

Ángel Luis Pujante and Ton Hoenselaars, eds. 2003: *Four Hundred Years of Shakespeare in Europe*. Newark: University of Delaware Press / London, Associated University Presses. 274 pages. ISBN: 0-87413-812-4

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This collection of articles has its immediate source in the conference held in Murcia (Spain) in late 1999; but it also bears close links with other, earlier meetings held by European academics interested in seeing how Shakespeare's works were received on the other side of the English Channel. The editors, Angel Luis Pujante and Ton Hoenselaars, acknowledge their indebtedness to these precedents (15-16); in fact, they are proud to present this edition as another stage in an on-going process whose goal is to build up a corpus of works on Shakespeare in Europe, or rather on Shakespeare as viewed by non-British Europeans. The process was no doubt generated by the need to vindicate both the coming of age of Shakespearean studies on the Continent and the extent to which Shakespeare has become a cultural icon outside the English-speaking countries.

That there was such a need is remarked in a comment by Delabastita and D'hulst (the editors of *European Shakespeares*, the earliest precedent of *Four Hundred Years of Shakespeare in Europe*) which Hoenselaars and Pujante quote in their Introduction: "*European Shakespeares* presented itself 'not just as a supplement to recent Shakespeare studies, but in a way as a critical comment on its British insularity' " (15). They also observe that, more than a decade after the publication by Delabastita and D'hulst, the impression remains that "from the British perspective, the continent still seems rather isolated" (18). But Hoenselaars and Pujante do not seem willing to follow up on this claim. This may explain why they have granted a British academic, Emeritus Professor Stanley Wells, the "privilege" of a Foreword,

in which he nevertheless admits, somewhat shamefacedly, that this area of Shakespearean studies has indeed been ignored by his insular colleagues.

Wells also argues that “much remains to be done” but that “the task is of its very nature unending [and] scholars will never be able to keep up with the European products of Shakespeare’s creativity” (9). This assertion may seem to be infelicitous, if one regards that the work done on Shakespeare in Europe—practically all of it by continental Europeans—is really impressive. But the task ahead must look daunting to anyone with a clear sense of what needs to be done; and Stanley Wells’s comment shows that he, like any other clear-sighted academic, is overwhelmed by the prospect of a Shakespeare continually revised, redefined and remade from a multi-lingual, multicultural context.

Pujante and Hoenselaar’s edition provides evidence of the difficulties inherent in the European-Shakespeares project. Its aim is to offer a panorama covering Europe in the last four hundred years. To do so in one single volume would be pointless; therefore, the editors seek their foundations in earlier initiatives. These are located in Delabastita and D’hulst’s initiative in 1990, in discussions held in the Glasgow ESSE Conference of 1995, and above all in the meeting “Shakespeare in the New Europe”, organised in Sofia (Bulgaria) in 1993 (see 15-16). This conference stands as a clear landmark in the development of continental Shakespearean studies, as it succeeded in energetically bringing in—and offering to the academic world—the perspectives of the eastern countries after the fall of the communist regimes. Moreover, as several of the participants in Sofia met again to discuss matters in Murcia, the earlier experience was an inevitable referent. The purpose of the latter conference was to bring in both a continuation and a complementary perspective to the topics under discussion; and as the focus in Sofia was mostly on recent constructions of Shakespeare, so the conference held in Murcia in 1999 aimed to place Shakespeare historically. But if the Sofia conference could not possibly attract contributions from all the countries in Europe, so likewise the Murcia conference could only provide a partial—though fairly significant—output as national criteria merged with diachronic and thematic concerns. Spain, Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Portugal, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium and France are represented with some centrality; other countries and areas, such as Russia, the Balkans and some other Eastern-European countries, are mentioned more in passing. And most contributions do indeed debate issues concerning the presence of Shakespeare in past centuries; but in some articles the focus is in the most recent past. Strictly speaking, only Schwartz-Gastine’s survey of

“Shakespeare on the French Stage” and, to a certain extent, the contributions by Portillo and Salvador on Spain and Gibinska on Poland, cover the four centuries mentioned in the conference title. Finally, the articles included in the edition deal with a wide-ranging variety of topics and approaches. The result is, inevitably, a kaleidoscopic view—and not quite a symmetrical one—of Shakespeare the man and his works, in Europe in the last four centuries.

Defining this edition as kaleidoscopic should not be interpreted as derogatory; nothing but a kaleidoscope can be provided as yet, and nothing can be realistically expected. It is worth bearing in mind that “Europe” is still only the name of a continent, and that there is no such thing as a “European culture”. The articles collected by Hoenselaars and Pujante provide welcome information of how Shakespeare has been viewed in a *plurality* of cultural contexts, and that is their most valuable asset.

The collection starts with Part I, which includes Stanley Wells’s Foreword and two Introductions: one by Hoenselaars and Pujante, who provide the historic and thematic background of their edition; the other by Balz Engler, who offers the theoretical background and proposes “a framework in which European Shakespeare reception may be conceptualized” (27) based on three main areas, namely, scholarship, theatrical performance and common culture.

