

Introduction

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What is Spain? In any ‘history of’, this becomes the key question, the one that informs the entire work and inevitably shapes the readers’ response to it. As the political and cultural boundaries of the Iberian Peninsula slowly formed themselves from the eighth century onward – boundaries which became relatively stable by the early sixteenth century as the nation-building agenda of the Catholic monarchs bore fruit – the global imaginary began to equate ‘Spain’ with Castile, the central plateau of the Peninsula that laid claim to being the seat of government (Philip II made Madrid the administrative capital in 1561) and, consequently, the very heart and soul of the country. This is just as Philip’s grandparents, Ferdinand and Isabella, would have had it, and the idea that Castile was somehow more ‘Spanish’ than the rest of the country was propagated and defended by generations of writers, politicians and opinion-makers in ecclesiastical and aristocratic circles. The so-called Generation of 1898 based its entire programme on this idea, and Francisco Franco made it one of the pillars of his long dictatorship (1939–75). Yet there was never complete agreement as to what constituted that elusive entity called ‘Spain’ (and the silencing of dissenters – as with the Catalans in 1715 or the Basques and Catalans during the Franco regime – has remained problematic). The question has become even more vexed following the ratification of the Constitution of 1978, which granted undefined rights to local autonomous regions. As non-Castilian areas reclaim their linguistic and literary heritages, working both with and against a centralised ‘Spain’, it becomes more and more difficult to speak in broad geographical and political terms of a homogeneous nation-state.

The very word ‘nation’ provokes another series of questions. What constitutes a ‘nation’? Whose nation? If we have learned anything from Benedict Anderson’s book, *Imagined Communities*, it is that nations are constructs, formed for disparate and complex reasons. If the idea of ‘nation’ is a contested one, then the idea of ‘national

literature' becomes even more so. Does something called 'national literature' exist? When does a nation come into being? How would a 'nation' produce a 'literature'?¹

These questions have no clear answers. Still, 'Spain' is a useful category, for it focuses our attention on that broad geographical area that crosses the Iberian Peninsula from northwest Galicia to southeast Murcia, from northeast Catalonia to southwest Cadiz. While there were many more languages that were heard across the Peninsula (in disparate parts at various times one could hear Latin, Arabic, Ladino, several Germanic languages, Galego-Portuguese, Leonese, Mozarabic, Navarro-Aragonese, Hebrew, Caló, Basque and Catalan, among others), 'Spanish' eventually became equated with 'Spain', and, once Portugal gained its political and economic independence in the twelfth century, that construct evolved into shorthand for the linguistic, political and cultural environment of the Iberian Peninsula.

So the title of this book, *A History of Theatre in Spain*, is to be viewed as a short-cut that will enable the reader to grasp a spacial and conceptual category and serve as a structural device to help us to avoid what has been called elsewhere 'The Funes Effect'.²

Beyond the play

The problems of documenting and assessing the theatre in Spain have often been commented on by academics who have sought to find ways of addressing the particular weighting accorded to certain historical periods by earlier generations of scholars.³ Spanish theatre's Golden Age⁴ is often

1 David T. Gies, 'The Funes Effect: Making Literary History', in David T. Gies (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Spanish Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 3–12 (p. 8).

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 1–12.

3 See for example, Maria M. Delgado, *'Other' Spanish Theatres: Erasure and Inscription on the Twentieth-Century Spanish Stage* (Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 1–3; David T. Gies, *The Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Spain* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 1–5; Evangelina Rodríguez Cuadros, *La técnica del actor español en el Barroco. Hipótesis y documentos* (Madrid: Castalia, 1998); John E. Varey, *Cosmovisión y escenografía: El teatro español en el Siglo de Oro* (Madrid: Castalia, 1987).

