

Adaptations and Translations  
of Shakespeare's "Othello," in  
France, during the Eighteenth  
Century. A comparative Study.

by Amida Stanton

*June, 1910*

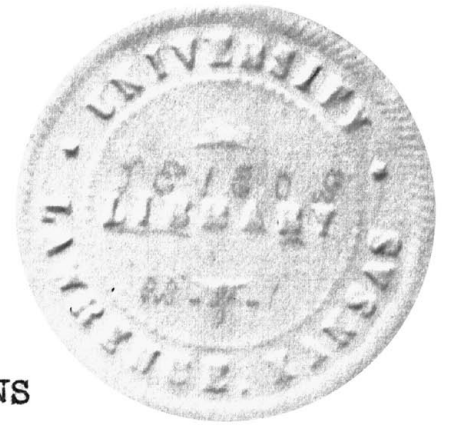
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Adaptations and translations  
of Shakespeare's "Othello"  
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*Introduction*

INTRODUCTION. 1

*Introduction*

## Introduction.

The first translation, so-called, of Othello appeared in France in 1745. The late appearance of this translation is partly explained by the fact that although in England, even during his own life time, Shakespeare was hailed as a world-great genius, in France for more than a century after his death, his very name was unknown. Moreover, even when stray copies of his plays began at last to find their way across the channel, they gave rise to the most varied criticism; and almost another century was allowed to elapse before they were recognized as the works of a master of drama.

"Les Anglais sont très habiles gens," wrote a French sojourner<sup>1</sup> in England in the seventeenth century, "leurs ouvrages sont presque tous bons, et il y en a beaucoup d'excellens. C'est dommage," he adds plaintively, "que les

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1. Bâle--Discours sur le feu M. Ancillon, etc., Tome I, p. 160.

Autheurs de ce pays-là n'écrivent qu'en leur langue; car ceux de celui-ci n'en peuvent profiter faute de les entendre." This ignorance of the English language itself, and still more, the apparent content to remain in ignorance of it, would seem to betoken a narrowness of view point, a lack of cosmopolitanism strangely out of keeping in a nation that wielded so wide an influence in European literature. The many evidences of French appreciation of Spanish, Italian, and classic literature are ample refutation of any such hypothesis.

The reason for this lack of appreciation of English literature is to be sought rather in other facts. In the first place, France and England were not yet far enough away from the days of the Hundred Years' War to have buried all national antagonism. The drama of Shakespeare, having its source so largely in the life and manners of a people that even during the seventeenth century, now and again greeted French visitors to their island with the not overly hospitable sobriquet of "French dogge", was hardly calculated to appeal to readers in France. Moreover,

the drama of Shakespeare found no answering element in France. There were no well-known literary grooves into which it fitted. It is, therefore, not merely because Shakespeare was of foreign birth that his drama had to be accepted "par petits morceaux"; (1) it is also partly because he represented an element thoroughly out of harmony with French literary ideals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (2).

The fact that we find no French translations and no extended comment on Shakespeare before the eighteenth century, I do not take, however, to be conclusive proof that his works were entirely unknown to French readers before the appearance of the *Lettres sur les Anglais et les Français* of B at de Muralt. It seems hardly probable that of all the French men of letters who found their way into England during the seventeenth century, either driven there by necessity or sent on some mission, not one ever turned over the leaves of one of the early folio

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1. Cf. Sainte-Beuve referred to on page 5.

2. Dumas recounts in his memoirs that even as late as 1822, a troupe of English actors attempting to present *Othello* in the *Th atre Porte Saint-Martin* was hissed from the stage and forced to take refuge in a neighboring music-hall.

editions of "Shakess Pear"(1), or ever saw one of Shakespeare's plays presented on the stage. So far as the seventeenth century is concerned, we are dealing with a period that accepted complacently Boileau's famous "Enfin Malherbe vint", without a single voice being raised to claim recognition for a forgotten Ronsard. It is not strange that the age that found Rabelais, Marot, and Montaigne "irregular", should consider unworthy even of passing mention, a dramatist who transgressed every known rule of classic tragedy.

In the very nature of things, the plays of "Attila-Shakespeare" could hardly fail to grate unpleasantly on hearers accustomed to the almost statue-like beauty and classic parity of the tragedies of Corneille and Racine. Before a court accustomed to see only royal personages figure upon the stage, Shakespeare would have introduced the rabble. To those critics who found that even Pyrrhus sometimes approached dangerously near comedy(2), Shakespeare would have presented entire scenes of pure comedy. To

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1., Journal des Savans, 1710.

2. Racine, Andromaque, Acte II, Scène V.

play-goers accustomed to learn through the récit, the death of the victim of tragedy, Shakespeare would have exposed in all its crudity, the whole "grande tuerie". The fact that Othello is black; that Cassio appears drunk upon the stage; that the whole tragedy revolves about a handkerchief, an object that apparently has no place in tragedy; the manner of Desdemona's death-- any one of these details was enough to condemn Shakespeare in the eyes of French critics.

The seventeenth century was content, apparently, to ignore Shakespeare. The eighteenth century observed a different attitude. Recognizing in him a certain amount of poetic insight, it sought to reduce him to its own conception of genius. Instead of enlarging its standards to dimensions that would embrace Shakespeare, it thought only of reducing Shakespeare to dimensions that would enable him to fit into a certain small groove in the conventional mould of tragedy.

"Avant de nous le faire accepter," writes Sainte-Beuve(1), "il nous a fallu pour le Shakes-

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1. Sainte-Beuve. Causeries du Lundi, 2 Mars, 1863.

peare, comme aujour d'hui pour le Goethe, comme pour tout ce qui est grand à l'étranger, nous couper les morceaux à l'avance, nous donner petit à petit la becquée, ni plus ni moins qu'aux petits oiseaux". It is the purpose of this paper to show through how many travesties Othello had to pass before attaining truer expression in the interpretations of the nineteenth century.



I. The "Zaire" of Voltaire.

## I. The "Zaïre" of Voltaire.

Othello's first appearance in France is in disguise. Those readers of the *Pour et Contre* who expressed so warmly their appreciation of the brief synopsis of several of Shakespeare's plays that had appeared(1) in the pages of that periodical, probably did not realize that they had already rendered a sort of homage to Othello when, six years previously, they had applauded for twenty-one nights in succession, Voltaire's *Zaïre*.

*Zaïre*, though not in any sense a replica of Shakespeare's Othello, contains certain elements that undoubtedly owe their inspiration to Shakespeare. With regard to the English poet, Voltaire seems to have put himself very much in the attitude of Molière toward poor Cyrano: "Cette scène est bonne; elle m'appartient de droit; je reprends mon bien partout où je le trouve." Even in the days of his bitterest invective against Shakespeare, Voltaire did not fail to recognize that the saltim banque "avait des saillies

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1. *Pour et Contre*, 1738, Tome XIV.

heureuses", and these saillies he has not been above borrowing. He turned over the leaves of Othello, picked out the pearls he found there, and set them in a mounting of his own. The parallel passages that follow are a truer homage to the genius of Shakespeare than Voltaire ever accorded in words:

Othello--

Prythee no more: let him come when he will:  
I will deny thee nothing.(1)

Orosmane--

Zaïre l'a voulu; c'est assez...  
...je fais tout pour Zaïre;  
Nul autre sur mon coeur n'aurait pris cet  
empire.(2)

Othello--

I must weepe,  
But they are cruell Teares; this sorrow's  
heavenly,  
It strikes where it doth loue.(3)

Orosmane--

Mais ces pleurs sont cruels et la mort va  
les suivre;  
..... ces pleurs  
Du sang qui va couler sont les avant-  
coureurs.(4)

1. Shakespeare: Othello, Vol. VI, Edition Furness, Act III, Scene III.

2. Voltaire: Zaïre, Vol. II de ses Œuvres, Acte III, Scène I.

3. Shakespeare: Othello, Act V, Scene II.

4. Voltaire: Zaïre, Acte V, Scène VIII.

Othello--

Had it pleased Heaven,  
To try me with affliction, had they rain'd  
All kind of Sores, and Shames on my bare head:  
Steep'd me in pouertie to the very lippes,  
Giuen to Captiuite, me, and my utmost hopes,  
I should haue found in some place of my Soule  
A drop of patience. But, alas, to make me  
etc.(1)

Orosmane--

J'aurais d'un œil serein, d'un front  
inaltérable,  
Contemplé de mon rang la chute épouvantable;  
J'aurais su, dans l'horreur de la captivité,  
Conserver mon courage et ma tranquillité:  
Mais me voir à ce point trompé par ce que  
j'aime!(2)

Dialogue between Othello and Desdemona(3).

Scene between Zaïre and Orosmane(4).

Othello's final speech(5).

Orosmane's final speech(6).

Moreover, in addition to having profited by some of the actual lines of Othello, Voltaire has succeeded in imparting to Zaïre a little of the movement that characterizes the English play but at the same time, without in any way destroying the essentially French, and above all, essentially

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1. Shakespeare: Othello, Act IV, Scene II.
  2. Voltaire: Zaïre, Acte V, Scène VIII.
  3. Shakespeare: Othello, Act IV, Scene II.
  4. Voltaire: Zaïre, Acte IV, Scène VI.
  5. Shakespeare: Othello, Act V, Scene II.
  6. Voltaire: Zaïre, Acte V, Scène X.

classic atmosphere of the play. The verve, the spontaneous vigour of the action, the rapid movement toward the climax, was to Voltaire's mind the chief merit of the English theatre(1). The vigour of action that he has succeeded in embodying in his own play is undoubtedly inspired by Shakespeare. And this, to my mind, is the greatest debt he owes the English dramatist.

