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Othello and Interpretive Traditions

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tured death. But clearly Henry's "figurative character of occasion" (112) conflicted with that of his father James (and thus pointed to schisms within political narratives). Further, the analogies of opposition found in Oberon reveal themselves in other Jacobean masques.

Beyond overt messages of royal politics and policies staged by James and his family for the viewing of England or Europe, contributors also examine how the masque offered opportunities for subtle negotiations regarding gender and bodies in performance. One of the most interesting essays is "Marginal Jonson" by Stephen Orgel about Queen Anne's patronage of the playwright, primarily in The Masque of Blackness (1605), in light of the period's topos of wife as book (145). In the essay, Orgel conflates marginality in gender and literary texts. Anne used Jonson to stage her own politics and to lend her "the artistic authority" she craved since "patron and poet shared a need for a space in which they could operate independently of the constraints of their situation" (171). Anne's negative reputation at court was in part a reaction to her intervention in her husband's political operations and her conscious scripting of masques—Orgel makes it clear that the conceit of "blackness" forming the antimasque was entirely Anne's (153). In Barbara Ravelhofer's essay "Virgin Wax' and 'Hairy Men-Monsters': Unstable Movement Codes in the Stuart Masque," she explores the fugitive patterns of dance in terms of both performers and audience, speaking directly to the issue of reception: the inclusion of noble child performers created a training ground for future aristocratic performance. David Lindley's article continues to explore the more elusive spectacular elements, this time the "sound-world" (275) of the performances. His thesis is that "[music's] inherent instability of signification . . . embodied and enacted . . . the ambiguities and ideological tensions" (292) which were continually hovering on the edges of these performances.

The editors have attempted an interdisciplinary approach, with contributors on a variety of subjects. They state, however, that "our emphasis is decidedly literary" and thus bypass the "visual aesthetics" of the masque (16). They affirm that "the book has few pretensions as a work of archival historical scholarship," and that all but one of their contributors are "literary in [their] affiliations" (16). Obviously, the volume's examination of Author (again meaning both poet and patron) is served by its focus on literary texts; however, the original question of the reception of masques as political theatrics is most clearly elucidated not only by an examination of the literary texts and authors (including patrons) but by considering the performance as a whole. The contributors clearly shared their articles during the development process, which created a cross-pollination of thought which is the collection's real strength.

GRETCHEN ELIZABETH SMITH
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If you like the work of Stanley Fish you will greet Edward Pechter's book on Othello with excitement. Dedicated to Fish himself, Pechter's provocative study is deeply invested in reader response criticism seeing Othello as problematic, contradictory, and adversarial, trapping and implicating audiences through its textual instabilities, or slippages. Though Pechter claims that his work "proceeds along interpretive rather than theoretical or metacritical lines" (x), he clearly offers an enlightened epistemology of belief and representation in Othello, particularly for those theatrical equivalents that cannot be portrayed on stage (for example, Cassio's dream; the consummation). Scrupulously scouring the text, Pechter correlates performance history with the rise and fall of major critical views and cultural events (Renaissance theologies of warfare to the O.J. Simpson case). Ultimately, he concludes that Othello criticism is contaminated because it has not acknowledged the balance between the Othello and Iago spheres, which he argues are indivisible and exchangeable. Appropriately enough, an early chapter on disconfirmations foregrounds the audience's resistance to anxiety over inhabiting these two worlds at once.

Even so, Iago becomes the central player on Pechter's stage. He poisons the audience, the other characters, and the critics themselves—as Pechter puts it, "[h]e subtends and determines belief" (75). Speaking more than one third of the lines in the play, Iago occupies a privileged space; he is the chief narratologist. Pechter charges that audiences are engaged personally with him through his asides, soliloquies, and that we are impelled to believe his delusions even when we know he is delusional. It is Iago, not Shakespeare, who brands the independent and honest Bianca a whore, because, as Pechter implausibly claims, even Ralph Crane, who compiled the dramatist personas for the Folio fell under Iago's knavery when he listed Bianca as "a courtesan." The critical response to Othello overall
has “increasingly aborded itself into Iago’s unillusioned and self-assured generalizations, to the point where contemporary commentary... seems designed as an instrument for Iago’s voice” (161). Listening to Kenneth Burke, Pechter hears Iago’s whispers everywhere.

