

Keith Gregor, 2010
Shakespeare in the Spanish Theatre: 1772 to the Present
London & New York: Continuum

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In recent years there has been an impressive growth in critical surveys of the ways in which Shakespeare has been refashioned in specific national contexts within the wider academic framework of what has come to be known as European Shakespeares (Pujante & Hoenselaars 2003; Hattaway, Sokolova & Roper 1994). Similarly, since the late 1980's there has been a renaissance in critical work examining the cultural politics of Shakespearean performance that has positioned the aesthetic choices made by individual theatre practitioners or particular companies within a wider social and political context (Hodgdon 1998; Massai 2006).

Keith Gregor's stimulating and wide-ranging history of the performance of Shakespeare in Spain can be located at the intersection of these two international trends and integrated more specifically with the important work by Spanish Shakespeareans such as Ángel-Luis Pujante (2007), José Manuel González (1993), Clara Calvo (2006), and Rafael Portillo (1994) to uncover and make available the diverse experiences of Shakespeare in Spain. Indeed, Gregor himself has already contributed to this work in a series of articles in national and international publications (2003, 2004). As a book-length study that aims to provide a historical survey of four centuries of Shakespeare for English-speaking readers, from *Hamleto* (1772), the earliest "Shakespearean" drama, to the present day, *Shakespeare in the Spanish Theatre* faces two immediate challenges. The first is how to link individual, often highly localised, performances to wider cultural trends, in order to give a sense of changes and continuities in Shakespearean performance over this

long period. The second is how to balance the need for detailed information about what is specific to Spanish Shakespeares, whilst also suggesting what elements the Spanish experience might have in common with performances of Shakespeare in other national contexts.

With regard to the first of these challenges, the book's claim to being representative rather than exhaustive enables it to chart connections between particular performances, national political developments and European aesthetic tendencies. Examples of this would include analysis of the differences between neo-classicists and romantics over the Shakespearean texts within the changing context of Spain's political relationship with France, or the tension between innovation and traditionalism in stagings of the plays under Franco's dictatorship. As for the second of these challenges, there are several examples of intriguing Spanish particularities in the book, such as the appearance of Shakespeare himself as a transgressive figure in several plays or the vital panorama of regional diversity that is so characteristic of Spanish theatre work. Yet there are also features with which readers from other national contexts, like myself in Portugal, may sense clear affinities. These include the reliance of early Spanish translators on Jean-François Ducis' eighteenth century French versions of the plays or the use of the 'symbolic capital' (86) of Shakespeare to bolster the cultural pretensions of a dictatorial regime.

In the introduction to the book, Gregor describes the history of Shakespeare in the Spanish theatre as:

a history of "false beginnings," of sporadic and often eccentric attempts to swim against the theatrical tide, to present aesthetic alternatives before an institution weighed down with prejudice and – despite Spain's own rich dramatic tradition – historically ill-prepared for the kind of revolution Shakespeare's work entailed.
(5)

As this quote suggests, the writing of such a chequered history represents a departure from traditional historiography, which tends to smooth out contradictions and implicitly or explicitly base itself on a narrative of national progress. Although Gregor's approach lacks the certainties of this kind of traditional history, its benefits may be seen in the study's exploration of a wide variety of examples of Spanish Shakespeare and a more complex notion of the forward

and backward movements of the historical process. In this respect, Gregor's final chapter deals with the performance of Shakespeare in the crisis-ridden new millennium, which has produced what he labels "Shakespeare on a diet" (149), based on a limited number of actors and a strong desire to cut or adapt the texts. This suggests that an intermittent tradition of Shakespearean performance in Spain is by no means only a thing of the past. The question that remains after reading the book, however, is the extent to which this phenomenon of intermittent performance has contributed positively or negatively to the Shakespeare that has been performed in Spain. While, on the one hand, it might be seen to necessarily demand a continual and needless reinventing of the wheel from Spanish theatre practitioners, on the other, the lack of a sustained Spanish tradition of Shakespearean performance could also be seen as liberating, in the sense that practitioners have not felt the same weight of tradition when they performed the plays as, for example, was felt in the United Kingdom.

