Two Exits in "Othello"

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Between this ultimate source of the salt story and its use in *Cleanness* I know no intervening link. The Hebrew legend does not seem to occur in the Latin Church Fathers, and it is not found in any Old French source accessible to me. It does not appear, it may be noted, in the Old French *Mistère du vieil testament*, though that is too late for influence on the English poet. Besides, I find no trace of it in other English works in which it might be expected, as the Old or the Middle English *Genesis*, the *Cursor Mundi*, the *Miracle Plays*, or the *Travels of Mandeville*, the writer of which does say that the pillar of salt was still standing in his time. It is perhaps not too much to believe that the Middle English poet was directly acquainted with the Hebrew commentaries on the Bible.

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‘JACKE JUGELER,’ ll. 256–259.

When wee came yender, there dyd I see
My mayster kisse gentilwomen tow or three
And to come emongs others my thought bysye
He had a myruayllus great phantasye.

I quote from the recent edition of the play by Professor W. H. Williams, who has the following note on l. 258:

My thought, me thought. Cf. l. 191.

bysye, i.e. [he was] busy. Hazlitt unnecessarily changes to ‘I see.’

It seems to me that an emendation *is* required, and I have little doubt that the true reading is ‘my thought by ’s ye,’ that is, ‘me-thought by his eye.’

The spelling ‘ye’ = ‘eye’ is found in the play at l. 576 ‘my yes, nose and lyppes,’ l. 821 ‘That he...hath sine [seen] w^t his ye,’ and l. 827 ‘I wold myne owne yes in no wyse belyue.’

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TWO EXITS IN ‘OTHELLO.’

It has frequently been observed that in the early editions of Shakespeare stage directions are found placed somewhat differently from what modern usage would require. A special class of such cases is made

up of entrances and exits indicated a little in advance of the proper moment for the appearance or disappearance of the character in question—a phenomenon commonly explained by the fact that the stage direction is originally for the information of the actor. (See, for example, the comments of Dyce and Furness on an exit of Jaques' early in the fourth act of *As You Like It*, New Variorum edition, page 213.)

A case of this character has lately occurred to me as not having been noted in any of the editions of *Othello*, and it is one where the correction—if one may call it so—is not without significance for the adjacent text. In IV, ii, 106, Emilia's indignant utterance, 'Here's a change indeed!' is followed by the direction *Exit*, whereupon Desdemona says:

'Tis meet I should be used so, very meet.
How have I been behaved, that he might stick
The small'st opinion on my least misuse?

Clearly the first of these lines is somewhat at odds with the other two. In the one, Desdemona declares the complete propriety of Othello's conduct; in the others she finds it a mystery. The answer is that the first line is addressed to Emilia, and that it is only the second sentence which is soliloquy. No doubt this has been apprehended by many readers; but since the *Exit* precedes the beginning of the speech in all the editions—so far as I have examined them—it is also true that many readers must have failed to apprehend it, and so have missed one of the significant touches that delineate Desdemona's character. In other words, rallying to her ladyhood as the impetuous Emilia comments on the situation, Desdemona tells her with dignity, 'Tis meet I should be used so,' and so begins the course of splendid mendacity which reaches its climax on her death-bed.

At the end of the same act I am disposed to think (though with somewhat less assurance) that another exit of Emilia's is misplaced, and another of Desdemona's soliloquies affected. This is not to be explained as in the instance just discussed, for the exit is not anticipated, but—it seems to me—delayed, or rather merged with the *Exeunt* that marks the end of the act. Emilia, it will be recalled, has been instructed to go away and leave her mistress alone. She does so, one may suppose, as Desdemona says 'Good-night, good-night' (l. 105). What follows, then,

Heaven me such uses send,
Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend!

is really soliloquy, and I imagine is always treated as such on the stage. While this circumstance does not affect its meaning, it surely enhances its beauty; and this should be brought out for the reader by the indication of a separate exit for Emilia. Of course on the modern stage, where the curtain falls, Desdemona has no exit at all.

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A NEGLECTED WORK OF PRE-RESTORATION CRITICISM.

It is surprising that such an interesting piece of literary criticism as Sir Richard Baker's *Theatrum Redivivum* (1662)¹, a reply to Prynne's *Histriomastix*, has been so neglected by students of Elizabethan literature, especially by those who have concerned themselves with criticism relating to the pre-Restoration theatre. By none of these is Baker's defence of the stage discussed. Yet this neglected work is of more intrinsic merit than several of those treated fully by these scholars; for it contains a good deal of that common sense which some say was lacking to the early apologists of the theatre.

Baker's production has not only been neglected; it has recently occasioned the following misleading statement from such an eminent scholar as Mr J. D. Wilson, who, speaking of the agitation caused by the Civil War, remarks: 'This, probably, also accounts for the fact that Prynne's book, apparently, remained unanswered until 1662, when Sir Richard Baker published his *Theatrum Redivivum*?'

In connection with this statement it should be noted that Sir Richard Baker died in Fleet Prison in February, 1644/45, where he had taken refuge about 1635. It should also be noted that the book was written several years before the author's death. The exact date of composition cannot be determined perhaps; still internal evidence indicates that the production was written before the closing of the theatres. On page 69 Baker himself gives the approximate date of composition, when he states that it has been 'almost fourscore years' from 'the beginning of our late famous Queen Elizabeth to the present.' I should say,

¹ The production was re-issued in 1670 with the title *Theatrum Triumphans or a Discourse of Plays*. On a fly-leaf of the copy of this latter volume in the Library of Congress a former owner has made the following note: 'The Theatre Vindicated Lond. 1661, 8vo. By Sir R. Baker.' No 1661 edition is referred to by Lowndes or other bibliographers.

² *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vi, p. 458 (note).