

CONTRASTING FORTUNES:
LOPE IN THE UK/SHAKESPEARE IN SPAIN

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In April 2004 the RSC began a season of five plays chosen from the vast, and still largely unexplored corpus of Spanish “Golden Age” drama. Laurence Boswell, who had received plaudits and also the Olivier Award for the SGA season he had conducted at The Gate theatre in London in 1992, was once again appointed to initiate audiences at Stratford, London and the provinces in the subtleties of the *comedia* form. And though at least two of the plays selected—Cervantes’s *Pedro, the Great Pretender* (directed by Mike Alfreds) and the Mexican nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s *House of Desires* (directed by Nancy Meckler)—had never been performed on the mainstream British stage, the pre-season hype and, naturally, Boswell himself were confident that the “plot-driven stories” of each of the plays, stories showing “essential human situations, like couples struggling with very recognizable dilemmas of love” (Boswell 2004), were what put them at the very centre of the European folk drama genre. To help to immerse audiences, actual and potential, in the unique “ambiance” of the *comedia*, the RSC further organized a string of “Latin-tinged” events, including “Girls on Top” performances, where audiences were

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separated by gender, crash courses in salsa, fiestas and, for the less energetic, workshops and debates on the questions of love and honour, traditional stumbling-blocks for readers and spectators ill-acquainted with the particular mind-set of classical Spanish authors (BBC 2004).

In this article,¹ I turn the clock back slightly to examine the conditions in which Golden Age drama and particularly the work of Lope de Vega, whose far more canonical *Dog in the Manger* Boswell himself was to direct, have recently been received in the UK. I follow this with a comparative consideration of the fortunes of Shakespeare in Spain, before assessing the impact both Lope and Shakespeare have had on their respective non-national audiences as well as the possibilities of more such cross-cultural exchanges now that the new SGA season has drawn to a close.

I

In 1988 Adrian Mitchell, one of the UK's foremost adapters of Spanish drama, produced his own translation of Lope de Vega's *El perro del hortelano* (*The Dog in the Manger*) at the Palace Theatre in Watford. Pithily retitled *Woman Overboard*, the play was set on a yacht in the Bay of Naples. As Mitchell would recall a few years later,

The play is a silly comedy about a woman who is always changing her mind. I thought it would make a good sort of thirties musical. And I'd never written one, so I set it on the yacht and we had lots of songs and music. At the end of it all, Lope de Vega came on stage and said how much he liked the show. We gave him a big speech along the lines of "Go and write this down", because one of the characters in the play was actually trying to write a musical. In fact, I played Lope in the last two performances myself, so I got my Equity card. I took a lot of liberties with that one, and I really forgot about the original play after a time. I couldn't have done a straight version of that, I wouldn't have enjoyed it because, frankly, I

didn't like the play much. (Johnston *Stages of Translation* 244)

Mitchell's brutal honesty contrasts with the subterfuges by which Lope's "silly comedy" was made palatable to the Watford audience: the departures from the original Spanish text, the 1930s nautical setting, the genre-switching from "high" to "low", the metatheatrical author-cum-actor intruding on a performance of his own play. Mitchell may have got his Equity card, but where (you might ask) did that leave Lope? How much of *Woman Overboard* could really be said to correspond to his original *conceit*, let alone his play-text? Do the same conditions apply today? Just how possible is it to re-present such a conceit in the modern theatre, without the self-conscious travestying, the artful "adaptations" introduced by Mitchell in 1988? This essay considers the fortunes of Lope's theatre in the UK and seeks to establish a comparison with the fate of Shakespeare in Spain. Rather than offer an arid catalogue of productions, I shall restrict myself to a few very recent cases, while appraising the reasons and conditions of admission of classical drama in Britain and Spain.

