

Shakespeare's Companies: William Shakespeare's Early Career and the Acting Companies, 1577-1594 (Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama)

Terence G, Mr Schoone-Jongen

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Focusing on a period (c.1577-1594) that is often neglected in Elizabethan theater histories, this study considers Shakespeare's involvement with the various London acting companies before his membership in the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594. Locating Shakespeare in the confusing records of the early London theater scene has long been one of the many unresolved problems in Shakespeare studies and is a key issue in theatre history, Shakespeare biography, and historiography. The aim in this book is to explain, analyze, and assess the competing claims about Shakespeare's pre-1594 acting company affiliations. Schoone-Jongen does not demonstrate that one particular claim is correct but provides a possible framework for Shakespeare's activities in the 1570s and 1580s, an overview of both London and provincial playing, and then offers a detailed analysis of the historical plausibility and probability of the warring claims made by biographers, ranging from the earliest sixteenth-century references to contemporary arguments. Full chapters are devoted to four specific acting companies, their activities, and a summary and critique of the arguments for Shakespeare's involvement in them (The Queen's Men, Strange's Men, Pembroke's Men, and Sussex's Men), a further chapter is dedicated to the proposition Shakespeare's first theatrical involvement was in a recusant Lancashire household, and a final chapter focuses on arguments for Shakespeare's membership in a half dozen other companies (most prominently Leicester's Men). Shakespeare's Companies simultaneously opens up twenty years of theatrical activity to inquiry and investigation while providing a critique of Shakespearean biographers and their historical methodologies.



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