4 The period roughly between the discovery of America (1492) and the death of Calderón de la Barca (1681) is generally called Spain's Golden Age because of the intense flourishing of the arts (El Greco, Velázquez, Zurbarán, Murillo) and letters (San Juan de la Cruz, Fray Luis de León, Santa Teresa de Ávila, Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, Cervantes, Góngora and Quevedo, among others) that paralleled the political rise and fall of the country.

perceived to begin with the particular spaces, *corrales*, that emerged from the charitable *cofradías* or brotherhoods during the second half of the sixteenth century and to end with the triptych of dramatists who later wrote for them: Lope de Vega (1562–1635), Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600–81) and Tirso de Molina (1579–1648). The richness of the Golden Age's dramatic canon has often led to the neglect of the work that emerged in its aftermath. As such, while the eighteenth century witnessed the extraordinary architectural construction of venues across Madrid and other major cities, it is too often reduced in more general histories of the period to a few select playtexts: most conspicuously Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos' *El delincuente honrado* (The Honest Criminal, 1773), Ramón de la Cruz's *Manolo* (1769) or *El teatro por dentro* (Theatre on the Inside, 1768), and Leandro Fernández de Moratín's *El sí de las niñas* (The Maids' Consent, 1806), with Spain's economic decline somehow equated with a lacklustre theatrical culture marked by a loud and unrefined performative style. David T. Gies too has lamented the tendency to view the nineteenth-century theatre not as a vibrant industry where ideas of authorship were consolidated and the commercial interests of a select group of publishers could be seen to have a decisive impact on the shape of the theatrical repertoire, but rather through 'the study of certain selected masterworks' such as the Duque de Rivas' *Don Álvaro o la fuerza del sino* (Don Álvaro or the Force of Destiny, 1835), José Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio* (1844), Manuel Tamayo y Baus' *Un drama nuevo* (A New Drama, 1867), a play or two on social malaise and gender inequalities by novelist-turned-dramatist Benito Pérez Galdós (1843–1920), and a representative text by the Nobel-Prizewinning observer of middle-class manners and excesses, José Echegaray (1832–1916).⁵ The problems of such an approach linger into the study of Spanish theatre in the twentieth century with G. G. Brown's *Literary History of Spain* judging twentieth-century drama 'unquestionably the branch of the arts in which Spain has least to offer to the common store of European culture'.⁶

Brown is indicative of a range of scholars who have conflated theatre and drama with an understanding of the theatrical act that rarely moves beyond an understanding of the text. The playtext has been the privileged object of scrutiny in Spanish theatre studies. The most tangible remains of

5 Gies, *The Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Spain*, p. 1.

6 G. G. Brown, *A Literary History of Spain: The Twentieth Century* (London: Ernest Benn, 1972), p. 110.

the most ephemeral of art forms has stood as its primary signifier. As such, much of the English-language material on Spanish theatre tends to focus on the output of playwrights.⁷ While the work of playwrights has inevitably contributed to the nation's theatrical culture, it remains problematic to see select masterworks as indicative of either the theatrical trends of the time or changes in audience consciousness.

This is not to say that as editors we posit a direct opposition between text and performance that promotes a discourse of authorisation. As W. B. Worthen has signalled, such binaries 'share an essentializing rhetoric' that allows for both 'text' and 'performance' to be 'construed as vessels of authority, of canonical values, or hegemonic consensus'.⁸ Our focus with this volume has been to look at the constructions of a textual history for theatre in Spain alongside a consideration of theatre as art form and industry, as place and space, as kinetic movement and material act. It takes on board the work of performers and directors, of designers and publishers, of agents and impresarios, of architects and ensembles in mapping out a historiography that references previous studies and marks new terrain in its recognition of theatre as performative. There is a revisionist and evidently positivist agenda to the volume. Spanish theatre often features as a poor European relation to the better-documented histories of its North European neighbours. Here the focus is on delineating and dissecting the practices of performers, architects, designers, impresarios, publishers and directors who restyled the theatrical climate in which they worked. Cosme (also known as Cosimo) Lotti's revolutionary set designs in the late seventeenth century stimulated dozens of innovative directors and playwrights in the eighteenth century and beyond (even when such innovations were harshly criticised by supporters of more conservative theatre reforms). Magical comedies extended the range of stage techniques, techniques that were integrated by more mainstream writers into their works. In the nineteenth century, impresario Juan de Grimaldi (1796–1872) and

7 This is especially the case with regard to twentieth-century theatre. See, for example, works as diverse as Gwynne Edwards, *Dramatists in Perspective: Spanish Theatre in the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1985); Marion Peter Holt, *The Contemporary Spanish Theater (1949–1972)* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1975); Michael Thompson, *Performing Spanishness: History, Cultural Identity and Censorship in the Theatre of José María Rodríguez Méndez* (Bristol and Chicago, IL: Intellect Books, 2007).

