this gentleman," followed by Bottom's surprisingly self-possessed handling of the introductions, fairy by fairy, with some amusing wordplay on their names. The passage begins with a stage direction—Enter four Fairies (Brooks adding their names)—and ends with another—Exeunt, amended from the Exit found in the Quartos and in the First Folio. Brooks's glosses cover "in his eyes" (with cross-references to Hamlet and Antony and Cleopatra), parallels to "feed him" and "in his walks" in a source, the probable identity of dewberries, Dr. Johnson's concern over "'glow-worms' eyes," and a shrewd glance at the ceremonial specificity implied by "To have my love to bed, and to arise,"

"to the full honors of the couchee and the levee." He goes on to assure us that "desire you of" is normal usage, and to note that cobwebs were used as homemade bandages. I do not quite see the need for the note on "honest gentleman" at line 177 ("my good sir; cf. OED honest obs. 1c."). When he arrives at Mistress Squash and Master Peascod as parents of Peaseblossom, Brooks has a useful cross-reference to Twelfth Night, but does not, to my mind, succeed in clarifying this strange joke. There are two other bits of editing here that I am mildly critical of: the omission of anything on Moth's name, and the handling of "enforced chastity." The point about Moth (the one fairy Bottom doesn't get to in his round of introductions) is that some editors tell us that the name means only "speck" or "mote," while others claim that Shakespeare is having it both ways and wants us to think of moths as well. One would like to be able to turn to the Arden for a ruling on that one. As for "enforced chastity," Brooks takes it to mean only a rape: "violated by force." But the moon, as his Introduction acknowledges, is sponsor of fertility as well as chastity, and "enforce" had the sense of "compel" when Shakespeare wrote the line. We have to face the possibility that Titania thinks the moon is weeping for some Hermia, compelled to remain chaste, which is a much more appropriate sentiment as she has Bottom carried off to her bower for presumed sexual consumption. "Enforced" may well face two ways, capturing Bottom's viewpoint—he seems to be putting up some resistance—as well as Titania's whetting of sexual appetite.

These few demurs are not intended to detract from the impressive editing skill behind the new Arden Dream, but to illustrate the rich web of choices any annotator of Shakespeare is inevitably entangled in. We may imagine complete or perfect editorial performances, but we are unlikely, in the circumstances, ever to get them.

Victims and Victimizers in Othello


Reviewed by PATRICK GRANT

Jane Adamson tells us we must stop indulging ourselves by attempting to praise or blame the characters of Othello. Traditional criticism has been naive in this respect, and has merely concealed the painful truth which Shakespeare puts before us: that human life can never be rid of "instability, perplexity and doubt" (p. 300), and that, like the characters, we are all to some extent victims and victimizers. The dynamics of injury, in short, are Shakespeare's special theme, and in Othello we learn how love itself depends on accepting one's vulnerability as well as the bitterness and fear that such acceptance entails. To think of love as benign is merely to indulge a self-protective delusion. The play's characters do this, and suffer for it; so do its critics and many of its readers, who thus avoid acknowledging a terrible pathos lurking at the heart of even their highest ideals.

Adamson is good at picking up the exact implications of tone—the import of a momentary hesitation or the sense of a rhetorical excess—and she has an eye for the attitudes implied by words: Iago's "lust for imperviousness" (p. 97); the "bold, unqualified frankness" and "beautifully relaxed acceptance" (p. 218) of Desdemona's account of her marriage; the "charge of

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deflected self-condemnation” (p. 259) in Emilia’s outburst against Othello. The main interest of her study lies in her ability to deploy this kind of perception to show how a character’s conscious attitude is often at odds with other dimensions of his intent; how, if we are alert, a speech may reveal to us a burden of anxiety which the character would rather not admit. For instance, Othello’s high eloquence in Act I is suspect because he tells his tale too fluently, with too much concern for the public impression he is making. His language therefore suggests some latent fear that his marriage may not measure up to his well-defined “image of himself as un-rufflable, utterly self-composed” (p. 125). Adamson patiently follows the uncontrollable “zigzag” (p. 200) of Othello’s subsequent feelings toward Desdemona, observing that his fears about the marriage conceal themselves under the cloak of a willed loathing which comes into violent conflict with his involuntary love. We cannot just will away our emotions, it seems, and so in Othello’s later speeches, when he is murderously calm, we should notice the “self-deceptive thinness” (p. 269) of his rationalizations and observe how the language gives us the sense of an “abyss of quite other feelings” (p. 270).

It could, of course, be objected that almost any statement made by human beings in ordinary discourse “really” conceals uncomfortable animosities and self-protective subterfuges. For this reason I draw attention to Adamson’s responsiveness to language; at one point she talks about “Sharp little splinters of feeling” which “perforate the apparently smooth . . . surface” (p. 160) of a dialogue, and her own best effects result from her treatment of the text in a manner which reveals actual, bleeding perforations as a function of Shakespeare’s art, not just as the fancy of a critic with a theory.

One result of such an approach is to stress how much like us the characters are, rather than how they are extraordinary, writ large in a tragic mode. This is especially true of Iago. He has, Adamson claims, an “essentially simple mind” (p. 76); his wit is stereotyped, his tone inflexible, his plotting repetitive, and he deals in “quite elementary experimental malice” (p. 38). He is, she allows, a “crucial limit case” (p. 65) because of his complete desire to make himself impervious to feeling (and, so, to being hurt). But we are all more like him than we think. Our very attempt to make him a villain and so to be rid of him, to “eradicate him to get what we want” (p. 85), proves the point. Bianca, we are told, is not really a whore (p. 242); there is no certain evidence that she is, says Adamson, and it is merely comforting to us to dismiss her rejection by Cassio as deserved. Similarly, Emilia does not really mean her cynical remarks to Desdemona on marriage (p. 238), but is the long-suffering wife of Iago, who hurts her repeatedly. Bianca, Emilia, and Desdemona are thus similarly vulnerable in their capacity to be hurt by those they love.

