

De la Concha, Ángeles ed. 2004
Shakespeare en la imaginación contemporánea.
Revisiones y reescrituras de su obra
Madrid: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia

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In *Shakespeare en la imaginación contemporánea. Revisiones y reescrituras de su obra*, Ángeles de la Concha offers a fascinating collection of critical essays that examine the pervasive presence of Shakespeare and his works in different forms of expression of contemporary culture. As the editor states in the introduction to the book, the aim of this collective volume is “explorar una muestra representativa de obras literarias que, desde los ámbitos geográficos y culturales más diversos y los posicionamientos críticos más plurales, revisan la obra del dramaturgo y la reescriben en diferentes géneros literarios” (10), thus proving a most timely contribution to both Shakespearean and contemporary literature studies. Indeed, the powerful appeal exerted by Shakespeare on all cultures and ages throughout history has acquired a new dimension since the last decades of the twentieth century, as many writers have begun composing works that respond to the Bard and to postmodernist interpretations of his plays.

This phenomenon has opened up the way for two major types of Shakespeare-related publications: on the one hand, there has been a proliferation of anthologies of classical and innovative reworkings of the playwright’s production, such as Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier’s *Adaptations of Shakespeare* (2000), or John Gross’s *After Shakespeare* (2002). On the other hand, the new body of Shakespearean rewritings has been met by several specialised studies that fully concentrate on the critical assessment of the appropriations and uses of Shakespeare in those literary works, as it is the case of Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer’s *Shakespeare and Appropriation* (1999), and Julie Sanders’s *Novel Shakespeares* (2001). In general, such studies are characterised by a limited focus – with *Shakespeare and Appropriation* dealing only with texts that talk back to Shakespeare, and Sanders’s work exclusively analysing feminist novels – which prevents them from presenting a comprehensive

picture of the richness and complexity of the Bard's renewed life in the broad context of present-day culture.

In contrast, the approach of *Shakespeare en la imaginación contemporánea* is best described by the "plurality" to which De la Concha refers in the passage of the introduction quoted above, as the essays collected in this volume examine the creative reinterpretation and reconstruction of Shakespearean plays in several genres, and from a wide range of critical perspectives. Thus, leaving aside the terminological controversy surrounding the use of labels like "appropriation", "adaptation", or "spin-off" (cf., to cite just a few, Cartelli 1999: 15-19, Sanders 2001: 1-2, Holderness 2003: 178-181), De la Concha resorts to the more neutral terms "revision" and "rewriting" to describe the multifaceted quality of the works under consideration in her edited volume, where she provides us with an illuminating and original panorama of Shakespeare's fertilising influence on contemporary imagination.

This originality is already noticeable in the opening chapter of the volume, "Shakespeare en la cultura popular", which explores how the Bard impinges on popular culture through such diverse media as film, literature, music, or television. Here, Sofía Muñoz carries out an engaging analysis of the phenomenon of "bardolatry" – or deep reverence for the figure of Shakespeare and for the universality and timeless nature of his work –, and she convincingly argues that the playwright is a prestigious icon in mass culture, where his dominant plays are *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*. This is illustrated with a detailed survey of Shakespeare's presence on screen, in love and crime fiction, management and self-help books, musicals, cartoons, advertising, and even in the tourist industry, including as well a study of different versions of *The Tempest* that attests to the pre-eminence of the Bard and his production in all forms of expression of popular culture.

Muñoz's choice of *The Tempest* to support her views is very significant because it signals the centrality of this play in contemporary revisions of Shakespeare's works. Indeed, as several critics have pointed out (Hidalgo 1997: 175-176, Sanders 2001: 5), *The Tempest* is the most frequently rewritten play together with *King Lear*, whose palimpsestic existence behind works composed since the last decades of the twentieth century becomes the object of analysis of three of the essays of *Shakespeare en la imaginación contemporánea*. The first of them, Pilar Zozaya's "Juicio a Shakespeare: Una aproximación a *Lear* (1971) y a *Bingo* (1973) de Edward Bond," carefully

examines Bond's attempt at de-mystifying the Bard in two plays that revolve around what this politically-committed dramatist sees as the inadequacy and inconsistency of Shakespeare's values. Thus, the essay by Zozaya reveals how Bond composed *Lear* to update the discourse and ideals of the Shakespearean tragedy to the audience of the 1970s – emphasising, as Zozaya states, the uselessness of regret and the danger of the idealised past –, while *Bingo* was aimed at exposing Shakespeare's failure to reconcile art and life, portraying him as a man unable to follow the principles reflected in his works.

