II.1
Fame at Last: The Recent Premiere of Moratín's *Hamlet* (1798)[*]

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On 8 July 2004, a new Spanish *Hamlet* had its premiere at the Festival de Teatro Clásico in Almagro. It was a production of Noviembre Compañía de Teatro, and was staged later in Madrid and in the provinces. One of the most surprising things about this *Hamlet*, at least for some, was the translation used: it was neither one of the most recent, nor a new rendering commissioned from a more or less famous writer, as is usually the case, but no less than the play's first translation from the English into Spanish, written by Leandro Fernández de Moratín (1769-1828), arguably the most important Spanish playwright of the 18th century. His *Hamlet* had never been staged since it was first published in 1798 under the pseudonym of Inarco Celenio [fig. 1][1], and has become famous, among other things, for being the only one in the language in which «To be or not to be» is not rendered «ser o no ser», but «existir o no existir» [fig. 2].

Moratín's *Hamlet* can be associated with other first translations of Shakespeare into Western European languages, such as those by Pierre-Antoine de La Place and Pierre Letourneur into French[2], Christoph Martin Wieland and Johann Joachim Eschenburg into German[3], or Alessandro Verri into Italian[4]. However, if we leave aside the theatrical advantage that others took of the German renderings[5], to the best of my knowledge these other first *Hamlet*s have never found their way onto the stage. But Moratín's *Hamlet* was chosen for this particular recent production, and used in the form of a shortened and slightly modernized adaptation by Yolanda Pallín[6].

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[1] Inarco Celenio [Leandro Fernández de Moratín], *Hamlet, Tragedia de Guillermo Shakespeare*, Madrid, Villalpando, 1798.

[2] Pierre-Antoine de La Place, *Le théâtre anglois*, London, 1745-1749; *Shakespeare traduit de l'anglois*, trans. by Pierre Letourneur, Paris, Duchesne, 1776-1783. See Helen Phelps Bailey, *Hamlet in France from Voltaire to Laforgue*, Geneva, Librairie Droz, 1964, pp. 8-11 and 18-22, respectively.

[3] *Shakespear: Theatralische Werke*, aus dem Englischen übersetzt von Herrn Wieland, Zürich, Orell, Geßner, und Comp., 1762-1766; *William Shakespeares Schauspiele*, von Johann Joachim Eschenburg, Zürich, Orell, Geßner, und Comp., 1775-1782. See Roger Paulin, *The Critical Reception of Shakespeare in Germany*, Hildesheim/Zurich/New York, George Olms Verlag, 2003, pp. 100-15 and 115-32, respectively.

[4] Unpublished translation. See Gaby Petrone Fresco, *Shakespeare's Reception in 18th Century Italy: The Case of Hamlet*, Bern, Peter Lang, 1993, pp. 129-67.

[5] See, for example, Simon Williams, *Shakespeare on the German Stage. Volume 1: 1586-1914*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 68.

[6] A word of thanks to her for providing me with a copy and for answering all the questions I troubled her with.

Choosing Moratín's *Hamlet* for the stage in 2004 seems to be a strange decision. For one thing, the company director, Eduardo Vasco, was attracted by the quality of the text, particularly by the fact that Moratín's language, being just over two centuries old, had aged in a natural manner, whereas some well-known contemporary translations such as Astrana's were archaistic («arcaizante»), i.e. artificially archaic. This was also the opinion of adapter Yolanda Pallín[7]. Personally, I could not agree more with both. Pallín added that Moratín's *Hamlet* was very faithful to the original, a remark which I would like to qualify later on. Moreover, the adapter also pointed out that Moratín translated the play because he fell deeply in love with it[8]. Here I must definitely part company with her, because this is far from being the case.

Bibliography on Moratín is very extensive. In particular, his *Hamlet* was examined critically in 1800[9], i.e. only two years after it was published, and has been the subject of a series of articles and publications ever since, both in Spain and abroad, including a doctoral dissertation in the US[10]. It has been both attacked and praised, sometimes in a rather confusing or contradictory way. At any rate, 19th-century critics, aware of the paradox that an incorrigible neoclassicist like Moratín could wish to translate a play like *Hamlet*, read what the translator had written on Shakespeare and his play, but did not have any illusions as to his admiration for either. Actually, looking on him as an admirer of Shakespeare and the play seems to be a rather modern development. In his extensive 1935 discussion of Moratín's translation, Alfonso Par, after quoting Moratín's harsh comments against Shakespeare and his *Hamlet*, also quoted some more favourable ones, and unexpectedly came to the conclusion that after all Moratín admired Shakespeare[11]. This notion was also expressed by Pilar Regalado Kerson in 1986[12] and by Isabel Verdaguer in a recent article[13]. One wonders if this is not a case of retroactive wishful thinking, i.e., what you would wish had happened, as if Moratín's merit could not be complete without his being an admirer of Shakespeare. I would like to take this opportunity to clarify the issue, as well as other related questions that, I think, also need some clarification. Other

[7] *El País*, 26 enero 2005, p. 48.