Gregor's history is also one which does not detach the phenomenon of Shakespearean performance from performances within the theatrical culture of other national and international dramatists. For instance, he highlights the curious paradox that Spanish theatre practitioners often chose to perform Shakespeare rather than Spanish dramatists like Calderón de la Barca or Lope de Vega, either because the rhythms of Shakespearean language in translation were considered more accessible for Spanish actors or in order to promote regional languages over the Castilian of the Spanish state. Such an approach raises some intriguing questions about the type of cultural work Shakespeare is put to when appropriated in non-Anglophone national contexts.

As the earlier quotations suggest, *Shakespeare in the Spanish Theatre* is in many respects a counter-cultural history of those translators and performers who have dealt more consistently or more imaginatively with Shakespeare. Indeed, they often take centre stage here rather than being consigned to the wings as marginal, as is often the case in traditional histories of Shakespeare. This provides a clearer notion of the importance of exceptional individuals and remarkable productions in the history of Shakespeare in Spain. Such individuals, ranging from the pioneering modernist director Adrià Gual to the *La Barraca* actress Margarita Xirgú, the first Spanish

woman to play Hamlet while in exile in Argentina, emerge as truly groundbreaking figures within a theatrical sphere where conformity seems to promise greater rewards than experimentation. Gregor stresses in particular the role of regional Shakespeares in providing alternatives to standardised performances in Madrid, right up to the present where companies in the regions have developed their own performance spaces, theatre personnel and networks. He also draws welcome attention to the fascinating history of gender in Spanish performances of Shakespeare, when discussing, for instance, the public furore over Juan Guerrero Zamora's 1975 *Taming of the Shrew*, which became a plea for equal rights between men and women and undermined traditional patriarchal readings of this ever-popular play.

It could be argued that it is in the context of the Franco dictatorship that such counter-cultural productions assume their greatest importance. Gregor's skilful detailing of the contradiction between the innovatory rhetoric of the Falange and the conventional banality of performances for elite audiences in the nationalised theatres during this time makes clear just how different these counter-cultural performances were and continue to be. However, the charting of the theatrical mainstream in tandem with the counter-cultural avoids what is often the major deficiency in counter-cultural histories of Shakespearean performance, which is a tendency to write their histories without a clear sense of what these performances aimed to offer alternatives to. Here, the contrast between the controlled hyperbole of performances under Franco and the patient determination of someone like Lluís Pasqual, who has sought a more profound relationship with the plays, is clearly drawn and the inclusion of both in the book illustrates two starkly different ways of engaging with the Shakespearean repertoire in Spain.

This book will be of obvious interest to Spanish Shakespeare scholars, for whom it constitutes an invaluable resource, particularly those Spanish Shakespeareans with research interests in translation and performance. It will also be of interest to those exploring the histories of non-Anglophone performances of Shakespeare, both in Europe and beyond. It sets itself an ambitious task, for the historical scope of the book ranges from the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries, yet each chapter of the book is clearly argued, fluently written and accessible to specialist and non-specialist audiences.

There is a strong sense of historical changes in approaches to Shakespeare as well as of the popularity of specific aesthetic tendencies at particular times. There is a clear distinction between the earlier appropriation of the Shakespearean text in Spain and the much later recognition of its performative potential. However, these tendencies are not allowed to solidify into hard and fast conclusions about what constitutes Spanish Shakespeare as a whole. If the critical history of Shakespeare in Spain, like the performance of Shakespeare itself, can be seen as a series of false beginnings, with impassioned individuals doing their best to construct a sense of a multifaceted tradition, *Shakespeare in the Spanish Theatre* is an important contribution to a complex and often contradictory critical history which also points to the ways in which the construction of such a tradition is inevitably criss-crossed by politics, history and difference.

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