

PETER SHAFFER IN SPAIN

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This is an abridged version of the article Merino-Álvarez, Raquel and Andaluz-Pinedo, Olaia (2017): Peter Shaffer en la cultura española, *Creneida*, 5, pp. 239-278, <http://hdl.handle.net/10810/36403>. Translation by Olaia Andaluz Pinedo.

1. INTRODUCTION

The British playwright Peter Shaffer died in 2016, but that same year saw a revival of *Equus*² in Spain. Indeed, his plays continue to thrive in Spanish theatre culture, thanks to a process of integration that began almost sixty years ago with the translation of *Five Finger Exercise*³. This play premiered in London in 1958 and was presented in Madrid (Teatro Beatriz) the following year. Peter Shaffer attended the first performance in the Spanish capital, and his presence helped to highlight what was a milestone for many: the staging in a commercial theatre of a play with subtle connotations of a taboo topic, homosexuality⁴.

In the 1960s performances of Shaffer's plays were staged frequently in Spanish theatres, coinciding with a period of change in the cultural history of our country. In this sense, his play *Equus* became another milestone: it involved the first instance of full-frontal nudity (male and female) authorised by censors for performance in a commercial theatre, shortly before Franco's death. The effect of this premiere on both audience and press recalls, thirty-three years later, the controversy surrounding the Broadway production of *Equus*, starring Daniel Radcliffe, the actor who rose to fame playing the part of Harry Potter. In

¹ Grupo TRALIMA/ITZULIK, GIU 16/48, Universidad del País Vasco, UPV/EHU (<http://www.ehu.es/tralima/>); proyecto IDENTITRA, MINECO, FFI2012-39012-C04-01T. GIC 12/197, IT728-13. GIC 10/117, IT 518-10.

² <http://ferroviaria.net/equus/>

³ Peter Shaffer, *Five Finger Exercise*, London, Samuel French, 1958. Peter Shaffer, *Ejercicio para cinco dedos*, Madrid, Escelicer, 1961.

⁴ Raquel Merino Álvarez, "Building TRACE (Translations Censored) theatre corpus: some methodological questions on text selection", in *Translation and Cultural Identity: Selected Essays on Translation and Cross-Cultural Communication*, coord. Micaela Muñoz Calvo and Carmen Buesa Gómez, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010, pp. 129-154, <http://hdl.handle.net/10810/17411>. The table "Homosexuality appears on Spanish stages via censored translations" is reproduced in the Appendix.

the United States too the play and its author continue to enjoy a notable presence in the theatre, and to create controversy.

If *Five Finger Exercise* constituted Shaffer's entrance into Spain, and *Equus* the consolidation of his position, then the British author's presence is finally verified with the premiere of *Amadeus* in 1982. And the successive performances and revivals of his plays confirms Shaffer's long lasting presence in our culture, in addition to the textual publication of his work, translated into Spanish and Catalan, and also the success in Spain of films based on his plays⁵.

The current study takes as its end point the year 2016, in which Shaffer's passing⁶ coincided with the new production of *Equus*. It is certainly the case that Shaffer's work has survived and indeed flourished in Spain, from its introduction in the 20th century, and continues to be relevant today.

2. PETER SHAFFER: A PLAYWRIGHT INTEGRATED INTO SPANISH CULTURE

Shaffer is part of a long list of foreign authors whose plays, translated into Spanish, helped integrate topics deemed controversial by censors into our culture. Translations of play-texts by Edward Albee, Graham Greene and Tennessee Williams⁷ were key in the renewal of topics such as sexual morality (adultery, homosexuality) on the Spanish stage⁸. These versions were produced by translators such as Alberto Martínez Adell and José Méndez Herrera, and by playwrights like José López Rubio⁹, whose mediating role here was

⁵ *Ejercicio para cinco dedos*, 1963; *El ojo público*, 1972; *Equus*, 1978; *Amadeus*, 1984. <http://www.mecd.gob.es/cultura-mecd/areas-cultura/cine/industria-cine/base-datos-peliculas-calificadas.html>.