[8] «Cayó fulminado, rendido de enamoramiento al leerla». ('He was knocked off his feet, struck with love on reading it'). See «'Hamlet' llega a Madrid como el clásico más contemporáneo», http://actualidad.terra.es/articulo/html/av2115788.htm (last visited on 14 July 2006). This was expressed more soberly in the company web page: see www.aldabaproducciones.com/obras/hamlet/index.html (last visited on 14 July 2006).

[9] C[ristóbal] C[ladera], *Examen de la tragedia intitulada Hamlet, escrita en inglés por Guillermo Shakespeare y traducida al castellano por Inarco Celenio*, Madrid, Viuda de Ibarra, 1800.

[10] Rudolph Morgan, *Moratín's* Hamlet, Unpubl. Ph.D. Diss., Stanford University, 1965.

[11] Alfonso Par, *Shakespeare en la literatura española*, Madrid/Barcelona, Victoriano Suárez y Biblioteca Balmes, 1935, vol. I, pp. 120-22.

[12] Pilar Regalado Kerson, «Moratín y Shakespeare: un ilustrado español ante el dramaturgo inglés», *Actas del IX Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas (1986)*, ed. by Sebastian Neumeister, Frankfurt a.Main, Vervuert Verlag, 1989, pp. 75-83. Available online at http://cvc.cervantes.es/obref/aih/aih_ix.htm (last visited on 14 July 2006).

[13] Isabel Verdaguer, «Shakespeare's 'Poem Unlimited' in Eighteenth-Century Spain», in *Translating Shakespeare for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Rui Carvalho Homem and Ton Hoenselaars, Amsterdam/New York, Rodopi, 2004, pp. 129-43.

than that, I will not discuss the recent production per se, but rather the way the translation was adapted for performance.

It seems to me that the basic reason for what I think is a mistaken view may lie in how the relationship of the translator with the original author and his work is understood. The modern professional translator, for whom translation is a livelihood, cannot usually choose the texts to be translated, and may even be obliged to translate a text he or she dislikes. On the other hand, the translator of poetry or poetical drama, who is not usually a 'professional' translator, who would starve if he or she depended for a living on translating this kind of literature, is supposed to have an attitude of either admiration for, or empathy with, the original author.

Mutatis mutandis, this was certainly the attitude of the first European translators I mentioned earlier. La Place favoured Shakespeare, and in his preliminary «Discours sur le Théâtre anglois» of 1745 he argued for the relativity of taste in order to make the English playwright acceptable to his neoclassical readers[14]. Later, Letourneur admired him, and even «worshipped [him] more intelligently… than Ducis, [his neoclassical adapter]»[15]. As to the first German translators, Wieland observed that Shakespeare's genius was not amenable to the classical rules, and therefore presented him as an exception to be made. And, as Paulin points out, he «placed the onus on the heart and mind of the reader to enter into Shakespeare's world»[16]. After all, Wieland had confessed in a letter of 1758: «Je l'aime avec toutes ses fautes»[17]. Eschenburg, a scholar rather than a poet, apparently the first German Shakespearean, seems to have been less emotionally involved than Wieland, but he «joined in the anti-Voltairean chorus» and was «seemingly obsessed with Shakespeare»[18]. As far as Alessandro Verri is concerned, he was «carried away by the force and truth of his passions» («rapito dalla forza, e verità delle sue passioni»), and whole-heartedly compared Shakespeare with a river in full spate, whereas the other dramatists seemed to him limpid rivulets («limpidi ruscelli»)[19].

Now the case of Moratín *vis à vis* Shakespeare was very different. He began his translation of *Hamlet* during his stay in England between March 1792 and August 1793, and finished it in Italy two years later. His *Hamlet* was the result of singular circumstances that are easily told. He travelled abroad, pensioned by the Spanish government, to improve his own play-writing through the study of other European theatre. As has been pointed out, his visit to England was only the second stop on a European tour which also included France and Italy. He arrived in Paris in the heat of the French revolution, was frightened away by what he saw, and decided to move on to London. Otherwise, as he confided to a friend, England might not even have been on his original itinerary[20].

