Krontiris, Tina [Κροντήρη, Τίνα]. *Ο Σαίξπηρ σε καιρό πολέμου, 1940-1950* [Shakespeare in Wartime, 1940-1950]. Athens: Alexandria, 2007 (pp 221). ISBN 978-960-221-368-1.

Tina Krontiris's book enriches the complex records of Shakespeare's afterlife in Europe by examining his presence on the Greek stage during the historically critical decade of the 1940s. It is, therefore, a valuable new addition to a series of relevant publications that have institutionalized the study of Shakespeare's presence in Europe since D. Delabastita's and L. D'Hulst's appearance of *European Shakespeares* in 1993.[1] Equally important, however, is the fact that Krontiris's book addresses the special issue of Shakespeare in wartime, which marks a relatively novel territory of research with only a few article-length precedents.[2]

The book is written in Greek and the central concerns and key questions it raises concern the cultural recruitment of Shakespeare on the Greek stage during the Second World War and the Greek civil war in its aftermath. In particular, the author explores the performative practices and the underlying ideological significations of the Shakespearean performances that were staged throughout this decade, with special attention to the role of individual directors, performers, and translators. Research focuses mainly on three different theatrical spaces—the Greek National Theater, the commercial theaters in Athens, and the amateur productions of Greek political prisoners in exile. In terms of organization, these developments are discussed in the course of seven chapters, in a multi-layered narrative that draws together Shakespeare, Greek socio-cultural realities, and the Second World War in its

1. The following is a representative selection of book length publications on the subject: Wilhelm Hortmann, *Shakespeare on the German Stage: The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998); *Four Hundred Years of Shakespeare in Europe,* eds. A. Luis Pujante and A. Hoenselaars (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London: Associated University Presses, 2003); *Shakespeare in the New Europe*, eds. M. Hattaway, B. Sokolova and D. Derek (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); Zdenek Stríbrný, *Shakespeare and Eastern Europe* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000); *Shakespeare and Renaissance Europe,* eds. A. Hadfield and P. Hammond (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004); *Shifting the Scene: Shakespeare in European Culture,* eds. L. Bezzola Lambert and B. Engler (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 2004).
2. See Werner Habicht, "Shakespeare Celebrations in Times of War," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52 (2001): 441-55; and Irena Makaryk, "Wartime *Hamlet,*" *Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism and Socialism*, ed. I. Makaryk and J. Price (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 119-35.

European dimension. Additionally, an Introduction, Epilogue, Bibliography, and numerous photographs are part of the scholarly apparatus of this engaging narrative.

While the book registers the performance history of the Greek Shakespearean productions, the main thrust is definitely political, with clear links to the socio-cultural concerns and the double outlook of past and present history underlying the methodology of cultural materialism and new historicism. The production of *Henry V* at the Greek National Theater on the eve of the German invasion of Greece in the spring of 1941 is read as an appropriation for the purposes of the War and specifically as a way of paying tribute to the British allies and as a means of raising the patriotic spirit of the people (chapter 1). The performance of *Othello* in 1942 at the privately-owned Kotopouli Theater is examined within the context of censorship, since the country was then occupied by the German and Italian forces (chapter 2). The author here attempts to explain how the specific theater company negotiated the ban on Shakespeare, securing the foreign censor's allowance and even presenting a performance that subverted the racist ideology of the nazi occupiers. The productions of *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice, Julius Caesar*, and *The Tempest*, which took place in the post-Liberation year (1945), are discussed in relation to the postwar theatrical and political reality (chapters 3 and 4). Here the author contends that Shakespeare was recruited as a firm link with the past, as a site of attempted theatrical innovation, and as a conciliatory agent in the midst of severe ideological conflicts, which resulted from the open confrontation between communists and nationalists.

