

The Shakespeare Company, 1594-1642. Gurr, Andrew. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 339 pp. \$65.00. ISBN 0-521-80730-1

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Twentieth-century theatre history tended to take as one of its basic units of interest the particular venues in which early-modern drama was performed, and hence landmark studies are George F. Reynolds's *The Staging of Elizabethan Plays at the Red Bull Theater 1605-1625* (1940), John Cranford Adams's *The Globe Playhouse: Its Design and Equipment* (1942), Irwin Smith's *Shakespeare's Blackfriars Playhouse: Its History and its Design* (1964), and Herbert Berry's *The Boar's Head Playhouse* (1986). These four are sadly neglected, justly rejected, as yet unsurpassed, and exemplary, respectively. Alternatively, critics focussed on particular writers (which endeavour shades off into literary criticism) but extraordinarily no-one thought to write a monograph of theatre history from the perspective of one early-modern company until Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean wrote their justly-celebrated *The Queen's Men and their Plays* (1998). McMillin and MacLean let Andrew Gurr's *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (1996) set the agenda in treating each company as distinct rather than assuming that they were much alike, as books such as G. E. Bentley's useful compendia *The Profession of Dramatist . . .* (1971) and *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare's Time* (1984) had done. With *The Shakespeare Company*, Gurr attempts for the Chamberlain's/King's men what McMillin and MacLean did for the Queen's men, and so in a sense this is a book-length expansion of what Gurr started in 1996.

Gurr's narrative begins, with no preamble about the origins of playing, in 1594 when the Chamberlain's men were formed as one pole of a state-enforced duopoly (as Gurr calls it) with the Admiral's men, each company allowed a suburban playhouse (the Theatre in Shoreditch and the Rose on Bankside, respectively) and enjoying the suppression of all other competition. In 1608 Shakespeare's company got possession of the indoor Blackfriars playhouse that they had hoped to occupy in 1596 (prevented then by a residents' petition), which Gurr sees as the fulfilment of a collective desire to play out of doors (at an open-air amphitheatre) throughout the summer and indoors in the winter that is first visible in the company's failed petition to be allowed play at the Cross Keys Inn in the City during the winter of 1594. In Gurr's appealing narrative, the company always wanted to move into the City and play indoors to wealthy spectators, but settled for a compromise of summer playing to all-and-sundry at suburban open-air amphitheatres and winter playing to small (but lucrative) elite audiences inside the City. This makes sense of the fact that when they finally got their hands on the Blackfriars, the company did not give up the Globe, and nor did they give it up when it burnt down in 1613, but it does not quite solve the mystery of one company (or rather, its leading sharers) owning two venues. Gurr is forced to explain this as cockiness on the part of the players--look how wasteful we can afford to be--which will have to do in the absence of other evidence, but which does not ring quite as true as the rest of his story. Indeed, that one venue was used in the summer and the other in the winter is a fair inference from the designs of the buildings (one open to the air, the other enclosed) but is not itself supported by documentary evidence.

Gurr characterizes the conditions under which the companies operated as something of a paradox--a workmanlike collaborative endeavour, yet based upon royal protection--but he does not exploit the explicatory power of this dialectic. Joint-stock companies epitomized the contradictions of capitalism as much as multinational corporations do today: for all that they appear to embody free enterprise, they need state institutions to maintain their monopolies. Gurr gives many examples of the friendly relations between theatre practitioners of the time, and yet is caustic about Roslyn L. Knutson's argument (in *Playing Companies and Commerce in Shakespeare's Time*, 2001) that we should see in these relations an attempt to fabricate mutually-supportive structures like the guilds that other trades could rely upon. I agree that guilds are a false analogy, but wonder why Gurr does not embrace the full potential of his point about paradox and contradiction: in entertainment as much as in international trade, early capitalism was spectacularly self-contradictory and liable to make strangers act like brothers and vice versa.

Tracing the peregrinations of the company, Gurr is not always scrupulously accurate. Repeatedly he claims that as soon as the 21-year lease on the site of The Theatre in Shoreditch expired in April 1597, the Chamberlain's men decamped to the nearby Curtain (pp. 8, 10), but in fact in a subsequent lawsuit about the lease the owner of the land Giles Allen and the owner of the theatre Cuthbert Burbage seemed to agree that this was not so. Rather, Allen allowed the company "to enioye the premisses after the first lease expired for the space of a yeare or two" and paying "onelie the ould rent" (C. W. Wallace *The First London Theatre: Materials for a History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1913) p. 196). Part of the problem might be that Gurr thinks that Everard Guilpin's collection of satiric verse *Skialethia*, in which The Theatre is described as empty, was written in 1597 when in fact the *terminus ad quem* is its entry in the Stationers' Register on 15 September 1598. A similar slip of detail appears to lie behind Gurr's dismissal of David Kathman's reassignment of the playhouse 'plot' of *2 Seven Deadly Sins* from Strange's men around 1590 to the Chamberlain's men around 1597-8, on the grounds that the plot names Robert Gough who was "in the Admiral's at that time" (p. 18n26). Gurr does not say why he thinks Gough was in the Admiral's men around 1597-8, but Kathman has in fact already shown why someone might make this mistake: there is a clear misprint in the standard edition of Henslowe's Diary (edited by R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert for Cambridge University Press, 1961, p. 329) that wrongly puts the boy actors of the *2 Seven Deadly Sins* plot amongst the boy actors of an entirely different play, one known to have been performed by the Admiral's men in 1597. The error is uncorrected in the recent paperback reprint of the Diary and appears to have affected statements about company personnel in Gurr's *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (p. 253) and Kathman is to be congratulated for putting us right on the matter ("Reconsidering *The Seven Deadly Sins*" *Early Theatre* 7.1 (2004), pp. 13-44 (pp. 27-28)). Gurr cites Kathman's article but does not seem to have read it.

A third such slip of detail concerns a picture that Gurr labels as showing the King's man John Lowin on stage in the role of Falstaff (p. 18), which he describes as coming from Francis Kirkman's book *The Wits* published in 1661. In fact, the first edition of *The Wits* was published in 1662, but the picture Gurr has reproduced is a distinctly inferior copy that appeared in the 1672 edition, which can be distinguished by the right hand of the Hostess: she has the anatomically-correct four fingers and a thumb in the original engraving of 1662 and a cartoonish three fingers and thumb in the 1672 copy that Gurr uses. Gurr writes that the engraver was probably John Chantry, which shows that he

has read John Astington's article on the picture, which made this ascription ("*The Wits* illustration, 1662" *Theatre Notebook* 47, 1993, pp. 122-40), but he has not taken on board its warnings about mistaking the two versions, nor its warning that the picture is useless to theatre historians--it does not show a particular actor playing Falstaff--because it is entirely derivative.

These failings do not mar the beauty of Gurr's grand narrative about the company, and indeed in proportional terms they are tiny fragments of a large picture that Gurr has magisterially composed from myriad scraps of evidence. That the picture coheres at all is itself a wonder, but all the more impressively Gurr is able to extrapolate from his data to make surprising but plausible claims. Thus, tracking the increase in music in the King's men's plays after they acquired the Blackfriars, Gurr sees a definite trend emerging and remarks that "Had the close-down not come when it did, they might have started to at least consider introducing operatic theatre" (p. 84). Nonetheless, the slips mean that this book is not yet the definitive work for scholars wanting to write about the Chamberlain's/King's men that McMillin and MacLean's book is for the Queen's men, which is a shame. On the other hand, Gurr's books tend to get revised and improved (his extraordinary *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* is in its third edition) and this one certainly deserves to.