THE CRITICS DEBATE

General Editor: Michael Scott

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Othello Peter Davison

Further titles are in preparation.

OTHELLO

Peter Davison

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MACMILLAN

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General Editor's Preface

OVER THE last few years the practice of literary criticism has become hotly debated. Methods developed earlier in the century and before have been attacked and the word 'crisis' has been drawn upon to describe the present condition of English Studies. That such a debate is taking place is a sign of the subject discipline's health. Some would hold that the situation necessitates a radical alternative approach which naturally implies a 'crisis situation'. Others would respond that to employ such terms is to precipitate or construct a false position. The debate continues but it is not the first. 'New Criticism' acquired its title because it attempted something fresh, calling into question certain practices of the past. Yet the practices it attacked were not entirely lost or negated by the new critics. One factor becomes clear: English Studies is a pluralistic discipline.

What are students coming to advanced work in English for the first time to make of all this debate and controversy? They are in danger of being overwhelmed by the cross-currents of critical approaches as they take up their study of literature. The purpose of this series is to help delineate various critical approaches to specific literary texts. Its authors are from a variety of critical schools and have approached their task in a flexible manner. Their aim is to help the reader come to terms with the variety of criticism and to introduce him or her to further reading on the subject and to a fuller evaluation of a particular text by illustrating the way it has been approached in a number of contexts. In the first part of the book a critical survey is given of some of the major ways the text has been appraised. This is done sometimes in a thematic manner, sometimes according to various 'schools' or 'approaches'. In the second part the authors provide their own appraisals of the text from their stated critical standpoint, allowing the reader the knowledge of their own particular approaches from which their views may in turn be evaluated. The series therein hopes to introduce and to elucidate criticism of authors and texts being studied and to encourage participation as the critics debate.

Michael Scott

A Note on Text and References

ALL quotations from *Othello* are from the New Cambridge edition, edited by Norman Sanders (Cambridge, 1984), and the few quotations from Shakespeare's other works are taken from *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, edited by Peter Alexander (London and Glasgow, 1951). The line references supplied (usually in *square* brackets, though sometimes in the main text) relate to these editions. Act and scene are included in the reference except where there is continued reference to the same scene.

With a few exceptions the other sources cited are given in the section 'Further Reading and References'. Most of these sources are identified in the text by author and date of publication of the edition cited, using which information they can be readily traced in the alphabetical list of references at the end of the 'Further Reading' section. Two important collections of criticism are identified by abbreviation:

C – the Macmillan *Casebook* on *Othello* (London, 1971)
ShS 21 – *Shakespeare Survey 21* (Cambridge, 1970)

Details of the criticism included in *C* (which is cited wherever it includes the relevant passage) and *ShS 21* are given preceding the alphabetical list of references. *All* page references – with date or abbreviation except where there is continued reference to the same source (or, in the case of *C* and *ShS 21*, the same *item*) – appear in *round* brackets.