⁶ <https://elpais.com/cultura>, 7 de junio de 2016.

⁷ María Pérez López de Heredia, *Traducciones censuradas de teatro norteamericano en la España de Franco (1939-1963)*, Bilbao, UPV/EHU, 2004.

⁸ Raquel Merino Álvarez, "A Historical Approach to Spanish Theatre Translations From Censorship Archives", en *Iberian Studies on Translation and Interpreting*, ed. Isabel García Izquierdo y Esther Monzó, Oxford, Peter Lang, 2012, pp. 123-140. <http://hdl.handle.net/10810/42568>

Raquel Merino Álvarez, "La historia de las traducciones de teatro inglés en España en el siglo XX: perspectiva desde el proyecto TRACE", en *Lengua, traducción, recepción: en honor de Julio César Santoyo*, coord. Rosa Rabadán, Marisa Fernández López, Trinidad Guzmán González, 2010, pp. 357-384, <http://hdl.handle.net/10810/15986>

Raquel Merino Álvarez, "Traducciones (censuradas) de teatro inglés en la España de Franco. TRACE: una perspectiva histórica", *TRANS. Revista de Traductología*, 13 (2009), pp. 19-31. <http://hdl.handle.net/10810/10578>

⁹ Raquel Merino Álvarez, "Censura, traducción e integración en el teatro de la época franquista: José López Rubio, hombre de teatro y traductor", *Hispanic Research Journal*, 17, 4 (2016), pp. 303-321. <http://hdl.handle.net/10810/41843>

Raquel Merino Álvarez, "The censorship of theatre translations under Franco: the 1960s", *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, 23, 3 (2015), pp. 303-321, <http://hdl.handle.net/10810/41844>

crucial. As mediators and agents in the introduction of foreign plays on the Spanish stage, producers, directors and actors often argued that box-office success abroad could guarantee success in Spain, and talked about bringing Spanish theatre in line with that produced and performed in London, Paris and New York.

In the context of TRACETi studies¹⁰, and drawing on information from censorship archives (AGA, *Archivo General de la Administración*, General Administrative Archive¹¹), it was possible to catalogue hundreds of translations that were presented for authorisation, in quantities that were sometimes similar to those by Spanish authors; indeed, so much so that we can find frequent references to discontent among Spanish playwrights for the censors' preferential treatment of works by foreign authors as a means of creating a pseudo-democratic image of Spain abroad¹².

Undoubtedly, Shaffer is a representative author in this sense, given the extent to which the staging of his plays helped import forbidden or controversial topics into Spanish commercial theatre. As will be examined below, the chronology of the introduction, consolidation and integration of his plays in Spain occurred during a crucial period in the history of our culture (1959-1982). In addition, the continued productions and publications of his works in the present are illustrative of the deep roots of these in our theatre culture.

Shaffer's plays in Spain can be addressed according to the division in periods mentioned above¹³, specifically from 1959 until the disappearance of Francoist censorship, which left a great deal of documentary evidence, and thereafter. In terms of the first period, the AGA is a rich documentary resource for researchers, sometimes the only source of information about foreign authors and play-texts that were translated and staged in our country.

Without the exhaustive censorship archives from the AGA we would not have been able to lay the foundations of this study, nor compare published texts with the theatre scripts stored in the archive, towards setting out a complete picture of an important part of the

Olaia Andaluz Pinedo, *Teatro y traducción (inglés-español). Análisis comparativo de traducciones comerciales. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/10810/15687>

¹⁰ Raquel Merino Álvarez, "Traducción y censura: investigaciones sobre la cultura traducida inglés-español (1938-1985)", *Represura. Revista de Historia Contemporánea española en torno a la represión y la censura aplicadas al libro*, 2 (2017), pp. 139-163, <http://hdl.handle.net/10810/37505>

¹¹ <http://www.mecd.gob.es/cultura-mecd/areas-cultura/archivos/mc/aga/fondos-documentales>.

