

Susan Valladares, *Staging the Peninsular War: English Theatres 1807–1815*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015. Pp. 459. £80. ISBN 9781472418630.

(Note: As Susan Valladares currently serves as Editor of *The BARS Review*, this review was commissioned and edited independently by Ian Haywood, one of the General Editors).

This richly documented and informative study accomplishes precisely what the title promises: a thorough examination of how Napoleon's invasion of Portugal led to Britain's military intervention in Spain and Portugal, and how back in Britain the Peninsular War excited a high degree of public interest reflected not only in newspapers and periodicals, but also in the theatres of the metropolis and the provinces.

For her first chapter, Valladares borrows her title, '*Pizarro*, "Political Proteus"', from William Cobbett's critique (1804) addressing the reinterpretations of Sheridan's play season after season as similar to the shifting alliances of Sheridan's politics. What for Cobbett was protean instability becomes for Valladares protean adaptability. In her introduction she announces her critical emphasis on the plurality of a play's meaning from one performance to the next, 'enabling possibilities of playing across seemingly demarcated lines' (3). Even at the time of its opening (Drury Lane, 24 May 1799), *Pizarro* was perceived to implicate a doubleness. Sheridan's *Conquistadores* may bear a Spanish standard but they could represent as well soldiers in Napoleon's army, while the Peruvian natives could be as English as the actors playing them. The audience would certainly share in the prevailing alarm that Napoleon was planning a full-scale invasion of England. Eight years later another protean change took place in the performance. *Pizarro* was still the ruthless conqueror, but it was now Spain that his armies had invaded. Portugal was a long-time ally, and its port in Lisbon was crucial to Britain's international trade. Spain was no such ally, and recollections of the Spanish Armada of 1588 continued to nurture suspicions of lurking hostility. But in May 1808 widespread resistance against French occupation rose up in opposition to Napoleon's attempt to place his brother, Joseph Bonaparte, on the Spanish throne. Allegiances shifted. Sheridan's play took on new political relevance.

In her second chapter, 'Performing Shakespeare', Valladares further develops her argument on the plurality of interpretations. She cites from *Biographia Literaria* (1817) Coleridge's argument that the war in Spain and Portugal 'made us all once more Englishmen'. She observes, too, a congruency between prevailing political sentiment and Coleridge's representation of the Spaniards in his *Remorse* (Drury Lane, 23 January 1813). Identifying Shakespeare as the national bard, Coleridge traces in his lectures an abiding ideological relevance of the plays. Contending that Shakespeare's plays were used to bolster nationalism and 'to (re)figure concerns about the British military action in the Iberian Peninsula' (59), Valladares examines *Henry V* and *Henry VIII* among her examples of plays of nationalism. The former achieved its success by ennobling the English and exposing the debased morality of the French; the latter suggested the wrongs to the Spanish people were represented in the role of Katherine of Spain. From the Roman plays she selects *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, emphasizing in each the divisive factions of authority and the exploitation of public feelings.

In Chapter 3 Valladares turns her attention to the 'Spectacular Stages', the unlicensed theatres of London. The Licensing Act (1737) required the Lord Chamberlain's approval of all plays. Traditional spoken drama was restricted to the three licensed theatres, Covent Garden, Drury Lane, and during the summer season the Haymarket. The unlicensed theatres were originally limited to song and pantomime. The very strictures of the Licensing Act prompted considerable innovation, so that older forms of dramatic performance (harlequinades, masques) were revised, new forms (burlesque, burletta, melodrama) gained

popularity, circus-like spectacles (equestrian drama, aquatic drama) were introduced, and more and more dialogue was permitted. Among her examples are two water spectacles by Charles Dibdin the Younger: *The Wild Man* (Sadler's Wells, 22 May 1809) and *The Battle of Salamanca*, (Sadler's Wells, 24 August 1812). The former adapts from *Don Quixote* 'an entertainment very much conversant with the Peninsular War' (114-115); the latter presents a carefully choreographed 'Bayonet Charge' (136-139). The flight to Brazil by the Prince Regent of Portugal was represented as *The Honest Criminal* (Royal Amphitheatre, 16 May 1808), a spectacle by Philip Astley (118-119).

In Chapter 4 Valladares turns her attention to the provinces, and most especially to Bristol's Theatre Royal and Regency Theatre. Noting that each of the provincial theatres had its own unique identity and performance history, she has chosen to avoid generalisations and offer instead a more detailed case study. For this purpose Bristol offers a more complex theatrical culture relevant to port activities engaged in war and trade, in smuggling and the revenue service. Many of the performances were bespoke by the military, and many featured the leading players of London on summer tour. In keeping with her thesis that a play is altered by the changing circumstances of performance, Valladares discusses the influence of troop movements on the theatre audiences. Like other provincial theatres, those of Bristol relied on a repertory of traditional plays, but they were also more responsive to the local involvement in the Anglo-Spanish alliance. Coleridge's Bristol lectures and the Bristol performances of Shakespeare provide her occasion to return to the arguments of her first chapter with new dimensions of alterity.

Valladares has framed her exposition with an Introduction and Afterward that cogently assert the relevance of her study in the larger context of the history of British drama. During the Napoleonic Wars, many plays acquired urgent new meanings. Her exposition of individual plays is richly informed by cross-referencing many other plays being performed at the same time. Having entered into an alliance with Spain against France, English theatres had to reconfigure many older plays as well develop reappraisals of the military action on the Continent.

The latter half of her book provides a major reference resource in the form of three appendices providing for the years 1807 to 1815 a comprehensive calendar of playbills for Covent Garden, Drury Lane, and Bristol Theatre Royal. She has printed in bold type those plays that may be relevant to further research on the wartime repertoire. As a reference resource, these appendices ought to be useful to all scholars working on the drama of the period.

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