In his discussion of the ways in which Shakespeare has been presented to the Europeans in the last four centuries, Engler notices how he has been consistently transformed. Engler shuffles terms such as “influence”, “reception” and “appropriation” to express this process of transformation and in the end declares his preference for “production” and “reproduction”. In my opinion, however, the word “construction”—which Engler used in the title of his Introduction—more appropriate, if not to cover the wide variety of transformations Shakespeare has suffered over the years, at least to present one of the most consistent connecting threads among the contributions included in Pujante and Hoenselaar’s edition.

Indeed, most of the articles included in this edition aim to present the various ways in which Shakespeare has been “constructed” or “construed” throughout Europe. Commenting on the poll conducted by the BBC which chose Shakespeare as the man of the millennium, Boika Sokolova quotes from Lisa Jardine to wonder if he “is much more than a convenient empty box to put things into”, and if “Shakespeare has become a cipher, one of those iconic figures ... who can be filled with any consumer message you fancy” (98). What Pujante and Hoenselaars’ edition shows is that he has certainly been used—but often in what might be called a “constructive”

way—in processes which sought both to instil ideas drawn from a specific local and temporal context and to extract them from the layers in which they lay semi-concealed among Shakespeare’s own words.

This is perhaps most evident in the articles included in “Part II: Appropriation”. Keith Gregor aims to show how Shakespeare the person was recreated as a fictional or dramatic character, in “Shakespeare as a Character on the Spanish Stage” (43-53); Boika Sokolova debates why and how Shakespeare was chosen the Man of the Millennium (98-109); and Marta Gibinska in “Enter Shakespeare: The Contexts of Early Polish Appropriations” (54-69), and Manfred Pfister in “Route 66: The Political Performance of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 66 in Germany and Elsewhere” (70-88) explain how his figure has been shaped according to political considerations in order to make him an icon of political resistance, in striking contrast with attempts to present him in the light of philo-fascist ideas, as G.D. White argues in “A.K. Chesterton and the Politics of Cultural Despair” (89-97).

In “Part III: Translations”, the thread acquires more technical overtones. This is particularly the case in Martin Hilsky’s contribution, “Telling What is Told: Original, Translation, and the Third Text-Shakespeare’s sonnets in Czech” (134-143). In “More Alternative Shakespeares” (113-133), Dirk Delabastita focuses also on “the endless complexities of cultural reality” that need to be adjusted and the many disciplines that must be involved in the process of translation (113) and offers an elaborate diagram to explain the various intertextual and metatextual operations to which a play like *Hamlet* can be submitted in its re-writing (119-122); but he is at the same time the most belligerent contributor in his claim that the “empire has used Shakespeare as an instrument of hegemonic English” both linguistically and culturally (129). The third contribution to this section, Filomena Mesquita’s “Royal and Bourgeois Translator: Two Late-Nineteenth-Century Portuguese Readings of *The Merchant of Venice*” (145-162) takes readers back to the matter of ideological constructions as she explains how two closely contemporary Portuguese translations expressed different, even contrasting, political ideas.

While Mesquita’s article focuses on the printed translations, those included in “Part IV: Productions” discuss the ways in which Shakespeare’s plays have been translated and, in the process, adapted, reconstructed and finally performed to suit specific purposes. But once again the emphasis is on how the original plays were transformed into something new in the hands of directors and producers—to the extent that at times Shakespeare’s

authorship is literally transferred to the directors: that is the case with Stefan Bachmann's *Troilus and Cressida*, analysed by Sylvia Zysset (196-210) and Jan Decorte's spectacular adaptation of the Henriad in *Ten Oorlog*, as presented by Josef de Vos in "Shakespeare's History Plays in Belgium: Taken Apart and Reconstructed as 'Grand Narrative'" (211-222). In these instances, the plays are reshaped by the directors in order to challenge their audiences into a new view of Shakespeare's work, but above all into a recognition of the essence of their own societies, perhaps even of their own selves in a Europe that was about to enter the new millennium.

The remaining contributions have a more general and varied outlook. Politico-ideological concerns can be discerned as well in Dennis Kennedy's discussion of the ways in which Shakespeare became an instrument for the promotion of western thought during the Cold War, in a sort of conspiracy orchestrated by American Intelligence services (163-179). But these concerns become marginal in the more factually-oriented descriptions provided by Rafael Portillo and Mercedes Salvador in "Spanish Productions of *Hamlet* in the Twentieth Century" (180-195) and Isabelle Schwartz-Gastine in "Shakespeare on the French Stage: a Historical Survey" (223-240). The latter should perhaps not have been placed last in the edition. The strong influence that the French stage exerted throughout Europe can be noticed in the frequency with which it is mentioned on other pages in this edition. As a consequence, while reading Schwartz-Gastine's article one cannot help having a sense of déjà vu, which undermines somewhat the value of her survey. Finally, facts are also the final contribution by Ton Hoenselaars, in his "Bibliography: Shakespeare in European Culture" (241-259) which, though illustrative of the work undergone in the continent, is only a "selective bibliography", as the author asserts.

As a conclusion, it could be said that *Four Hundred Years of Shakespeare* in Europe is a welcome and highly rewarding contribution to the study of Shakespeare's impact in Europe. However, in order to appreciate its value, it should be regarded in combination with earlier works, especially with *Shakespeare in the New Europe*, whose topics of discussion it continues and develops into new lines of research. It should also leave readers willing to see further contributions by the researchers involved in the project.

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