¹² Berta Muñoz Cáliz, "Censurado por el franquismo", *El Cultural* (2006). <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/nd/ark:/59851/bmcfx948>

¹³ Berta Muñoz Cáliz, *El teatro crítico español durante el Franquismo, visto por sus censores*, 2005. <http://www.xn--bertamuoz-r6a.es/censura/tesiscensura.pdf>

history of theatre culture in Spain and in Spanish (original and translated). Theatre written originally in English was certainly the main source of foreign drama that was seen on Spanish stages at the time. In this sense, Peter Shaffer's work, from the point of view of the number of plays registered in AGA, is representative of a group which also contains Shakespeare, Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, George B. Shaw, Edward Albee, Arthur Miller and Graham Greene¹⁴.

Similarly, the whole body of Shaffer's plays in Spanish can be seen as representative of theatre staged on the commercial circuit, in Madrid or Barcelona, following London or New York, and hence of theatre oriented to mainstream audiences. If we add to all that the fact that, since the first performance on Spanish stages (*Five Finger Exercise*, 1959), the controversial themes of Shaffer's theatre and his own identity were seen as repulsive in nature and were used as a means of helping to introduce delicate topics, the study of his plays translated into Spanish is definitely representative of a period dominated by censorship, and of a way to renew Spanish theatre through the translation of foreign plays.

2.1. SHAFFER IN SPAIN, 1959-1968: *Five Finger Exercise*, *The Private Ear / The Public Eye*, *Black Comedy*.

On the 20th of February, 1959, a review was published in the newspaper ABC of the premier of *Five Finger Exercise* in Madrid, six months after its London opening and ten prior to its staging in New York. This event completed a process that began with the application to stage the play submitted to the censors by Alberto González Vergel (director) on the 9th of January. The censors' decision was quick, although the process was not free from obstacles. Authorisation of this play's staging, as in other cases, was preceded by its success in London, but also —and we have little documentation about this— by the patina of controversy that some fragments of the play had, as well as the personal life of the playwright himself, which, although not publicised, was known and shared in the theatre world.

¹⁴ Raquel Merino Álvarez, "Mapping translated theatre in Spain through censorship archives", pp. 183-184. <http://hdl.handle.net/10810/41498>
Raquel Merino Álvarez, "Traducciones (censuradas) de teatro inglés en la España de Franco. TRACE: una perspectiva histórica". <http://hdl.handle.net/10810/10578>

It would be risky to state that the subtle connotations of the topic of homosexuality that can be found in the play were the main reason for the producers' choice of author and play. Yet when *The boys in the band* by Mart Crowley was premiered in 1975, Francisco Álvaro, among other critics, set out the precedents of plays that had already dealt with such a delicate theme on the Spanish stage: "The topic is not new in our scene. It was presented in *Tea and Sympathy* and *Five Finger Exercise*"¹⁵.

Shaffer attended the premiere of the first of his plays translated into Spanish (February 1959), a highly significative presence, one which was acknowledged and endorsed by the theatre world (producers, directors, critics and playwrights), who paid homage to the British playwright in April of that year, as we can see in the brief press release reproduced in the Appendix¹⁶.

The censors' offices authorised the production of the play and issued the first *guía de censura* (a document required for performance), with indications of text to be omitted. These censored expressions refer explicitly to the topic of sexual morality, against the ideology of the regime (see Appendix). For instance, an allusion to homosexuality is crossed out: "convirtiese a mi hijo en un marica" ("turn my son into a cissy"). Furthermore, comparative textual analysis shows that the translator seemed to have deliberately changed expressions such as "On the breasts" and softened others, such as "make love", translated as "insinuar" (make advances to somebody), these perhaps traces of self-censorship.