8 W. B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 5, 11.

actor-manager María Guerrero (1868–1928) played decisive roles in the professionalisation of the Spanish stage, marking theatre's shift from a government-controlled activity to a commercialised industry. Histories of stage direction in the twentieth century, for example, rarely acknowledge the contribution of directors such as Adrià Gual (1872–1943), Gregorio Martínez Sierra (1881–1947) or Cipriano de Rivas Cherif (1891–1967) to the evolution of stage language, even though their developments are arguably as important as those of Copeau, Lugné-Poë and Reinhardt. Spanish practitioners have played a key role across the centuries in providing structural models, performative vocabularies, design conceits and cultural paradigms that have been appropriated outside Iberia. Fernando de Rojas' *La Celestina* (1499) sold over 100,000 copies in Spain alone during the years of the Inquisition and was translated into English and French in the early sixteenth century, offering a prototype for dialogue that proved highly influential.⁹ Tirso de Molina's archetypal womaniser, Don Juan, became a suggestive model for dozens of international dramatists and opera librettists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and Nietzsche revealed a particular attraction to Chueca and Valverde's *zarzuela*, *La Gran Vía*.¹⁰ The mass exile of theatre workers during the Civil War and its aftermath that played a seminal role in developing pedagogical initiatives in Argentina, Chile, Mexico and Uruguay evidently shaped the ways in which training – in matters of interpretation, design and dramatic writing – was conceived and structured at a time when each of these countries was grappling with how a lasting 'national' theatre might be forged.

While a recognition of Spain's imperial past in the Americas features in a number of contributions to this volume, it does not purport to be a study of Latin-American or Latino theatre. Rather, the focus is on peninsular Spain and the transnational currents that have either moulded theatrical practices in the Spanish state or influenced theatre-making in Central and South America. Colonialism and exile have formed part of a theatrical exchange that has witnessed strong links with South America, and these

9 Ana María Murillo Murillo, 'Love and Chastity in Two Early English Versions of *La Celestina*', in S. G. Fernández-Corugedo (ed.), *Proceedings of the II Conference of the Spanish Society for English Renaissance Studies* (Universidad de Oviedo, 1992), pp. 193–203.

10 See Armand E. Singer, *The Don Juan Theme, Versions and Criticism: A Bibliography* (Morgantown, VA: West Virginia University Press, 1965).

are referred to in ways that recognise the transcultural links that necessarily inform any attempt to map a 'national' theatrical culture.

Constructing a history

'Historical inquiry', Thomas Postlewait observes, is 'the pursuit of truths about the past within the conditions and constraints of possible knowledge'.¹¹ This volume is as much about the telling of theatre history as the narratives told. Interpretation is necessarily an act of reconstruction and subject to a series of factors. This collection makes evident the varied interpretations (and tensions) that prevail in the construction of theatrical histories of Spain. The chapters bring together a range of contributors from across Spain, Ireland, France, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada in mapping out a theatrical history that moves from the religious and domestic environments of companies in the late medieval years to the street performances of the generation of theatre companies that sprung up in the aftermath of Franco's demise. The volume assembles, for the first time in English, scholarship around the theatrical culture of early modern Iberia, Spain's Golden Age, the performative culture of the Enlightenment, the questioning of theatrical and gender paradigms on the nineteenth-century stage and the ideological schisms of Spain's theatrical culture during the twentieth century. While much of the volume focuses primarily on the role and function(s) of theatre from medieval times to the twenty-first century, the chapters on the rise of the stage director, actors and acting, cultural exchanges with Latin America and performative genres (the Golden Age *comedia*, *zarzuela* and *flamenco*) offer broader explorations of generic evolution and point to a theatrical culture that encapsulates both the popular and the elite, the actor-centred and the author-driven, as well as an engagement with non-Spanish forms, practices, practitioners, intellectual ideas and dramatic texts.

The origins of the theatre in Iberia have been charted by Norman D. Shergold, and César Oliva and Francisco Torres Monreal (among others).¹² Circuses (for chariot racing) and theatres were in evidence during Iberia's

¹¹ Thomas Postlewait, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 1.