Beyond this point resemblance between the two plays practically ceases. The oriental blood of Orosmane is perhaps a faint concession to the Moorish ancestry of Othello. In both plays an enemy threatens attack. In Othello, however, the enemies feared are Turks coming from the east; the enemies that Orosmane fears are Christians coming from the west.

The very title of the play indicates a difference in conception. In the English play, it is the jealous Othello who has the preponderant role; in Zaire, it is the woman, the victim of his jealousy. If Voltaire has in this particular, suffered any influence, it is, I should say,

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1. Discours sur la tragédie, Œuvres, Vol. II.

that of Racine, in whose plays, as many of their titles indicate, the preponderant role lies with the woman.

Orosmane, true French courtier of the seventeenth century in spite of his oriental garb, presents little physical resemblance to the "sooty-bosom'd" Moor. Nor is the resemblance in character much more striking. Othello is instinctively open, worshipping, unsuspecting, "the nature whom Passion could not shake". Orosmane, generous, passionately loving, is royally exacting in his love:

Orosmane--

Je vous aime, Zaire, et j'attends de votre  
 âme  
 Un amour qui réponde à ma brûlante flamme.  
 Je l'avouerai, mon cœur ne veut rien  
 qu'ardemment;  
 Je me croirais haï d'être aimé faiblement (1).

Othello's jealousy is a gradually increasing flame, kindled and fed from without; Orosmane has in his own heart the germs of the jealousy that is to destroy his happiness. The two following passages indicate sufficiently this difference in character between the French and the English hero:

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1. Voltaire: Zaire, Acte I, Scène II.

Othello--

Honest Iago,  
My Desdemona must I leave to thee;  
I pray thee let thy wife attend on her  
And bring them after in the best advantage(1).

Orosmane--

Ne croyez pas mon plus que mon honneur  
confie  
La vertu d'une épouse à ces monstres d'Asie,  
Du sérail des soudans gardes injurieux(2).

It is Orosmane who first confides his suspicion to Corasmin. Othello has his first doubt suggested to him by Iago.

Orosmane is above all, a lover; Othello is first of all, a soldier:

Othello--

Come Desdemona, I have but an hour  
Of love, of worldly matter, and direction  
To spend with thee. We must obey the time(3).

Orosmane--

Je vais donner une heure aux soins de mon  
empire,  
Et le reste du jour sera tout à Zaïre(4).

Between the character of Zaïre and that of Desdemona, there is all the difference that exists between the women of Shakespeare and the

1. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene III.
2. Voltaire: Zaïre, Acte I, Scène II.
3. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene III.
4. Voltaire: Zaïre, Acte I, Scène V.

women of Racine. Desdemona, winning, gracious, charmingly girlish, exists by reason of her relation to Othello. Zaïre, like Andromaque and Phèdre, stands alone. Both Zaïre and Desdemona are passive victims, Zaïre because she chooses to be, Desdemona because she can not help herself. In the case of Zaïre it is the familiar motif so dear to classic tragedy, the eternal struggle between love and duty.

Desdemona is too little in accord with the spirit that condemned the Cléante of Molière for his lack of filial respect, to serve as a model for a heroine of French tragedy. Zaïre, slave at the court of Orosmane, suggests rather Andromaque at the court of Pyrrhus than the English heroine. In her readiness to sacrifice her own happiness to the filial obedience she owes her father, she suggests, perhaps, Chimène, but certainly not Desdemona.

The character of Iago, properly speaking, does not appear in Zaïre, for we can not regard Corasmin as being in any sense the counterpart of Iago. Iago's is a character that seems in general not to appeal to French readers. De Broglie recounts that in 1830 when De Vignys' *More de Venise* was



presented for the first time at the Théâtre Français, the only role that failed to meet with applause was that of Iago. This part, he declares, would have failed utterly had it not been for the excellent acting of M.---. "Selon nous", he continues, "ce rôle a déplu parce qu'il n'est pas bon; parce qu'il est non pas inconséquent, mais incohérent"(1). The wickedness of Iago, according to De Broglie, is diabolical beyond the point of reason or logic; the end in view does not warrant the heinousness of his design. Moreover, it is illogical that a person so fiendish in character should at the same time be a brave soldier and command respect. Iago's critics are, I think, a little of the opinion of Master Rymer who finds the character of Iago unbecoming a soldier and a gentleman and who devoutly "hopes he is not brought on the stage in a Red Coat"(2).

On the whole, so far as Shakespeare is concerned, it may safely be said that Voltaire owes to him only those elements to which he has accorded praise, "le mérite de l'action et quelques belles scènes".

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1. Revue française, Janvier, 1830.  
2. Rymer: Short View of Tragedy.

II. The "Othello" of La Place.

## II. The "Othello" of La Place.

It was several years after the publication of *Zaïre* that another work appeared, to satisfy the growing anglomania that had been taking possession of French readers. This work, entitled *Le Théâtre Anglois*, was published in London anonymously in 1745, but the author was currently known among men of letters to be Pierre Antoine de la Place, later editor of *Le Mercure*. Of the eight volumes that compose the work, four are devoted to the plays of Shakespeare. In his translation, the author has been guided largely by Pope's edition of Shakespeare to which he makes frequent allusion.

The work of La Place, noteworthy because it is the first attempt(1) to reproduce Shakespeare for French readers, is in itself of little value. It is a mere travesty of the tragedy of Shakespeare, full of inaccuracies, and conveying absolutely no

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1. Before the appearance of La Place's translation, Voltaire had translated a few brief passages of *Othello* in his *Lettre sur la Tragédie*--the same passages that he afterwards put to such effective use in his *Lettre à L'Académie*. He had made, however, no such serious effort as La Place made, to reproduce all of *Othello* for French readers.

idea of the original. The preface to his work, however, shows that although La Place may have failed in his interpretation of Shakespeare, he was, nevertheless, an independent and original thinker and a critic of no mean ability.

He was, moreover, fully alive to the genius of the English dramatist. La Place is among the first of his countrymen to assert that Shakespeare should not be judged according to French standards of tragedy and that he is none the less a genius for not having been cast in a classic mould(1). "Gardons-nous bien", he concludes with a note of true prophecy, "de condamner sans retour aujourd'hui ce que nos neveux applaudiront peut-être un jour"(2).

Nevertheless, in his interpretation of Othello, La Place, far from presenting the work as it exists in English, has eliminated from it every element not in conformity with the traditions of the French theatre. Unconsciously, and in spite of his own better judgment, he tries after all to make Othello as far as possible, a hero of French tragedy.

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1. Préface, page 71.

2. Préface to Le Théâtre Anglois, Vol. I.

La Place has not attempted to give a complete translation of any of the plays of Shakespeare. He has chosen only those passages that to his mind best illustrate the beauties of the English author and that have a direct bearing upon the action. The remainder of the play he gives in outline. It is interesting to note in this connection, that of the forty scenes given in synopsis, thirty are scenes in which Iago figures(1). Certain other scenes he has omitted, notably the one between *Ænilia* and *Desdemona* beginning with the lines, "My mother had a maide called *Barbarie*,"(2) because "de telles scènes ne seroient susceptibles d'aucunes grâces, dans une traduction, et surtout dans une traduction française".

To La Place's mind, Shakespeare's gravest fault lies in the fact that he has introduced into his plays circumstances that revolt by their cruelty, that much of the dialogue has no bearing upon the plot development, that his characters often speak a language "peu digne du cothurne".

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1. La Place, and all of his successors in this century, in their translations have observed the French method of dividing the act into scenes. The forty scenes referred to are, of course, scenes that have been thus divided.

2. Compare note, Acte IV.

Almost all the scenes that he omits in his adaptation are scenes that fail in one or another of these particulars. The first act of the play is the only one in which no such scenes are given in outline. In this instance, La Place has contented himself merely with shortening the long speeches, Brabantio's accusation of Othello, for example, being condensed from the twenty lines it occupies in the original to eight lines.

It will be impossible in this brief paper to indicate all the divergences of text that occur in La Place's version, as there is practically but one line in the whole play that is a literal reproduction of the corresponding line in Shakespeare.

"My heart is turned to stone."(1)

"Mon cœur est changé en pierre".(2)

I have endeavoured, therefore, to choose a certain number of passages that will give an idea of the essential differences between the two plays.

The Othello of Shakespeare and the Othello

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1. Shakespeare: Othello, Act IV, Scene I.
  2. La Place: Acte IV, Scène VII.

of La Place have little in common. "The Moore is of a free, and open nature"(1), says the Iago of Shakespeare. Says the Iago of LaPlace, "Le More est soupçonneux; je le rendrai facilement jaloux"(2).

