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Jan Kott is Dead, Long Live to the <“Hybrid”> Critic

Abstract: This article is a little tribute that a drama teacher, an editor and translator and a lecturer in English Literature would like to contribute to this *Special Issue* in Honour of Professor Dr Jan Kott, the most influential non-English speaking Shakespearean Critic in the second half of the 20th Century and early 21st Century. In the initial part of the essay we will overview Kott’s influence in the development of current Shakespearean tradition(s) in Spain from the early 1970s to the present day. In fact, his writings and critical views on William Shakespeare’s *Works* have been a decisive point in the development of new approaches to this playwright in some University Departments and Drama Schools in this country. The whole discussion will take the notion of *hybrid* and *hybridization* as the point of departure and we will draw some conclusions for discussing new critical thinking in Art (Science,) and Humanities.

Keywords: Jan Kott, William Shakespeare, translation, globalization, Shakespearean criticism, dramaturgy, hybrid teaching.

“Truly thrilling” was accessing to a unique source of information when the aim consists of analysing oral history and traditions and much more exciting when you can share it with all *netizens* and other people in such a simple way.¹ We, like many others all over the world, had been studying his essays, reading his

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¹ We invite the reader to access to the following online resource: Text und Bühne. (1990) *Jan Kott. Is still Shakespeare our Contemporary?* Youtube. 9 July 2013. Web. Accessed 15 June 2021.

memoirs or we even were fortunate enough to hear about him for other personal experiences but, till that very moment, we had not yet had an opportunity to hear one of his most outstanding features: his foreign accent when talking in English. The relevance emerged so clearly that we felt it would be a wonderful idea to use this as an extra resource to supplement this very same text because he would be entertaining while popularising his global audience(s). The title of the channel, *Text und Bühne*, gave us some clues in advance about this sight and when we played that recording, it was enchanting listening directly to Professor Dr Jan Kott lecturing on Shakespeare's *Contemporaneity*... again.

At first, we ignore the fact that we all heard him in this constrained lockdown because it was perfect for the resumption of our critical talks but during this virtual and asynchronous meeting with one of the most prolific and iconoclastic Shakespearean critics of the past century, a particular passage captured our attention. In particular, that one when he talks about his colleague "T. J. B. Spencer" and the "three bodies of Shakespeare" basically for two reasons: on the one hand, we were provided with some *watchwords* to orchestrate this challenge; on the other, because Jan Kott and T. J. B. Spencer played an important part in consolidating the first Spanish Shakespearean Institution on the international scene. A concrete scenario, which is still part of our daily life and that we will try to unveil in the course of these shared reflections.

As with both leading scholars, obviously, we also share the essence of those "Shakespearean bodies" in his triadic relation between individual ("to be read" or textual), society ("to be told" or academic) and species ("to be performed" or theatrical) but, from our critical point of view, we believe it is appropriate to identify another condition between individuals and society in order to best fit the previously described model by Spencer. In fact Kott began his lecture by referring to this *dual* state when describing a father and his son in a desert island during a time of exile.² This kind of Socratic method he mentioned to describe the scene, this mutual respect between individuals based on asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking (commonly known as peer-to-peer education in current curricular reforms) proved to be a key element in the comprehensive approach to William Shakespeare's *Works* by our Spanish school since its creation in the 1970s and, logically, one of the objectives in this essay will consist of trying to expand this triadic approach into a *tetradic* one because from our temporal perspective (individual, *dual*, social and historical) some ideas of both schools of thoughts could be clarified.

² At the beginning of his lecture, Kott describes the scene included in the first chapter of a biography of Shakespeare by Victor Hugo and he read the dialogue between this author and his son. Moreover, the scene has clear references in appearance and meaning to *The Tempest* by Shakespeare.

Another topic that Kott mentioned in this recording, before analysing and criticising some Shakespearean plays and concepts in detail, deals with the utopic purpose of any (literary) translation but, instead of using a temporal concept, he employs a spatial one, magnifying the hugeness of this humble aim that Victor Hugo ingeniously compared with the enormity of an ocean.³ But it is after these time-space concepts when he includes some basic opposition between sources and influences, between some old traditions and new iconoclastic proposals, between friendliness and textual dismemberment. Some conceptual parameters where, as Kott remarked, only audiences have the key to establish more or less contact with real poetry, with new experiences, with real problems of life, with the real drama of time and above all, with the illusion that Shakespeare, is unchangeable. And this *dual* perspective, this *two-faced* approach to mythologies and realisms presided over the beginning and endings of conflicts by a dramatic Polish Janus, began for most of us with “a careful reading of the list of” essays contained in a book once called *Szkice o Szekspirze*.

A Title for a Book, a Book for a Title

In 2014, during the proofreading phase of our last academic translation of William Shakespeare for the publishing house Cátedra, the editor in chief was asking us about the title for the play we were proposing because, after consultation with some reviewers, we were being altering the editorial tradition and some doubts were raised. After some talks with her, she finally agreed not to change our *Medyda, por Medida* for matching the original “*Measvre, for Measure*” and our 2015 edition consolidated some regular updates within the editorial policies of our Institution because we had from the beginning of this specific project a twofold objective in mind: to open Shakespeare to the public in an orthodox way and to attract both traditional and new audiences by catching their attention. Obviously, we were aware that this change would be drawing further criticism but it was worth the effort to highlight both a significant change in our editorial policies for translating the texts contained in the *First Folio* of 1623 into Spanish from new theatrical-dramaturgical point of views and the beginning of a new trend for editing similar dramatic texts thanks to emergent technologies (e. g. TEI P5 and XML Standards). In this case, obviously, time will tell and history will judge.

