

Braulio Fernández Biggs. *Calderón y Shakespeare: Los personajes de La cisma de Inglaterra y Henry VIII*.

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Braulio Fernández describes his comparative project in this book as a complete study of the central topics and characters in Calderón's *La cisma de Inglaterra* (1626–27) and Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* (1613), written in collaboration with John Fletcher, which has never been carried out before (28). He departs from an overestimation of the dramatic value and theatrical design of *CI*, which is comparable “to the best play of Shakespeare” (14), while he undervalues *H8* as a “minor play” (20) in the Shakespearean canon without taking into account that it belongs to Shakespeare's final period where the Bard, at the height of his dramatic creation and style, shows how “the energies of romance live on in [his] final effort at staging history” (Adam Zucker, “Late Shakespeare,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney [2012]: 368), using elements taken from romances, such as music, spirits, and pageantry, in a context of mystery and wonder, as in Cranmer's dream vision of Elizabeth I's future reign.

Both plays have been significant in terms of performance because of their spectacular court ceremonies and trials, though neither *CI* nor *H8* have been regarded as Calderón's and Shakespeare's best and most popular plays. However, their dramatic achievement would not have been the same without them, as they dramatize historical events that meant a lot not only to spectators, but also to the two playwrights, as they give us their own interpretation of key moments and characters from the reign of Henry VIII: the rise and fall of Cardinal Wolsey; Henry's divorce from Katherine of Aragon, which led to England's break with Rome; and his marriage to Anne Boleyn. Calderón and Shakespeare were not indifferent to the English Reformation, whose dramatization reveals characteristic

Protestant and Catholic interpretations of the cause of the religious confrontation. They take sides in the staging of history, as what happened in the past “has much to do with the question of who is interpreting the past and how” (Jonathan Hart, *Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* [2011], 151). Both dramatists were well aware of the importance of history, as it became a matter of national and theatrical interest. But, as Biggs points out, they portray those historical events under certain assumptions and considerations (111), for “history in any form in which we encounter it is culture-bound, not objective, not immutable” (John Loftis, *Renaissance Drama in England and Spain. Topical Allusion and History Plays* [1987], 6). History, therefore, becomes a pretext for the dramatization of relevant episodes in Henry VIII’s troublesome reign, in accordance with Calderón’s and Shakespeare’s particular ideologies and beliefs. They adapt, change, and alter the sources (Ribadeneyra, Holinshed) through a compression of events whose interpretation remains inextricably bound to the significance and emphasis given to them.

The consideration of *CI* as a tragedy needs further clarification for it can be misleading in relation to *H8*. Calderón’s play has been considered a tragedy (Francisco Ruiz Ramón, *La tragedia y Calderón* [1984]; Ignacio Arellano, *Historia del teatro español del siglo XVII* [2005]) because it is the key concept of the play, dealing as it does with the problem of individual freedom and its consequences, and fate is at the center of the dramatic structure around which the dramatic action revolves (102–05). However, it cannot be referred to as a proper English Renaissance tragedy, full of blood, revenge, and despair (Mike Pincombe, “English Renaissance Tragedy: Theories and Antecedents,” in *English Renaissance Tragedy*, eds. Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr. [2010]: 3–16). For this reason, *CI* has been labeled a “quiet tragedy” (Gail Bradbury, “Tragedy and Tragicomedy in the Theatre of Lope de Vega,” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 39 [1962]: 305), while *H8* has been classified as a history play containing tragic elements, which means that Calderón and Shakespeare wrote different plays on the same historical episodes using different dramatic styles.

There are also some notable gaps in the book. Though it features a generous selection of quotations to present a detailed — but sometimes too long-winded — account of key scenes from both texts, it occasionally lacks further personal analysis and elaboration. Finally, every now and then such comprehensiveness and thorough coverage of critical issues tend to become repetitive and confusing, as in the case of the central characters in the two plays (Henry, Katherine, and Wolsey). There is also a dependence on the critique of some scholars whose original quotations in English are only given in translation in light of future readership, as the book is written in Spanish. An updated bibliography, particularly on the Shakespeare part, would have been much appreciated, whereas some relevant comparative studies by significant scholars like Kenneth Muir and Ann Mackenzie are also missing.

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