Quite unlike that Othello whose plea was:

"Rude am I, in my speech,  
And little blessed with the soft  
phrase of Peace,"(1)

the Othello of La Place concludes his speech with all the fluency and grace of a courtier of Louis XIV: "Mais en me trouvant si particulièrement honoré par cette preuve de votre confiance, oserai-je vous représenter que je laisse ici une épouse chérie, et qu'elle n'y peut rester qu'avec un établissement et des prérogatives dignes du poste que son époux occupe, et conformes à sa naissance?"(3)

No allusion is made to the physical appearance of the man. The reluctance to translate "Thicks-Lips", or to make Othello appear in any way physically repulsive, is characteristic of all the translators during this century. This altogether natural reluctance, loses a

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1. Shakespeare: Othello, Act **II**, Scene III.
  2. La Place: Othello, Acte IV, Scène III.
  3. La Place: Othello, Acte I, Scène XII.

part of its significance in the light of the interpretation of the characters by actors of to-day. For in this particular we have come to be of the French way of thinking; Garrick with his black countenance and gaudy turban(1) would hardly correspond to the modern idea of Othello.

La Place has likewise failed to reproduce for French readers the character of Iago, as it exists in the original. One of the traits of the Iago of Shakespeare is that he frequently gives only vague hints in words, as to what are his real motives of action. In such cases La Place usually tries to put into concrete form the thought that is merely hinted at by Iago, as for instance, in Iago's long speech beginning:

Were I the Moore, I should not be Iago.  
In following him I follow but myself, etc.  
I am not what I am(2).

This speech, La Place has condensed into four lines:

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1. John Galt: Lives of the Players, Vol. I, p. 268.
  2. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene I.



Dieu seul connoît les cœurs: mais mon extérieur n'est jamais composé que pour la fin à laquelle je tends. Tâchez donc de me mieux connaître(1).

Another instance occurs in the same scene:

Iago--

Call vp her father, ...  
Rowse him, make after him, poyson his delight,  
.....  
And though he in a fertile clymate dwell,  
Plague him with flies: though that his Ioy  
be Ioy  
Yet throw such chances of vexation on't  
As it may loose some colour(2).

Iago--

Je ne vois, qu'un moyen pour l'empêcher  
d'enlever Desdemona. Avertissez le Père:  
qu'il frémissé d'un pareil complot. Répandez  
en partout le bruit... C'est l'unique  
secret de faire manquer l'enlèvement projeté  
par le More.

Here again La Place has sought to give more concrete form to Iago's thought, but in this case he has perverted the sense of the passage.

Shakespeare's Iago is animated only by the hope of throwing such chance vexation as may be, upon the happiness of Othello. At the time the play opens, it is already too late to prevent the marriage.

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1. La Place: Othello, Acte I, Scene I.  
2. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene I.

The character of Desdemona is a very languid one. She appears upon the stage less often than the Desdemona of Shakespeare, and when she does appear, her words are not remarkable. The following is an illustration of the general tone in which the whole part is conceived:

Desdemona--

And I a heauie interim shall support  
By his deere absence. Let me go with him(1).

Desdemona--

Ma plus chère espérance est trahie; et je  
ne répons pas de survivre à la douleur de  
son absence(2).

La Place has succeeded in imparting a faint Racinian flavour to the character of Brabantio's wrath by a plentiful sprinkling of "perfides" and "infâmes" with which he has replaced the epithets, occasionally more vigorous than poetic, of Shakespeare's Brabantio:

Brabantio--

Downe with him, theefe!(3)

Brabantio--

Qu'il périsse l'infâme!(4)

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1. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene III.
  2. La Place: Othello, Acte I, Scène XII.
  3. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene II.
  4. La Place: Othello, Acte I, Scène VII.

Brabantio--

Oh thou foule Theefe,  
Where hast thou stow'd my daughter?(1)

Brabantio--

Ah, scélérat, qu'as-tu fait de ma fille?(2)

Brabantio--

For if such actions may have passage free  
Bond-slaves and Pagans shall our statesmen  
be(3).

Brabantio--

Si de tels attentats restoient sans  
châtiments les scélérats et les vagabonds  
de cette espèce seroient bientôt à la  
tête de la République(4).

In this last instance, La Place seems to have failed to observe that Shakespeare has made use of terms that apply peculiarly to Othello. La Place has replaced them by the more general terms, "scélérats" and "vagabonds", and the lines, forthwith, lose a part of their significance.

In the version of La Place, moreover, but passing allusion is made to the element of magic which forms practically the basis of the accusation of Shakespeare's Brabantio. Le Tourneur is the only one of the eighteenth century translators of Shakespeare who has given

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1. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene II.
  2. La Place: Othello, Acte I, Scène VII.
  3. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene II.
  4. La Place: Othello, Acte I, Scène VII.

to the element of magic the force it has in the original.

Brabantio--

She is abus'd, stolne from me, and corrupted  
By Spels, and Medicines bought of Mountebanks(1).

Brabantio--

On me l'a ravie elle est déshonorée;  
elle est perdüe; L'enfer s'en est mêlé sans doute(2).

The Egyptian of Shakespeare is a charmer that "could almost read the thoughts of people". In La Place she is "une fameuse Egyptienne".

Beginning with Act II, Othello has been very extensively abridged in the version of La Place. Many incidents are omitted altogether. Here, even more than in the opening act, the lines have been purged rigorously of all their picturesque word-imagery and of every allusion that might in any sense be deemed homely. In this last particular, La Place has fairly enlisted under the standards of those seventeenth century frequenters of salons who could not forgive Molière's Agnès her "tarte à la crème". A few instances will suffice to show what transformations the language of Shakes-

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1. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene III.  
2. La Place: Othello, Acte I, Scène XI.

peare suffered at the hands of La Place:

Othello--

Thou hast set me on the Racke(1).

Othello--

C'est toi dont la noire fureur  
Prépara le poison qui dévore mon cœur(2).

Othello--

How shall I murther him, Iago?(3).

Othello--

Quel supplice assez affreux pour me venger  
de ce perfide?(4)

Othello--

I would haue him nine yeeres a-killing(5).

Othello--

Que n'ai-je mille morts à lui faire  
souffrir?(6)

Quite as often, however, La Place has replaced the figures of Shakespeare by prosaic paraphrases in which all the grace and poetry of the original is lost. As an instance of this, the following passages may be cited:

Iago--

And I...

...must be be-lead and calm'd  
By Debitor, and Creditor. This Counter-caster  
He (in good time) shall his Lieutenant be,  
And I (blesse the marke) his Mooreship's  
Auntient(7).

- 
1. Shakespeare: Othello, Act III, Scene III.
  2. La Place: Othello, Acte III, Scène XIV.
  3. Shakespeare: Othello, Act IV, Scene I.
  4. La Place: Othello, Acte IV, Scène VII.
  5. Shakespeare: Othello, Act IV, Scene I.
  6. La Place: Othello, Acte IV, Scène VII.
  7. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene I.

Iago--

J'ai vu Cassio, cet indigne compétiteur  
devenir le lieutenant d'Othello et il ne  
m'est resté d'autre titre que celui de pre-  
mier domestique de sa noire seigneurie(1)

"A round unvarnish'd tale"

becomes for La Place

"un discours naturel et destitué de tous  
frivoles ornemens de l'art".

Cassio--

'Tis our great Captain's Captaine!(2).

Cassio--

C'est l'épouse du général(3).

Cassio--

Tempests themselves, high Seas, and howl-  
ing windes,  
The gutter'd Rockes and Congregated Sands,  
Traitors entsteep'd to enclogge the guilt-  
lesse Keele,  
As hauing sence of Beautie, do omit  
Their mortall Natures, letting go safely by  
The Diuine Desdemona(4).

Cassio--

Mais Desdemona étoit digne d'être respectée  
par la tempête même(5).

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1. La Place: Othello, Acte I, Scène I.
  2. Shakespeare: Othello, Act II, Scene I.
  3. La Place: Othello, Acte II, Scène IV.
  4. Shakespeare: Othello, Act II, Scene I.
  5. La Place: Othello, Acte II, Scène IV.

The manner in which the picturesque exclamations and oaths in Shakespeare have been softened in the translation of La Place is also interesting. We know from La Bruyère that with the young courtiers of Louis XIV it was a passing mode "d'appuyer tout ce que l'on dit... par de longs et de fastidieux serments", (1) but this mode never found its way into classic tragedy. The Iago of La Place does not hear "Cassio high in oath"; "J'entens la voix de Cassio exprimer des sentimens de fureur". "Amen to that (sweet Powers)", cries Othello heartily to the prettily expressed wish of Desdemona; "Que les Dieux vous entendent!" exclaims the Othello of La Place. Iago's oath,

Witnesse you euer--burning Lights above,  
You Elements that clip vs round about (2),

is too fantastic to appeal to La Place. He replaces it by "Et moi, je jure, O Ciel!"

The frequent allusions that Shakespeare makes to animals seem almost always to prove stumbling blocks to the eighteenth century translators. La Place, as a rule, makes no attempt to translate such expressions literally--

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1. La Bruyère: De la Société et de la Conversation.

2. Shakespeare: Othello, Act III, Scene III.

Othello--

Oh, she will sing the Sauvagenesse out of  
a beare(1).

Othello--

Le seul son de sa voix, auroit adouci les  
monstres les plus féroces(2).