[14] See H. Phelps Bailey, *Hamlet in France*, cit., p. 8.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[16] R. Paulin, *The Critical Reception of Shakespeare in Germany*, cit., p. 106.

[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 99.

[19] G. Petrone Fresco, *Shakespeare's Reception in 18th Century Italy*, cit., p. 133, n. 14.

[20] See *Epistolario de Leandro Fernández de Moratín*, ed. by René Andioc, Madrid, Castalia, 1973, p. 138. See also Susi Hillburn Effross, «Leandro Fernández de Moratín in England», *Hispania*

While in England, Moratín studied the language, the daily life, the customs and the artistic manifestations of this foreign country. Although at a later stage he did a little better, at the beginning he almost despaired of learning to speak English: «The language is hellish, and I lose almost all hope of learning it»[21]. Then again, he did not feel very much at home in England, where he found a general materialistic attitude in the people[22]. His theatre-going in London acquainted him with the English drama of the period and with Shakespeare. However, despite some words of praise, his notes on the performances he saw show him again as the irredeemable neoclassicist who could not countenance the absence of rules and the lack of *bienséance*. If he had been a different writer, Shakespeare could have been his revelation on the road to Damascus, but this was not the case. His notes on the Shakespearean productions he saw were extremely critical. *Richard III* was an «absurd performance», particularly on account of the «apparition of eleven dead»[23]; *The Tempest* was an «eccentric play, in which Shakespeare gave free rein to his imagination»[24]; *Julius Caesar* «a very irregular play, dictated only by talent and without the aid of art»[25].

And yet he translated *Hamlet*, a play we cannot be sure he saw performed in London. To the translated text he added an important paratext: an introduction, a «Life of Shakespeare» and extensive critical notes which constitute a valuable critical document. At first sight, Moratín appears to display a characteristically neoclassical mind divided between the beauties and the imperfections of Shakespeare. But there is much more to it. For Moratín «the defects which stain and darken [*Hamlet*'s] perfections» add up to form «an extraordinary and monstrous whole»[26]. He found the dialogues «most coarse, capable only of provoking laughter in a wine-sodden, gross populace»[27]. His «Life of Shakespeare» soon ceases to be a biography and becomes a continuation of his hostile view of the playwright. And one could add the many harsh comments on particular passages of the play which he included in his notes. In the end, his attitude is so severe that one may easily be led to wonder why he took the trouble to translate Shakespeare if he found him so gross and lacking in art.

Changes in taste throughout Europe made Moratín incorporate modifications

48:1 (1965), pp. 43-50, and Pedro Ortiz Armengol, *El año que vivió Moratín en Inglaterra 1792-1793*, Madrid, Castalia, 1985.

[21] «La lengua es infernal y casi pierdo las esperanzas de aprenderla». See *Epistolario*, cit., pp. 134-35.

[22] See S. Hillburn Effross, «Moratín in England», cit., p. 45.

[23] «Absurda representación […] aparición de los once muertos». Leandro Fernández de Moratín, *Obras póstumas*, Madrid, Rivadeneyra, 1868, tomo III, p. 177.

[24] «Extravagante pieza, en que Shakespeare dejó correr sin freno a su imaginación». *Ibid.*, p. 178.

[25] «… una pieza [tan] irregular, dictada sólo por el ingenio y sin los auxilios que presta el arte». *Ibid.*, p. 179.

[26] «los defectos que manchan y oscurecen sus perfecciones forman un todo extraordinario y monstruoso». I. Celenio, *Hamlet*, Prólogo, no pagination.

[27] «… diálogos más groseros, capaces sólo de excitar la risa de un populacho vinoso y soez». *Ibid.*, no pagination.

into the 1825 second edition of his *Hamlet*[28]. The «Life of Shakespeare» was omitted, quite a few of his critical notes were altered or eliminated, and a sentence like «capable only of provoking laughter in a wine-sodden, gross populace» became simply «capable only of provoking laughter *in the vulgar*» (emphasis mine). As a recent editor of his translation suggests, a clue to the changes may lie in the biography of Moratín written by Manuel Silvela, with whom the playwright conversed and spent his last years. Discussing Moratín's view of Shakespeare, the biographer asked himself: «How could he applaud in the plot the inverisimilitudes, the ravings, and in the style the ridiculous mix of bombast and triviality of the English poet, whose disorder is supported and willingly re-established by *a new sect*?»[29]. So, if Moratín's «Life of Shakespeare» could be read as a kind of manifesto against the Bard, his attack was wisely removed in 1825, when the Romantic movement (the «new sect») had made Shakespeare its major reference. It was not only that Romanticism was unstoppable: to attack Shakespeare then, as he had done in 1798, would have been ridiculous.

