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Shakespearean perspectives

LEÃO, Liana de Camargo; SANTOS, Marlene Soares. **Shakespeare, sua época e sua obra**. Curitiba: Beatrice, 2008. 360 p. ISBN: 978856078000-6.

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"He is not of an age, but for all time!" The words of Ben Jonson (1572-1637) not only introduce an essay written by Marlene Santos for *Shakespeare, sua época e sua obra*, but also serve to summarise the thinking underlying this excellent book. Shakespeare was a genius whose work reverberates everywhere, and this compilation of essays focuses on many interesting aspects of the dramatist's work, providing the reader with a well-grounded understanding of Shakespeare's writing, social context and echoes in Brazil.

According to the editors, the principal objectives of *Shakespeare, sua época e sua obra* are to disseminate the research of Brazilian scholars concerning the English Bard and to contribute to the growing number of papers on the reception of Shakespeare in Brazil. The book is seen as an opportunity to increase the somewhat limited amount of critical literature on Shakespeare written in Portuguese, since most academic writing about Shakespeare is in English. Leão and Santos are only too well aware of the difficulties of dealing with such an author, and they highlight the importance of their publication as an introduction to Shakespeare's work. The book is divided into fifteen sections, each focusing on a specific aspect of Shakespeare's production.

In the first article in the collection Cristiane Smith focuses on the life of William Shakespeare. The lack of verifiable facts on Shakespeare's life is emphasised by the author, who limits herself to giving information which will be familiar to readers who are already interested in the dramatist. Although the essay does not come up with any new information, the circumstances surrounding Shakespeare's life serve as a necessary introduction to a book whose aim is to focus on the varied branches of the playwright's production.

The second essay, by Roberto da Rocha, focuses on the political environment at the time of

Shakespeare. The article is principally concerned with the turbulence through which England was passing as the theatre blossomed. In order to explain this particular period Rocha highlights political conflicts and religious disputes from the time of Henry VII to the reign of Charles I. The emphasis, however, is on the circumstances surrounding the accession of Queen Elizabeth I and her particular contribution to the arts. Da Rocha discusses many aspects of the Queen's political intentions with regard to drama and the arts in general, which were considerably stimulated during her reign and, indeed, were used as political instruments.

In the third article, Barbara Heliadora discusses the English theatres in Shakespeare's time. It is well known that the Elizabethan theatres had a unique architecture when compared to previous and posterior performance spaces. In order to explain their configuration, Heliadora provides a background to the development of drama in England. When 14th-century artisans performing religious plays started to become professional their improvised stages had to serve as their dressing room and sometimes also as a shelter. These new actors therefore needed a place to perform. An appropriate space was found in inn-yards, which enabled actors to restrict access and charge entrance fees. Heliadora goes on to provide the reader with technical details concerning Elizabethan theatres that contribute greatly to the reader's understanding of their operation.

Shakespeare's creativity in handling language and elaborating new forms of expression is Caetano Galindo's subject in the fourth article in the book. To highlight the particular contribution of the dramatist to the English language, Galindo discusses some myths concerning the author's use of language, emphasising that the historical moment was propitious for Shakespeare's fabulous

(re)creation. Galindo's principal objective is to point out Shakespeare's enormous talent in understanding the spirit of the English language. His essay draws the reader's attention to different perspectives on the subject, going beyond the traditional approach.

Aimara da Cunha Resende discusses the presence of popular culture in the fifth essay. The author does not limit herself to exposing popular influences on specific plays, but also draws the reader's attention to the circumstances surrounding their presence in the plays. Resende demonstrates that English drama and especially Shakespearean plays broke with tradition since they integrated high and low culture, and explains that this was due to the characteristics of the particular relationship between social groups in the Elizabethan period. Resende concludes her essay by arguing that, in bringing England's popular culture into his plays, Shakespeare was recreating life itself, portraying man in his many faces, and has thus left us a real cultural heritage.

The ambiguity of Shakespeare's portraits of women is discussed by Anna Camati in the sixth article. Camati comments on Shakespeare's subversion of the orthodoxies of patriarchal society and his capacity to capture the spirit of his era, showing how his plots reflected the crystallized position of women in Elizabethan society.

Providing a context for the important presence of music in Shakespeare's plays and poems, Caetano Galindo discusses music in the Elizabethan period. His essay discusses the forms of music and the instruments of the time, and goes on to demonstrate how music was ingrained in Elizabethan drama of the time especially that of Shakespeare. The article focuses on technical aspects of music and instruments, and highlights some important musicians in Elizabeth's time, but one would welcome a greater emphasis on the presence of music in Shakespeare's work.