³ In the Spanish context, one of the authors that has most influenced in this field has been José Ortega y Gasset. His famous essay entitled *Miseria y Esplendor de la Traducción = Elend und Glanz der Übersetzung* extends this idea developed by Hugo and supported by Kott.

We introduce this anecdote in this section because electing the right title, the right cover or even the right foreword for a book is something essential to the phenomenon we all call “best-seller book”. In the case of “literary criticism”, as noted by Joseph Campana, maintaining the highest degree of “cultural visibility” when writing nonfiction has only been achieved by a few, but it is remarkable that in his selection of four well-known authors, two of them are Shakespearean experts. It is likewise highly illustrative that, in the case of Marjorie Garber, he describes her essayistic writing (her scholarship) as very familiar for the public because her approach to Shakespeare’s *Works* is “eclectic, encyclopaedic, historical and anecdotal”, remarking that some of her academic books (specially *Shakespeare and Modern Culture*) are continuing “the story scholars have been telling since Jan Kott’s *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* about the ways in which Shakespeare’s works live on, transform, and tangled themselves up in contexts far distant from the Renaissance stage.” (*Criticism of Criticism*)

In this respect, Pérez Gállego (Pérez *El País*, 1987), Emeritus Professor of English and North American Literature at the Complutense University of Madrid and the best Shakespearean scholar in Spain until his death in 2013, talked about the influence of the Polish critic in his country in a very short article entitled *Un Amigo de Hamlet (An old friend of Hamlet)* at the end of 1980s. His analysis becomes overwhelmed, at least, from a technical and editorial point of view. He describes Kott’s book as a prophetic example, as a classic text for classic texts, for renewing the exercise of theatrical and dramatic criticism in Spain and he remarks how important this text was (and still is) for the members of the Spanish *Shakespeare Institute* but, besides that, he deeply deplores that the first translation of “*Szkice o Szekspirze*” by Jadwiga Maurizio—translator of Stanisław Lem into Spanish too (Lluch, 15-17)—was so literal that, from his point of view, it considerably reduced the initial scope of Kott’s ideas in the Spanish-speaking world. In fact, Pérez Gállego puts the accent on the “*absurdity*” of her proposal (*Apuntes sobre Shakespeare*) because “*Apuntes*” in Spanish (*notes* in English) denature the content of this influential book substantially and does not capture any reader’s attention. Such is the degree of isolation and the small success of Maurizio’s translation that Joan Guasp,⁴ a famous playwright in Spain, declared in 2007—after the publication of *Shakespeare, nuestro contemporáneo* by Trigán and Olszewska—that it was a shame that “this book” by Jan Kott would have never been translated into Spanish.⁵ A statement that, besides not being correct, we think is worthwhile to develop.

⁴ Joan Guasp *English*, <https://www.escriptors.cat/autors/guaspj/joan-guasp-english>. Accessed 15 June 2021.

⁵ Guasp, Joan. *El Ciervo*, vol. 56, no. 678/679, 2007, p. 43. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40833961>. Accessed 15 June 2021.

In his memories, (Kott *Still*, 41-43) the Polish critic tells us about his personal relationship with Adam Bromberg, highlighting how important this editor was for his international projection. In this sense, Kott said:

I am indebted to Bromberg for my own initial entry into the world. While still the director of the PWN he suggested that I publish my *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary* in English. This was a year after the Polish edition came out. His idea seemed to me even more foolish than unexpected, but Bromberg commissioned the English translation to Bolesław Taborski and paid for it in hard currency. He had not only the imagination of a great editor but also the business sense. The English edition of my *Shakespeare*, published by Methuen, was printed in Poland. And paid for in hard currency.

Kuharski (Kuharski *Essay*, 53), in his short biography on Kott states, in this regard, that *Szkice o Szekspirze* was published in Polish in 1961, translated into English by Taborski in 1964 and revised and enlarged as *Szekspir Współczesny* in 1965. “Selected Works” which point out the presence of two documentary sources for this famous book from 1960 to 1970. But a quick overview of these same records using new bibliographical tools like *WorldCat*⁶ suggests an interesting challenge. Among others editions and translations of this title we can find: in 1961, a German translation by Peter Lagman entitled *Shakespeare heute*; in 1962, a French one entitled *Shakespeare notre contemporain* by Anna Posner and the Portuguese *Shakespeare nosso contemporaneo* by Norberto Ávila; in 1964, the aforementioned translation into English *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* by Taborski, the Italian *Shakespeare nostro contemporaneo* by Vera Petrelli, *Eseji o Shakespeareu* in Slovenian by Uroš Kraigher and Radojka Vrančič and *Shakespeareovské črty* in Czech by Ludmila Furgyíková; in 1968, a Spanish translation entitled *Shakespeare, nuestro contemporáneo* by Jaime Sarusky in La Habana, Cuba; and, finally, in 1969, *Shakespeare, contemporanul nostru* by Anca Livescu and Teofil Roll in Rumanian and *Apuntes sobre Shakespeare* in Spanish by Jadwiga Maurizio.