A textual comparison, apart from showing possible instances of (self-)censorship, shows that both translations, signed by Alberto Martínez Adell¹⁷, are almost identical and in

¹⁵ The topic of homosexuality had been introduced, as far as it has been possible to trace, with plays authorised mainly for single sessions in *Teatros de Cámara* (Club Theatres): *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (record 217/50, 228/58, 7/59), *Un tranvía llamado deseo* (record 300/56) by T. Williams, *Tea and Sympathy* (record 358/55, 338/56, 61/57, 299/62) by R. Anderson. *Five Finger Exercise* constitutes a turning point in Spanish theatre, emerging as it does in a production for commercial theatre. *The zoo story* by E. Albee (record 75/63, 118/69) deals with the same topic as the previous plays, yet from the time of its authorisation for single performances in theatre clubs in 1963, would not be premiered in a commercial theatre until 1973. *The boys in the band* was banned in 1970 and again in 1972 (record 267/70) and would not be staged until 1975 (533/74).

Francisco Álvaro, *El espectador y la crítica. El teatro en España en 1975*, pp. 86-90, (p. 86). Francisco Álvaro, *El espectador y la crítica. El teatro en España en 1959*, pp. 98-101.

Raquel Merino Álvarez, "Building TRACE (Translations Censored) theatre corpus: some methodological questions on text selection". <http://hdl.handle.net/10810/17411>

Raquel Merino Álvarez (ed.), *Traducción y censura en España (1939-1985): Estudios sobre corpus TRACE: cine, narrativa, teatro*, p. 145. <http://hdl.handle.net/10810/10158>

María Pérez López de Heredia, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Homage to Peter Shaffer: ABC, 9/4/1959.

¹⁷ Alberto Martínez Adell is a professional translator of authors including Andersen, Conrad and Ibsen (<http://www.mcu.es/webISBN>). In the Spanish theatre world, such professional translators exist, but playwrights, actors and directors also produce versions and adaptations of works.

general reflect the dialogue of the original play, although some words and utterances are omitted and added in the translation.

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On the 18th of March, 1964, the censors' record 62/64¹⁸ was opened with the application to stage Shaffer's plays *The Private Ear* and *The Public Eye*. Shaffer was certainly considered a well-known author, and the comments in the press and in the procedure to censor and file the record 62/64 in AGA, together with that of *Five Finger Exercise*, are certainly worth bearing in mind.

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In 1967 Juanjo Menéndez's company presented to the censors the play *Black Comedy*, in a version by Vicente Balart (record 362/67). Once again Shaffer was not treated too severely.

Shaffer's theatre falls at the centre of a period of *apertura* (policy of openness) the effects of which were already being felt in 1959, and which would have its peak in 1963-67 with José María García Escudero as the Director General for Film and Theatre. Shaffer's production is located at the centre of the theatre system, the commercial circuit, and led to the introduction of topics that challenged unwritten norms of censorship, as well as those which, since 1963, had been specified through their publication in the BOE (official state gazette) concerning sexual morality, among other restrictions. *Five Finger Exercise* represents a triumph towards openness to themes and situations at the start of the period under scrutiny here, and *The Private Ear* and *The Public Eye*, but particularly *Black Comedy*, follow the trail of that first success, in the final part of a period that ends with the dismissal of those people at the helm of the General Directorate for Cinema and Theatre (1967) and the Ministry for Information and Tourism (1969). If foreign authors seem to have had more options in terms of being vehicles for change and for defying the established control on stages, some, like Shaffer, seem also to have been supported by agents from the Spanish theatre system itself, as well as being endorsed by his box-office success.

2.2. SHAFFER IN SPAIN, 1969-1975: *The Royal Hunt of the Sun, Equus*¹⁹.

¹⁸ This censors' record has been found in AGA, filed together with the above-mentioned record 6/59.

¹⁹ Barbara Aszyk, "El teatro español durante la transición política", *Sociocriticism*, XXXI, 2 (2016), pp. 7-41.

Shaffer's benevolent journey in the Spanish theatre world was interrupted in 1969, when the application to stage *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* encountered insurmountable pitfalls, these resulting in a ban. Following the aforementioned removal of those in positions of power, more restrictive stances were imposed seeking to contain or reverse the changes that had already begun. The topic of the play, the conquest of Peru, was now addressed in light of the new situation in the censors' offices and, as might be expected, there was opposition to the improper use of "Spain's good name". The censors did not approve of an English author exploring the "leyenda negra", questioning a sacrosanct episode in the country's history.