¹² Norman D. Shergold, *A History of the Spanish Stage: From Medieval Times until the End of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); César Oliva and Francisco Torres Monreal, *Historia básica del arte escénico*, 3rd edn (Madrid: Cátedra, 1997).

years as part of the Roman Empire¹³ and, while the church frowned on these public entertainments, their influence is evident in the pagan festivities of the early centuries AD and the performances of jongleurs and troubadours in both public spaces and court palaces. Indeed, throughout this collection contributors delineate the attempts of the church to control what performance in the public sphere might constitute. From the Nativity and Easter plays of medieval Spain to the staging of *autos* in the cathedrals of Spain in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, the influence of the church over both content and means of production has remained tangible.

While Fernando Lázaro Carreter's 'definitive' anthology of medieval texts may position Spain's medieval theatre as one of 'absence' with 'nothing' supposedly present between the twelfth-century *El auto de los Reyes Magos* (The Play of the Three Kings) and Gómez Manrique's pieces in the early fifteenth century,¹⁴ more recent revisionist historians have documented the rich tradition of celebratory performances that existed, constructing an argument that does not equate a small number of extant texts with a poor theatrical culture. While other historians, such as Eva Castro and Charlotte Stern, have chronicled how the spectacles of the Middle Ages were potent signifiers both of religious doctrine and social regulations,¹⁵ Ángel Gómez Moreno's chapter turns to the materials that have been unearthed by historians in recent years and what these might reveal about the theatrical culture of the Spanish Peninsula between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries – thirteenth-century Iberia was made up of the dominant kingdoms of Castile and León (with Asturias, Cordoba, Galicia, Jaén, Extremadura and Seville), Aragon (also including Barcelona, Valencia and Balearic Islands) and Portugal. Granada and Cadiz remained under Moorish rule – the Muslim Berbers had taken over a significant proportion of Iberia in the eighth century – until 1492, and the small kingdom of Navarre stood on the northern border with France.

The information Gómez Moreno draws on is partial and incomplete but it does offer an indication as to the performative culture of the Middle

13 John H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 337–87; S. J. Keay, *Roman Spain* (London: University of California Press/British Museum, 1988), p. 137.

14 See Fernando Lázaro Carreter (ed.), *Teatro medieval* (Madrid: Castalia, 1965).

15 Eva Castro, *Introducción al teatro latino medieval. Textos y públicos* (Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1996); Charlotte Stern, *The Medieval Theater in Castile* (Binghamton, NY: SUNY, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1996), p. 6.

Ages in Iberia: the Corpus Christi processions, the liturgical enactments presented in cathedrals, the court mummers, the beasts animated by amateur human performers – it is only possible to speak of professional actors after 1540. Gómez Moreno offers a model of the historiographer as part-detective, part-forensic investigator offering pointers gleaned from the documents he has encountered of the practicalities of performing work in medieval Castile.

In Chapters 2–5, Jonathan Thacker, José María Ruano de la Haza, Margaret Greer and Evangelina Rodríguez negotiate a range of contested facts and factors in their own historical narratives. Thacker examines the influential dramaturgical model established by Lope de Vega and considers its revisioning in the hands of the dramatists that came in his wake. Ruano de la Haza deconstructs some of the myths around the seventeenth-century stage, questioning views that see it as the space for openly commenting on politics or espousing imperialism. Margaret Greer examines the palace as the place (both physical and ideological) of performance in the Golden Age, noting how political power was articulated through the paratheatrical spectacles produced at the roving courts by and for royal audiences. Evangelina Rodríguez focuses on the professionalisation of the actor through from the sixteenth century to the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Her discussion takes on board both intellectual and practical concerns, and engages with a range of views that show how the commercialisation of the Spanish stage was intrinsically linked to the rise of new performative discourses during the nineteenth century.

René Andioc follows Rodríguez in focusing on the material workings of the eighteenth-century stage (discussing in particular the rehearsal processes and the economic cost of producing work as well as the ideological consequences of the censorship mechanisms then in operation). His conclusion that *El sí de las niñas* (The Maids' Consent, 1806) was seen by nearly a quarter of Madrid's adult population points to the resonance that theatre enjoyed in the cultural life of a city where stage performance proved a barometer of the temper of the times.

Andioc, Josep Maria Sala Valldaura and Fernando Doménech Rico all delineate the ways in which the eighteenth century became the testing- and battleground for the renovations of the previous century. Lope's and Calderón's powerful presence marked performance rituals and playwriting for decades following the latter's death in 1681 and the arrival of (and subsequent renovations instituted by) the Bourbon dynasty after 1700.

