

THE TRANSLATION OF FOREIGN PLAYWRIGHTS AS A STEP TOWARDS MODERNITY IN 18TH CENTURY SPANISH DRAMA^{1 2}

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Abstract

After analysing the attempts at renewing Spanish drama in the 18th century, together with the numerous allusions to foreign drama in this period, attention is paid to the assimilation, by means of translation, of a number of French models (tragedies, comedies of manners, pieces of opéra-comique, etc.), which reached an uneven success, determined as it was by the influence of theatrical tradition. In spite of difficulties, these models contributed to a highly desired reform of drama by means of a transformation of both forms and topics, much in accordance with modernity.

Resumen

Tras analizar las alusiones al teatro extranjero en el siglo XVIII español, así como los distintos intentos de renovación del teatro español en la época, en los que la referencia al teatro extranjero fue una constante, el autor se detiene particularmente en la incorporación, mediante la traducción, de varios modelos franceses (tragedia, comedia moralizante o de costumbres, ópera cómica, etc.), que alcanzaron éxito desigual, condicionado en ocasiones por la fuerza de la tradición teatral. A pesar de las dificultades, contribuyeron a la tan deseada reforma del teatro, modulando un proceso de transformación de las formas y los temas, en la vía de la modernidad.

Keywords: Translation. Drama. Modernity. 18th century. Spain.

Palabras clave: Traducción. Teatro. Modernidad. Siglo XVIII. España.

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² This article is the English version of “La traducción de piezas extranjeras como vía hacia la modernidad en el teatro español del siglo XVIII” by Francisco Lafarga. It was not published on the print version of MonTI for reasons of space. The online version of MonTI does not suffer from these limitations, and this is our way of promoting plurilingualism.

Before addressing the role which translations and adaptations of foreign theater may have played in the modernization of 18th century Spanish theater,³ it would be good to raise the following question: of which theatre are we speaking: of the neoclassical theatre, or of the Enlightenment theatre, or simply of the 18th century theatre? If neoclassicism is limited to a particular aesthetic, defined by theoretic principles and norms, it is more than certain that the foreign theatre which was known in Spain exceeds this concept, because not all of it is strictly neoclassical. If by neoclassical theatre one understands that which deals with novel questions or presents “modern” human types, regardless of the aesthetic to which the works are attributed, this presence is manifestly broader. In fact, there seems to be some confusion or overlapping between the concept of “neoclassical” and that of the “Enlightenment,” which are at times used interchangeably. I believe that the former should be limited to aesthetics, based on the respect for the rules of Classicism, while the latter deals with ideologies, coupled with a more open positioning with reference to the new tendencies and a more critical attitude. Frequently, in 18th century Spanish theatre, both positions go hand in hand, and the better part of the approaches of the Enlightenment court appear in neoclassical, i.e. regular, works. But it is not always so, and the striking manifestation of this is found in the so-called romantic comedy, which, while incorporating “modern” elements in the line of Enlightened thought, displays at the same time undeniable links with the Spanish dramatic tradition, i.e., with the Baroque theater (cf. Lafarga 1991). On the other hand the Spanish romantic comedy has clear links with the dramatic formula known as “bourgeois drama,” which, if it was not born in, at least was defined by France. This fully Enlightened theater –in the context of France we may without reserve label it “philosophic”– appeared and was established as a trend which, although not purely anti-classical, was at least outside the (classical) French theatrical tradition.

Since there are not only links with foreign theatre in the context of regular Spanish theatre, but also in contexts manifestly “irregular,” such as the interlude, which was looked down upon by more classical minds, it is more than obvious that it is undesirable to use the term “neoclassical theatre” when dealing with the presence of French elements in the 18th century Spanish playwrights.

Foreign references in Spanish theatrical tradition

Even though literary critics of 18th century Spanish literature have long since banished the idea of an almost absolute dependance upon France, one must not go to the other extreme and accept the mirage of self-sufficient literature, closed to any contamination; more and more, literary history shows to what point contact with other literatures is vital for the development of a national literature.