This example of censorship record is a rich documentary source, among which we find a note (14/1/1969) from another record processed by the Board of Cinema Censorship, addressed to the Director General, about the application to shoot a film adaptation of the play *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. This note describes various attempts to shoot the film, most of them in Spain. A first authorisation of the film script on the 8th of February, 1967, is mentioned, and another one on the 1st of March, 1968, regarding the shooting of the film in Spain, an American production whose script was authorised. The shooting itself was authorised on the 2nd of May that year (with two recommendations related to a respectable treatment of the figure of Spaniards).

On the 2nd of May, 1974, the producer Manuel Collado presented a second application to stage *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. In the censors' record, one of the three censors involved in the reports points out: "although the appellant expresses that it is a modified version, it is difficult to think of the reasons that the previous ban could have. Perhaps a muddled patriotism or a religious sense, also muddled". Despite the authorisation and *guía de censura*, the production did not go ahead, with Spain in this case omitted from the international circuit that staged the play²⁰.

From a textual point of view, perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of this translation, signed by Vicente Balart, is the substitution or omission of fragments that criticise Spain or religion. We may take as an example the deletion of the sentence, addressed to Atahualpa, "They want to write psalms to their god in your blood". In spite

²⁰ *Man of La Mancha*, by Dale Wasserman (record 231/66), a musical about the characters of Cervantes and Don Quijote, constitutes a case in which "the good name of Spain" was defended in the censors' offices, suggesting cuts and changes, but authorising the production in an attempt to show that the *apertura* was already in progress in 1966.

Raquel Merino Álvarez, "Censura, traducción e integración en el teatro de la época franquista: José López Rubio, hombre de teatro y traductor". <http://hdl.handle.net/10810/41843>

of these possible instances of self-censorship, as we have mentioned, censors opposed the perspective taken on the conquest of Peru.

In the case of *Equus*, although documentation from the censors' record was not available for consultation, it was possible to compile information from other sources (press, publication of the play), and these allow us to verify that *Equus* had better luck with the censorship process. After a procedure that could often be long and complex, Shaffer's play premiered in Spain just weeks before Franco's death, and constituted a milestone in that it included the first appearance of full-frontal nudity (male and female) authorised for a commercial theatre²¹. Once again, the translation of a play by a foreign author achieved what seemed forbidden for Spanish authors, and another taboo, nudity, was broken. *Equus* also coincided in Madrid's theatres with two other polemic plays, one about homosexuality and the other about a vision of the figure of Christ that some found "irreverent": *The boys in the band* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

In the critics' reactions, according to the press releases and articles reproduced in the volume edited by Francisco Álvaro in 1975, as well as the Aymà edition²², the first thing that draws one's attention is the visualization of the controversial situations: the characters' nudity. For the front page of the Spanish edition, a photograph of the London premiere is chosen where the actor appears dressed, while in the volume edited by Francisco Álvaro in 1975, a picture in which the main actor appears naked is selected (see Appendix).

Equus was a success in Spain, as it had been in London and New York, but that success, and even the premiere itself, might not have been possible without the perception of Shaffer as being an established author, one frequently seen in Spanish theatres. His work was, by that time, well integrated into our theatrical landscape, alongside that of Spanish playwrights, and enjoyed both revivals and publications.

2.3. SHAFFER IN SPAIN, 1975-1982: *Amadeus*

²¹ It is probable that the censorship process that led to the authorisation of *Equus* was as complex as that of *The boys in the band*, a play by Mart Crowley that portrays a party celebrated by a group of homosexual men. The censorship record of Crowley's play began in 1970 and resulted in a premiere with high media impact in 1975.