In a recent collection of essays which record the impact of Spanish Golden Age drama abroad José María Ruano has mapped the fortunes of Lope, Calderón de la Barca and Tirso de Molina in the English-speaking world. At the same time as these authors have been largely excluded from the works of English-language criticism which, consciously or otherwise, have contributed to the formation of a Western canon, their plays, Ruano asserts, have remained "conspicuously absent from the Anglo-Saxon stage" (Ruano 235 [translation mine]; see also Dawn Smith, and Castilla 195). With a few honourable exceptions, the theatre of the *siglo de oro*, he claims, has failed to impact on Anglophone audiences in the way, say, that the French classics have. This lack of recognition is often matched by an (equally alarming) lack of respect for the "essence" of the comparatively few plays which have been produced. This has made them prone to the caprices of translators and directors, each with his/her own particular "ideological" axe to grind.

The liberties which have been taken are, he argues, such that are “not normally taken with [the texts] of Molière and Racine but which have become *de rigueur* in the case of Spanish classical theatre” (Ruano 236). Victims of that “process of unnatural selection” which is literary canon-formation (Guillory), the plays of the Golden Age have, in Anglophone contexts, or so it is suggested, appealed to all but specialist constituencies. Alternatively, as the Mitchell production shows, they have been transformed into something else.

Examples in the US abound. Only last year, in New York, Lope’s biggest international success, *Fuenteovejuna*, was revived in a production which one reviewer described as “a marriage of the Theater of the Absurd and a night at Don’t Tell Mamma” (Karam 2003). Though Lope’s narrative of power-abuse and collective justice-taking was still dimly recognizable, the bulk of the production seems to have been directed towards providing the kind of entertainment considered adequate at a venue calling itself the Duplex Cabaret Theatre: the manipulation of a “rather saucy, luscious-lipped puppet”, the inclusion of several torch songs with punchy titles such as “Pardonne Moi, It’s Now Time for War” or “Men Are Fuckers” and, as focal-point of the spectacle, the “rap-off” between the quarreling lovers which, the reviewer reflects, “would make Eminem proud” (Karam 2003). Ruano himself, whose article I have been mentioning, cites the *New York Times* review of the 2000 production of Calderón de la Barca’s *La vida es sueño* (*Life’s a Dream*). Though the production was savaged for adopting the interpretative style of soap-opera, the original author was praised for his unwitting modernity:

Calderón, a superb poet with deep psychological insights, explored astonishingly modern concerns: an intellectual elite manipulating nature, determinism undermining free will, child abuse producing criminality, men subjugating women. His play should translate easily into captivating present-day theater. (qtd. in Ruano 236)

This, according to Ruano, is precisely the problem. By translating so “easily” into a modern theatrical idiom, the “essence” of Calderón’s comedy has been lost sight of. What the *New York Times* reviewer hailed as “a parade of bondage, rape, torture, mutilation, murder, treason and civil war, accompanied by the music and rhythms of flamenco” (qtd. in Ruano 236), is dismissed as the travesty of a play whose roots are firmly planted in the European Renaissance. If only modern critics and directors had acknowledged this simple fact, they would have discovered that at the heart of Golden Age drama is, *pace* Ruano, the concept of *character*; that, through character, are to be found those “universal and human values which would have brought that drama to transcendence” and, like the plays of Shakespeare and Molière, assured it a place on the theatrical Olympus. “How is it possible,” Ruano storms in conclusion,

that a culture which has given the world characters as human as la Celestina, Lazarillo, Don Quixote and the figures in the canvases of Velázquez, Murillo and Ribera, should simultaneously deny that humanity to the characters of its most popular artistic form? Realism, humanism in all but the theatre? (Ruano 242)

Ruano’s charge of a-historicism, with its questionable corollary of anti-humanism—the incapacity to see Segismundo, Peribáñez or Don Juan as Renaissance *characters*—is in stark contrast to the views of other scholars of Golden Age drama who adduce *excess*, rather than a *deficit* of historical content, as the prime reason for the plays’ failure to appeal to Anglo-Saxon audiences. If *siglo de oro* drama does have a universality problem, David Johnston has suggested, it is largely the result of a fixation with its own history, “with the sensitivities forged by the experience of being Spanish...as well as the sensitivities dislocated by that experience” (Johnston “Las terribles aduanas” 92; translation mine). The closer one’s reading of the plays, as either translator or director, the clearer it becomes that, experientially speaking, they are

light years away from our own Anglo-Saxon meaning systems. Re-encoding such arcane concepts as *pundonor*, unpacking the religious or social ideologemes with which the plays are encumbered, translating basic attitudes to sex or marriage have proven intractable difficulties for adapters and producers who, in any case, have in Shakespeare an inevitable reference-point and prism for classical theatre.

