
Renaissance and Reformation

Renaissance et Réforme



Othello

Jonathan Locke Hart

Volume 42, Number 2, Spring 2019

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065156ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065156ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Hart, J. (2019). Review of [Othello]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 42 (2), 246–248. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065156ar>

son style en fonction des personnages (écrivains, jurisconsultes, médecins, prélats, soldats, etc.) qui sont réunis pour fournir « un tableau suggestif du siècle dans lequel ils ont vécu » (22). Pour chaque notice biographique, Jean Brunel présente les variantes principales, une annotation succincte comportant quelques références bibliographiques dont certaines auraient cependant mérité d'être remplacées par des mentions de travaux plus actuels.

Avec ses tables et ses index, ce volume offre une excellente édition bilingue des *Elogia* de Sainte-Marthe, agrémentée de nombreuses illustrations qui évitent la monotonie du catalogue. Comme les précédents, ce volume de référence, utile tant aux historiens qu'aux critiques littéraires, devra figurer dans toute bibliothèque universitaire.

FRANÇOIS ROUGET
Queen's University

Shakespeare, William.
***Othello*. Ed. Jessica Slights.**

Peterborough, ON: Broadview / Internet Shakespeare Editions, 2017. Pp. 356.
ISBN 978-1-55481-326-1 (paperback) \$12.95.

There are many editions of Shakespeare. Having used in teaching and research the quartos, the First Folio, and various editions, knowing over decades some of the editors of volumes and complete works and having been to many theatrical productions of Shakespeare in different countries, having watched the BBC Shakespeare and other performances on film and television, and having written about some, I can say, along with George Bernard Shaw, that Shakespeare's text matters. We should pay attention to it and its vicissitudes, fluidity, multiplicity, cruxes, and emendations. Shakespeare left us signatures, a voice recorded by a court reporter, perhaps a trace of his hand in the *Thomas More* fragment, and not much else. Shakespeare is a ghost in an editorial machine.

Shakespeare did not want his bones to be moved in the grave, but editors have been moving his words, and this may happen to the last syllable of recorded time or as long as collation is an editorial art. When even great dramatists like Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson have only a few editions—not to mention less-known playwrights (to the public at least) like Thomas Kyd, Thomas

Middleton, Cyril Tourneur, John Webster, and even the once popular Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher—Shakespeare has many. We have many Arden editions of Shakespeare and not so many new and newer editions of Revels, that is, non-Shakespearean English drama. “O, reason not the need,” Lear tells Regan, but his words might also be a plea for more editions of Shakespeare.

While I think we need new editions of other important playwrights and writers, I welcome many editions, performances, readings, interpretations, and productions of Shakespeare. As someone who has partly made a living teaching and writing about Shakespeare, I also know how time-consuming editing can be. Years ago, my friend and mentor, G. Blakemore Evans, warned me off accepting an offer to do a Variorum edition, as some had died in that endeavour. Shakespeare has touched the minds and souls (psyches) of generations of readers, audiences, teachers, and scholars as well as the public. He is a wonder of language, a poet and dramatist, a treasure for the world and not just for English speakers. And Shakespeare is controversial. Agon and controversy can be productive. Many claim Shakespeare, but he is himself. His text, as messy as it is (I have talked about the messiness of the text elsewhere), matters, a matter with a spirit of its own.

That is why I am grateful to The Internet Shakespeare Editions at the University of Victoria and Broadview Press for producing this Shakespeare series, on the internet and in book form, creating what they call an “integrated text” to meet the needs of students today (7). Students are the heart of the university and so this work makes a difference. Teachers, researchers, laboratories, libraries, schools, and universities are there for the students, their families, and the public. We are all students and that includes scholars, actors, directors, and others. Michael Best and Don LePan, as well as their colleagues at the University of Victoria and Broadview Press respectively, deserve credit. Their project is enlightened, backward and forward looking, combining the internet and books, the media of devices, ink and paper—all made up of electrons, differently. The Shakespeare editions in this series combine background materials, intellectual and historical contexts, an introduction, chronology, essays on the life and theatre of Shakespeare, and a bibliography, not to mention the text itself. The website has more extensive forms of all these materials than does the book (7).

Shakespeare moves through time and so does his magnificent tragedy, *Othello*. Jessica Slights has provided a fine edition, which includes the reprinted

work of David Bevington, from his Broadview edition of *As You Like It* and the seventh edition of his Pearson Longman *Complete Works* (2014) (9). Bevington is one of the preeminent post-Second World War editors of Shakespeare, and his work on medieval drama from Mankind to Marlowe and on Shakespeare is outstanding. The Slight family, Camille, William, and Jessica, have made a remarkable contribution to Renaissance Studies. Jessica Slight calls *Othello* “perhaps Shakespeare’s most unsettling play,” although it would have stiff competition (11). How love goes wrong so quickly is what Slight is thinking about, and how love turns to hatred, exposing the audience and not simply the characters to personal, social, and political risks—a private and public impact.

Slight’s Introduction addresses the play and the critical reception by Thomas Rymer, Samuel Johnson, A. W. Schlegel, Coleridge, Anna Jameson, A. C. Bradley, G. Wilson Knight, William Empson, Bernard Spivak, Marianne Novy, Irene Dash, Karen Newman, Patricia Parker, Edward Pechter, Ania Loomba, Mary Floyd-Wilson, Emily Bartels, and others. Slight also gives a helpful history of performance from 1604 onward. She discusses figures like Samuel Pepys, Margaret Hughes, James Quin, David Garrick, John Philip Kemble, Edmund Kean, Ira Aldridge, Paul Robeson in the theatre, and others, such as Orson Welles and Laurence Fishburne, in film.

My one reservation, which G. Blakemore Evans once warned me about, using the Oxford Shakespeare as an example, is “silent emendation.” When Slight says the following, “I have also silently modernized spelling, punctuation, and formatting throughout” (72), I take exception, as I have a different view of editing. At least Slight tells us what she is doing. It is important to show such changes in the notes if space allows. Some editors emend without mention.

Jessica Slight’s edition of *Othello* makes a fine addition in its scholarship, notes, and Introduction. It deserves to be in schools, universities, and libraries, and is a resource for filmmakers, television directors, actors, and theatre directors. Here is *Othello* with a history for the contemporary world.

JONATHAN LOCKE HART

Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies

University of Toronto