It is interesting to note that by none of the translators of Shakespeare during the eighteenth century has this verse been translated literally. Le Tourneur the most nearly approaches a literal translation in his line: Oh les accents de sa voix charmeroient la férocité d'un tigre. The allusions to flies(3), blind puppies(4), falcons(5), dog(6), aspicks' tongue(7), crocodiles, are translated neither by La Place nor Le Tourneur, who substitute some animal more worthy to figure in classic tragedy, or replace the whole figure by a paraphrase. Ducis, Douin, Butini have suppressed the allusions altogether.

La Place dismisses the drinking scene with the words: "Ce spectacle a pu plaire jadis à la populace Angloise, que Shakespeare a toujours eu la complaisance d'égayer dans ses pièces, même les

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1. Shakespeare: Othello, Act IV, Scene I.
  2. La Place: Othello, Acte IV, Scène VII.
  3. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene I.
  4. " " Act I, Scene III.
  5. " " Act III, Scene III.
  6. " " Act III, Scene III.
  7. " " Act III, Scene III.



plus sérieuses. Mais comme je suis persuadé que de pareilles licences, surtout dans une Tragédie, ne sont plus du goût des Anglois modernes, je me garderai bien de les offrir aujourd'hui dans une Traduction aux yeux délicats de nos Français."

The "handkerchief spotted with strawberries" La Place has translated by "un mouchoir richement brodé de fleurs". La Place and Le Tourneur are among the few translators of their century who were bold enough to employ the word at all. In *Zaire*, the handkerchief is "un billet"; in the adaptation of Ducis, "un bandeau de diamants"; in that of Douin, "un bracelet". In the edition of La Place now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, it is amusing to note that some reader of long ago has blotted out the word, "mouchoir" and in bold, indignant hand has inserted in its stead, "voile!"

In Acte V, all that passes between Othello and Desdemona is written in verse. As a consequence, these scenes are even more of a paraphrase than the preceding ones. Throughout the whole play La Place has adopted the method of translating the blank verse of Shakespeare into rhymed alexandrines. The effect given to the dialogue by this incongruous mixture, Brabantio addressing the duke in prose and being replied to in pompous

alexandrines, is hardly a happy one, and we are, on the whole, not sorry to find that in this particular, La Place has been imitated by none of his successors.

Notwithstanding its incompleteness and its very slight literary merit, this translation of Othello-- if one may call translation, so free an adaptation-- met with such success that La Place was induced to increase to four, the two volumes he had originally intended to devote to Shakespeare. Together with the work of Le Tourneur, Le Théâtre Anglois remains the only attempt to follow with any exactness the actual text of Shakespeare. The works of La Place's successors, Douin, Butini, and Ducis, are nothing more than free adaptations in which no attempt has been made to follow Shakespeare except in the general plot development.

III. "Le More de Venise" of Douin.

### III. "Le More de Venise" of Douin.

La Place intended his translation merely to be read, not to be presented upon the stage. In 1773, however, M. Douin, capitaine d'artillerie, an admirer of Shakespeare who had passed several years of his life in England, wrote a More de Venise intended to be produced upon the stage(1). Although characterized as a translation, Le More de Venise of M. Douin contains not one word of the Othello of Shakespeare. Had we not the good captain's word for it, we should be strongly inclined to think that he knew Shakespeare's Othello only through hearsay.

M. Douin, like his predecessors who had interpreted Shakespeare, found it necessary to prepare his readers in a Discours Préliminaire for the character of the play they were to enjoy. "C'est le chef d'œuvre du grand Shakespéar", he writes, "et il ne lui manque dans l'original Anglois, pour être aussi régulière qu'aucune des Tragédies grecques et Françoises que l'unité de lieu et celle de temps... J'ai tâché", he adds, "de ramener le More de Venise dans les bornes les plus exactes de ces

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1. Introduction to Le More de Venise.

deux unités". Moreover, M. Douin, like La Place, finds that the Othello of Shakespeare contains many scenes that have no direct bearing upon the action; that very often, "le plus bas comique se trouve place auprès du tragique le plus touchant... J'ai aussi remédié autant qu'il m'a été possible à ce défaut"(1).

Friends of his, "imitiés aux mystères de Melpomène", having made certain criticisms of his play, Douin devotes no less than twelve pages of his preface to a refutation of their various objections, none of them, needless to say, profound. The element of magic occupies too prominent a part, declare these modern Aristarques; Iago is too wicked; Othello is too black. However, if one may judge from the blackness of the magisterial looking being, pictured on the frontispiece in turban and long cloak, dagger in hand, bending over a sleeping Desdemona in court gown of the Louis XIV period, M. Douin, capitaine d'artillerie, has fairly maintained his ground against his critics in this, as in other particulars.

Douin does not, of course, introduce the hand-

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1. Introduction, p. 6.

kerchief spotted with strawberries. "J'ai pensé que ce tableau étoit peu propre à paraître sur notre théâtre. J'ai donc changé le mouchoir en bracelet".

As may readily be imagined, the play after undergoing such a series of transformations, presents little likeness to the Othello of Shakespeare. Brabantio and the Doge of Venice do not appear in the play at all, the whole scene beginning with the arrival of Othello and Desdemona in the island of Cyprus. On the other hand, Douin has introduced a sort of half-accomplice to Iago, in the character of Fabricé, a sergeant in the army, dependent on Iago for promotion. Being thus shared by another, the wickedness of Iago seems less black.

Othello is like the Othello of Shakespeare only in profession. One can easily see the military training of the capitaine d'artillerie cropping forth now and again in the martial commands that Othello is much given to issuing:

Othello--

Good Michael, looke you to the guard to-  
night,  
Let's teach ourselves that Honourable stop

Not to out-sport discretion(1).

Othello--

Observons cependant que les Forts, la  
Marine,  
Ne négligent en rien leur sage discipline.  
Établissez la garde aux Portes, au Palais,  
Aux Forts, à l'arsenal, et ne souffrez  
jamais  
Qu'un œil trop curieux observe nos  
ouvrages(2).

Again on being roused by the noise of the  
brawl between Cassio and Montano, Othello  
hurries onto the stage and gives orders as if  
for a siege:

Que l'on double la Garde, et qu'il  
sorte du Fort  
Chaque heure une Patrouille avec un  
Capitaine:  
Qu'on roule deux canons dans la place  
prochaine(3).

Douin, unlike Butini and Ducis, does not  
do away altogether with the drinking scene. He  
adopts a subterfuge to which he triumphantly  
calls attention in his preface. Speaking of  
Cassio, Iago says:

Si je puis l'engager ce soir à se prêter  
A mon dessein; un vin que j'ai fait  
apprêter  
Doit dès le second verre, achever mon  
ouvrage.  
Il sera furieux(4).

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1. Shakespeare: Othello, Act II, Scene II.
  2. Douin: Le More de Venise, Acte I, Scène VI.
  3. " " " " " Acte II, Scène VI.
  4. " " " " " Acte II, Scène I.

It is, therefore, a specially prepared beverage that is destined for Cassio, and by reason of this fact "on peut dire, que Cassio est empoisonné, mais non pas pris de vin. Il est vrai qu'il croit lui-même avoir été coupable de l'intempérance, mais le spectateur sait à quoi s'en tenir". "Je dois avouer", adds the captain naïvely, "que j'ai été obligé de changer considérablement Shakespéar"(1).

Iago invites Cassio to sup with him, and Cassio accepts in words that certainly were never inspired by Shakespeare:

La fatigue du jour et la stricte diète  
 Que Neptune en courroux à tout mortel prescrit  
 Qui sur son élément monte sans être inscrit  
 Ont laissé mes esprits abattus(2).

Soon after follows the scene of the quarrel.

"A Knaue teach me my dutie?" cries the genuinely drunk Cassio of Shakespeare. "I'le beate the Knaue into a Twiggen-Bottle". The "poisoned" Cassio of Douin is more Racinian in his wrath:

Non c'est en vain qu'ici l'on s'oppose à  
 ma rage!  
 Périsset mille fois l'insolent qui m'outrage!

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1. Introduction, p. 16.

2. Douin: Le More de Venise, Acte II, Scène II.



M'apprendre mon devoir! Lui! Par les étendards  
 Que moissonna ma main aux nobles champs de  
 Mars,  
 Ou j'en aurai vengeance, ou j'y perdrai la  
 vie(1).

After the scene of the drinking, Cassio apostrophizes wine in a long discourse beginning "O vin! liqueur traîtresse, Dangereuse Circé..." Needless to say the lines bear no resemblance to those of the Cassio of Shakespeare, "hurt past all surgery".

Douin has utterly failed to catch the spirit that breathes through the pages of the English play. His one idea seems to have been to smooth away all the rough vigour of Shakespeare's lines. Where Shakespeare is pithy, Douin is tiresomely long; where Shakespeare introduces a lengthy comparison, Douin cuts him short. The following is a good instance of his hopeless inability to reproduce the spirit of the lines:

I will aske him for my Place again,  
 He shall tell me, I am a drunkard:  
 Had I as many mouths as Hydra,  
 Such an answer would stop them all(2).

Cassio--

Ah! sa réponse est faite; il ne sçait pas  
 farder.  
 Quoi! le vin te commande, et tu veux commander!  
 Vil déserteur de Mars, va chez les Sybarites,

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1. Douin: Le More de Venise, Acte II, Scène IV.  
 2. Shakespeare: Othello, Act II, Scene II.

Commander à leurs festins et présider à  
leurs fêtes(1).

