Before Orientalism

Studies of orientalism have chiefly concentrated on the eighteenth century and beyond, while most Renaissance work on colonial discourse and travel writing has foregrounded the New World. Before Orientalism examines early Anglo-Indian cultural relations through trade (with the establishment of the East India Company), tourism, and diplomacy and illuminates important differences between the reports of travelers and the representations of the London press and stage.

Richmond Barbour examines exotic visions of “the East” as staged in the playhouses, at court, and on the streets of Shakespeare’s London. He follows the efforts of the newly established East India Company, and the troubled, deeply theatrical careers of England’s first tourist and first ambassador in India, Thomas Coryate and Sir Thomas Roe. The wide range of illustrations depicts early modern London’s theatricalization of the world and exotic representations of “the East” and reveals European influences on Moghul art and Moghul influences on English representations.

Richmond Barbour is Associate Professor of English at Oregon State University. His published articles have appeared in Criticism, Publications of the Modern Language Association (PMLA), Journal of English and German Philology (JEGP), and the Huntington Library Quarterly.
Since the 1970s there has been a broad and vital reinterpretation of the nature of literary texts, a move away from formalism to a sense of literature as an aspect of social, economic, political and cultural history. While the earliest New Historicist work was criticized for a narrow and anecdotal view of history, it also served as an important stimulus for post-structuralist, feminist, Marxist and psychoanalytical work, which in turn has increasingly informed and redirected it. Recent writing on the nature of representation, the historical construction of gender and of the concept of identity itself, on theatre as a political and economic phenomenon and on the ideologies of art generally, reveals the breadth of the field. Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture is designed to offer historically oriented studies of Renaissance literature and theatre which make use of the insights afforded by theoretical perspectives. The view of history envisioned is above all a view of our own history, a reading of the Renaissance for and from our own time.

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Before Orientalism

London’s Theatre of the East, 1576–1626

Richmond Barbour

Department of English
Oregon State University
For Nancy
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