

Ángel-Luis Pujante and Keith Gregor, eds. 2020.
Otelo en España.
La versión neoclásica y las obras relacionadas.
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Racist or not racist, double-time crux or not, and African, Moorish or Morisco allusions aside, William Shakespeare's *Othello* has haunted the imaginations of millions of theatergoers and readers. The tragic and pathetic killing of a young and innocent Venetian woman at the hands of a murderous, deranged, dark-skinned man has become one of the epitomes of Shakespearian theatrical achievements, as much today as it was in the seventeenth century.

Actually, in the past decades we have started to examine and interpret *Othello* through a poststructuralist critical lens (mostly focusing on gender and ethnicity), and deeper concerns of a racial, political and, in general, ideological nature have become prominent for scholars, general readers, and audiences. But before this was possible, the play experienced a surge of popularity in the nineteenth century, the birth and growth of "Otelomanía" (Pujante 2007, xxv), which the present book examines and explains at some length. Ángel-Luis Pujante and Keith Gregor's *Otelo en España: la versión neoclásica y las obras relacionadas* is the latest contribution by the authors to an already impressive series of publications examining and editing the neoclassical Spanish versions of a number of Shakespearian plays. So far, Pujante and Gregor have produced monographs on the Spanish neoclassical versions and translations of *Hamlet* (2010), *Macbeth* (2011) and *Romeo and Juliet* (2017). Additionally, Prof. Pujante has co-authored two more books on Shakespeare in Spain, one encompassing texts between 1764 and 1916 (with Laura Campillo, 2007) and the second providing a bilingual, annotated bibliography on the subject (with Juan Francisco Cerdá, 2015).

The present book, unlike its precedent volumes, has only one classical version of *Othello* to examine and edit (the only one staged in nineteenth-century Spain), namely Teodoro de la Calle's 1802

translation of Jean-François Ducis's adaptation of the Shakespearian original. Ducis's version was composed, in French, in 1792, significantly close to the French Revolution, and enjoyed considerable popularity, although it suffered some serious criticism. Together with this translation by La Calle (the first *Othello* a Spanish audience could experience), Pujante and Gregor also edit and annotate three other works of a different nature and relevance: the libretto of Gioachino Rossini's opera *Otello* by Francesco Berio (premiered in Naples in 1816, and in Barcelona in 1821); the mock play *Caliche, o el tuno de Maracena* (1823), of unknown authorship; and *Shakespeare enamorado* (1828), a comedy translated by Ventura de la Vega from the French original *Shakespeare amoureux* (1804), by Alexandre Duval.

In general terms what the volume offers the reader is, first and after the brief preliminary notes ("Nota preliminar", 11-12), a thorough and scholarly examination of these four texts ("Introducción," 15-48) with additional notes on the texts edited ("Notas complementarias," 51-54). Then, the edition of all four works follows (with editorial comments and content notes, 55-238), constituting the bulk of the volume. Finally, a select bibliography on the subject (241-243), and a list of Spanish translations and adaptations of *Othello* in Spain (carefully prepared by Jennifer Ruiz-Morgan, 245-246) complete the volume. The book is one of the fruits of a Research Project funded by the Spanish *Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades*.

The introduction to the four texts is both highly readable and scholarly. It should be essential reading for any understanding of what the authors aptly call "complejo sistema de filtros" [complex filter system] (16): the complex translation, adaptation, staging, and reception history of these four texts, and therefore it becomes essential to a good understanding of the vicissitudes of *Othello/Otelo* in Spain. Pujante and Gregor start by examining Jean-François Ducis's *Othello* (1792), the neoclassical French translation of Shakespeare's play, adapted to neoclassical tastes and with significant alterations of Shakespeare's original.