Desdemona does not appear in the play of Douin until the third act. Unlike most French heroines, her rôle in the play is a minor one. Douin has evidently been too greatly occupied with his hero to pay much attention to Desdemona. Desdemona in her love for Othello, is even more frank than the Desdemona of Shakespeare.

Je crois, me disoit-elle un jour,  
Que pour me savoir plaire  
Mercutio devoit faire sa seule affaire  
D'apprendre d'Othello tous ces récits touchans  
Qui font couler mes pleurs et captivent mes  
sens!(2)

The song that Desdemona sings in Shakespeare's play is omitted in the version of Douin. The Desdemona of Douin does, however, have the same presentiments that come into the mind of the English heroine, and she is interrupted in her musings just as the Desdemona of Shakespeare is interrupted in her song. "Nay, that's not next", says Shakespeare's Desdemona and then adds fearfully, "Hark, who is't that knocks?" "'Tis the wind", replies Æmilia, soothingly. "Mais quelqu'un vient, va voir qui c'est!" says the

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1. Douin: Le More de Venise, Acte II, Scène VII.  
2. Douin: Le More de Venise, Acte I, Scène I.

French heroine to her confidante. "Non, c'est le vent!" replies Emilia and adds with a matter-of-factness that should have proved convincing, "Cette exposition est au nord, et souvent j'entends le même bruit".

One cannot but feel, too, that Douin has rather overstepped the bounds, when he causes Othello to turn calmly from the wife he has just murdered, to apologize to the maid who has been kept waiting:

...C'est être trop distrait,  
 J'avais oublié qu'Émilie attendoit,  
 Mais que la liberté dont avec vous j'en use  
 Me serve, je vous prie, en ce moment d'excuse(1).

Douin has steadfastly refused throughout the play to introduce any of the many allusions to animals to be found in Shakespeare. He has apparently been reserving them for Émilie's speech when she discovers the death of her mistress:

Au secours! Un lion, un tigre, un monstre,  
 un ours,  
 Le More a massacré Desdémone, au secours!(2)

In the final scene, Douin's hero proves himself more dangerous in his despair than Shakespeare's Othello. At sight of Cassio, Othello

1. Douin: Le More de Venise, Acte IV, Scène VIII.

2. Douin: Le More de Venise, Acte V, Scène V.

draws his sword and is with difficulty prevented from killing him. A moment later, when Iago is dragged in, securely bound, Othello rushes upon him and wounds him seriously before Iago's guards can interfere. This somewhat unsoldierly attack on a defenseless, even though wicked, enemy does not prevent Othello's replying modestly to Montano's question:

Et vous, brave Othello, trop malheureux  
guerrier,  
De quel nom aujourd'hui dois-je vous  
appeler?

Nomme-moi, si tu veux, assassin  
honorables  
Mon cœur fut pur, Montane, et mon bras  
seul coupable.

Douin closed his preface by assuring all friends of Shakespeare, "que si cette pièce est du goût de mes compatriotes, je pourrai bien me déterminer à employer mon loisir à leur donner successivement tout le théâtre de Shakespéar, en ne me réservant d'autre liberté que celle d'épurer les pièces de leurs superfluités, et de les restreindre dans les règles des trois unités". Douin seems not to have received the encouragement he had hoped for. At any rate, Othello continues to remain the only attempt ever made by him to translate Shakespeare.

IV. Le Tourneur's Translation of "Othello".

## IV. Le Tourneur's Translation of "Othello".

The year 1776, however, marks a new epoch for Shakespeare in France. Echoes of the great jubilee held in his honour, in 1769, had come across the channel. In the salons to which he was invited on the occasion of his visit to Paris in 1751, and again in 1765, Garrick repeated scenes from Shakespeare that in no way resembled the colourless adaptations of La Place, nor yet the fragmentary and more or less inexact translations of Voltaire. The same "Anglo-maniacs" who had clamoured for translations of Richardson, Smollett, and Fielding, began with equal insistence to clamour for more complete translations of the works of the dramatist who for two hundred years, had held so sure a place in England. In answer to this growing desire to know the real Shakespeare, there appeared in 1776 the first complete and authentic translation of the works of Shakespeare, the most important of any of the many translations during the eighteenth century. The success of the work was immediate. The first volume had been published with a list of several hundred sub-

scribers, a list that was increased with the appearance of each succeeding volume.

This translation, generally known as that of Le Tourneur, is in reality, the work of two other men, as well, le Comte de Catuélán and Fontaine-Malherbe. Le Tourneur, however, was the most active of the three collaborators, and it is with justice that the credit of the work is largely ascribed to him(1).

The translation of Le Tourneur is based upon a careful study of all the English editions of Shakespeare that had been published in England up to 1776. It is a conscientious and praiseworthy attempt to place the real Shakespeare before French eyes.

Judged by present standards, Le Tourneur's translation of Othello is imperfect. In spite of its undoubted merit, it reflects but feebly

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1. Pierre Le Tourneur, a monograph by Gertrude Cushing, published in the Columbia Series, N. Y., a work which I have been unable to secure for this study, may contain indications as to just what part of the translation is the work of the collaborators of Le Tourneur. I have made no attempt to determine the question as I have been unable to secure sufficient data upon which to form a judgment.

the English Shakespeare. Le Tourneur did not fail in the way that his predecessors had failed; he makes no attempt to reduce Othello to purely classic mould nor does he have recourse to dramatic subterfuges more in harmony with the conventions of the French theatre. Le Tourneur fails in the actual technique of translation. He was confronted with the always difficult problem of rendering into French the English idiom. His chief defect lies in the fact that he was often content to suppress whatever was not capable of literal translation. It seems not to have occurred to him to seek a picturesque expression in French to translate the picturesque expression in English. When the literal translation was impossible, as often it is, Le Tourneur considered apparently that a prosaic paraphrase was the only substitute. Examples of such paraphrases are the following:

Iago--

    And I.....  
    ...Must be be-lead and calm'd  
    By debtor and creditor(1).

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1. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene I.



Iago--

Je me vois rebuté et payé de vaines  
paroles:  
Je sais que je vous dois; prenez patience;  
Je m'acquitterai un jour; et il faut que  
je me taise(1).

Iago--

... You shall marke  
Many a dutious and knee-crooking Knaue;  
.... Others there are,  
Who trym'd in Formes and visages of Dutie  
Keepe yet their hearts attending on  
themselves(2).

Iago--

Vous trouverez nombre d'esclaves  
officieux et rampants... Il en est d'autres  
qui portant sur le front le marque et  
les signes d'un profond dévouement  
tiennent au fond leur affection tournée  
sur eux-mêmes(3).

Iago--

For when my outward action doth demon-  
strate  
The natiue act, and figure of my heart  
In Complement externe, 'tis not long after  
But I will weare my heart upon my sleeve  
For Dawes to pecke at; I am not what I  
am(4).

Iago--

Quand mon extérieur<sup>fera</sup> voir le fond de  
mon âme, attendez-vous à me voir aussi me  
porter mon cœur nud sur ma main pour l'of-  
frir en proie aux<sup>yeux</sup> des méchants et des  
sots (5).

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1. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte I, Scène I.
  2. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene I.
  3. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte I, Scène I.
  4. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene I.
  5. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte I, Scène I.

Iago--

So will I turn her vertue into pitch;  
And out of her owne goodnesse make the net,  
That shall en-mesh them all(1).

Iago--

Ainsi je prétens que sa vertu soit l'in-  
strument de sa ruine(2).

Iago--

As where's that palace whereinto foul  
things intrude not?(3)

Iago--

Et quel est ce cerveau où il ne soit pas  
entré quelquefois des coupables impressions?(4)

Iago--

But euery Punie whipster gets my Sword(5).

Iago--

Le premier apprentif dans l'école des  
armes m'enlève mon épée(6).

Not always, however, does the French trans-  
lator render by an indifferent and more or less in-  
exact paraphrase the lines of Shakespeare. Le  
Tourneur was not lacking in poetic instinct. Very  
often he has felt the beauty of the figure or of  
the picture in the original, and has sought to

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1. Shakespeare: Othello, Act II, Scene II.
  2. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte II, Scène XV.
  3. Shakespeare: Othello, Act III, Scene III.
  4. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte III, Scène VI.
  5. Shakespeare: Othello, Act V, Scene II.
  6. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte V, Scène IX.

give it expression in French. He has hesitated, however, to risk the daring comparisons of the English poet, and as a rule, the passage loses colour in his hands:

Iago--

Your heart is burst, you haue lost halfe  
your soule(1).

Iago--

Le poignard est sur votre cœur(2).

Othello--

Were it my Cue to fight, I should haue  
knowne it  
Without a Prompter(3).

Othello--

Si mon devoir étoit de combattre je l'au-  
rois su connaître sans avoir besoin qu'on  
m'en fasse la leçon(4).

Iago--

With Cables of perdurable toughnesse(5).

Iago--

Par des chaînes indissolubles(6).

Montano--

Me thinks the wind hath spoke aloud at  
Land(7).

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1. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene I.
  2. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte I, Scène II.
  3. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene II.
  4. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte I, Scène VI.
  5. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene III.
  6. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte I, Scène IX.
  7. Shakespeare: Othello, Act II, Scene I.