Regarding the original title in Polish for these translations we find: *Szkice o Szekspirze* for the Portuguese, Italian, Czech, Rumanian and Spaniards translations; *Szekspir Współczesny* for the German; and in the case of French and Slovenian translations, we find both *Szkice o Szekspirze* and *Szekspir Współczesny* in their records. Apart from these raw data, if we compare physically the Spanish edition by Maurizio based on the 1961 text and the English one by Taborski based on the 1964-65 revision, we find that in the former there is neither “Preface” by Peter Brook nor the “*Shakespearian Notebook*” Appendix. A special paratext, in the case of Brook’s words, that in

⁶ *WorldCat: The World’s Largest Library Catalog*. <https://www.worldcat.org>. Accessed 15 June 2021.

tandem with that controversial title contributed to the popularization of the book. In this regard, Garber (Garber *Shakespeare*, 288) shares with us the following reflection:

At the same time, there appeared for the first time in English translation another, equally influential book that also put *King Lear* at this center, the Polish writer Jan Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*. Kott's interpretation became vastly important for the itinerary of *King Lear* in the theater and on film from the sixties on. In both of these books—books which could not, in other ways, be more different—the word “our,” a classical shifter (*whose* time? *whose* contemporary?) signals both a problem and a marker for modernity.

Noteworthy is the fact that dates and data are not aligned according to Kott's written testimonial but as he himself recognised (Kott *Still*, ix) he wrote his “*biographical sketches*” at the dictation of his memory and in some cases there are “alterations and lapses” because “memory always has only one tense: the present.” As we can see, some editions did translate *verbatim* the initial title of the essays. Others use the most popular title but these were published before the revision of the Polish title and text within 1961 and 1965. But, in the case of the Spanish translation by Jadwiga Maurizio, it calls our attention that the English translation by Taborski was already released and, as Lluch (15) remarks, during that time Maurizio was reading and studying French in-depth, paying special attention to theatre and drama. Does this mean that she had a chance to use Poster's translations but she did not? Perhaps, considering that Maurizio was a good “*literary translator*”, Kott's essays were very “technical” for her. Or maybe, being the first time she was translating in a professional way, this text needed an extra skill for getting a greater recognition among other experts in Spain. Or maybe the audience was much more interested in *watching* Shakespeare⁷ than in reading it. All we can say, agreeing with Pérez Gállego, is that Kott's influence by means of his nonfictional book was rather limited, at least at the beginning of the 1970s, in this country.

On the other hand, and prior to a brief analysis on Kott's influence in Spain, what it is worth mentioning here is the relationship that maybe Bromberg and Kott achieved with some of these translators due to the intellectual revolution that was taking place between Politics and Literature in a Post-War Era. A chapter that according to recent studies (Popa, 2019) concern with the

⁷ During the 1960s and 1970s some Shakespearean productions were broadcast in a famous program entitled *Teatro de Siempre* (Traditional Theatre) and *Estudio 1* (Studio 1). For further information, review: Shakespeare. *Archivo RTVE* <https://www.rtve.es/rtve/20150709/william-shakespeare-archivo-rtve/1174722.shtml> Web. 15 June 2021.

“Political commitment and the International Construction of symbolic recognition during the Cold War” after the signing of *The Letter of 34*⁸ by Jan Kott, other artists and thought leaders. Ioana Popa (3-14) who analyses the transferring between East and West Literary products in French, talks about the translation channels that were created after the de-Stalinization within the Eastern Bloc and about the *cultural hybridity* that translators got when transferring Polish authors into French. Among chief mediators, Popa highlights the figure of Anna Posner and her capacity to foster competition between publishers for specific works and authors experiencing censorship or being marginalized. A phenomenon that provided some authors both a national identity in the exile and international fame, relocating them in new canonical forms. This would explain too why Kott effectively and generously exhibits the name of his translators in his own texts, giving visibility to this *hybrid mediator*—with which we are convinced he identifies himself—and why Stříbrný (101) locates Posner before Taborski in the historical path.

Spain in Kott, Kott in Spain

In his memoirs (*Kott Still*, 20-27) the Polish author mentioned his stay in a monastery located in the Massif Central of France to test his faith because he considered himself a nonbeliever. It seems that his experience as a seminarian was far more fruitful than his stay in Paris because in that place of worship, reflection and dialogue he made friends from different continents and his reading and essayistic skills were increased significantly. We can see a good sample of the academic freedom he experienced in that place just by paying attention to some authors (Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Cornelius Jansen, Bataille, Sade) or topics (philosophy, theology, languages, pornography) but Kott remarks that his favourite seminar was an optional one dealing with history of art and history of painting. In this seminar, lectured by a Spanish Dominican, is where he experienced his initial contacts with the *grotesque*, with cruelty and bestiality in art and life, with the sophisticated satire, with Goya’s pictures and Artaud’s proposals and with “a mass and office of the dead for the Basques”. Tortures and madness, death and destruction, exile and passivity, Fascism and totalitarian regimes were concepts to think in depth but, as he remembers in “the early spring of 1939”, they also were the prelude of the approaching War and of the highest forms of absurdity that he would experience in person. In this context, it is difficult to determine how significant was the Spaniard in Kott from this learning experience but, apparently, it sounds a little distant or asymmetric. But

⁸ Polish History Museum, Warsaw <https://polishhistory.pl/the-letter-of-34/> Web. Accessed 15 June 2021.

let's try to sketch a historical approximation of the influence that the figure of the Polish critic has exerted on our form(s) of understanding Theatre.