Responses to the 2003 production of Lope's *Peribáñez*, directed by Rufus Norris at the London Young Vic, are illustrative here. The play itself had been advertised, in anticipation of Ruano, as a perfect example of Renaissance humanism, with Lope as the provider of some of the deepest insights yet offered into human nature. This, as Norris himself would aver in an intervention in *The Guardian*, was because the author

knew and loved people; he also knew pain, grief, torture and suffering. His worlds are full of disappointment, temptation and loss in the midst of extreme joy and irrepressible humour. And his women are as rounded as his men. They are strong, full-blooded, hot-tempered and canny. They are honest and pure-hearted, but fallible with it. Lope's complex intimacy with women is thrown straight back on to the stage, breeding vivid and believable creatures, often embodying a force both natural and vital. (Norris 2003)

Norris's neo-Leavisite enthusiasm for the "vitality" of Lope's work contrasts sharply with the response of theatre critics who, while lauding the decision to produce the play at all, failed to see beyond the essential *Spanishness* of the spectacle. "Spanish Golden Age plays are rather like Hollywood westerns," affirmed Michael Billington in *The Guardian*: "much of the pleasure lies in their rearrangement of stock ingredients" (Billington 2003). The "stock ingredients" in question were the "standard themes" of honour, jealousy and class, all of which were described as being plucked from the abyss of irrelevance by Norris's (otherwise inexplicable) decision to re-contextualize the action in the period of the Spanish Civil War, as well as Lope's "own [undefined]

brand of psychological subtlety" (Billington 2003). "Generally speaking we may seem to have lost interest in honour as a topic", or so assured James Fenton in an article for the same newspaper. And yet, he adds defensively,

that does not mean that we cannot be stirred by a play in which honour is the motivating force. After all, we understand what humiliation (the opposite of honour) is, and we pursue honour in various of its aspects all the time, by other names. Respect is the current street-slang under whose rubric issues of honour are discussed and fought out. (Fenton 2003)

This almost apologetic attempt to universalize and contemporarize the culturally and historically-bound concept of honour is the exception amongst responses which linked the true values of Lope's *comedia* to its illustration of something vaguely conceived of as Spanish peasant *nobleza*. Thus, the "force both natural and vital" of creatures such as Peribáñez was viewed as unthinkable beyond the play's Spanish rural ambit. For *The Telegraph's* Spain correspondent, Peribáñez was a paragon of no-nonsense rustic honesty whose binary opposite is the glamour and sophistication threatening to overrun modern-day Spain. Inspired by Peribáñez's blend of simplicity and bull-fighter courage, Christopher Howse was convinced that "La Pija [Spanish for "Posh" Spice, Victoria Adams] and her husband [footballer David Beckham, then recently transferred to Real Madrid] are no toreros":

The real hero is still the plain man, like Peribanez [*sic*], the hero of Lope de Vega's play 400 years ago. He labours, belongs to the land, defends his wife and his honour and so is nobler than the feckless man who calls himself a nobleman and lives at court. The royal court of the 17th century is today the television studio world of rich footballers' wives. (Howse "La Pija")

If typical reactions such as these have already proven obstructive to the untammelled influx of Golden Age drama, the competition from