Montano--

Il me semble que la voix des vents a  
horriblement retenti sur terre(1)

Othello--

Though that her lasses were my deare heart-  
strings  
I'll whistle her off, and let her downe the  
winde,  
To prey at Fortune(2)

Othello--

Quand les tresses de sa chevelure tien-  
droient aux fibres de mon cœur je la re-  
pousserois loin de moi, et l'abandonnerois  
sans retour à la merci du sort(3).

Othello--

Then Murther's out of tune,  
And sweet Reuenge growes harsh(4).

Othello--

La mort s'est donc trompée! Et la ven-  
geance, si douce à mon cœur se change en  
poison amer(5).

Occasionally, too, Le Tourneur has replaced  
the voluntary simplicity of Shakespeare's lines  
by a phraseology somewhat more pretentious which  
destroys the vigour and force of the verses. The  
following examples will illustrate:

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1. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte II, Scène XI.
  2. Shakespeare: Othello, Act III, Scene III.
  3. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte III, Scène VI.
  4. Shakespeare: Othello, Act V, Scene II.
  5. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte V, Scène VII.

Desdemona--

And I a heauie interim shall support  
By his deere absence(1).

Desdemona--

Il me faudra supporter dans une pénible  
solitude tout le temps de sa cruelle ab-  
sence(2).

Iago--

Thus do I euer make my foole my purse(3).

Iago--

Va, pars, emplis ta bourse-c'est ainsi,  
que je sais trouver la mienne dans la dupe  
qui m'écoute(4).

Iago--

Oh you are well tun'd now. But Ile set  
downe the peggs that make this Musicke as  
honest as I am(5).

Iago--

Ho, vous voilà montés à l'unisson mais je  
veux mêler dans cette harmonie un accord  
qui soit du ton de mon âme honnête(6).

Othello--

No, my heart is turn'd to stone:  
I strike it, and it hurts my hand(7).

1. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene III.
2. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte I, Scène IX.
3. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene III.
4. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte I, Scène XI.
5. Shakespeare: Othello, Act II, Scene I.
6. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte II, Scène VI.
7. Shakespeare: Othello, Act IV, Scene I.

Othello--

Oui; mon cœur est changé en marbre, je sens sa dureté; il repousse ma main(1).

Le Tourneur has, perhaps unconsciously, given a different atmosphere to the play of Shakespeare by the use of words that ennoble certain homely elements in the English play. "Three great ones of the city", for instance, becomes in the language of Le Tourneur, "trois nobles de cet état"; "to speak too loud" is to "prendre un ton de dédain"; "poor trash" is translated by "mauvais émissaire"; "excellent creature" by "intéressante orpheline, naïve enfant"; "flies" by "insectes dévorans"; "wild cats in your kitchen", "tigres pour vos suivans"; "crocodile", "serpent". The "weed" to which Desdemona is compared becomes a "rose empoisonnée". "Worthy Othello" becomes "noble Othello"; the "generous islanders", "nobles insulaires".

Neither is Le Tourneur's translation free from inaccuracies of text, a fact which is due partly to his own ill-comprehension of the English lines, partly to his having followed the indication of certain commentators of Shakespeare, whose judgments have been proved false in the light of

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1. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte IV, Scène V.

present day criticism. These inaccuracies have been so frequently pointed out, that any fresh enumeration of them would seem unnecessary. I shall call attention to but two, which may have been the result of carelessness, or may even have been intentional.

Othello--

By heaven, he echoes me as if there were some Monster in his thought too hideous to be shewne!(1)

Othello--

Par le ciel, pourquoi te fais-tu l'écho de mes paroles comme si ta pensée recéloit quelque monstre trop hideux pour que tu m'oses montrer?(2)

The force of the lines is weakened by having the verb put in the form of direct address, for the speech is really a half-aside of Othello's. It is the awakening of his first suspicion-- he has not yet reached the point where he is willing to let this hideous thought be shared by a third person.

Othello--

Oh, the world hath not a sweeter Creature(3).

Othello--

Oh l'univers n'avoit pas une plus douce créature(4).

1. Shakespeare: Othello, Act III, Scene III.
2. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte III, Scène V.
3. Shakespeare: Othello, Act IV, Scene I.
4. Le Tourneur: Othello, Acte IV, Scène V.

The use of the present tense in these lines is altogether significant, as being an indication of the depth of Othello's affection for Desdemona. In spite of the fact that he believes her to be guilty, he is not able to harden himself against the charm of her loveliness.

Le Tourneur does not attempt to lighten the colour of the Moor. He does, however, seek to render more probable the fact that Desdemona, a Venitian, could fall in love with a Moor. The "maid called Barbarie" is described by Letourneur as being a "Moresse, une pauvre Moresse". In his notes to his translation of Othello(1) he suggests that the very fact that Desdemona had been accustomed since childhood to the sight of a dark-skinned Moorish girl, made the blackness of Othello less repulsive to her(2).

La Place's version was the only one of the eighteenth century interpretations not designed to be presented on the stage. For this reason, his play has certain advantages over those of Douin, Butini, and Ducis whose obvious efforts to bring

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1. Le Tourneur: Note to Acte I, Scène VIII.

2. Rymer, in his Short View of Tragedy, ironically suggested a similar expedient, but hardly, I imagine, with the thought of its being followed.



the English play within the conventions of French tragedy resulted in a painful stiltedness and artificiality of expression. Le Tourneur's Othello, on the other hand, although written to be presented on the stage, is comparatively free from the woodenness of the plays just cited, because Le Tourneur, like La Place, paid small heed to French conventions of tragedy, feeling that his chief care should be a faithful and accurate translation of the text before him.

In spite of the defects of his work, Le Tourneur will always hold a deserved place in the history of French literature. His courage in presenting to French readers the genius in whom he believed, and in persisting manfully in his work of translation in the face of all the criticism it did not fail to arouse, is worthy of admiration, the more so as Le Tourneur was writing for a day and age "accoutumée à tourner en ridicule tout ce qui n'est pas d'usage(1)."

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1. I have not attempted to carry further the parallel study of Le Tourneur and Shakespeare for fear of encroaching upon a ground that has already several times been made the subject of study. For a detailed analysis of the differences of text cf. Beljame--Wm. Shakespeare--Texte critique, Paris, 1897.

V. Voltaire's Attitude toward Shakespeare.

## V. Voltaire's Attitude toward Shakespeare.

Le Tourneur won many friends for Shakespeare by thus putting him in touch with readers who heretofore had known him only through travesties. And yet the appearance of Le Tourneur's translation was, also, the signal for the outbreak of a violent storm of criticism, criticism largely inspired by Voltaire.

The history of this picturesque literary quarrel is too well known to need restating here(1). Whether Voltaire was moved merely by a feeling of wounded vanity, as some of his detractors have declared, or whether he was actuated by a more generous motive is a question that the individual reader can best decide for himself. In justice to Voltaire, it can not be denied that he had never, even in the moments of his warmest enthusiasm, shown himself an unqualified admirer of Shakespeare; it is at best, a tempered sort of praise that he has meted out to the author of Hamlet and Othello. Therefore, it is but reasonable to believe that in

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1. For a careful account see Thomas Lounsbury: Shakespeare and Voltaire; also, Jusserand: Shakespeare en France sous l'ancien Régime.

this amusingly undignified controversy "Saint-Denis Voltaire" was, to a very considerable extent, contending in all sincerity, as he himself said, for the glory of Racine and Corneille, and for the future of the French theatre. But in the face of his own private correspondence during this time, neither, I fear, can it be denied that he was contending also, to a certain extent, for the glory of Voltaire. Moreover, throughout the whole controversy it must be confessed that the despised "écuyer de Gilles" maintained his ground with a dignity that somewhat puts to shame his brilliant and more practised adversary.

In connection with this picturesque quarrel, it is interesting to observe the influence that has been exerted upon Voltaire by one of Shakespeare's own countrymen, "le savant Rymer", a carper and a writer of diatribe not unlike Voltaire himself. The resemblance between Voltaire's and Rymer's criticism of Shakespeare is a curious and interesting one. From the number of expressions that Voltaire seems to have borrowed from Rymer, from the number of parallel passages that are to be found in the two works, even to the citing of the story of Gorboduc, one can not doubt but that here too, Voltaire has been content to "reprendre

son bien où il l'a trouvé".

In spite, however, of Voltaire's long war of diatribe, he did not succeed in driving out the invader from Outre-Manehe. If his polemics had an effect, it was to make Shakespeare even more widely known. French readers, whose interest had heretofore not been aroused, began to desire a closer acquaintance with the dramas which gave rise to such bitter criticism on the one hand and to such warm eulogies on the other. In the end it was Gilles--Shakespeare who won the day.

But notwithstanding the undoubted success of Le Tourneur's translation, his work figured in salons and in libraries but was never presented upon the stage(1). Even had we not his own word for it, we should have known from the minuteness of the stage directions, that Le Tourneur wrote his translations in the hope of seeing them played in French theatres. The time had not yet come, however, when a Paris audience could enjoy a play so far removed from the traditional conceptions of tragedy. Le Tourneur never lived to see full honour accorded the author to whose success in France he had so largely contributed.

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1. Jusserand: Shakespeare en France.

VI. The "Othello" of Butini.

## VI. The "Othello" of Butini.

Among Shakespeare's admirers, however, there were a persistent few whose ambition it was to see Shakespeare's plays acted upon the French stage, and who accordingly set about adapting them to the exigencies of the French drama. During the remainder of the eighteenth century there are two such adaptations of Othello.

