

Reviews

Clare, Janet. *Drama of the English Republic 1649-1660*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002. xix+ 311 pp.

Reviewed by José Manuel González
University of Alicante

The drama of the English Republic 1649-1660 which traditionally has been somewhat neglected finds careful attention in this edition. Contrary to the traditional critical positions it shows how those years were a time of dramatic variety, innovation, and vitality when there was a cultural revolution in England. The plays are situated in their theatrical and historical context that was reflected in the theatre of the period. This ambitious book within the series of the Revels Plays Companion Library successfully proves that editions are meant to be more than mere textual reproductions as it includes not only texts but also new perspectives and approaches to guide the reader to a new and deeper understanding and appreciation of Commonwealth plays.

One of the strengths of this edition is its ability to explain the complex relationship between the historical situation and the survival of theatre in political circumstances where it was affected by social and political contradictions. Drama was used as a metaphor (23) to evade censorship and to respond to the political crisis. Such a detailed account of the theatrical context was needed to reinterpret and to update previous critical views on the this drama like those by Lois Potter and Dale Randall, among others. A broad ranging analysis and information about the theatrical, cultural and historical milieu is provided presenting the texts of the four plays in relation to the political moment as plays are also historical products. Besides the general introduction contains valuable documentation on the oppositional state of the drama of the English Republic questioning canonical readings and dealing with major cultural and intellectual developments that coincided with the political and religious tensions that led to the Civil War. The plays are set in the context of their involvement in crucial contemporary issues and debates on matters related to drama itself. They reflect the contradictions and variety of a drama which survived the turmoil of war. The edition as a whole is cogent and balanced, setting new standards in editing. It is innovative and modern in presentation and method. Its comprehensive introduction connects the plays to specific historical and cultural practices that took place in Republican England including recent trends in the critical study of Commonwealth drama. There is a major concern with the text as performance underlining the richness and diversity of the drama of the 1650s which was poor neither in theatrical production nor in dramatic activity in spite the political crisis of the moment.

In this context plays were considered a part of “the oppositional culture” (1) though they tried to adapt themselves to the new theatrical needs and techniques. “Resistance” seems to be the only means for the survival of drama in order to avoid its repression or suppression. Thus Janet Clare explores “the interaction between politics and dramatic aesthetics” (2) examining both their continuities and differences, as well as their particular choice of theatrical strategy and of dramatic forms. She finds the plays more challenging

than traditional views have allowed, making an important contribution to give a more positive presentation of this dramatic period that was not so barren and dark as is shown by its theatrical variety.

The dramatic survival of the theatre meant not only the invention of new strategies and forms but also the discovery of new theatrical space as drama became a marginal activity. However this was not an obstacle as new locations were set up to stage plays in noblemen's houses and other buildings associated with the theatre. In this way the politics of space became a big issue as both politics and space were constructed from the same contradictory, multiple discourses and practices that led to the question of the instability of human subjectivity and identity of place as "always unfixed, contested and multiple" as Doreen Massey has consistently argued. And it is precisely this correspondence -the one that frames the negotiations between public and private spaces revealing relations between authority and subjectivity, and the circulation of contradictory interests, anxieties and practices- that contributed to the survival of a theatre made of the blending of hybrid material and radical ideologies.

From this perspective Commonwealth drama cannot be said to be closet drama -as Harbage and Schoenbaum suggest- simply because there are no records of performances. It is true that plays of the period were written to be read following the English tradition started by Mary Sidney and Elizabeth Cary's plays. But the great bulk of the dramatic production of the period was meant to be staged in spite of the restrictions imposed by the Puritans. This underground drama should be distinguished from the official one that was informed by the Republic aesthetics and the exaltation of national values and identities.

There were other more popular and informal alternatives to the drama like the pamphlet play whose circulation was facilitated by the new printing regulations. Janet Clare stresses the importance of this hybrid dramatic form that meant an adaptation to the new theatrical needs in order to produce fresh subversive plays that dramatised recent news and events. Music played a significant role in the drama of the Republic. It was a means of reinforcing the aesthetic dimension of the dramatic action as seen in Davenant's *The Siege of Rhodes* that has been considered one of the earliest English operas. Theatre was, therefore, regarded as spectacle and entertainment which should incorporate other artistic forms to produce more spectacular performances. It seems as if literary and textual interests were superseded by dramatic ones.

There is a representative coverage of texts and of the new dramatic ways in which old forms and practices altered including a balanced selection of texts which reflect the complexity of the editorial procedure as they did not have a specific dramatic identity. Bearing this in mind some editorial adaptations were needed to preserve significant stage directions. Thus the entry of masques has been replaced by acts, a more suitable theatrical term. The reliability of texts meet the highest standards of scholarship. Detailed notes and critical commentary are given on the same page of the text, though the notes on the texts are rather short and incomplete. In both introductions -the general and the particular to each play- contexts and cultural practices as well as intertextual relations prevail over textual considerations. Two appendices that might be of help for a complete reading and

understanding of the plays are included. The first is a song from the second entry of *Cupid and Death* and the second additional passages from the enlarged version of *The Siege of Rhodes*.

The drama of the English Commonwealth not only continued the Shakespearean and Jonsonian tradition but also anticipated and facilitated the rise of Restoration theatre. Restoration drama would not have been possible without the dramatic variety and activity of the English Republic when new dramatic forms and conventions appeared. It was when English theatre spanned “From the irreverent treatment of Shakespearean text to the sensational political drama of the Exclusion crisis to the opera of Purcell to the classical ethos of Nathaniel Lee” (35). In this way the edition sheds new light on the plays of the 1650s that made a significant break with the past contributing to the theatrical growth and development of the theatre that followed the Restoration of Charles II in 1660.

Works Cited

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Martin Rodriguez, Antonio Maria. *Fuentes clásicas en ‘Titus Andronicus’ de Shakespeare*, León: Universidad de León, 2003, 283 pp.

Reviewed by José Manuel González
University of Alicante

Titus Andronicus, “the black sheep of the Shakespearean canon”, is no longer “one of the stupidest and most uninspired plays ever written” (Eliot, 82). Although Harold Bloom classifies it as an “Apprentice Tragedy”, contemporary criticism emphasises its importance in the Shakespearean canon for it is a sophisticated and modern play which should be frequently read and performed. Today the question of authorship has been displaced and critics have concentrated on a literary and theatrical analysis of the text. *Titus Andronicus* has been one of the most neglected plays of the Shakespearean corpus within Spanish criticism, theatrical productions, and translations, perhaps because it is problematic, controversial, and immoral. For this reason it is unusual to find studies devoted to *Titus Andronicus* or to the classical sources of Shakespeare’s plays in Spain. This book is really exceptional because it deals precisely with the classical sources of *Titus Andronicus* suggesting that “Shakespeare’s most shocking play [it] should be closest to the spirit of the