

The Reinvention of Theatre in
Sixteenth-Century Europe

Traditions, Texts and Performance



EDITED BY T. F. EARLE AND CATARINA FOUTO



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CHAPTER 1



Sooner than Shakespeare: Inwardness and Lexicon in the Drama of Gil Vicente and António Prestes

Hélio J. S. Alves

Universidade de Évora

Gil Vicente and the Representation of Self

The lights burn blue, it is now dead midnight.
Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.
What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by;
Richard loves Richard, that is, I am I.
Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am!
Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why,
Lest I revenge? What, myself upon myself?
Alack, I love myself. Wherefore? For any good
That I myself have done unto myself?
O, no, alas, I rather hate myself
For hateful deeds committed by myself.
[...]
I shall despair. There is no creature loves me,
And if I die, no soul will pity me —
And wherefore should they, since that I myself
Find in myself no pity to myself?¹

It has been said that this speech's 'peculiar badness is difficult to describe'. The sentence comes from a peculiarly extreme critic of Shakespeare, Harold Bloom. The words 'dreadful' and worse also occur to him when faced with this play. Bloom's critical assault on Shakespeare's 'exorbitantly lengthy, cumbersome and overwritten *Richard III*' does not end here, however. On the particular speech quoted above, he says that 'no actor can salvage Richard from sounding silly', a risk that obviously I believe to be worth taking, though only for a less than Bardolatric purpose. As for women, it seems we should reach no further: the play is 'any actress's nightmare, for none of the women's parts are playable', he says. He even goes as far as stating that, for the 'ghastly' widow of Henry VI, 'Shakespeare never could compose a decent line'.² These are, of course, rather carefully chosen items from Harold Bloom's Shakespearean worship, but they are nonetheless comforting for those of us who