In other words, Moratín did not die a Romantic or a Shakespeare convert. To be sure, he expressed his admiration for a number of passages in *Hamlet*, the style of which he praised, yet one cannot find in him the general admiration or favourable attitude towards Shakespeare of the first European translators I mentioned earlier. Unlike Wieland, who loved Shakespeare with all his defects, Moratín could not love him *because* of his defects. The Spanish playwright, who had read and used Nicholas Rowe's biography of Shakespeare, ignored what this playwright and editor had written some eighty years before him, i.e. that it would be hard to judge Shakespeare by a law he knew nothing of[30].

Barring obvious differences, the case of Moratín looks more like that of Voltaire. As is well known, the French writer claimed to have been the first to have shown the French – and, we can add, Continental Europeans – some pearls he had found in Shakespeare's «énorme fumier» ('huge dunghill'). Already in the eighteenth of his *Lettres philosophiques* (1734)[31], Voltaire had synthesized the arguments for and against Shakespeare that would echo in Europe throughout the 18th century and the first decades of the 19th, particularly the notion of his few virtues mixed with his many defects. What matters, however, is the attitude. For Voltaire and those who, like Moratín, followed him one way or another, Shakespeare suffers from many vices for so few virtues. For the admirers of Shakespeare, certainly for the Romantics, the Bard's many virtues redeem him

[28] *Obras dramáticas y líricas de D. Leandro Fernández de Moratín*, Paris, A. Bobée, 1825, tomo III.

[29] Quoted in Juan Carlos Rodríguez, *Moratín o El arte nuevo de hacer teatro*, Granada, Caja General de Ahorros, 1991, p. 59.

[30] *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear*, ed. by N[icholas]. Rowe, London, Jacob Tonson, 1709, p. xxxvi.

[31] This important book, first published in its French original in 1734, made Shakespeare known to the French and Europeans in general. It had appeared in an English translation by John Lockman in London and Dublin the previous year under the title *Letters concerning the English nation*. The book may have been written between 1728 and 1730 and was probably printed in some form in 1731. See *Voltaire on Shakespeare*, ed. by Theodore Besterman, Geneva, Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1967, p. 44, n. 1.

from his defects (an idea that, in a different way, was first expressed by Ben Jonson when he said of Shakespeare that there was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned)[32]. As far as Moratín is concerned, nowhere can we find in him a statement to this effect: the very opposite is true. Writing on his translation of *Hamlet* at the end of the 19th century, a critic admitted that Moratín might admire Shakespeare in part, but he added: «The translation of the admirer seems to be the translation of an enemy»[33].

The point is therefore that one can do justice to his translation without wishing him to have been what he was not, an admirer of Shakespeare. This, however, should not lead to the conclusion, as has recently been the case, that «his explicitly neoclassical ideas did not affect his translation»[34], as if translations were produced in a vacuum. On the one hand, Moratín was fully aware of the stylistic variety displayed in *Hamlet*, but he does not seem to have admired it, nor is it clear whether he would or could imitate it. He tends to miss the comic, ironic or sarcastic language of the original, and smoothes down inelegant but forceful expressions like «And as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down, / The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out / The triumph of his pledge» (I.3.11-13). Sexual language seems to have caused him some embarrassment. In the exchange between Hamlet and Ophelia in the play-within-the-play, he seems to have adopted and adapted some of Letourneur's solutions, whose French translation he consulted, so that the only deliberate omission in Moratín's text is to be found in his rendering of Hamlet's «That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs» (III.2.113). Of this line he only translated «That's a fair thought», followed by suspension marks, but, unlike Letourneur, he added the following note: «The passage left out is one of those whose translation might offend the modesty of the reader. The original says: *That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs!*»[35]. At least in these respects, his neoclassical frame of mind *did* influence his translation, though I hasten to add that these characteristics of Moratín's *Hamlet* can also be observed in the other European translators of Shakespeare from the neoclassical period to close to our own times.