To pay such attention to close-grained ordinariness is to read the play very much like a novel; indeed, Adamson reaches easily for analogues to Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, and George Eliot. Consequently, Shakespeare’s large effects—the extravagant, melodramatic depiction of an extreme situation; the punishing boldness of an old-fashioned morality of heaven and hell, of sanctified bonds and Satanic disintegrations—tend to be ignored. In counterpoint to its very extravagance, we might suggest, the play’s sense of “domestic interior” is all the more challenging and interesting: good and evil are, we feel, potent in the world, somehow hugely in contention, and it is especially shattering to glimpse that this is so, and yet also to feel our own limitations in judging clearly between good and evil in particular cases. In this respect, Iago’s strategy is less the reflection of his trivial mind than an exploitation of his victims based on the clear knowledge that a man falls when his “bestial part” overrides his reason. Adamson’s treatment of “Virtue? A fig! . . .” diminishes the speech by limiting it to a “cheering up” (p. 93) of Roderigo, and by ignoring Iago’s bare-faced manipulation of the standard moral and psychological truths to which he pays obedience even in thwarting. Likewise, by stressing Bianca’s suffering ordinariness, Adamson misses an important general effect of the epilpsey scene and the action immediately preceding it: namely that Othello here takes his wife for a whore. The substitution is visually, emblematically, before us as Bianca makes her entrance for the first time at the very moment when Othello has adulterated his marriage in his mind by permitting Iago to usurp his reason. Adamson’s avoidance of those things in the play that are, so to speak, larger than life, and that challenge the fine-tuned, intimate social and psychological interchange of which she gives such interesting accounts, cause her (as she admits) to have scant interest in the play’s use of time or in its relation to contemporary ideas. One regrets such omissions most because her case might have been even more strongly put if she had allowed some of them studied admission.

As it is, Adamson’s critique causes her to be, in one respect, intriguingly like Iago. His basic assumption, “reflected,” we are assured, “in his every speech and action,” is, like hers, that
Taking Pleasure in Measure


Reviewed by Darryl J. Gless

The Preface to Mark Eccles' New Variorum Measure for Measure contains a disarming autobiographical detail. "Variorum editions," Eccles writes, "have given me great pleasure ever since my boyhood, when I first discovered Furness at the Washington Public Library." For others among us, Furness offered less pleasure than dismay. When, as a graduate student, I began to deal seriously with such editions, the Variorum Shakespeare appeared to embody the dusty burden of the past and all its intolerable weight. It asserted in its bulky authority that everything worth saying about Shakespeare—and much that should have remained interred in decent obscurity—had been said. It threatened fledgling scholars and critics with the dispiriting conviction that their fathers were too numerous, and collectively too perceptive, to be easily shunted aside and forgotten. Despite this accumulation of prejudices, Professor Eccles' New Variorum Measure for Measure has won my warm admiration—a response which has resulted in part from the edition's power to communicate something of the pleasure its editor found in producing a work so persistently illuminating and accurate as this.

Like its predecessors, of course, the edition is massive, and its sheer mass, the complexity of its apparatus, and the weight of commentary can oppress the user. But consulted selectively and repeatedly, as it ought to be, Eccles' work makes accessible a treasure of useful information about Measure for Measure, Shakespeare, his times, and his language. Naturally, the edition covers all the standard subjects—editorial history, text, date, sources and influences, critical reception, stage history, music—and it provides an exhaustive bibliography. The line-by-line commentary is the edition's most useful feature, however, because of the unflinching clarity of mind that Eccles brings to bear on the language of this difficult, not to say bewildering, work.

The importance of Eccles' attention to the precise meanings of Shakespeare's language is everywhere apparent. Take I.iii.51, for instance, where the Duke reports that Angelo "Stands at a guard with Enui." To define "Enui," Eccles provides a gloss by Schmidt ("Malice...Especially malice shown by calumny and depreciation") and persuades us of the legitimacy of this nineteenth-century commentator's gloss by invoking the reassuring authority of the OED—an authority the editor does not hesitate to correct or supplement as occasion arises. Because the term "envy" comprises the notion of calumny, the Duke's assertion about Angelo's character touches on a theme that belongs to the play's larger concerns. Whether it be authentic or feigned, virtue finds itself under constant slanderous attack throughout Measure for Measure, and calumnious or slanderous judgments number among the play's primary thematic actions. They are a subtype of the larger category of exaggerated, uncharitable judgments forbidden by the Biblical measure-for-measure text (Matthew vii.11; cf. Mark iv.24; Luke vi.38), source of this play's title and key themes.

Most notorious of the characters who indulge habitually in slanderous judgments is, of course, Lucio. But others join him. He is surpassed by Angelo himself, who becomes "envious," despite the overt opposition to envy, in his condemnation of Claudio, a condemnation so public and so heedless of mitigating circumstances as to constitute a kind of slander. Though she is moved by understandable terror of sexual violation and the attendant fear of shame and of damnation, Isabella becomes, for a moment, no less remarkably "envious." She judges Claudio—among other ignominious things—a whoremonger worthy of the death he awaits: "Thy sin's not accidental, but a trade...Tis best that thou diest quickly."