home-grown “rivals”, headed by Shakespeare, has been particularly problematic. Johnston, adapting a figure invented by the great nineteenth-century Spanish novelist Galdós, has identified Shakespeare as a kind of cultural immigration-officer who, for centuries, has determined what foreign theatre gets in and also how (Johnston “Las terribles aduanas” 91). In the first place, the Shakespeare shadow has loomed large as *domestic* cultural capital whose prestige and commercial appeal has precluded the need to invest in non-English classical dramatic products. On the other hand, and as the degree of acceptance of a play is, as Susan Bennett has observed, dependent on the accessibility of the performance “through the codes audiences are accustomed to utilizing, the conventions they are used to recognizing” (112), the chances of *siglo de oro* plays, with their stock characters and heavily verse-based texts, ever challenging the hegemony of Shakespearean production are slight indeed. “I don’t think anyone would argue that, line for line, Lope could match Shakespeare”. So conceded Rufus Norris in his piece for *The Guardian* (2003). And underlying professional attitudes to Lope is almost always, first, the figure of the apology and, second, the positioning in relation to the English bard. “What’s the Spanish for Shakespeare?”, is the title of Norris’s own intervention, as if being recognizably “Shakespearean” were the desired end of the production of a foreign classic. “Enter a new Bard,” a preview of *Peribáñez* in *The Independent* declared more forthrightly (Taylor 2004), with the critic nodding appreciatively towards the closing chapter of Jonathan Bate’s *The Genius of Shakespeare* (1997), where the historical fantasy of Lope actually eclipsing Shakespeare, not line for line, but in terms of “aspectual” plurality and “performative” potential, is provocatively floated.

The hypothesis never came to fruition and, almost inevitably, the Shakespearean immigration-officer has intervened to determine the angle with which producers and reviewers negotiate the audience’s “take” on the comedias. “*Peribanez* is a Spanish morality tale from the time of Shakespeare, which was also the Spanish Golden Age”, a review of the Norris production instructively begins. The “idyllic” opening

sequence in which Michael Nardone's Peribanez marries the local beauty, Casilda (Jackie Morrison) is soon interrupted by the entrance of the comendador, the Flower of Spain, played by David Harewood, "in a performance that brings to mind [the actor's] Othello, as his character's tragic destiny beckons". Finally, "where Shakespeare would have allowed good and bad to die together, Lope de Vega chooses a more subtle, though still bloody, ending" (Fisher 2003). "The tempter or the tempted, who sins most?", Billington would ask in a review written from the prism of Angelo's worldly cynicism in *Measure for Measure*, "and part of the greatness of Lope's play, written shortly after Shakespeare's, lies in how it shows the technically blameless Casilda driving the Commander mad and her husband to paroxysms of jealousy" (Billington 2003). Comparisons such as this—el comendador or (possibly) Peribáñez with Othello, Casilda with Isabella, Lope with Shakespeare—assume intertextual connections which may or may not throw light on the characters/narratives involved. The point I am making is not that such connections necessarily prove unhelpful but that in Britain, and despite the trickle of *comedias* to reach the mainstream British stage, Shakespearean drama continues to provide the "horizon of expectations" against which the plays are judged and interpreted, while the figure of Shakespeare remains the ultimate (theatrical) authority before whom the Golden Age author must stop and produce his theatrical credentials.

II

That this cannot be otherwise is attested by Shakespeare's own tricky passage into Spanish theatrical culture. For centuries Spanish critics have yoked him together with a series of more or less dominant national counterparts: in turn, Lope, Calderón, Tirso and, more recently, Cervantes (Pujante "Shakespeare and/or"). On practically every count—his language, his lack of respect for the unities, his characters' lack of moral fibre, etc.—the Englishman was found wanting and, in some cases, considered a destructive influence on Spain's own dramatic talent. The national cultural revivals of the Second Republic and, from

a vastly different ideological perspective, of the early years of the Franco dictatorship did little to bolster Shakespeare's reputation in Spain. When the process of nationalization extended to the theatres themselves, the competition with domestic Golden Age classics, often brutally reworked to fit the ideologemes of Francoism (García Santo-Tomás 365, 375), left no room for any but the most established plays of the Shakespeare repertoire. Thus, of the 180 or so plays produced at the Teatro Español, the regime's flagship playhouse for classical drama, in the period 1939-76, only 13 were recognizably Shakespearean (Bernal). Of these 13 productions, 9 were the work of the same director, Cayetano Luca de Tena, whose spectacular and (not coincidentally) resoundingly successful productions of *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Hamlet*—all in the 1940s—failed to encourage either his successors at the Español or at the slightly more up-beat María Guerrero. As has proven virtually the norm in Spanish theatre history, the challenge to the theatrical mainstream would come from the more restless university companies or on the "peripheral" circuits of Cataluña and the Basque Country. For the rest, only José Tamayo and the Lope de Vega Company's production of *Hamlet* in 1961, together with the quatercentenary of Shakespeare's birth in 1964, would stir anything like official interest in the theatrical possibilities of the Englishman's œuvre.