In the 1940-1960 period, we can find two monographic studies (Ballester, 1945; De Madariaga *Hamlet* 1945) on Shakespeare's *Works* from a *Historical* point of view *per se*.⁹ In the first case, we find the book entitled *El Historiador William Shakespeare (William Shakespeare, the Historian)* by Rafael Ballester Escalas (1916-1993) that according to Monterrey (91) would serve him to write his doctoral dissertation entitled "*Concepto y estructura de la historia en la obra de Shakespeare*" (1950). This Ancient History lecturer and translator reviewed from a very personal approach both the figure of Shakespeare as a "Historian" and his *Histories* in depth, saying that some conceptual changes are necessary to renovate our points of view, provided that we are not losing its meaning as an organic whole. For him, Shakespeare the *Historian* is not a professional *chronicler* because he included some anachronisms, additions and inaccuracies in his texts but that is only a small detail because this playwright used an integrative writing to depict the whole humanity. Ballester, in fact, affirms that analysing History consists of analysing contradictions, but if we only focus our attention on "*mechanical proofs*" we are losing a huge range of theatrical possibilities, of theatrical experiences. A reflection we think Jan Kott would agree with strongly. Ballester also stressed that Shakespeare in general did not investigate *History*, he just set it down with a view to imagine these characters as never before existed, just pure fantasy, so that he had courage to give extra *courage* to them. The only feature that secular historians did not credit to some royal figures (e. g. Richard III) in their official Chronicles. A fact, that makes a distinction between having courage of *writing* History rather than of *being* History.

In the second case we find an in-depth study entitled *On Hamlet* (derived from his bilingual edition (English-Spanish) with an introductory essay and notes) by the prolific diplomat and writer Salvador de Madariaga y Rojo (1886-1978). A melancholic and thought-provoking study for interpreting this play—very similar to Hugo or Kott's literary experiences—that it was also written from exile in an island. A critic that, despite lecturing in Oxford (UK), did not have the same influence than Kott on the Shakespearean scene, but who foresaw that political construction of these new identities from a unique European perspective. On this particular issue, he said (De Madariaga *On Hamlet*, vii-viii):

⁹ For an approach to those Shakespearean Studies in Spain prior to 1940, specially Alfons Par, Astrana Marin, Juliá Martínez and others, you can check: Monterrey, Tomás. "Los Estudios Ingleses en España (1900-1950): "Contexto ideológico-cultural, autores y obras". *Atlantis*, 25.2 (December 2003): 71-96. https://www.atlantisjournal.org/old/Papers/25_2/071-096%20Monterrey.pdf. Accessed 15 June 2021.

It is not in vain that Shakespeare shone in the European firmament when the sun never set on the Spanish domains. The era of Shakespeare is the era of Spain. Now nations reach the apex of their power when the genius of the time is in harmony with their own genius; when in other words the age acts as a sounding board for their own peculiar note. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the Spanish era because then the subject of the world’s debate was man on a background of absolute values—God, evil, death, love, free arbiter and predestination; all pre-eminently Spanish themes. The eighteenth century was French because by then the world’s debate had shifted from the spirit of the mind, from inspiration and revelation to enquiry, from synthesis to analysis, and from religion to politics. The nineteenth century was English because by then politics had grown so thing that one could see the economic bones through the ideological skins, and the once religious and theological ethics had become secularised into social morality. And we are now entering a new era in which social mechanics or behaviourism threatens to oust social morality, an era therefore which will be the century of the U. S. and the U.R.S.S. as the case may be.

As we can see Salvador de Madariaga, after analysing several national characters in Europe is not far off from the new reality we inhabit, although it gives us the impression that when he thought about these changes, he had in mind literary *authors* rather than literary *critics* (we think of Harold Bloom in the same way than Jan Kott) as national geniuses. A subtle line which marks the artistic quality from new types of brutalism and minimalism. But this Spanish author (De Madariaga *Portrait*, 151-153) gave us a pleasant surprise when he also outlined, in a very intuitive way and in anticipation of Kott’s main thesis on *King Lear*, some connections between Ireland, Poland, Spain and the “familiarity with the *absurd*”. On this specific subject, he adds that:

this familiarity with the absurd is a somewhat rare quality in Europe, perhaps only known to the Irish, the Spaniards and the Poles. Nor are their “*absurds*” of the same quality or flavour, even though they spring from the same root. The root is, of course, a superabundance of the individual, as against the social, pole of the being [...] The determination to suffer no law, no pressure from the world outside one’s skin, is common to the Irish, the Spaniards and the Poles [...] Only the Spaniards, the Irish and the Poles fight on when they know it is to no purpose. It is the absurd in them that results in a kind of glory over death.