Alternative theatrical practices developed in the margins of the canonical: *comedias de magia* (magical comedies), *comedias de santos* (plays about saints), and short pieces settled, albeit uncomfortably, into the theatres' repertoires. As opposition to these popular forms – and to the *autos sacramentales* – mounted, theatres and dramatists were challenged to develop new ways of expressing ideas, complicating received wisdom, and serving political and religious ends, as Sala Valldaura indicates in his chapter. Doménech Rico outlines the shifts that led to Madrid's dominance as the centre for theatre production in the Iberian Peninsula. The theatres that were refashioned in Madrid during these years (including the Cruz and Príncipe, and the Caños del Peral, built in 1708) embodied the shift from the open-air performance space to the indoor playhouse. After mid-century, when the new neoclassical aesthetic took hold, intellectuals railed against popular theatre and attempted to provide new models to be copied. Women playwrights slowly began to express themselves (María Gálvez de Cabrera [1768–1805] managed to have numerous plays staged and reviewed in Madrid), and the competing aesthetics of playwriting, as Andioc demonstrates in Chapter 8, made for a rich, if troubled, environment.

José Luis González Subías points out in Chapter 11 that no literary or cultural activity of the nineteenth century was more popular, more harshly criticised, and at the same time, more cultivated than the theatre. As the middle class solidified its hold on Spanish culture, nightly visits to the theatre became de rigueur, and consequently the momentous social changes of the time can be tracked on the stage. Romanticism (and the impresario Juan de Grimaldi) ushered in new techniques in acting, lighting, scenery and stage design, and financial structures, along with a nearly insatiable need for 'product' (literally thousands of plays were written, performed, reviewed and published during the course of the century).¹⁶ The industry that generated these 'products' is delineated by González Subías, who offers concrete information on the number of theatres in Madrid as well as the provincial capitals, Paris and London, the make-up and organisation of theatre companies, the mechanism for selecting works to be staged and the cost of tickets for performances in the different venues. As González Subías and Lisa Surwillo show in their individual chapters, hundreds of publishers produced thousands of book editions of

¹⁶ Gies, *The Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Spain*, p. 4.

the plays, which were used by actors and the reading public. Printers servicing the theatre publishing industry numbered 700 up to 1870. The growing middle class identified strongly with their reflections in the *alta comedia*. Audience conventions are explored by González Subías as a way of considering the relationship between spectators and space. Women dramatists and actresses slowly became more visible and more influential.¹⁷ The number of theatres exploded after mid-century, and theatre took up residence in bars and even in the streets. Surwillo treats the physical theatres (rebuilt from *corrales* to *coliseos* in the eighteenth century) as sociopolitical spaces embodying both the changes evident in the demographics of Madrid's shifting social landscape and the shifts in dramaturgical output then being negotiated in the city's vibrant theatre scene. González Subías' approach is more pragmatic: delineating the material changes that saw electric lighting and heating replace gas lighting after 1888 and the implications of this for the performative culture of Spain.

The entrepreneurial ethos that marked Catalonia in the latter decades of the nineteenth century is present in the performing arts, which looked to Paris (as opposed to Madrid) for cultural innovation. The architectural legacy of *modernisme* – Catalan art nouveau – is evident in the architectural shape of Barcelona but it also fostered avant-garde developments in painting and stage practice. In tracing the innovations of such practitioners as the director-designer Adrià Gual (1872–1943), the introduction of novel ideas in playwriting, décor and costume, David George and Jesús Rubio Jiménez delineate the cross-fertilisation of the performing and visual arts that spread from Barcelona to Madrid where they were consolidated through the numerous art theatres and innovations in scenography and acting prevalent through the first three decades of the century.

Andrew Anderson and Dru Dougherty too map a climate of innovation and change associated with Spain's Second Republic (1931–6). The prominent number of intellectuals that dominated the Cortes, the law-making lower house of the Spanish parliament, looked to models that linked cultural dissemination to social regeneration. While it is possible to trace important developments in stage language through the 1920s under such directors as Gregorio Martínez Sierra and Cipriano de Rivas Cherif, the particular relationships between writers, directors, performers and

17 See David T. Gies, 'Genderama: Performing Womanhood in Nineteenth-Century Spanish Theatre', *Hispanic Research Journal*, 10.2 (April 2009), 108–21.