At the same time, Moratín undertook his task conscientiously, and although he devoted himself to it without the scholarly involvement of an Eschenburg, he spared no efforts to equip himself with as many editions of, and critical commentaries

[32] «But he redeemed his vices, with his vertues. There was ever more in him to be praysed, then to be pardoned». Quoted in Edmund K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988 [1930], vol. 2, p. 210.

[33] «La versión del admirador parece la versión de un enemigo». Leopoldo Augusto de Cueto, *Estudios de historia y de crítica literaria*, Madrid, Sucesores de Rivadeneyra, 1900, p. 152.

[34] I. Verdaguer, «Shakespeare's 'Poem Unlimited'», cit., p. 137.

[35] «El pasage que se ha dexado en blanco, es uno de aquellos cuya traduccion podria ofender la modestia de los lectores. El original dice: *That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs!*». I. Celenio, *Hamlet*, cit., pp. 354-55, n. 7. Letourneur had translated the line as: «C'est une riante image…» ('It's a smiling image…'), thus omitting «to lie between maids' legs». W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, trans. by Pierre Letourneur, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, 1884, p. 96. Moratín also left untranslated «O vengeance!» in Hamlet's second speech, but this seems to be an oversight.

on, the play that he could lay his hands on. Considering his poetics and the free translation habits of his age, he rendered *Hamlet* with reasonable fidelity, certainly with more than Letourneur had shown. Like other translators at the time, Moratín made the odd blunder with the English. For instance, in the famous lines «Or that the Everlasting had not fixed / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!» (I.2.131-132), he misread «canon» (the religious precept) as «cannon» (the artillery piece), and was so unhappy about this that he added the following note: «To portray the Almighty striking men down with thunderbolts is now a commonplace, but to imagine Him shooting an artillery cannon is indeed a novelty. Bear in mind that in Hamlet's time there were neither cannons, nor gunpowder»[36].

Despite the fact that he consulted Letourneur, Moratín criticised the French translation, which he called a «traducción pérfida» ('a betrayal of a translation')[37]. He felt that Letourneur went too far in his desire to constantly improve Shakespeare, either by modifying the original or by omitting passages that would sound comical or offend propriety: not only Hamlet's bawdy language with Ophelia, but also his puns and his baiting of Osric, along with many other details throughout his translation[38]. Like Letourneur, Moratín translated the *Hamlet* songs in rhymed verse, but, unlike him, he also rendered the first actor's speech in good Spanish blank verse, and the play-within-the play in rhymed lines. At least in these two cases he tried to reproduce the contrast of styles in the original. Being a proficient poet, he could have translated the play into blank verse in imitation of the original, had he so wished, and in this manner pave the way for the translation of Shakespeare into Spanish verse, which appeared only decades after him.

Having said this, we should also remind ourselves that the concept of fidelity in translation has evolved considerably in the last two centuries. Dirk Delabastita is right, I think, when he observes that the German Schlegel-Tieck translations of Shakespeare in the Romantic period have had an influence that situates itself on a more general plane, having become «a type or a blueprint for what a Shakespeare translation can and should look like»[39]. But Moratín was not so source-text oriented as to have thought of systematically preserving the contrast between prose and verse that is so important in the original. In this respect, and again from this historical vantage point, Moratín's *Hamlet* cannot be considered a faithful translation in our modern sense.

However, if read independently of the original, the Spanish of his *Hamlet* is in line with the distinguished use of language he displayed in his own comedies. In this respect, and despite all reservations, one can understand that a modern theatre director would want to choose his *Hamlet* for a production. Whether intended or not for the stage (and I do not think this matters here), it reads and

[36] «*No asestára el cañón.* Pintar al Omnipotente arrojando rayos á los hombres, ya es comun; pero imaginársele disparando un cañón de artillería, es cosa muy nueva por cierto. Notese que en tiempo de Hamlet no habia cañones, ni pólvora». I. Celenio, *Hamlet*, cit., p. 332, n. 12.

[37] *Ibid.*, Prólogo, no pagination.

[38] See H. Phelps Bailey, *Hamlet in France*, cit., p. 19.

[39] Dirk Delabastita, «Notes on Shakespeare in Dutch Translation: Historical Perspectives», in *Translating Shakespeare for the Twenty-First Century*, cit., p. 111.

sounds well and could have been used in the theatre after its publication. It was not, because the only kind of Shakespeare possible on the Spanish stage at the time, as well as in the French, and apparently the Italian theatre, was in the form of the Ducis neoclassical adaptations. Let us be reminded that these adaptations continued to be staged at the Comédie Française as late as 1851[40]. In this context, it is worth quoting a remark by Pablo Avecilla, who in 1834 wrote an adaptation of Moratín's *Hamlet*, and, when publishing it twenty-two years later, he explained that he had adapted it because it would have been impossible to present it on stage «with all the defects of the [Shakespearean] original which our learned Inarco Celenio [Moratín] had skilfully preserved»[41]. In historical perspective, the criticism becomes praise for what is criticized.