A year earlier this author (De Madariaga *Essays*, 33-42) tried to give an answer to this political question—the complex relation between the individual and the community—in an essay entitled “*The Artist as Citizen*” where he analysed three creative prototypes: scientists, artists and *saints*. From a creative point of view, his answer was that the best choice is both “Neither” and “Both” because the creative evolution of any community is fastened to the [creative] life of the individual without crossing the line towards any “literary anarchy” because “art

for art's sake cannot mean that. Just as science for sake of science cannot mean that we condone the experiments made on prisoners in Buchenwald". In his concluding remarks and recommendations, he points out that all artists should "watch over the freedom of the art", all citizens should "watch over the liberty" of their fellow citizens and all men should "watch over liberty" because the *aesthetic thinking* is the greatest exponent for freedom. In the same line of aesthetic thinking from exile but most recent, Arthur Koestler (1905-1983) the Hungarian writer captured by the Fascists and condemned to death during the Spanish Civil War, developed his own theory on this socio-political issue (Koestler *Art*, 1969; *Janus*, 1978). In his case, the creative prototypes reviewed are sages, artists and *jesters* and among his theoretical achievements we find the fruitful notions of "*bisociative thinking*" and "*holons*". But, in contrast to Kott or De Madariaga, the fact of not being a lecturer may have placed him in an intellectual outskirts and his main line of thought must be recovered from fictional literature by reading *Darkness at Noon*.

Without doubt, these comparative lessons from solitary confinements and exiles,¹⁰ where creative thinking, languages and politics rule the core of the literary phenomenon are according to Pérez Gállego (González, 39-62), the true birth of the "Shakespearean Criticism" in Spain. Comparative lessons that, in conjunction with new dramatic and theatrical influences (we think of *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett) triggered an intellectual response to our human suffering, to our human condition. Once at this point is where the Spanish and the Polish critical schools met and we began to notice the direct influence of Kott (and Brook) in our new approaches to William Shakespeare's *Works*.

It is not surprising that Pérez Gállego mapped a new critical framework out around Jan Kott because at the end of the 1960s he was investigated both English traditional and contemporary drama.¹¹ Apart from sharing critical readings from famous Shakespearean critics (Tillyard, Wilson Knight, Boas, Levin, Bradbrook, etc.), an initial study on "downturn" in Shakespeare's Roman Plays, a sociological study on Elizabethan Drama dealing with Shakespeare, Heywood, Tourneur, Webster, Middleton and Rowley (1967), a doctoral dissertation where he examines some sociological relations between *Literature and Rebellion* in England from the perspective of the *Angry Young Men* (1968) and an in-depth study of dramatic levels in Christopher Marlowe (1969) are part of his cover letter before finding in Kott's "Grand Mechanism" a keyword for analysing the relationship between power and politics in Shakespeare's *Comedies*. In fact, his *Shakespeare y la Política (Shakespeare and Politics)* became a significant milestone not yet surpassed in the Spanish university studies.

¹⁰ Regarding Jan Kott's exile, cf. Kuharski, 2003, 235-257.

¹¹ In our edition of *Measure, for Measure* (2015, 93-99) the reader can find a first attempt we began to compile the textual production of this critic.

Since the publication of this book—that according to Pérez Gállego himself emulates Kott’s proposal (González, 40)—a new phase for the Shakespearean studies began in Spain by a close cooperation between the English Department at his alma mater, University of Zaragoza, and the English Department at the University of Valencia, with the outstanding presence of the stage actor, playwright and scholar Manuel Ángel Conejero. One year after, in 1972, the Spanish section of *The World Centre for Shakespeare Studies* was founded and this specialized centre for Theatrical Studies under the direction of Pérez Gállego already enjoys the support of Jan Kott and Kenneth Müir, among others specialists involved with this International Institution founded in London two years before (*Las Provincias*, 19 Jan. 1974, n.p.). Since that time, the Spanish section will promote different academic meetings, conferences, seminars and cultural events around Shakespeare and Drama at national and international levels being one of the biggest events the 7th *World Shakespeare Congress* (1997-2001) in Valencia and Madrid.

It must be stressed that, apart from exploring similar theatrical resources and writing in a similar way, Jan Kott and Pérez Gállego shared intellectual interests and employed similar critical theories to approach the literary phenomena. Apart from History of art, History of painting and Ancient Greco-Roman texts and authors, they both had a direct influence from painters from Zaragoza. The aforementioned Francisco de Goya in the case of Kott and Julián Gállego



Fig. 1. Spanish Section of the World Centre for Shakespeare Studies.
Personal file Vicente Forés López

Serrano, his uncle, artist and art historian, in the case of Pérez Gállego. Regarding their *hybrid* critical thinking (Kott, *Still*, 47-93; Kuharski, *Arden*, 235-257; Cid, 216; Díez 391-418, 493-522; Domínguez Lasierra, personal communication, 24 July 2018) they both studied scientific disciplines (e.g. mathematics, logics, computational notation) but soon after they change them for literary and cultural studies, being classical mythology, sociology of literature, symbolism, rhetoric, linguistics and anthropology some related fields they both include in their texts and/or teaching. And, obviously, they seek new *languages, expressiveness and imageries*, from *realism* and *symbolism* within Shakespeare's *Plays*.

