Review of Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean The Queen’s Men and Their Plays, 1583-1603 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

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Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean
The Queen's Men and their Plays
£40.00 hardback
ISBN: 0-0521-59427-8

The centripetal pull towards London has exaggerated the marginality of provincial drama in the early modern period. This book--the first full-length study of the Queen's Men--provides a clearer picture of performance practices outside the metropolis. With the support of new evidence gathered by the Records of Early English Drama (REED) project, McMillin and MacLean explore how and why the Queen's men company was formed in 1583. By stripping the leading troupes of the day of their star players and putting them all into one company under her name, queen Elizabeth drew to herself theatrical activities previously controlled by barons. This was effectively a curtailment of theatre by central government, making it smaller, more profitable, and, most importantly for the new industry's development, more stable. For the players, touring had the advantage that fewer plays were needed in the repertory (the audience in a new town will not complain if yesterday's show is simply repeated) and for the queen, touring provided a useful publicity machine with which to advertise her good governance throughout the land. As well as providing tour maps, ground-plans of extant performance spaces, and photographs, the book concludes with three useful appendices listing recorded performances of the Queen's Men, a casting analysis (giving the minimum number of actors required for each of the plays), and biographical notes on the Queen's Men. This is a valuable research tool for any scholar interested in the dynamics of the early modern theatre and this theatre company in particular.

Joan Fitzpatrick