Ducis's text (itself an adaptation from earlier translations into French) changed the Shakespearian source significantly: Othello stabbed Hédelmone (Desdemona), the number of characters was reduced, and the tragic denouement was avoided through a happy conclusion that stage directors could freely adopt. This was the text

that liberal poet and playwright Teodoro de La Calle translated into Spanish in 1802, himself also introducing some changes. Thus, La Calle did away with the rhyming alexandrines of Ducis and employed hendecasyllables with alternate assonant rhyme instead (the authors do not clarify whether French 6 + 6 or Spanish 7 + 7 alexandrines are meant). While he retained Ducis's cast of seven characters, La Calle adjusted their names to sound more Spanish. Interestingly, he offered Spanish audiences a more truly Shakespearian Iago by reintroducing the monologues in which the Ensign expresses his evil intentions, which Ducis had excised from his French adaptation.

Premiered in Naples in 1816, and in Barcelona in 1821, Rossini (composer) and Francesco Berio (librettist)'s *Otello*, an opera in three acts, became one of the Italian composer's most memorable works. As Pujante and Gregor explain, Berio's libretto was almost unanimously criticized by no less than Lord Byron and Stendhal on account of the liberties it took with the Shakespearian original. As the authors argue, Berio's text was strongly conditioned by Rossini's composing demands, and hence the distance between the original play and the libretto. Berio (as had Ducis) diminishes the evil nature and relevance of Iago and sets all the action in Venice. The various performances of Rossini and Berio's opera, tremendously popular in Spain, are detailed by Pujante and Gregor, who specify the extant librettos. Most of them, they tell us, include a Spanish translation, although (in a too familiar note) none informs us of the name of the translator(s).

Caliche, o el tuno de Maracena (1823) is an anonymous comedy that could be considered a mock-*Othello*. (It was eventually titled *Caliche, o la parodia de Oteló*). The authors, who inform us that it was attributed without much evidence to playwright J.M. Carnerero, describe how this popular play became part of the European post-Enlightenment rejection of high drama, what we could consider a Nietzschean turn towards the hybridization of high and low culture. Pujante and Gregor provide us with an illuminating commentary on the links between this play, Shakespearian parodies, and Ramón de la Cruz's *sainetes*, as well as with an examination of how Shakespeare's tragedy was acculturated to fit the audiences of Granada and Madrid.

Finally, *Shakespeare enamorado* (1828), a translation by Ventura de la Vega of the French original *Shakespeare amoureux, ou La pièce à l'étude*, by Alexandre Duval (1804), dramatizes a (most likely) apocryphal

anecdote related to the playwright's love life and erotic exploits. This play, interestingly, includes Shakespeare as a character for the first time in Spanish theater history: in the play, Shakespeare is trying to seduce one of his actors, Clarence (Carolina, in the Spanish translation), with whom he is in love. This work introduces an interesting additional intertextual set of references that involves *Richard III* (which in the play is being rehearsed) and *Othello*. Pujante and Gregor also introduce a brief but fascinating political reading of Duval's play (which was staged in Barcelona, in French, for Napoleon Bonaparte) that shows how the play also dramatized a confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy.

The editions have been prepared from a number of base texts the editors identify, and editorial procedures are explained in the "Notas complementarias" section (51–54). For La Calle's *Otelo*, the 1802 text has been employed; however, the last four pages are missing, and the editors have used the 1803 edition to complete the play. Also, those parts originally censored have been added in italics. Berio's librettos of Rossini's opera present the difficulty of their inconsistency, a consequence of the various opera companies involved in the various performances. Because of this, the editors have also taken into consideration the first Italian librettos, all other known variations, and the librettos of 1822 and 1827 as well. *Caliche* has been edited following the first 1823 edition of the play, although editorial notes allude to the other two known texts, the manuscript of 1828 and the 1831 edition. Finally, the text of *Shakespeare enamorado* is based on the 1831 edition, without neglecting some annotations kept from 1828.

In all cases, spelling and punctuation have been silently modernized, and the text of the plays has been made reader-friendly. The textual notes, while generally limited to illuminating editorial problems and clarifying issues of lexis and content, establish insightful comparisons with the original French and Italian sources as well.

In short, Pujante and Gregor have provided a volume essential for an understanding of Shakespeare's prominence in nineteenth-century Spain. This "Othellomania" cannot be explained without reference to the varying fortunes of the four texts the authors have edited and insightfully explained.

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