Regarding differences between both critics, to point at least one, we must know that Jan Kott follows the theoretical approaches by Mikhail Bakhtin to the *Semiosphere* (Kuharski *Arden*, 240) and Pérez Gállego, due to a close link with Harvard University, is inclined to follow the context-oriented approach to Shakespeare known as *New Historicism* developed by Stephen Greenblatt.¹²

With reference to Manuel Ángel Conejero, we can say that, in 1974, he combines his teaching at the University of Valencia with other cultural and artistic activities at the Theatre group while completing his doctoral dissertation on the expression of loving used by Shakespeare. Shortly after, he lays the foundation for the first academic group specialised in Renaissance Drama with the publication of *Shakespeare: Orden y Caos (Shakespeare: Order and Chaos)* in 1975, a work in progress till the arrival of his *Eros adolescente: La Construcción Estética en Shakespeare (Adolescent Eros: The Aesthetic Construction in Shakespeare)* in 1980. Monographic studies (Conejero, *Orden*, 26; *Rhetoric*, 37) that they mix both a linguistic and visual thought—following primarily the theoretical claims by Rudolf Arnheim in his *Entropy and Art*—in order to make a leap from “la historia de otra historia” (the history of another history (*retelling*)) towards “translating a translation” via traditional Rhetoric as a vertebral axis. That is to say, we pass from a single *musical score* based on rhythm and poetic patterns (literal translation or *poetic phrase*) to an *audio-visual score* based on poetic patterns, stage movements, rhetorical figures and oratory (dramatic translation or *theatrical phrase*) to get an effective communication between the source and the target system because, as Pérez Gállego claimed (González, 47), it is required the direct projection of the play into a data visual set. Something that, for example, we miss in *Hamlet* by De Madariaga (1949) but that, in contrast, Wyspiański (86-89)—an information source for Kott (Kuharski *Arden*, 241)—explores when describing the *stage space* and its multiple *dimensions*.

¹² An updated description of current Literary Theories can be found in Berensmeyer, I. *Literary Theory: An Introduction to Approaches, Methods and Terms*. Stuttgart: Klett Lerntraining, 2014.

One of the main weaknesses that this scholar found in his research (Conejero *Rhetoric*, 13-36) was the inadequacy for a great majority of Castilian and Spanish translations. Some use French texts as source documents. Some others were mutilated texts. Some others were simple adaptations that had nothing to do with the original. Canonical translations (Astrana Marín and Valverde) did translate the entire dramatic corpus into Castilian but plays were only in prose, no verse. And some others—to a lesser extent—used original sources (e. g. McPherson) but the poetic pattern was so rigid and forced (mainly hendecasyllabic verses) that actors would not be capable of telling their lines in a right way on stage. Bearing in mind all this, in 1978 he decided to create the first and only Spanish *Shakespeare Institute* together with Jenaro Talens, Juan Vicente Martínez Luciano y Vicente Forés López. A team of *academic artists* (questioning *oxymoron*) decided to shake *dramaturgy studies* up for Spanish-speaking audiences thanks to their *multidimensional* translations and the active collaboration of experts such as T. J. B. Spencer, Roger Pringle, Jan Kott, Peter Brook and Giorgio Melchiori, to name a few.



Fig. 2. Kott attending an International Meeting in Valencia (11 Feb. 1979).
Personal file Vicente Forés López

Their model compared to other design approaches (e. g. philological, literal in prose, poetic or scientific/academic), as argued by Conejero (Conejero *Rhetoric*, 15) will follow the guidelines outlined by the Italian scholar with a small but significant change: the Socratic method or peer group discussion; Their goal: the best setting for that multidimensional stage space that Shakespeare's *Plays* need for getting a uniformity of style now and then.

Kott's methodology (Kott *Head*, 93) does not differ much from this *dual* approach to Shakespeare's texts and traditions we assert, as we can see in an article he wrote in a collective volume to honour the British scholar T. J. B. Spencer. Let's just see how he plays this out when he wrote *Head for Maidenhead*, *Maidenhead for Head*:

George Whetsone's play, *The Historie of Promos and Cassandra*, published in 1578 and long forgotten, is acknowledged as the main dramatic source of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, I wish to present the interrelation between the two plays not from the perspective of philological influences but as a transformation of one and the same structural model. To uncover such a transformation is at the same time to make literary and, more importantly, theatrical interpretation.

To “uncover” transformations to “make literary” and “theatrical interpretation”, that is the key his approach proposes. To use a method of interpreting something—in his case he uses Levi’s Strauss’ method of interpreting the Oedipus’ myth—for improving a “graphic model” to work with.¹³ Pérez Gállego (González, 45) saw this and it was expanded in his *Dramática de Shakespeare* (*Shakespeare’s Dramaturgy*), a text that implies the active participation of the reader as a supporting actor being *present|absent* at the same time. Marjorie Garber (*Coming*, 1997) saw this too and she explains us how powerful and wonderful was the *Coming of Age in Shakespeare*. Kott (Kott *Still*, 88), with the subtle irony of a polymath *look back in joy* and says:

The Circle of Polonists was my university. In the most literal sense. Its members began to conduct their own courses twice a week, in the afternoon and evening. The initiative came from Franciszek Siedlecki; he was the oldest of all of us and also the most mature [...] Siedlecki taught Polish versification, and it was from him that I heard for the first time about Saussure’s linguistics and the phoneme. Siedlecki said that Einstein had split the atom the Prague Circle had split the word. Einstein did not split the atom. Siedlecki was more of an expert in phonetics than in physics. But words suddenly acquired a certain transparency. They no longer consisted of letters, prefixes, suffixes and roots; phonemes existed because of mutual oppositions and formed morphemes that differentiated meanings.

