

NOTES ON THE NET

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Electronic Listservs are here. They enable even fledgling computer operators to connect with like-minded people in this country and abroad in order to consider issues of mutual interest. Although more people are subscribing to listservs daily, countless others are waiting to be convinced that they should take the few steps it takes to get involved. This department is designed to whet further the appetites of those cautious readers of *JDTC* who are poised, almost ready to join the feast. It does not replace listserv discussion nor can it adequately represent its scope or potential. It merely offers some samples.

The SHAKSPER Listserv provides discussions of potential interest to many readers of *JDTC*, especially those focussing on Renaissance drama. Operating out of the University of Toronto and edited by Hardy M. Cook of Maryland's Bowie State University, the list enjoys a moderately diverse membership. While most subscribers are English department academics specializing in Shakespearean studies, other faculty from related disciplines (eg. history and theatre) as well as undergraduate and graduate students are also represented. Membership continues to grow apace. At last count, there were over 350 members from more than fifteen countries.

SHAKSPER postings cover a wide variety of general topics and sources. For example, recently an extended interchange focussing on *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE* and anti-semitism put readers in contact with: other members' informed readings, references to articles and books that have addressed the issue, perspectives of practicing actors and directors, and numerous bits of contextualizing historical and social data. As might be expected, no definitive conclusion embraceable by all was posted, but the lively intelligence informing the discussion was apparent, and the stimulation it provided undoubtedly sent many back to the play with renewed energies and commitment. Other discussions have probed interpretive issues in other plays with equally evident thoughtfulness and respect.

SHAKSPER members also debated the nature(s) and possibilit(y/ies) of performance criticism. One of the more vexing concerns proved to be coming to agreement on the term's meaning. For some it referred to the reviewing of current performances. Others saw it as a heuristic way of engaging with the printed text through imaginative consideration of performance-based issues, with special focus on historical reconstruction. Still others included acting and

directing interpretations as instances of implicit performance criticism. Predictably, the excesses of concept-heavy theatrical practice and the myopia of self-conscious critical schools were frequent discussion targets in this forum as they are in others.

In brief and frequent messages, subscribers readily assist one another with answers to questions; suggestions for research sources; information about conferences, festivals and other events; and reviews of current productions. Archives easily accessible to members also contain useful and interesting items. Included, for example, are logs of previous postings; brief member biographies; a listing of conferences and calls for papers; a directory of Shakespeare institutes, journals, organizations, and libraries; numerous conference papers; and an index of works in progress. All are documents retrievable by SHAKSPER subscribers. One recently archived item is the Electronic Workbook record of the year long NEH-sponsored Folger Institute Seminar whose participants met periodically at the Folger Shakespeare Library from September 1992 through May 1993. Entitled "Shakespeare and the Languages of Performance," this document provides full seminar reportage on topics of pedagogical interest such as the instructional uses of reviewing, classroom performances, performance history, multi-cultural perspectives, and media resources. Also included is a 26-page, partially annotated, bibliography.

One subscribes to SHAKSPER by submitting a brief (no more than 500 words) biography to the list editor at the following electronic address: hmcook@boe00.minc.umd.edu. Subscription is not automatic, but no one is refused.

Whereas SHAKSPER typically is restrained in tone and conservative in its addressing of issues, PERFORM-L, the performance studies listserv operated out of New York University, often exhibits a rowdier, more free-wheeling air. While topics discussed often seem at first glance to be similar, the inquiries frequently follow different intellectual routes. (For example, one SHAKSPER member, briefly a subscriber to PERFORM-L, found the latter's discussions of performance criticism to be "bizarre.")

Many postings seek to clarify for general readers the emerging discipline of performance studies. Existing, as it does, at a nexus which braids issues found in anthropology, theatre, sport, ritual, music, and popular entertainment--to cite only a few examples--into a common plait, performance studies apparently intrigues and mystifies many of the listserv's subscribers simultaneously. For example, brief explications of professional wrestling, celebrity stand-ins and look-alikes, audience participation, sports events, street cons, and various ritual behaviors triggered responses dealing with issues of presence, liveness, mediation

(both technological and cultural), oneness and a host of other issues deemed relevant to the understanding of this emerging and stimulating discipline.

Some of the ensuing discussion on these and other topics was far from muted and polite. The issue of gender-linked communication styles proved especially inciting to some participants, so much so that consideration was given to ways listserv posting might be profitably curtailed. Somewhat less volatile, perhaps, but nonetheless important to performance studies' bid for recognition as a legitimate scholarly discipline was the extended discussion of its place in the August 1993 convention plans for the Association for Theatre in Higher Education. By the time this column is read the convention will have occurred and varied analyses of its performative nature rendered. It is more than passingly likely that many of them will show up on PERFORM-L.

PERFORM-L often provides timely access to information for readers who might otherwise find themselves behind the news curve. For example, the recent departure of JoAnn Akalaitis from the New York Shakespeare Festival was aired and its implications discussed extensively within hours of its being announced. Similarly, a detailed review of Richard Schechner's FAUSTGASTRONOME was posted shortly after the show's premiere. It, too, prompted spirited discussion.

Like many listservs, PERFORM-L maintains archives that can be easily accessed by members. Plans are to include files of past postings, bibliographies, syllabi, works-in-progress, drawings, and any other materials subscribers find relevant.

To subscribe to PERFORM-L, one need only send an e-mail message to: listserv@acfcluster.nyu.edu with NO SUBJECT INDICATED and a message which says only "SUBSCRIBE PERFORM-L." Anything else will confuse the program that enters subscriptions. The list owner who sorts out problems is Sharon Mazer <mazers@acfcluster.nyu.edu>.

Sampled above are only two of a rapidly expanding number of listservs addressing issues of evident concern to *JDTC* readers. The best way to get hooked on their value is to get hooked up to their voice. Messages, some provocative and some merely provoking, will soon show up in your e-mail box. You can even join in. It is a way to sound the pulse of colleagues and expand the range of your professional dialogue.

Readers wishing to comment by either surface mail or e-mail can write Ronald A. Willis, University Theatre, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045 or rwillis@kuhub.cc.ukans.edu.

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Book Reviews