Raquel Merino Álvarez, "La homosexualidad censurada: estudio sobre corpus de teatro TRACETi (desde 1960)". <http://hdl.handle.net/10810/10169>

²² In the Spanish edition from the publishing house Aymà (Peter Shaffer, *Equus*, Barcelona, Aymà, 1979), there is an introduction by Peter Shaffer where he refers to the 1973 production at the National Theatre in London, and a final section about *Equus* and the press (pp. 143-145) reproduces some reviews that appeared on the occasion of its premiere in Spain.

For the play *Amadeus*²³ it was not possible to locate the record (in this case *de ordenación*, regulatory) that had to be filed before its premiere in Spain, in January 1982²⁴, although we have the publication of the text from the publishing house MK Ediciones²⁵.

The film *Amadeus* was released in Spain as promptly as other film adaptations of Shaffer's plays (in Appendix). In this case, the playwright himself wanted the adaptation to the cinema of his play to be the last of its rewritings: in the postdata at the end of the English edition of the play, he specifically says that he would not allow this play to become an opera (such as *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*) or a ballet (such as *Equus*²⁶).

What Shaffer did not (or could not) want to avoid was the successive productions of his translated plays. *Amadeus* has been an enduring success, with performances into the 21st century²⁷ in Spanish theatres. Similarly, revivals and new productions of *Black Comedy*²⁸ and *Equus*²⁹ have continued. As noted above, Shaffer's work remains alive in Spanish theatre, and his translated plays continue to occupy a central place in our culture.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

For general international audiences, the name of the English playwright Peter Shaffer is invariably linked to the film *Amadeus*, directed by Milos Forman and focussing on the figure of Mozart. Important factors in the film's success, and its influence around the world, are due in no small part to its cinematographic values, plus the awards it received, particularly the global importance of the Oscars. However, *Amadeus* is not only a hugely successful work penned by playwright Peter Shaffer, it is also a link in the chain that marks Shaffer's presence in the medium of theatre. By examining this imaginary chain

²³ Peter Shaffer, *Amadeus*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981. The play premiered at the National Theatre in London on the 2nd of November, 1979.

²⁴ The general catalogue TRACETi (<http://www.ehu.es/tralima/catrace.php>) includes the information drawn from searches in the AGA that have resulted in the location of censors' records filed between 1938 and 1985. After the enactment of laws on freedom of speech in the theatre, and the ratification of the Constitution, the bureaucratic structure of the censors continued to manage regulatory applications to stage plays (called *de ordenación* and *calificación*), until May 1985, the year when the Ministry of Culture was reorganised. Among regulatory records of this type we have found one corresponding to *Equus* (237/83), and presumably another one in which the play *Amadeus* would have been filed.

²⁵ Peter Shaffer, *Amadeus*, Madrid, MK Ediciones y Publicaciones, 1982.

²⁶ Peter Shaffer, *Equus*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984.

²⁷ Anita Viola, *Cartelera teatral en ABC de Madrid (2000-2004)*, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, 2012.

²⁸ Viola, *ibid.*, states that in periods such as 1996-1997, it was plays by foreign authors that enjoyed the highest acceptance, among others *Black Comedy* by Shaffer.

²⁹ Searches in the Spanish Theatre Documentation Centre (30 October 2017) retrieved fifty documents related to plays by Shaffer performed in Spain. <http://teatro.es/estrenos-teatro>.

from a historical perspective, we have tried to go back in time in an attempt to reflect how the integration of this English author in Spanish theatre was produced.

Thus, Shaffer's translated plays can be regarded as texts that have become well integrated into Spain's culture, and their study from a historical viewpoint, supported by documentary and textual evidence, allows us to celebrate, in 2016, 57 years of Shaffer in Spain. The productions and revivals on Spain's main stages, in the amateur circuit and in provincial theatre, the box-office success, but also the times when certain plays did not reach the stage, have all influenced the perception and reception of the British playwright's work in our country.

There is a Spanish Shaffer and a Shaffer in Spanish, these interwoven with the unwritten pages of Spanish theatrical history. His translated texts are alive and current, not only in the available editions, but also in those living texts that travel around the whole territory in new versions and updated older versions, celebrating the vitality of an essential author, imported and integrated into the Spanish scene.