twenty-first-century ways).

The disdain for the work of theatre historians expressed by several of these scholars seems misplaced. Throughout their essays, these literary scholars reveal a naiveté about basic historical concepts such as *commedia dell’arte* company organization and practices that they spawned, such as lines of business and possession of parts. They also neglect the importance of the dramatic theory of Philip Sidney and Horace to early modern drama. (Only one contributor references Sidney. Horace does not even appear in the bibliography.) Their awareness of these fundamental aspects of theatre history would have greatly enriched their interpretations in this anthology. Only Peter Cockett—the one theatrician among the contributors—speaks of applied research (i.e., getting up and actually *performing* the plays) as a mode of scholarly inquiry that needs no apology.

There appear some nuggets of useful information and insight in these essays. We would all benefit much more if these scholars spent their energy to conduct more primary research that would yield enough new evidence to draw conclusions that have sound support.