This investigation shows the extent to which, in John Gross's words, "almost the only neo-Shakespearean plays with any life in them are anti-Shakespearean in spirit, or at any rate [...] hostile to his values" (2002: ix). Likewise, the works explored by Ana Zamorano in "'Nunca una mujer escribirá como Shakespeare' ¿Acaso debería?" attempt to undermine the values that lie behind *King Lear* through the strategy of rewriting, though in their case the process of revision is not ruled by a personally political view like that of Bond's, but by a feminist enterprise which seeks to challenge the objectification of women in Shakespeare's text, and to give voice to silent female characters. In this sense, as Zamorano posits in an enlightening essay that explores gendered revisions of the Shakespearean tragedy such as *Lear's Daughters* (1987), or *The Yiddish Queen Lear* (2002), among others, feminist playwrights have found a successful means of keeping alive the female creator embodied by the fictional Judith Shakespeare in the questioning and transformation of the patriarchal tenets of *King Lear*.

Alongside these theatrical compositions, Shakespeare's tragedy has become the target of different rewritings in the novelistic genre, which has emerged as the most fruitful medium for contemporary revisions of *King Lear* and *The Tempest*. Among them, two of the brightest rewritings of these Shakespearean plays in the 1990s are Angela Carter's *Wise Children* and Marina Warner's *Indigo*, to which several chapters of *Shakespeare en la imaginación contemporánea* are devoted. On the one hand, Clara Calvo acutely analyses Carter's complex embedding of Shakespearean echoes and resonances in "Shakespeare, Austen y Angela Carter: Padres e hijas en *Wise Children*," where this novel is described as a rich exercise of interaction with the Bard's recurring ideas that goes beyond a simply comical revision of *King Lear*. Through a detailed and well-documented study of *Wise Children*, Calvo discovers the links existing between Carter's novel and works by Shakespeare and

Austen in their exploration of the relationship between fathers and daughters when the mother is absent, and discloses how *Wise Children* not only criticises the importance given to legitimacy in the family, but also places Shakespeare as a bridge linking high and popular culture.

On the other hand, "*Indigo* de Marina Warner: Una (re)versión de *The Tempest*" offers a thorough examination of Warner's active dialogue with *The Tempest* in a rewriting that takes into account the ideological reappraisal of the play by contemporary critical trends. As Ángeles de la Concha remarks in the course of the essay, that dialogue is based on an intertextual strategy that exposes the gaps and ideologies of Shakespeare's work, and which implements a radical change in the structural geometry of the play, much more complex than the mere reversal of dichotomies. Indeed, De la Concha convincingly argues, *Indigo* is a new composite that brings together the lines of *The Tempest* with others of different stories and genres, subverting and amplifying at the same time the presence of Shakespeare's characters in a fascinating exercise which connects with the fragmentary, contradictory, and problematic nature of the postmodern subject.

In her analysis of Warner's innovative treatment of the Shakespearean figures, De la Concha pays special attention to the portrayal of Caliban, precisely the character that has replaced Prospero as the focus of interest in the postmodernist paradigm (Muñoz 1999: 80-81), and the one that has inspired a greater number of postcolonial rewritings of *The Tempest*, according to Isabel Carrera's "La suerte de Miranda: Relecturas de *The Tempest* desde el Nuevo Mundo." This contribution to the book under review discusses non-European revisions of the Bard's romance that spring from colonial, ethnic, or cultural re-readings of the play, dealing extensively with those composed in the Caribbean area – like Kamau Brathwaite's poems – and their development of an independent mythology made up of Shakespearean characters.

The fact that this interesting panorama is not restricted to novels such as George Lamming's *Water with Berries* (1972) or Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), but concentrates instead on poetry, constitutes a clear proof of the comprehensiveness of *Shakespeare en la imaginación contemporánea*. Just as the essays by Zozaya, Zamorano and Carrera show how the book does not focus exclusively on the novel as the most prolific genre for Shakespearean rewritings, other contributions reflect the volume's engagement with

revisions that originate in plays different from the dominant *King Lear* and *The Tempest*, or that fall outside the concept of rewriting itself.