The first was written in the year 1785 by a Swiss, M. Butini, ancien Procureur Général de Genève. M. Butini had once been a barrister and there still exist in the Bibliothèque Nationale, one or two legal treatises from his pen, together with a *Traité sur le luxe*. However brilliant M. Butini may have been at the bar, he is hardly a more successful <sup>in his</sup> interpretation of Shakespeare than Douin.

"Je m'arrêterai peu sur quelques changemens indispensables dans la Pièce de Shakespeare", remarks Butini in his preface. "On sent assez qu'il fallait ôter à Othello sa figure basanée, adoucir le dénouement, élaguer quelques scènes, simplifier la marche, réduire le sujet aux trois unités. Rien

n'est plus aisé que de retrancher ces défauts graves, trop communs sur la Scène Angloise".

One cannot but observe that Butini has been unable to preserve the beauty of the English text, however successful he may have been in correcting its defects. His lines in no way suggest Shakespeare, but they are strongly reminiscent of La Place and Douin.

Having to observe the unity of time and place, Butini, like his predecessors is forced to abridge very largely the scenes from Shakespeare. Brabantio the Doge of Venice, and the Senators do not appear upon the scene. The whole action of the play takes place in Cyprus "au péristyle du palais du Gouverneur". The role of confidant occupies, of course, an important place. Desdemona is made to tell the tale of her own wooing; and as a result, all the artlessness of the star-eyed Desdemona of Shakespeare, listening breathless to Othello's tale, is lost for us.

Butini, like La Place and Douin, omits all elements of the supernatural, all allusions not in accord with the conventions of the drama. In the dénouement, Desdemona is killed on the stage, but not by being smothered. "Othello la frappe"(1).

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1. Butini: Othello, Acte V, Scène VIII.



Othello's final speech, among the best, perhaps, in the play, gives a sufficient idea of the vein in which the whole is conceived.

Othello--

Peignez, peignez ma honte, et mes sombres  
regrets,  
Et mes remords affreux, égaux à mes forfaits.  
Qu'ils sachent qu'un guerrier nourri dans les  
alarmes,  
À vos yeux étonnés a répandu des larmes;  
Et porte-leur enfin mon poignard tout sang-  
lant  
Teint du sang de ma femme et lavé dans mon  
sang.

(Il se frappe.)

Cassio--

Il expire, il n'est plus, l'infortuné  
succombe.  
Oublions son forfait, et pleurons sur sa  
tombe(2).

The play seems never to have been presented on the stage, nor can I find any mention made of it in contemporary criticism of the day. It is to be feared that even during its own age it was allowed to fall into the dusty oblivion in which it lies to-day.

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2. Butini: Othello, Acte V, Scène XII.

VII. The "Othello" of Ducis.

## VII. The "Othello" of Ducis.

The last attempt made during the eighteenth century to present Shakespeare to French theatre-goers was that of Ducis whose Othello appeared in 1792. With Ducis, who knew Shakespeare only through the translations of Le Tourneur(1), it becomes almost a cult to reduce the vast genius of the English poet to more classic form. Ducis refuses political honors, refuses the post of Conservateur de la Bibliothèque Nationale. "S'il m'est donné d'être un peu utile à mon pays, ce ne peut être qu'en mettant en action sur la scène quelques-unes de ces grandes vérités morales qui peuvent rendre les hommes meilleurs, vérités que la réflexion saisit bien dans un livre mais que le théâtre rend vivantes en parlant à l'âme et aux yeux. Pardonnez--moi donc, citoyen ministre, de refuser une place qui m'ôterait le seul moyen que Dieu m'ait donné pour servir mes semblables"(2).

Before condemning too harshly the colourless

1. Lettres de Ducis, ed. by P. Albert.  
Lettre à David Garrick, Page 8.

2. P. Albert: Lettres à M. Paré, 17 Octobre, 1793.

adaptations of Shakespeare that Ducis has given us, we should take into consideration the fact that if his plays had presented any greater likeness to the original, they would probably never have been allowed to appear in a Paris theatre. It was in reacting against the elements in Shakespeare that were at war with the traditions of the French drama, that Ducis produced that pale line of travestied heroes and heroines bearing the stamp neither of his own personality nor of that of Shakespeare.

Othello was the last of Shakespeare's plays adapted by Ducis, and is perhaps, the least happy of his many <sup>unhappy</sup> adaptations. In this, as in all of his adaptations, Ducis has changed the names of the characters. Desdemona becomes Hédelmone; Iago, Pézare; Brabantio, Odalbert; Emilia, Hermance; Cassio, Lorédan(1). The names chosen by Ducis are less harsh than those in Othello, and they have the double advantage of being more easily rhymed.

The changes in name, however, are perhaps the least of the metamorphoses to which the characters

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1. De la Fosse, it will be remembered, observed the same license in his tragedy of Manlius based on Otway's Venice Preserved. De la Fosse was apparently of the same mind as Voltaire who declared in his Discours sur la tragédie that the names of Otway's characters would have been in themselves, enough to damn the play in the eyes of French critics.

in this tragedy are subjected. Ducis feels that he has not only to guard against all infringements of the rules of classic tragedy, but also to guard against the individual prejudices of his audience. Small wonder, if, in his efforts to satisfy all these varying standards of judgment, he has failed to reproduce that poet whose smallest care was the individual prejudices of his audience.

Ducis, like his predecessors, found that it was necessary to give to the Moor a less sombre complexion. "J'ai pensé que le teint jaune et cuivré, pouvant d'ailleurs convenir aussi à un Africain, auroit l'avantage de ne point révolter l'œil du public et surtout celui des femmes"(1) Consequently the Othello of Ducis becomes little more than a sun-burned Pyrrhus, but a Pyrrhus drawn by the hand of an imitator, and like many imitations, falling far short of the master copy.

The Othello of Ducis, like Orosmane, is a lover par excellence.

Othello--

Le ciel me fit, hélas! en me donnant le  
jour

Un coeur pour mon malheur, trop sensible à  
l'amour(1).

This same Othello declares later:

On m'appelle le More, et j'en fais vanité:  
Ce nom ira peut-être à la postérité.  
Mais l'amour m'apprit trop à dédaigner la  
gloire(1).

Such a speech is little in accord with the character of the Othello of Shakespeare.

Othello--

And heauen defend your good soules, that  
you think,  
I will your serious and great businesse scant  
When she is with me. No, when light-wing'd  
Toyes  
Of feather'd Cupid seele with wanton dulnesse  
My speculatiue and offic'd Instrument  
That my Disports corrupt, and taint my  
businesse,  
Let House-wiues make a Skillet of my Helme(2).

Othello in his first speech to Odalbert shows the filial reverence that was lacking in Molière's Cléante.

Othello--

That I haue tane away this old man's  
Daughter  
It is most true; true I haue married her;  
The verie head and front of my offending,  
Hath this extent; no more(3).

Othello--

Odalbert, je me tais; je ne puis vous  
répondre  
Vous avez trop acquis le droit de me confondre(4).

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1. Ducis: Othello, Acte I, Scène V.
  2. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene III.
  3. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene III.
  4. Ducis: Othello, Acte I, Scène V.

The character of Hédelmone reflects but feebly that of Desdemona. Hédelmone has not the sure position of wifhood to give her courage to meet her father's anger. There is a marked difference in the bearing of the two when summoned before the Duke.

Brabantio--

... Come hither, gentle Mistris  
Do you perceiue in all this Noble Companie  
Where most you owe obedience?

Desdemona--

My Noble Father,  
I do perceiue heere a diuided dutie,  
To you I am bound for life, and education:  
etc.(1).

Hédelmone (à Hermance)--

Arrête... où suis-je?  
.....  
Mes yeux sont obscurcis, mon corps est abattu,  
.....  
Soutiens-moi, chère Hermance.

Odalbert--

C'est donc là votre époux?

Hédelmone--

Que répondre? O, mon père!  
Je sais que ce guerrier confondu devant vous,  
N'a point dû se flatter de se voir mon époux.  
Etc. (2).

Hédelmone is the heroine of classic tragedy, destined to be unhappy, torn between her anxiety

1. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene III.
2. Ducis: Othello, Acte I, Scène VI.

for her father, and her love for Othello. The forebodings that sadden Desdemona in the fourth act are present with Hédelmone throughout the play. The source of Hédelmone's unhappiness, however, is in her own feeling of guilt for the wrong ~~she~~ she has done her father.

Hédelmone, like Zaïre, bears the preponderant role in the French play. It is her own acts, her own decisions that bring about the denouement. In the Othello of Ducis, the whole weight of the accusation turns upon Hédelmone's fidelity; in the play of Shakespeare, it turns rather upon the question of Cassio's honesty.

Far from occupying the rôle of that Brabantio who opposed his daughter's marriage as long as he still had hopes of saving her from it and who then, unable to remedy matters, died from grief, Odalbert, implacable in his anger, is a necessary instrument in the dénouement. It is he who is indirectly the cause of his daughter's death.

"Looke to her (Moore) if thou hast eies to see:  
She ha's deceiu'd her Father, and may thee", (1)

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1. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene III.



cries Brabantio. His words convey with them a sort of presentiment of all that is to occur later, a warning given ironically, but full of boding significance. Odalbert's parting words produce an entirely different impression. He expresses the same thought, but with an added element. In the case of Odalbert, it is the classic appeal to the gods, the incensed father calling down their wrath upon the child who has sinned against him.