The breakthrough came in the 1980s—nearly a decade after the collapse of the dictatorship and of the cultural protectionism associated with the system of national theatres. What Enrique García Santo-Tomás has characterized as a "fin-de-siècle springtime" for classical Spanish playwrights, and Lope in particular, with the creation (in 1986) of the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico and of a series of companies devoted to an imaginative reinvestment in the *comedia* (García Santo-Tomás 385; translation mine), was also the period of the most lavish and spectacular productions of Shakespeare to be seen to date. It was as if, with the advent of freedom, Spanish theatre producers, responding to audience demands, found it necessary to include foreign classics in their repertoires as an antidote to the stagnation and introspection of the pre-democratic era. (Alternatively, and equally plausibly, both the

regeneration of the *comedia* and the turn to Shakespeare stemmed from a deep malaise in the contemporary theatrical scene and a serious shortage of new authorial talent [Edwards 154].) Not all of these productions were either original or pertinent to the conditions of post-transitional Spain. Rather, as Rafael Portillo and Manuel Gómez-Lara suggest, the lavish sceneries and star-studded casts tended to bespeak a dearth of ideas rather than a thoughtful appropriation for modern times (Portillo & Gómez-Lara). Significantly, and with the sole exception of *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, on the one hand, and *Richard III*, on the other, the “historical” dramas were relegated to amateur performances or simply not considered stage-worthy. Nevertheless, by the early 1990s “*Shakespearemanía*” was so entrenched that professional performances of the Bard’s work actually outscored those of plays by Lope, Tirso and Calderón put together. In a period of heady optimism and substantial investment in the arts, Shakespeare’s theatre, “uncontaminated” by the national Catholic appropriation to which its Golden Age counterpart had been subjected under Franco, appeared to speak for both the newly re-enfranchized culture-starved middle-class majorities and also the forces of separatism which, from their traditional strongholds on the Spanish “periphery”, continued to see in the production of Lope, Tirso and Calderón the hallmarks of a covert centralism.

Nowadays, Shakespeare’s theatre continues to dominate the Spanish stage—often at the expense of Spain’s own “aureate” tradition. As recently as 2003, at Spain’s premier classical theatre event, the summer festival at Almagro in Ciudad Real, Shakespeare’s plays or Shakespearean adaptations accounted for no fewer than seven of 30 or so spectacles billed. Of these only nine were by Spanish authors—3 by Lope de Vega, 2 by Tirso de Molina, 1 by Antonio de Zamora, 1 by María de Zayas y Sotomayor, an operatic adaptation of *Life’s a Dream* and an anonymous *entremés*. Of the Shakespeare productions, the now staple inclusion of versions of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (2 separate productions) and *Richard III* was added a rare production of *Troilus and Cressida*, Teatre Lliure’s powerful modern-dress rendering of *Julius Caesar* and a flamenco-pop version of *Romeo and Juliet* (*Romeo x*

Julietta). The last two productions, especially, reveal an imperious desire to innovate upon existing practices, to breathe new and unexpected meanings into well-trodden playtexts, if necessary by adding to what is already there. The Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico's production of *Romeo x Julieta*, with its blend of hip-hop and flamenco, *cante jondo* and rap, has been transformed into what director Emilio Hernández defends as an "indispensable fusion" of elements to be pitted "against those who reduce Humanity to the axes of Good and Evil, satanizing flags and names...an intifada of sticks and stones" to be waged against the idea of a reality without a future (Hernández; translation mine). Alex Rigola's *Julius Caesar*, by contrast, reveals just what a reality might be like, the stark neon-lit set peopled by immaculately groomed, black-and-white clad actors, the political in-fights of imperial Rome transplanted to a timeless present where the couple of "Word" and "War" is offered as the symbolic diptych which encompasses the possible range of human actions.