Let us then broach the use of this *Hamlet* in the theatre. The contemporary adaptation follows the usual procedures of deletion and substitution, with only one addition, which is actually the completion of Hamlet's sexual remark to Ophelia omitted by Moratín («That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs»). The deletions reduce the text to roughly half[42]. This is then a *Hamlet* of a little over two hours in the tradition of the First Quarto *Hamlet* which in our time has found particular expression in the cinema (in Kozintsev, Zeffirelli, Almereyda and the Branagh short version). The performance begins with a prologue spoken by Horatio which is a conflation of two short passages: his references to the wonders following the death of Julius Caesar in the first scene and his summary of the events of the tragedy in the last. Both the prologue and the play end with Horatio's words near the end of the play: «What is it ye would see? / If aught of woe or wonder, cease your search» (V.2.316-17).

This textual reduction was dictated by reasons of dramatic and financial economy. The cuts pervade the whole text, sometimes affecting whole passages or even a whole scene, and tend to be deletions of amplifications, reflections, commentaries or details, both in the speeches and in the dialogue. Sometimes the cuts end up changing a dialogue into a monologue, with the secondary actor having become a supernumerary, as in the exchange between Polonius and Reynaldo (II.1). Gone are characters like Fortinbras or Osric (the gist of his message is given by Horatio), and gone are passages like the actors' speeches (II.2 and III.2), with the result that the play-within-the-play has been reduced to the dumb show. Gone is, in consequence, Hamlet's second soliloquy, the one that begins «O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!» (II.2.552), which expresses the hero's reactions to the first actor's speech.

[40] Ducis's *Hamlet* was performed at the Comédie Française 203 times between 1769 and 1851, and no less than 65 nights between 1831 and 1840, i.e. at the peak of the Romantic movement. See Paul Benchettrit, «*Hamlet* at the Comédie Française: 1769-1896», *Shakespeare Survey* 9 (1956), p. 60.

[41] «con todos los defectos del original, que diestramente conservó nuestro ilustrado Inarco Celenio». Pablo Avecilla, *Hamlet. Drama en cinco actos. Imitación de Shakespeare*, Madrid, Imprenta de C. González, 1856, p. 3.

[42] To be accurate, the 33.889 words which make up Moratín's text are here reduced to 16.605.

Cuts in a theatrical text are always contentious, even though one can understand and accept the reasons of dramatic and practical economy. However, I do think that the omission of the actors' speeches, particularly the first (the Pyrrhus speech), is a loss in more than one sense. In the first place, it is the loss of a very dramatic part of the play. Both actors' speeches are metadramatic, which means that through this artifice Shakespeare paradoxically enhances the realism around them. But what makes this possible is a special use of language in the two instances. In the Pyrrhus speech the vocabulary is parodically literary; the metre, rigid; the imagery, violent; the tone, highly rhetorical. In other words, it offers a sharp contrast with the rest of the dialogue, which can be implicitly or indirectly perceived as 'realistic' language by comparison. As I pointed out earlier, Moratín, unlike Letourneur before him, translated these speeches in blank verse and rhymed verse, respectively, i.e. he imitated one of the most obvious cases of stylistic variety that is a key feature of the original. As the Spanish theatre company apparently wanted to do justice to his old translation by using it for performance, it seems strange that they did away with one of its most obvious literary and dramatic merits, one that other translators of *Hamlet* after Moratín would not or could not attempt.

Other than that, all the names pertaining to classical mythology, like Niobe or Hyperion, are eliminated, undoubtedly to avoid archaic references which might be distracting or simply incomprehensible. What is curious, at least to me, is the systematic suppression of all exclamations, if only because they are the only expressions of emotion that are uttered without a verbal reference or content. So the famous «Alas, poor Yorick» (V.1.180) becomes in the adaptation simply «Poor Yorick». To be sure, Spanish exclamations such as 'Oh!' can be an irritant to the actor, as they can have an unnatural, or even comic effect in the audience, but I think that more natural exclamations like '¡Ah!' or '¡Ay!' should not present a problem to an actor worth his salt. I have been assured that in this particular production the actors were not stopped from uttering exclamations, only the company did not want them necessarily imposed by the text. But in this case, how did the actors know when they would have to exclaim? Be that as it may, if some of these deleted exclamations were not restored in performance, the result could have been awkward in some passages: having deleted Polonius's words and exclamations when Hamlet kills him, he would collapse onstage like a statue from behind a curtain.