Othello’s fortunes have plummeted, and justly so for Pechter. In a piercing chapter “The Death Without Transfiguration,” he dismantles (David) Bradleyism (and like-minded travelers E.M.W. Tillyard and Helen Gardner) to strip “Othello Agonistes” of his heroic status. According to Pechter, Othello’s murder of Desdemona and suicide have been wrongly honored as sacramental or ritualistic, and he catalogues a host of reasons why (textual and contextual), chief of which is that we do not merit (nor will Iago allow) a scapegoat to purge us of deeds that Dr. Johnson said “could not be endured.” Pechter thus disallows claims of Othello’s “transcendent nobility” to get us off the hook Iago cleverly has us bite. Moreover, a heroic Othello leaves too many questions unanswered—to wit, the whys and hows of act five. Pechter’s views of Othello may be too draconian for directors, I fear, to cast the play.

For the most part, though, Pechter’s line of reasoning is compelling because of his keen historicizing. He aptly details the stage traditions that have elevated or erased various critical manifestations advanced by Samuel Coleridge, Bradley, T.S. Eliot, Kenneth Burke, Stephen Greenblatt, Karen Newman, and Stanley Cavell. Throughout he contextualizes performances by Tommaso Salvini, Edwin Booth, Henry Irving, Ellen Terry, Charles Fechter, Orson Welles, Laurence Olivier, right up to Laurence Fishburne—especially their visual metaphors—the theatrical equivalents for various critical/cultural positions. Pechter chooses apt illustrations. Victorian productions with lionized Othellos often ended with the Moor’s death speech, diminishing if not negating Iago’s brooding malevolence. One valorized nineteenth-century Othello, dressed as a gentleman, sat at a desk during the temptation scene (3.3). Fearful of any “womanly presence” (114), eighteenth-century productions cut the role of Bianca entirely. Irving’s bustling Iago “nonchalantly munches on grapes and spits out the pits” (57), ominously sexualizing Cassio’s meeting with Desdemona in act 2, scene 1.

Pechter frequently sets an original (Jacobean) production/interpretation against a later one to construct his case. For example, while Renaissance audiences saw the tragic loading of the bed with Othello, Emilia, and Desdemona, nineteenth-century spectators would have had their sensibilities jarred by females occupying the same space as the Moor. Race would have troubled Shakespeare’s audiences far less because they would have understood and accepted the inherent contraries that audiences today grapple with—that is, black can represent the diabolic yet Moors were allied to England because of their mutual enemies, the Venetians. Relying heavily on a 1610 record of a performance of Othello by rhetorician Henry Jackson, Pechter argues that original Desdemonas were much stronger, more persuasive, than their later more docile, victimized counterparts.

If Pechter has decanonized the play, he has also freed the script for us editors, actors, critics, audiences, from its unjustified romantic moorings and the supersubtle vestigia of the intervening centuries. Kudos to him for writing a taut history of Othello, unvarnished and honest, in its theatrical and critical contexts.

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Due to the Victorian moral backlash against dancing, the focus in dance on the body rather than the mind, the ephemerality of dance in performance, and its relegation to the sphere of women, dance has been one of the least theorized performing arts. The Routledge Dance Studies Reader seeks to redress this dearth in dance scholarship. The book is organized into six parts, each of which includes a short introduction and bibliography.

According to the back cover copy, The Routledge Dance Studies Reader is designed as an introduction to the field of dance studies “for the student, the practitioner, and all those interested in enhancing their experience of dance.” In her introduction to the book, editor Alexandra Carter traces the development of dance studies internationally and outlines current debates surrounding the methodologies appropriate to the study of dance. Though the book makes no claim to be a comprehensive collection, the bibliographies and suggestions for future reading alone offer a great resource to students in dance.

Grouped chronologically, Part I, “Making Dance,” reveals the creative strategies and the “mechanics” used by various choreographers. A key point of discussion centers on the degree of control which