But all this *full potential*, all this *wisdom*, without the pertinent *know-how* will be little point in creating any interaction. And that is what we mirrored from Jan Kott’s lessons: bridge the gap between theoretical and practical knowledge. On this respect, let’s see what Kuharski (Kuharski *Arden*, 245) tells us about the role of drama schools:

Theatre artists, much like the members of a diasporic group, also inhabit an archipelago of cultural centers and peripheries. They lead dual lives, at once sharing in the life of the larger communities they inhabit and participating in a subculture with an intense and insular collective life of its own, deeply marked by an arcane and complex common history and sharing shibbolethic rituals and codes of behaviour.

Obviously, the key question is: where do we learn those shared shibbolethic rituals and codes of behaviour? In 1979, Rague-Arias (21, 1) portrayed the issues surrounding this problem in Spain and, following the example of some

¹³ These methods that can be specified as proto-computational, are the basis for current trends in Digital Humanities and Literary Criticism. As an example: Moretti, Franco. *Distant Reading*. London and New York: Verso, 2013.

European cases (e. g. Kott, Brook and Olivier) some solutions were proposed. Theatrical projects were subsidised thanks to local and central governments and our group of *academic artists* had a close collaboration with the Theatre company “*Teatro del Arte*”¹⁴ under the direction of Miguel Narros (1928-2013). The choice had all elements to achieve the objective to offer an “*authentic*” Shakespearean production for a contemporary audience from a contemporary point of view because Narros (Castro, 2021) was a stated supporter of the *Stanislavski method*, worked in tandem with William Layton and Andrea D’Odorico and he had led some Shakespearean plays in the past. Furthermore, as Narros himself declared after reading Kott’s book (González, 425) the issue of humankind in Shakespeare is the issue of the contemporary man and most social concerns and personal attitudes can be found in his plays.

The chosen play for restarting Shakespeare was *Macbeth* and the *Teatro Español* hosted the premiere of this play on 29 November 1980. Next day, the theatre critic Eduardo Haro Tecglen (1980, n. p.) set a harsh criticism down¹⁵ via *El País* and the first thing that draws our attention are: the title “*Un product híbrido*” (A hybrid product) and the watchword “*hibridación*” (hybridization). To get this term, this theatre critic compared this staging with the Romantic proposal by Victor Hugo to his own contemporaries, remarking that the *musical* and the *audio-visual* scores were out of sync and this could be due to both a *naturalistic* approach by the director and a lack of reconciliation between the *schools* involved because words, voices, silences and shouts were too cold for such a bloody sequence of events. He also suggests that Shakespeare rewrote an old Tale for a Romantic audience in a Renaissance time (cf. Janus) but if the proposal is not suitable, it is much better to make use of false patterns (in the Spanish case, hendecasyllabic and overacting). We want to believe that for avoiding this de-synchronization problem, our *hybrid* agents reflected on Haro’s

¹⁴ Although most of them depend on Universities, it is important to notice that before 1979 (García, 55) we had University Theatre Groups and Independent Theatre groups, being the latter the main generator of Professional Theatre groups in Spain. For further information on these Independent groups, the reader can visit the project which is lead by *Museo Nacional Reina Sofia* entitled *Spain’s “Independent Theatre”, 1962-1980*. <http://cdaem.mcu.es/teatro-independiente/grupos/?idioma=en>. Accessed 15 June 2021.

¹⁵ This *harsh criticism* could be due to the fact that *Tabano*, an Independent Theatre group, released another production of *Macbeth* earlier that year. This Shakespearean adaptation, entitled *Un tal Macbeth*, tried to merge the original text with the world of criminal gangs but, as Haro remarked, the setting layout did not match and most proposed thesis on the script could not be found on-stage. A format defect shared among peer theatre groups that focused their attention on body expression and stage movements rather than in words and speeches. Haro Tecglen, Eduardo. “Un empeño imposible” *El País*, 5 Mar. 1980, https://elpais.com/diario/1980/03/06/cultura/321145215_850215.html. Accessed 15 June 2021.

note and they asked Kott how to solve it. For him the *watchword* would be *editing* (Kott *Our*, 282-283) because the “living Shakespeare of our time has been presented, first and foremost, in film.”¹⁶ Film has discovered the Renaissance Shakespeare” and they finally found the *pretext* to praise his *Plays*.



Fig. 3. Rehearsing *King Lear* at the University of Valencia, Spain.
Empar Ferrer (*Fool*) – Fermí Reixach (*King Lear*); Personal file Vicente Forés

¹⁶ Two in-depth studies on Shakespeare and Film for Spanish audiences can be found in: Pérez, Xavier. and Balló, Jordi. *El mundo, un escenario. Shakespeare, el guionista invisible*. Kindle ed. Anagrama, 2015 and Gil-Delgado, Fernando. *Introducción a Shakespeare a través del cine*. Madrid: Ediciones Internacionales Universitarias, 2001.