The second procedure – substitution – is carried out following an apparently eclectic approach, but showing, I think, some inconsistencies. The adaptor provides correct solutions for the few blatant blunders of translation I mentioned earlier, such as the canon/cannon case, but leaves unchanged Moratín's mistake with «to take arms against a sea of troubles» (III.1.61), in which «arms» is not read as weapons ('armas'), but as parts of the body ('brazos'). Clearly, most of the replacements attempt to offer a modern equivalent for words or expressions in Moratín that would now be perceived as obsolete, infrequent, obscure or ambiguous. I have counted twenty-nine replacements, which is not excessive[43]. On the other hand, the adaptor has not modernized nine cases of archaic words

[43] One could argue against the substitution of some items, such as «designios» ('designs') or «fin» ('end') for «propósitos» ('purposes'), which I think unnecessary.

or expressions that are perceived nowadays as definitely obsolete, which were probably obsolete in Moratín's time[44], and which would have been kept as they were even in the 19th century, to preserve the flavour of the old language in subjects of time past. Finally, I would like to finish this survey by referring to what, in my eyes, is a curious substitution. Translating Hamlet's «when Roscius was an actor in Rome» (II.2.392-393), Moratín uses the correct Spanish equivalent («Roscio») for the actor in Rome. The adaptor replaces this name with «San Ginés», which is very surprising unless you know that this saint was also a Roman actor. He, by the way, became a Christian and suffered martyrdom at the time of emperor Dioclecian, i.e. nearly four hundred years after Roscius. The point is: how many in the audience would know more about the actor-saint Ginesius («San Ginés») than about the actor Roscius?

It would seem that a foreign Shakespeare production aiming at excellence in all respects would choose a translation which is both as faithful and as performable as possible. This is sometimes done, but, to the best of my knowledge, it is often no more than a desideratum. In the circumstances, the choice of a two-century-old translation for a contemporary performance may seem strange, but it may not be such a wrong decision after all when the ideal cannot be reached for one reason or another. Besides, it may help to do justice to translations such as Moratín's, which, mainly for historical reasons, have been both attacked and praised inconsistently. Moreover, as a Spanish text it has worn very well, and offers a literary and dramatic quality that is not always to be found in more modern translations. This is certainly a sound reason for a theatre company to choose this *Hamlet*, but, as I have tried to show, it is not so convincing as regards its fidelity to the original, and the choice cannot be justified on the basis of Moratín's admiration for Shakespeare or for his *Hamlet*. The resulting adaptation, if we leave aside the drastic textual reduction and other arguable decisions, did not make too many substitutions, which could be interpreted as the adaptor's respect for an original of notable quality that still sounds fresh and natural today.

Other than that, and given the subject of this publication, it might be useful to consider the case in its possible European dimension. For one thing, to what extent could this instance be extrapolated to other European countries? Would similar old translations be considered usable for the stage now, and would it be desirable to use them? Would there be any literary and dramatic advantages in using them, depending on the cultural and historical circumstances of the various European countries? If these and other similar questions yield positive answers, new work will have to be done, and I would be happy not only to have tried to clarify an interesting case, but also to have encouraged a little more discussion and research on European Shakespeare.

[44] Such as the enclitic pronoun in «dígote» instead of «te digo», or words like «afeites y embelecos», which definitely sound like 16th century Spanish.