In this sense, Pilar Hidalgo's "El texto shakesperiano como crítica cultural: De *Brave New World* a 'Mrs Caliban'" traces the presence and function of Shakespeare's texts in works that make use of his plays but do not rewrite them, as illustrated with the narratives by Huxley and Rachel Ingalls. From this original perspective, Hidalgo reveals that both pieces take Shakespeare as a measure of the depth and sincerity of human feelings, integrating his works in ways that diverge from those of the typically postmodernist rewriting: whereas Huxley resorts to the literal quotation to portray a non-Calibanesque savage that deplores the coldness of a civilisation where Shakespeare's tragedies make no sense, "Mrs Caliban" deploys certain elements of *The Tempest* – like the tension between fantasy and reality – in its depiction of the protagonist's relationship with a Caliban-like monster of a different species, which exposes the lack of passions in contemporary society.

The originality of the approach of this essay is paralleled in the course of *Shakespeare en la imaginación contemporánea* by the treatment of different forms of revision such as that examined by Graham Huggan in "Shakespeare poscolonial y la novela contemporánea sobre el holocausto". Here, instead of dealing with prototypical novelistic rewritings of *King Lear* or *The Tempest*, Huggan offers a detailed analysis of the functions of intertextuality in Caryl Phillips's *The Nature of Blood* (1997), where the web of stories uncovering the difficulties for the reciprocal understanding of the victims of oppression includes the construction of a racial subject in a prequel to *Othello*.

Similarly, two contributions by Ángeles de la Concha and José Ramón Díaz transcend the conventional scope of studies of Shakespearean rewritings in their exploration of narrative and filmic revisions of the history plays. These works, whose centrality in the new historicist paradigm (Hidalgo 2001: 141) has not been matched in the field of contemporary rewritings, emerge as the focal point of "El poder de lo excesivo frente a los excesos del poder. *Falstaff* de Robert Nye." Here, De la Concha applies the Bakhtinian concepts of "chronotope" and "carnival" to her meticulous investigation of both Shakespeare's complex approach to history, and Nye's hyperbolic presentation of the ideological principles underlying the Bard's historical drama. Thus, after analysing the strategies at work in

Henry IV to depict a power based on usurpation, the essay concentrates on the carnivalesque protagonist of Nye's (1976) novel, which places Falstaff at the centre of a richly intertextual universe that questions the process of history writing.

If *Henry IV* and its rewriting provide a focus in the chapter by De la Concha, Díaz's essay takes several film versions of *Henry V* as its object of study. In this sense, "*Henry V en la pantalla*" provides an enlightening discussion of the screen adaptations by Laurence Olivier (1944) and Kenneth Branagh (1989), as well as Michael Bogdanov's filmed theatrical production (1989). Through an exhaustive and in-depth examination of each version that includes comparisons of significant aspects such as the presence of the chorus or the depiction of the Agincourt scene, Díaz discloses Olivier's exploration of the possibilities of the filmic medium in a patriotically epic portrayal of the king as a charismatic warrior, which contrasts with the pessimistic and dark tone of Branagh's highly interfilmic work, and with Bogdanov's construction of the figure of Henry as a military leader without scruples.

In line with all these essays that go beyond the usual notion of contemporary rewriting, the last chapter of *Shakespeare en la imaginación contemporánea* also offers a different insight into the issue of Shakespearean revisions. Marta Cerezo's approach to *As You Like It* does not focus on recent rewritings of the comedy such as Barbara Trepido's *Juggling* (1994) or Kate Atkinson's *Human Croquet* (1997), but investigates instead Shakespeare's own strategies of revision when composing his play. In this way, "*As You Like It* como juego de revisiones y reescrituras" thoroughly analyses the dialogue between Shakespeare's comedy and its main source – Thomas Lodge's *Rosalind* – with the aim of showing how the Bard resorted to textual links in order to attack, support, or comment on ideological discourses of his time.

The presence of *Rosalind* behind *As You Like It* keeps Lodge's romance alive through a process of transformation and rewriting that operates in a more complex and enriching way in the multiple revisions of Shakespeare's works composed throughout the twentieth century. Such works, which enhance Coleridge's view of the Bard as "the great, ever-living dead man," become the target of *Shakespeare en la imaginación contemporánea*, a compilation of eleven essays that fill a gap in the studies of Shakespeare's influence on contemporary culture by providing a comprehensive picture of his presence both in literary rewritings and in other forms of expression.

All in all, this book is an immensely valuable contribution to Shakespearean research that neither specialists nor students should miss.

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