Odalbert--

Tu m'as trompé, perfide. O ciel, dans ta  
vengeance,  
Fais qu'il soit à son tour trompé par  
l'apparence!

.....  
Tes mains ont attaché le malheur sur son  
front.

Crois-moi, veille sur elle: une épouse si  
chère

Peut tromper son époux, ayant trompé son  
père.

Retiens ces mots; adieu.(1)

Perhaps, however, the most strangely metamorphosed of all the characters is that of Pezare. "Je suis bien persuadé", writes Ducis, "que si les Anglois peuvent observer tranquillement les manœuvres d'un tel monstre sur la scène, les Français ne pourraient jamais un moment y souffrir sa présence. Aussi est-ce avec une intention très

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1. Ducis: Othello, Acte I, Scène VI.

déterminée que j'ai caché soigneusement à mes spectateurs ce caractère atroce, pour ne pas les révolter"(1). Pézare, consequently, occupies the rôle of friendly confidant of Othello, up to within the last forty lines of the play when, with a suddenness which must have astonished the spectators not a little, he develops into a consummate villain. Moncénigo--

Othello, votre ami,  
L'exécrable Pézare était votre ennemi.  
Brûlant pour Hédelmone, il déguisait sa  
flamme,  
Cachait les noirs projets concentrés dans  
son âme. Etc.(2).

Ducis has observed Voltaire's injunction not to introduce too many characters upon the stage. The senators, sailors, soldiers who interpolate remarks in Shakespeare's play have no part in the dialogue in Ducis's version.

The element of magic enters but slightly into the *play* of Ducis. Says the Brabantio of Shakespeare:

Judge me the world, if 'tis not grosse in  
sense,  
That thou hast practis'd on her with foule  
Charmes(3).

1. Introduction, page 167.

2. Ducis: Othello, Acte V, Scène VI.

3. Shakespeare: Othello, Act I, Scene II.

The Othello of Ducis says:

Toi, malheureux! réponds. Par quel art,  
 quel secours,  
 As-tu forcé ma fille à souffrir tes amours?(1)

The "magic handkerchief" does not appear in the French play. It is a "bandeau de diamants" that proves the undoing of Hédelmone.

In his adaptation, Ducis does not try to reproduce the striking figures and word-pictures of Shakespeare. For all embellishment of verse, he confines himself to the well-worn metaphors of classic drama: "flamme", "hymen", "feux", "foudre", "état funeste" and others. He eliminates from Shakespeare's text all crudities of expression, but he eliminates, likewise, the elements that constitute the real beauty of the verse.

Obviously the development of the plot could not be the same in the two plays, because of the changes necessitated in the version of Ducis by his observance of the unities, and his suppression of all incidents "d'un bas comique". Thus the play presents little resemblance to the Othello of Shakespeare.

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1. Ducis: Othello, Acte I, Scène V.

But even with all these changes, Ducis found that he had still not made sufficient concessions to the conventions of French drama-- or rather, in this case, to the susceptibilities of his audience. It was not enough that the unwieldy pillow should become, in the play of Ducis, a swift-moving dagger. At the dreadful moment, French play-goers closed their eyes and shudderingly refused to look. Evidently, there was but one solution possible; there must be no tragic ending. Consequently, Ducis devised a "happy ending" for his play, to be adopted or not at the discretion of the directors of theatres. Moncénigo, Odalbert, Lorédan enter upon the stage just in time to prevent Othello sacrificing his wife to his blindly jealous rage. Odalbert is appeased; Hédelmone forgives; and in the general happiness, even Pézare is not forgotten. "Je suis trop heureux pour ne point pardonner", says Othello as the curtain falls.

With Ducis closes the list of adaptations of Othello during the eighteenth century. Shakespeare having for several years been the subject of violent controversy, seemed for the moment to be forgotten. His plays furnished for a time subject-matter only for opera and pantomime(1). Othello came to be cited with more and more frequency in dramatic criticism where one can not fail to observe that gradual change of attitude with regard to Shakespeare himself which Diderot has voiced in his well-known comparison. "Ce Shakespeare, je ne le comparerai ni à l'Apollon du Belvédère, ni au gladiateur, ni à l'Antinoüs, ni à l'Hercule de Glycon, mais bien au Saint-Christophe de Notre Dame, colosse informe, grossièrement sculpté; mais entre les jambes duquel nous passerions tous", declared he, and Shakespeare lovers applauded. Much the same comparison has been made by Pope some sixty years before, but at that time it stirred no ripple of admiring comment; the seventeenth century

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1. In Thimm's *Shakespeariana*, and again in Jusserand's *Shakespeare en France sous L'ancien Régime*, mention is made of *Le More de Venise, ou Othello, pantomime entremêlée de dialogues (et de danses) représentée sur le théâtre au cirque Olympique de Mm. Franconi, 1818.*

was not fond of "Gothic" cathedrals.

The present study of Shakespeare necessarily closes at a period when his position in the world of the drama was still undecided in France. France to-day, needless to add, accords him no uncertain rank. The same Paris that once proved so inhospitable to players from Outre-Manche who attempted to present Othello before French theatre-goers now has a "Compagnie française du théâtre Shakespeare" of its own which presents Shakespeare's plays in French to French audiences. "Ainsi présenté", declares le Figaro, in speaking of the play last given(1), "Shakespeare à Paris s'annonce comme un des gros événements de la saison théâtrale".

So long as Shakespeare failed to find an answering element in existing standards in French literature, just that long he failed to meet with appreciation. With the coming of those distant cousins of his, the Romanticists, having in themselves, the kindred spirit that creates understanding, the days of travesties were at an end-- "Attila-Shakespeare" had come into his own.

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1. Cymbeline, presented in April, 1910.

VIII. Conclusion.

## VIII. Conclusion.

Viewed from the standpoint of literary excellence, or judged in the light of later translations, these eighteenth century interpretations are, for the most part, faulty enough. In fact, only two, the *Zaïre*(1) of Voltaire and the *Othello*(2) of Le Tourneur can be said to possess any considerable literary merit; the remaining plays, while forming a not uninteresting addition to Shakespeariana, can, so far as their individual excellence is concerned, hardly be regarded as more than literary curiosities. Even as contributions to scholarship, they

1. Voltaire's *Zaïre* is too well known to students of literature to need extended comment here. For an excellent analysis of the play see Henri Lion: *Les tragédies et les théories dramatiques de Voltaire*.

2. *Othello* is one of the plays translated by Le Tourneur in collaboration with le Comte de Catuëlan and Fontaine-Malherbe. It is, therefore, perhaps less characteristic of Le Tourneur himself than some of the later plays. But even here one can not fail to observe the predominance of those qualities that set him apart from other translators of his day and that gave his work distinctiveness. It is interesting to note that the Le Tourneur edition of Shakespeare as revised and annotated by Guizot, is still widely used in France, notwithstanding the many other translations that have since been published. For a detailed treatment of Le Tourneur's work as a translator, together with a general appreciation of his worth as a man of letters, see the work of Gertrude Cushing referred to on page 41.



do not bear analysis, for the adaptation method of translation, so much affected by men of letters in the eighteenth century, falls short when judged by the more exacting standards of scholars to-day.

Obviously, however, the value of the last-mentioned plays does not lie in their individual excellence as literary types, but rather, in the fact that collectively, they mark a certain phase in the development of French drama and, therefore, have a deserved place in French literary history. One of their chief merits lies in the interesting side light they throw on literary ideals and literary tendencies of the eighteenth century. They appear at a transition period in the history of French drama, and this period they reflect, less ably perhaps, than the works of Voltaire and Le Tourneur, but still not unfaithfully. In the attempt to reduce Shakespeare to classic measure, these authors show, like the feeble school of imitators that succeeded Racine, and like Voltaire himself, the clinging to an ideal so well-defined and faultless, that whatever was out of keeping with it seemed, of necessity, crude and imperfect; in certain timid innovations, heralded by long, apologetic prefaces, they mark the gropings toward

a new ideal and the beginnings of a different conception of the drama. Indeed the fact that Shakespeare should be translated at all seems to point to that enlarging of standards that was later to lead the way to the development of modern drama.

Apart, too, from their literary significance, the plays are of broader value, as serving to bring into clearer relief those fundamental differences of literary conceptions and literary ideals between the French and the English that even to-day make the literature of the one land difficult of appreciation in the other. It was the weakness of these eighteenth century translators that they sought to harmonize the two ideals by stripping Shakespeare of those traits that mark him as pre-eminently English; just as, not so many years before, London playwrights had sought to make the plays of Corneille, Racine, and Molière acceptable to English theatre-goers by transforming the French heroes into roistering blades with a ready command of oaths, and by introducing songs and dances between the various scenes.

The expedient, as might have been foreseen, proved in neither case, a happy one, so far as the original plays are concerned. In this very ex-

pedient, however, lies the third, and perhaps the chief claim to merit of this repertory of travesties,- for the English heroes furbished up in French trappings and the French heroes who underwent similer metamorphoses at the hands of English "translators" are, after all, and in spite of the seeming paradox, among the early factors which helped later to develop what posterity has been pleased to call the cosmopolitan spirit in literature.

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