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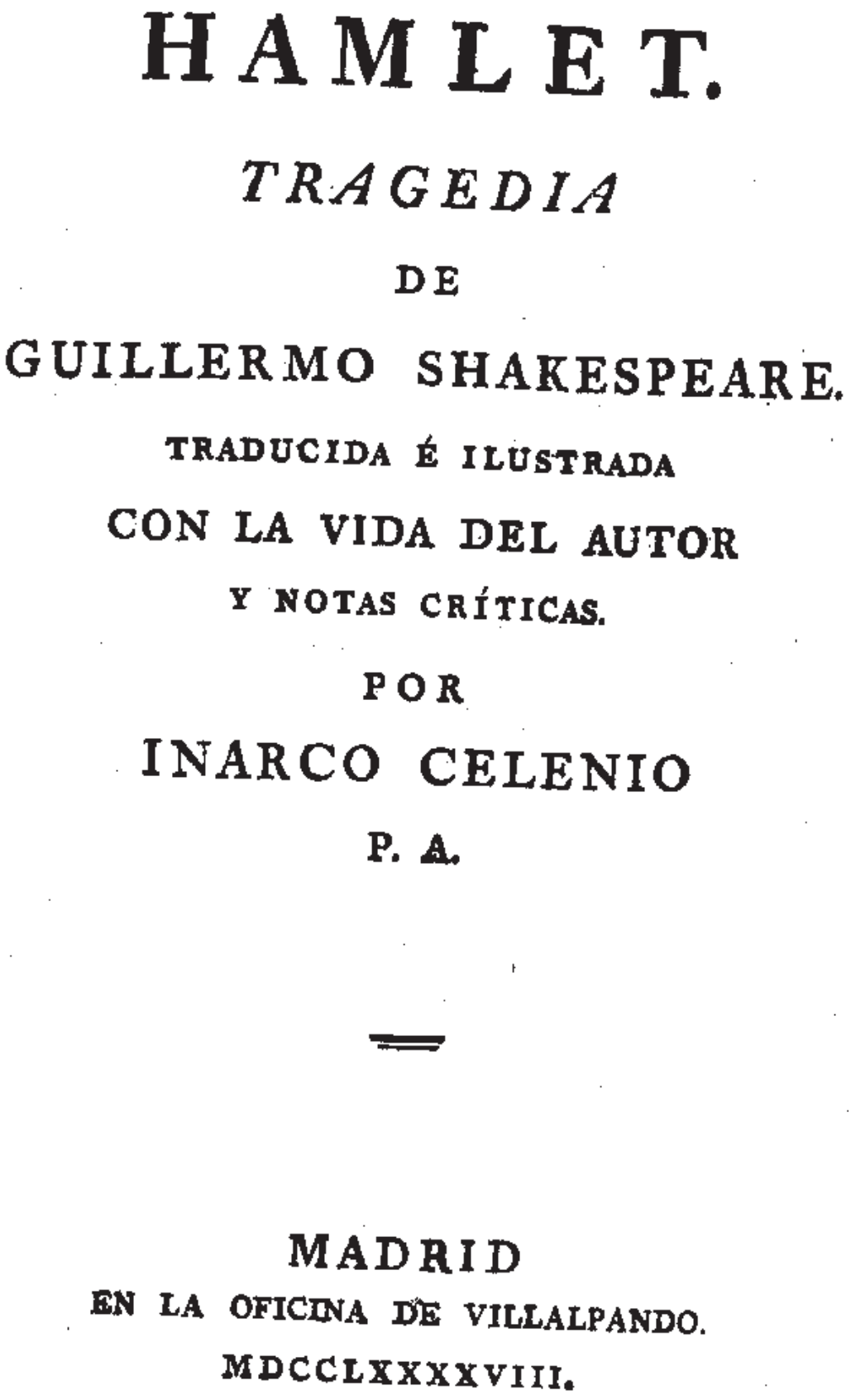

HAMLET.

TRAGEDIA

DE

GUILLERMO SHAKESPEARE.

TRADUCIDA É ILUSTRADA

CON LA VIDA DEL AUTOR

Y NOTAS CRÍTICAS.

POR

INARCO CELENIO

P. A.

MADRID

EN LA OFICINA DE VILLALPANDO.

MDCCLXXXXVIII.

Figure 1
Frontispiece of the first edition of Moratín's *Hamlet*

SCENA IV.

HAMLET, OFELIA. (a)

HAMLET.

Existir (a) ó no existir: esta es la qüestion. ¿Quál es mas digna accion del ánimo, sufrir los tiros penetrantes de la fortuna injusta, ú oponer los brazos á este torrente de calamidades, y darlas fin con atrevida resistencia? Morir es dormir. No mas? ¿Y por un sueño, diremos, las aflicciones se acabaron y los dolores sin número: patrimonio de nuestra débil naturaleza?... Este es un término que deberiamos solicitar con ánsia. Morir es dormir... y tal vez soñar. Sí, y ved aquí el grande obstáculo: porque el considerar que sueños podrán ocurrir en el silencio del sepulcro,

(a) *Hamlet dirá este monólogo creyéndose solo. Ofelia á un extremo del teatro, lee.*

Figure 2
«To be or not to be» in Moratín's translation