Both these productions—and others which could have been mentioned—recall the experiments carried out with the Spanish classics discussed above. Indeed, in their fusion of apparently divergent artistic genres (*Julius Caesar* mixes classical music and rock), the self-conscious modernizations and the accretion of elements not included in the "original" playtext but which gesture, however awkwardly, towards an often ill-conceived sense of contemporary "relevance", both the Spanish appropriations of Shakespeare just cited and the British productions of Golden Age drama appear to occupy common ground. Central to that position is the import of elements from popular culture, as if the mere presence of such elements assured the plays' decodability into an idiom appropriate to the needs and expectations of modern theatre audiences. In the case of Shakespeare in Spain, this has led to alignments which have deeply divided both scholars and critics writing in the specialist press. As in Ruano's critique of modern misappropriations of Golden Age classics, the attack has often been pitched at the level of the "authenticity" of the productions, of their "fidelity" (or otherwise) to both the letter and the spirit of the

Shakespearean “original”. In both the academy and the popular press, considerable time and energy has been expended discussing just how “true” these adaptations are to the “essence”, how “recognizable” Shakespeare remains behind these “postmodern” travesties.

Inevitably, in the case of foreign-language drama, translation has also been an important site of contention. Laurence Boswell, himself an occasional translator of Spanish drama, has said:

Conceiving a play from another language is both a necessity and an opportunity, and at that moment you come down really to the sensitivity and intelligence of the translator and the director, both of whom respect the original and try to treat the original with both great reverence and great irreverence, in order to create a living version four hundred years later in a different culture of what that dead author wanted. So we are the living custodians of Calderón, as it were, but in this particular instance, we can't not be living in 1995 and we can't not be speakers of English. (Johnston *Stages of Translation* 149)

In Britain the luke-warm response to Valle-Inclán's *Luces de Bohemia* (*Bohemian Nights*) in the early 1990s was attributed by translator David Johnston to the fact that the British theatre “[hadn't] yet clarified its relationship either to translation or to the journey towards otherness that lies at the heart of our experience of non-English language theatre” (Johnston “Theatre Pragmatics” 66). In Spanish attitudes to Shakespeare the journey Johnston alludes to has been considerably shortened by translations of *all* of Shakespeare's work, many of them commissioned out to writers whose status as canonical authors in their own right has helped secure its value as “linguistic capital”—regardless of the stage-worthiness of the texts themselves. As for the “custodianship” of the English playwright, but from the historical and linguistic perspective of contemporary Spain, the sense of place has only very occasionally informed the work of translators who, in the main, have resisted the

temptation to rewrite Shakespeare in a distinctly Spanish idiom or to season their translations with national cultural ingredients.

III

Paul Julian Smith has referred to Spain as the “woman of European culture”. This largely unlooked-for femininity has come, he claims, from the fact that she has been “excluded from the main currents of political and cultural power, scorned for her alleged sensuality and emotionalism, pitied for the lack of that serene classicism and rationalism that once was admired as the ideal” (232). As the stage on which texts are denuded and interpreted in their most immediately public form, the theatre has proved another such site of exclusion. “The first directorial problem that presents itself” in producing a Golden Age play, wrote one American director in the early 1980s, is “the mustering of courage to choose [one]” (Oliver 75). Some twenty years later, directors still adduce “pragmatic” reasons for not taking a chance on playwrights like Lope: the expense of casting so many different characters, the poverty of existing translations, Spain’s own indifference to its classical dramatic tradition, etc. (Norris 2003). To these directorial misgivings should be added certain critical objections to the mixing of modes which, as in the RSC production of Calderón de la Barca’s *El pintor de su deshonra* (*The Painter of Dishonour*) in 1995-96, was allegedly greeted with a “mixture of plaudits and puzzlement” as to the appropriate response to a play which both confirms and doesn’t confirm the importance of honour (Shuttleworth 1996). In both cases (directorial edginess and hermeneutic uncertainty) the production of Golden Age drama abroad has fallen well short of the production of Shakespeare in Spain who, *often for the same reasons*, is confirmed as its most popular foreign import and even, as recent billings at Almagro suggest, its most representative classical author. Equally paradoxically, the modernizations to which Shakespeare has been subjected in recent years have merely reinforced his status as cultural capital, even as the liberties taken with Lope and company have been taken as necessary

adaptations of dramatic material considered obscure or scarcely relevant to the present circumstances.

