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The Masks of Anthony and Cleopatra (review)

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Renaissance Quarterly, Volume 60, Number 1, Spring 2007, pp. 310-311
(Review)

Published by Renaissance Society of America



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post-Gunpowder Plot England. The conspiracy was overthrown by Cicero, who, as consul, acted extralegally by having the conspirators summarily executed. *Catiline* is thus usually seen as an endorsement of James's emergency powers, but Lemon's reading finds a good deal more irony and ambiguity in the play. Lemon argues that Jonson, like Donne, undermines the "simplistic dichotomy" between the ruler's will and the good of the nation. Lemon concludes the chapter by claiming that post-Gunpowder Plot England was wracked by public debate among both Catholics and Protestants about the legal parameters of treason. Despite James's continual assertions of absolute power, he faced challenges from not only radical Jesuits but also from Protestant and Catholic "middlegrounders" (159).

In a somber afterword Lemon claims that her study illustrates "the danger the law itself poses as a mechanism for increasing state authority in a time of emergency" (163). Lemon adds that threatened states simply cannot distinguish between necessary and oppressive strategies for dealing with treason. That task, she says, falls to the arts. Lemon's book provides valuable New Historical leverage on how early modern English writers dealt with the problem of treason and tyranny, a problem becoming familiar again.

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Marvin Rosenberg. *The Masks of Anthony and Cleopatra*.

Ed. Mary Rosenberg. Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2006. 606 pp. index. bibl. \$80. ISBN: 0-87413-924-4.

Mary Rosenberg possessed a nearly completed first draft of *The Masks of Anthony and Cleopatra* (spelled *Anthony*, she explains, because her husband preferred the softer sound of the Folio spelling) following her husband's death in 2003; having worked closely with him throughout the last five or six years of his life, during which he was deeply interested in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, she was able to complete and edit the manuscript, adding several excellent appendices to produce a book that is engaging to read and valuable to teachers, students, actors, directors, designers, and scholars alike.

Similar to Rosenberg's other four *Mask* books, this final book examines each scene of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* with careful attention to the text and to an extensive collection of critical analyses and records of staged and filmed productions (through reviews and interviews with actors and directors). Critics' and directors' assessments of the characters figure prominently into the book's central thesis, for Rosenberg proceeds with the argument that "this drama of Shakespeare's evokes more sharply diverse responses than any of his others" (27). This "key schism" formulates itself into two polarities that Rosenberg calls the *Yeas* and the *Nays*: respectively, those who believe that love is the central motivation of the protagonists' union and who share in their sufferings, and those who question the nobility of Antony and Cleopatra, finding their relationship to be grounded in lust, selfishness, or ruthless desire for power. The *Yeas* tend to find the play a

tragedy, while the *Nays* view it a “chronicle, a morality” with “savage words” for the protagonists, even “‘criminality’ for Cleopatra, ‘satyriasis’ for Antony” (28).

Further, however, Rosenberg shows how the *Yeas* and *Nays* pattern is intrinsic to the divided world of the play — Rome and Egypt, patriarchal and matriarchal cultures, cold reason and hot emotion, hero and villain — while the overflowing language of hyperbole, antithesis, and oxymoron mirrors the “vastness” (11) of the personalities, of the geographic space, and of the emotions evoked in the play. Scene by scene (with three additional chapters focused on Antony, Cleopatra, and Octavius), Rosenberg progresses through the play, urging the reader to speak aloud the crucial lines of the play in order to discover whether the words resonate as a *Yea* or a *Nay* for the reader of the book and examining the critics’ *Yeas* and *Nays* at each turn. From the beginning, Rosenberg does not hide his own conviction that Shakespeare intended his play as a grand *Yea*: a play in which the actor, reader, and audience share with Antony and Cleopatra in “a profound experience of life and love, of hurt and healing,” and “a deep caring for their people” (33). Students of literature and actors may well find Rosenberg’s process a valuable experience, for it comprises both a sustained personal interaction with the play’s text and a scholarly survey of critical-theatrical responses. The last chapter, “Is *Anthony and Cleopatra* a Tragedy?” offers the student a good model of genre debate, written by Mary Rosenberg as an interaction with her husband’s notes on the subject (she is a self-confessed *Nay*).

The appendices are most valuable, perhaps, to scholarly research: “A Note on the Historical Cleopatra 69 BC–30 BC,” a “Critical Bibliography,” and a “Theatrical Bibliography.” The “Critical Bibliography,” while it is not intended as a comprehensive survey, nevertheless contains around a thousand entries. The “Theatrical Bibliography,” again not an exhaustive list, nevertheless spans four centuries, six continents, and thirteen languages.

The Masks of Anthony and Cleopatra offers teachers, directors, actors, and students a refreshing model for the enthusiasm and passion for Shakespearean language and scholarship that creates excitement in the classroom — Rosenberg was teaching a freshman seminar on the play through much of his drafting of the book — and on the stage. Most valuable, perhaps, is Rosenberg’s demonstration of the vast scope, not only of the play, but also of the reactions of the viewing and reading public. Cleopatra’s “infinite variety” (2.2.246) is well demonstrated to be an intrinsic quality of this magnificent play itself.

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Shirley Sharon-Zisser, ed. *Critical Essays on Shakespeare’s A Lover’s Complaint: Suffering Ecstasy*.

Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006. x + 204 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$94.95. ISBN: 0-7546-0345-8.

The short narrative poem *A Lover’s Complaint* is an enigma: it first appeared at the end of Thorpe’s first edition of Shakespeare’s Sonnets in 1609 and then was