In "A dramaturgia shakespeariana" Marlene dos Santos emphasises Shakespeare's extraordinary capacity as a writer of drama. Although her aim is to give a general view of all of Shakespeare's plays, it is of course impossible to condense Shakespearean drama into a little over forty pages. However, dos Santos is successful in arousing the reader's interest in basic aspects of Shakespeare's dramatic technique.

In "O soneto shakespeariano", Luci Collin shifts the focus from the plays to the poems. She summarises the differences between the English sonnet and its Petrarchan forebears, and traces its rhyme-scheme to characteristics of the English language. Collin argues that Shakespeare's was a

sophisticated version of the original English sonnet. According to her, Shakespeare's poetry unifies language and thought with a sequence of metaphors or ideas, representing not only an important contribution to English poetry but also to Western literature.

The tenth essay analyses the narrative poem "The Rape of Lucrece", arguing that it is a denunciation of violence against women. The poem blends elements of Ovid's "Fasti" and Titus Livius' history of Rome. Solange de Oliveira suggests that, in the character Lucius, Shakespeare shows that Lucrece should not have stabbed herself and that it is the rapist, Sextus Tarquinius, who should have been punished. She argues that the poem thus focuses the reader's attention on Tarquinius and his crime. Oliveira's essay follows the same theoretical line as Camati's, stressing how Shakespeare's work questions the established norms of Elizabethan society with regard to women.

In "A presença de Christopher Marlowe na obra de William Shakespeare", Mail Azevedo discusses the relationship between the drama of Marlowe (1564-1593) and that of Shakespeare. The essay stresses the importance of Marlowe in the Elizabethan period. Azevedo emphasises that, although this great dramatist was obfuscated by Shakespeare's genius, he nonetheless influenced the Bard. However, she admits that there is no evidence that Marlowe and Shakespeare, although they were close in age and had the same occupation, were friends or directly collaborated with each other. Azevedo's essay nevertheless encourages the Brazilian reader to note the points of similarity between some of the plays of Shakespeare and those of Marlowe.

The twelfth essay discusses the challenge that Shakespearean drama represents for cinematographic language. In "Shakespeare no cinema", Liana de Leão gives a detailed account of the adaptations of Shakespearean plays for the cinema, from the first attempts to handle theatrical language in motion pictures to the most recent. According to Leão, Akira Kurosawa's "Throne of Blood" (1957) is a masterpiece in Shakespearean cinema, not only because it brings Shakespeare's text to the screen, but also because it is a successful recreation of the plot and Macbeth's conflicts, finding visual equivalents for Shakespeare's poetry.

In the thirteenth essay, Marcia Martins gives a general overview of the history of translations into Portuguese from Shakespeare. She also comments on the different translations. She contrasts those translations that seek to reproduce the characteristics of Elizabethan English with those that try to facilitate the understanding of a contemporary

public. By means of examples, Martins discusses each style of translation, not attempting to judge which is better, but stressing the difficulty for the translator of capturing and communicating Shakespeare's way of perceiving the world and mankind.

The fourteenth essay is written by Barbara Heliadora, who gives a detailed chronological account of Shakespearean drama on the Brazilian stage. In this fascinating article Heliadora talks about the first appearances of Shakespeare's plays in the country, in French adaptations, especially those by Jean-François Ducis (1733-1816). Like his notorious English contemporary, Thomas Bowdler (1754-1825), Ducis disapproved of violent and obscene scenes, as well as of plots that went against neoclassical taste, and so he rewrote many Shakespearean plays. Heliadora goes on to refer to the first appearances of original Shakespearean texts in Brazilian theatres, and comments on recent productions.

The book ends with Marcia Martins' excellent list of translations of Shakespeare into Portuguese from 1933 to 2006, which supplements her essay

earlier in the book. As a reference source this database alone justifies the acquisition of this book by any Brazilian Shakespeare scholar.

Shakespeare, sua época e sua obra is a homogeneous and coherent piece of work written by some of Brazil's leading Shakespeare scholars. Leão and Santos's volume brings together a diverse group of researchers to illuminate various perspectives on Shakespeare, covering a range of fundamental studies in a variety of fields. The book unites in a single volume a wide panorama of useful information and bibliographical references on Shakespearean studies with a particularly Brazilian flavour.

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