The figure of Lope, with whose *Dog in the Manger* I began this brief comparison, was resurrected in *The Telegraph* in connexion with the terrorist bombings in Madrid of March 11 and the multitudinous peace marches which followed. "Such cohesion of neighbours," argued the paper's Spain correspondent

is...more easily seen in villages. The Spanish for village is pueblo—the people. National laws may be ignored—taxes or compulsory crash-helmets—but the pueblo behaves in unconscious unity, like a school of fish wheeling in unison. This unity applies to morality as much as to daily customs. To act against the mores of the pueblo is to be sin verguenza, shameless—an outcast, worse than a prostitute—like a bomber.

Lope de Vega latched on to this truth in the 17th century with his celebrated play *Fuente Ovejuna*. It deals with a village...that committed a murderous act. When the investigating magistrate tries to find the culprit he gets nothing but the answer: *Fuente Ovejuna* did it.

What goes for killing goes for suffering. [...] (Howse 2003a)

The forced nature of the analogy (killing-suffering) doesn't concern me here. What does is the unexpected recourse to Lope's *Fuenteovejuna* (*Sheep Spring*, as Adrian Mitchell has also translated it [Johnston *Stages of Translation* 242]) to explain the popular reaction to the recent atrocity. Has Golden Age drama finally broken out of the prison-house of history to which its very Spanishness confined it, finally acquired the "universality" (the ability to describe/explain the present) formerly reserved to greater classics such as Shakespeare? Are the "sensibilities" stirred by the outrages in Madrid—sensibilities by no means confined either to Madrid or to Spain—encompassed by a play about a peasant revolt in a tiny Córdoba village written some time

between 1612-14? "Choose the subject and (let the precepts forgive us) care not whether it is the stuff of kings and queens" ("*Elijase el sujeto y no se mire,/(perdonen los preceptos) si es de reyes*"), wrote Lope in his *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias* (ll.157-158). Has he finally been "credentialized" to address the issues which, as the most populist of classical Spanish playwrights, he went against the grain to suggest were the ones which mattered most to the common man?

Given the bemused response to the RSC's SGA's season, with only Boswell's fast-moving adaptation of *Dog in the Manger* achieving the desired results and reaching the very heartland of Lope country, Madrid, as part of the capital's Autumn Festival, it is hard to see Lope or any of his Golden Age contemporaries ever acquiring the status in the UK which Shakespeare has in Spain. As John Guillory has remarked, the credentializing process begins and ends at school (Guillory), and here, perhaps more than in the theatre, the imperviousness of the British system to other-culture, particularly foreign-language, acquisition is heavily tilted against a comparable absorption of the work of Spanish playwrights (but see Castilla 2003: 196). Even when "marginal", i.e., treated as an outsider to the culture whose literature is being taught, Shakespeare retains his status of centrality, as a "structural symptom of literary culture" itself. As Donald Hedrick puts it: "The Shakespeare example continually confirms its value along with ours as gatekeepers of the *distinctions* of culture" (241)—a value which has long ceased to be dependent upon the language in which the plays are written. The institutional indifference to Golden Age drama, symptomized by the absence of Golden Age playwrights from the works which have contributed most to the construction of a literary canon, has been compounded by an, at best, instrumental relation to the language in which the plays were written and, as the *Telegraph* example reveals, a correspondingly superficial and cliché-ridden concept of the culture it articulates. "This is no time to be monolingual," assured Mary Louise Pratt in 1995, as specialists in comparative literature faced up to the challenges and also the dangers of full-blown multiculturalism (62). Nearly a decade and several cultural misprisions afterwards, and in

contrast to Shakespeare's Britain, the "woman of Europe" is still waiting for someone to speak her theatrical language.

Note

1. The article, which draws on comments made by (*inter alios*) Francisco Florit, Ángel Luis Pujante and Gary Taylor, includes material first presented in a short paper given at the 31st International Shakespeare Conference ("Writing on Shakespeare") held at Stratford-upon-Avon in August 2004. Much of the research for it was funded by the Dirección General de Investigación of the Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology (Research Project PB98-0398: Shakespeare's presence in Spain in the framework of his reception in European culture).

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