Following a chronological order, Krontiris then examines the hegemonic Shakespeare that emerged from the four productions staged at the Greek National Theater in the years of the Greek civil war (1946-1950). Citing Dennis Kennedy on Shakespeare in postwar Europe, she contends that in Greece, too, the English bard was appropriated at this time as an icon of traditional values in an effort to evade the painful memories and the weight of responsibility for the catastrophic World War (chapter 5). The evidence is drawn from a detailed examination of the work of Dimitris Rondiris, director of the Greek National Theater and almost exclusive producer of Shakespeare in the years of the civil conflict (he staged *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Richard II*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Tempest*). In the shadow of the Greek civil war, the state-controlled, dominantly conservative National Theater produced a hegemonic Shakespeare that looked like the Shakespeare of the late 1930s and was far removed from the grim realities of the present.

The author highlights and attempts to explain the fact that with the exception of an unsuccessful performance of *Antony and Cleopatra* in 1949, no other Shakespearean play appeared in the professional theaters in the years 1946-1953 (chapter 6). She attributes the rarity of Shakespeare's presence on the commercial stage in this latter part of the decade to the numerous difficulties faced by the acting companies in the postwar era (financial problems, fear of political persecution, inaccessibility to theatrical developments in Europe, lack of experience with contemporary staging methods, a sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the achievement of the English Shakespearean actors etc.). The author notes additionally that the conservative appropriation of Shakespeare by the public stage in the last part of the decade functioned negatively with respect to the private theaters, since it encouraged the idea of the bard as a predominantly "difficult" poet, a representative of high culture, and a spokesman of traditional values.

In the last chapter that is a real *tour de force* the author discusses the lonely attempts of a handful of political prisoners of leftist ideology to produce collectively a "Shakespeare for the people" on desert Greek islands, their place of exile towards the end of the decade and shortly after the civil war (1948-1951). In an environment of incarceration and humiliation and amidst tensions, fears, and scarcity of means, the performances of *The Merchant of Venice* (1949, 1951) and *Othello* (1951) by the prisoners constitute an ideologically progressive gesture that ironically signals the "liberation" of the participants as well as of Shakespeare from the confines of an elitist signification (203). However, the concluding part of this chapter makes clear that such fragmentary and temporary attempts were only marginal and largely ineffectual outside the specific setting.

The overall argument that emerges from the investigation of all these matters is that staged Shakespeare did not after all meet the urgent needs and sufferings of the Greek people in those times of national crisis, political polarization and fratricidal war. The findings of individual chapters suggest cumulatively that the reasons are multiple and inevitably conditioned by the material difficulties and unresolved ideological conflicts underlying the histories of performance and reception in the three theatrical spaces examined. The conservative politics and regressive stage aesthetics of the National Theater, the meager attempts at renewal or the disappearance of Shakespeare at the end of the decade in the commercial theater, as well as the marginality and ambiguous effects of the theater of exile, are clear indicators of a general failure to assimilate Shakespeare meaningfully. In fact, the sterile image of Shakespeare as a difficult poet and as icon of high culture

remained unchallenged in mainstream culture throughout the turbulent 1940s. The author rightly notes that at times of national crisis this kind of Shakespeare "can offer no consolation to the people who suffer" (209). In the context of this book's argument, the meaning that one reads into the particular situation has a political basis: the progressive forces did not know how "to take Shakespeare away from the few and bequeath him to the many" (211).

Detailed references to Greek history and local politics do not limit the wider interest of this study. Its real strength lies in the attempt to examine critically the Greek realities of the war and postwar era in the light of contemporaneous European developments and within a framework that takes into consideration a spectrum of theoretical issues of current scholarly interest pertaining to the global reception of Shakespeare. It is obvious that in dealing with wartime Shakespeare, Tina Krontiris attempted to explore a largely unmapped area in the history of European Shakespeare. For that matter, she should also be commended for the analytic and imaginative way she handled an erratic body of evidence in reconstructing the record of the Greek Shakespearean performances of this decade—documents, theater programs, photographs, old journals, memoirs, and interviews. On the other hand, one could say that at the same time this merit functions occasionally as limitation, since the lack of enough evidence at times invites speculation. Without a doubt, in its entirety the book remains an original and substantial contribution to the history of the Greek theater, to the larger question of Shakespeare's appropriation in times of crisis and to the growing field of European Shakespeares. It remains to hope for an English version of it that could make it accessible to a wider academic readership.

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