For this purpose, they invoke the “Great Mechanism¹⁷” and as Macbeth was dead, they proclaimed a *Long live to King Lear!* And indeed, that was that happened. An *absurd staging*, which was four hours of length in an empty space (1983 and 1997) that, as in the case of Jan Kott, marks a before and an after to understand “Shakespearean bodies”. Those bodies Kott cited in such a passionate way that, here and now, must be expanded with a fourth one: to be *edited*. Wyspiański, Brook and Olivier just indicated the creative path but Kott walked it along to find common solutions to these challenges. Nobody can measure if he was right or wrong, but one thing is for sure: he used a spread spectrum for a *Glocal* Shakespeare, all over the world, for *dramaturges*, directors, players and *multi-cultural* audiences.

A Quote for a King, A King for a Quote

Mixed feelings sometimes arise after reading or listening Jan Kott’s ideas on Shakespeare. Art or Science, two *schools* both alike in dignity. Strříbrný (101) said that Kott was unique but “not precise or scholar in any sense of the word” and his essays were “marked by a number of elementary mistakes and misreading” provoking even a winter of discontent in traditional criticism. Kujawińska Courtney, (*Shakespeare in Poland*), with a divided heart among tradition and (post-)modernity and the weight of evidences and history in mind maintains that any critic “cannot be a respected Shakespearean scholar without knowing his book”. Kuharski (451-453) insinuates devotedly that we should use *hybrid* parameters to rank him in a *Glocal* World and the Spaniard Pérez Gállego (Gonzalez, 43) still complains that nobody within our Institution wanted to embark on such an open and polemic *existential criticism*. Now is the time his friend Brook would say he is a Renaissance *polymath*. And we, following another polymath, we just think he is a Pole Janus, a *holon* (Koestler *Janus*, 60).

With Kott we learnt that, sometimes, the unconventional results an effective acting. That drama and theatre as *living entities* have individual, *dual*, social and historical items because our temporal thinking is often vague and

¹⁷ Jon Viar, a former student of the *Shakespeare Foundation of Spain*, uses Jan Kott’s “Gran Mechanism” to return to the controversial issue of Shakespeare’s authoring, ascribing the words and *Plays* of the Bard of Avon to Christopher Marlowe. His work, openly declared Marlovian, is a product of an original research both as an actor and as a scholar, because it emanates from a lengthy reflection about the evolution of modern and post-modern drama and, in this context, it has to be noted that it gives continuity to some ideas of the Polish critic: differences between Classical Drama and Renaissance Drama, Gods vs. Humans, External vs. Inner Mechanisms, Comparing texts and proposals. As we may disagree with his thesis and conclusions, we should also mention his research.

ambiguous and past, present, future and *eternal* are axis of symmetry. So that, *Contemporary* is not a stage in world history, the outbreak of which is conditioned by its “iron laws”. It is a great period that occurred, and is occurring, as a result of the confluence of certain circumstances initially in a certain place and at a certain time, but later absorbed practically all of humanity. *Contemporary* encloses individual circumstances, decisions, struggles, criticism, rebellion and rupture with *traditions*. In this sense *contemporary* can be easily affiliated to *democracy*. If this term assumes thirst and ability for self-reflection and self-criticism, Can an individual be “*contemporary*” out of time?

With Kott we discovered that majesty and buffoonery are interchangeable (Woszczerowicz and *Stańczyk*) that things are not always what they seem and *absurd* is not as bad as is repeatedly portrayed. That the History of Western and Eastern Theatre collected, step by step, that displacement from Myths and Religion (*gods/saints*) towards Tragicomedy and Grotesqueness (*jesters*). That recreating *Classics* is a *spatial* (e. g. *Ran (Lear)* Kurosawa) and not a *temporal* question.

With Kott, besides, we also discovered that sages, scientists and artists should have hybrid discussions instead of circular conversations to avoid both individualism and provincialism. Translation would be the *watchword*; the vital element to response any critical question although this discipline is not considered—as our colleague Vicente Forés constantly reminded us—an academic discipline *yet*. Even if we run the risk of becoming *Bernardo* for answering our own questions, as Muriel Bradbrook (112) highlighted when she gave us an existential interpretation of *Hamlet*. New teaching and learning is going to be different and the Lifelong Learning approach, where mixing informal, formal, technical and artistic skill will be a thrilling challenge.

To be precise or not to be precise, that is the question.

With Kott we understood that *theatre*, as an area of human activity, is like a *kingdom* and, it is clear that this *expert* ruled as a king for a time. But, as he himself remarked (Kott *Still*, 279) “one thing is clear both anatomy and metaphysics: death comes when the heart stops beating” and iambic pentameter is the heart of this Shakespearean art. We do not have a better way to conclude this distant tribute, some words of *wisdom* from his *colleague* Peter Brook (110): “*Shakespeare. Quality. Form. This is where our work begins. It can never end.*” Jan Kott was dead, that is *scientific evidence*, but thousand of great admirers worldwide meet him *every time*...

Who's there, now?

Nobody. Unfold yourself.

Long Live to the <“*hybrid*”> critic!

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