

Stages of Intersubjectivity and Cultural Memory in Elizabethan, Jacobean and Restoration Drama

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At a historical juncture in which knowledge production and the institutional role of universities are increasingly undervalued, and in which the humanities, particularly literary studies, are often regarded with scepticism by market-driven agendas and private companies, and even by families who believe they are shaping their children's futures through utilitarian choices of university degrees and professional pathways, scholarly endeavours such as the present volume acquire renewed urgency and relevance. To conceive and bring to fruition this special issue of *Pygmalion. Revista de teatro general y comparado*, a long-standing journal published by the Instituto del Teatro de Madrid (ITEM) and the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, devoted to literary and culturally critical inquiry, responds not merely to an academic need but to an intellectual imperative of singular significance. This special issue is centred on Elizabethan, Jacobean and Restoration English literature. The volume's coherence and richness, grounded in the diversity and critical depth of its contributions, allow us to articulate its contents –and, accordingly, this introduction– around two complementary sections: the first devoted to Fletcher and Massinger, and the second to Restoration theatre, Shakespeare as character and irony in Shakespeare and Dylan.

The essays gathered in this first section of the volume engage with some of the central problematics of Elizabethan and Jacobean English drama: the construction of alterity –national and cultural– the emergence of new configurations of economic and social power, and the reworking of classical models within a cultural milieu shaped by imperial expansion and pervasive ideological anxiety. Rather than conceiving early modern theatre as a passive mirror of its historical moment, the contributions assembled here approach the stage as a dynamic site of symbolic negotiation, where ideological tensions and unstable subjectivities are actively staged and reconfigured.

Holman-Smith's article lies at the very core of these concerns through its analysis of *Love's Cure* (1615), by John Fletcher and Philip Massinger, read in dialogue with Ben Jonson's *The Devil Is an Ass* (1616). Focusing on theatrical cross-dressing, the essay advances an original reading that intertwines metatheatre and gender performance. The "Spanishness" of the cross-dressed characters does not operate merely as an exotic backdrop but rather as a constitutive element that intensifies the metatheatrical self-awareness of the Jacobean stage. By placing English drama in conversation with the Spanish Golden Age *comedia* –a theatrical tradition in which women were permitted onstage– this article offers a particularly illuminating perspective on English theatrical anxieties surrounding the body and representation, revealing the extent to which nationhood and gender are inextricably co-constructed in performance.

From a complementary critical angle, Camacho's contribution turns to the drama of Philip Massinger in order to examine the nexus between financial power and social anxiety in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (1625) and *The City Madam* (1632). Situating Massinger within the context of the profound economic transformations of Jacobean and Caroline England, the article foregrounds the playwright's ability to transform the stage into a laboratory for interrogating the rise of mercantile capital, the precariousness of credit and the moral tensions engendered by an emergent economic order. Theatre thus emerges as a privileged space for dramatizing the fears and contradictions of a society in transition from feudal structures to an incipient market economy.

The second section of this issue opens with Restoration drama. Sell Maestro offers a deep examination of sir Robert Howard's *The Great Favourite, or, the Duke of Lerma* (1668), a play which dramatizes the Machiavellian strategies employed by the Duke of Lerma (*valido* of Spanish King Philip III) to retain royal support and political power. Scholarly criticism has traditionally associated the play with the events that led to the banishment of the Earl of Clarendon (Lord Chancellor and royal favourite) from the court of Charles II in 1667. Nevertheless, in an exercise that combines both historical and textual analysis, Sell Maestro argues that to view the play merely as an allusion to the historical Earl of Clarendon is to limit our understanding of a text infused with political undertones. Instead, by stressing the points of resemblance between the historical court of Charles

II and the fictional recreation of the Spanish court of Philip IV, the author defends the thesis that the play's anti-Machiavellian criticism –embodied in the Duke of Lerma– reveals Howard's profound attack on the entire system of royal favouritism that had dominated European courts since the advent of the Early Modern Period.

The recently released and critically acclaimed film *Hamnet* (2025), directed by Chloé Zhao, reveals the ever-present interest in exploring new ways of representing Shakespeare on stage and on screen. Cid's essay focuses precisely on the theme of Shakespeare as character, a new subject matter that entered the Spanish stage in the early decades of the nineteenth century with the premiere of Ventura de la Vega's *Shakespeare enamorado* (1828). In his comparative analysis Cid brings together two distinct –but historically connected– theatrical milieus in the reception of Shakespeare in Europe to illustrate the different uses of Shakespeare as character in Enrique Zumel's *Guillermo Shakspeare* (1853) and Ruggero Cappuccio's *Shakespea Re di Napoli* (1994). Drawing on reception theory and the semiotics of theatre, Cid argues that the reconfiguration of Shakespeare from historical figure to theatrical character serves as a cultural, political and metatheatrical mirror. Despite employing different approaches, by turning Shakespeare the man and author into a living fiction, both, Enrique Zumel and Ruggero Cappuccio, expose the complexities of power, identity, and historical invention. Shakespeare thus undergoes a transition from a historical myth or *logos* to an embodied myth: a sign within the stage's semiotic landscape that challenges traditional notions of “authentic” Shakespeare.

This special issue ends with an innovative and expanding body of academic scholarship in the field of Shakespeare studies that explores the intertextual relations between William Shakespeare and Bob Dylan. Employing a rich and varied corpus, Shakespeare's major plays (histories, tragedies and comedies) and Dylan's songwriting from the mid-1960s to the early 2000s, López-Peláez's article examines and compares instances of irony in Shakespeare and Dylan. Based on pragmatic and linguistic theories of irony –particularly relevance theory– López-Peláez's article examines how irony serves as a performative and critical mode of engagement in the works of both Shakespeare and Dylan, arguing that both artists use irony not merely as a rhetorical device, but also as a literary mechanism central to unsettle authority and destabilize cultural mythologies. By situating Dylan in a direct intertextual dialogue with Shakespeare, the study posits that irony functions as a tool to expose human contradictions and criticise the status quo.

Taken together the contributions gathered in this special issue reaffirm the critical life of English drama from the late sixteenth century to the Restoration period and beyond, while simultaneously demonstrating the capacity of literary scholarship to present broader questions of cultural memory. Across diverse historical moments and genres, the essays collected here converge on a shared understanding of the stage as a privileged site of intersubjective encounter and linguistic experimentation, where social conflicts and aesthetic traditions are not merely reflected but actively contested. Indeed, this volume invites readers to reconsider the permeability of literary canons and the temporal continuities that bind early modern drama to later cultural forms. In doing so, it seeks not only to advance specialised debates within Renaissance or Restoration studies, but also to reaffirm the humanities' indispensable role in fostering critical thought and interpretative rigour in an era increasingly hostile to complexity. This stage, as these essays artfully show, remains a space where our literary past is studied to define and protect our future.