One must recognize that in the second half of the 18th century, French literature, for diverse reasons, was a primary reference point for Spanish culture as well as for other cultures on the European continent. Above all, this was because of the prestige of the French language, which had, for political reasons, managed to expand its influence and, therefore, served as a vehicle for 18th century literature which was less brilliant than that of the period immediately before it but more varied and with an undeniable appeal, both from the point of view of its genres and forms as well as its contents. Nor is it wise to forget the presence of Italian literature, although in this

³ For some general considerations, cf. Lafarga (1996); in relation to French theatre, Lafarga (2003).

case, strongly focused on two authors of prime importance, Metastasio and Goldoni, representatives of two successful dramatic formulas, melodrama and *dramma giocoso*.⁴

In the case of theatre, it would also be wise to take into account the desire for renewal and reform among intellectuals and cultural authorities, which included the abandonment of some of the traditional dramatic structures which had been maintained in spite of their supposed decadence during the better part of the century, as well as the incorporation of new forms or visions as such. This does not imply, as one already knows, that classical theatre had been totally abandoned, and the billboards confirm the sustained presence, although waning in tendency, of baroque comedy on stage and in the public taste. But in the mind of many was the idea that without disowning tradition, the repertoire had to be renewed, appealing to new dramatic formulae which, at the same time, were presented as more suitable for the proposal of “modern” situations.

The change began to materialize by mid-century, in the context of the *Academia del Buen Gusto* and thanks to the efforts of one of its members, Agustín de Montiano, who in 1750 gave a first *Discurso sobre las tragedias españolas* accompanied by the tragedy *Virginia*. But neither this nor the one he published shortly there after, *Ataúlfo* (1753), were presented on stage. Therefore his essay was reduced to a double demonstration: on the one hand, the evidence that the tragedy was not something completely new in Spain, since tragedies had already appeared during the Renaissance and there was no need, therefore, to resort to foreign models; and on the other hand, the proof that Spaniards in the 18th century –or at least one of them– were capable of writing tragedies. In fact, it took some years for a Spanish tragedy to appear on stage and for it to be something more than a well-intentioned parlour trick.

Yet, the real launch of regular theatre would require institutional initiative and the will of the authorities who were bent upon theatrical reform (see Dowling 1995). In this regard, it is wise to remember the creation of a theatrical company to perform in the theatres of the Royal sites at the initiative of the Count of Aranda (see Rubio Jiménez 1998) and minister Grimaldi, taking as their starting point, the company formed in Seville at the request of Pablo de Olavide. What is of interest to the present study is not so much the creation and functioning of said company, managed first of all by the Frenchman Louis Reynaud and then, until its dissolution in 1777, by José Clavijo y Fajardo, but the necessity, which was felt from its beginning (in the spring of 1770), to provide it with a worthy, modern and regular repertoire. And, in the absence of Spanish works, they had to resort to translations of French pieces, some already translated and others which were entrusted to different authors. Even though the references which have survived through different sources do not coincide completely⁵, the list which can be compiled demonstrates a massive presence of extremely varied French pieces, ranging from tragedies by Racine and comedies by Molière to bourgeois dramas (by Beaumarchais) and tragedies by Voltaire.

The same reliance on translation appears years later in the framework of another reform project, based on the report by Santos Díez González, which resulted in, among other realities, the publication in 1800-1801 of a six volume collection called *Teatro Nuevo Español*: in spite of its title, 22 of the 28 pieces which it contained were translations (Lafarga 1993). Shortly thereafter, and using the previously mentioned project as support, the *Memorial literario* insists on the usefulness of translation for theatrical reform:

If the good Castilian poets and prose writers, who are not lacking, were to conspire together to transfer to our native tongue the good French tragedies and comedies, for the mediocre and much less the insignificant would never merit such honours as translation, the reform would be carried out by necessity, without effort or obstacles; for the thought that suddenly we might have Molières

⁴ For reasons of space, I have not included in this article the contributions to Spanish theatre in the 18th century by Italian theatre. Concerning Metastasio, see the studies of Garelli (1997) and Baldissera (2007), and concerning Goldoni, those of Calderone and Pagán (1997) and Pagán (2003).

⁵ A report of this repertoire is found in the study of Cotarelo concerning Iriarte (1897: 69), as well as in works, already considered classics in the field, by Cook (1959: 228-229) and McClelland (1998: I, 141-142); also in more recent times, see López de José (2006: 292-302). In some cases the translations have been lost; in others the name of the translator is unknown.

and Racines is nonsense. They were trained by translating, copying, or imitating our poets, and almost always the Greek and Latin poets, and we should do the same (II, 1802, 57).

However, this “conspiring together” could not occur spontaneously, but rather had to be the fruit of premeditated planning. The translations which were preformed and published under the auspices of the latter project do not seem to correspond to a premeditated plan for quality, but rather to fads which turned out to be fleeting. The majority of the plays, with the exception of those associated with great and prestigious names (Molière, Diderot, Schiller, as well as Destouches), belong to playwrights who reached only momentary fame: Marsollier, Lemercier, Monvel, Collin d’Harleville, Colman, Lewis, Kotzebue. The fact that very few names remained on the billboards for more than a few days, as well as the frequently negative criticism which they received from the press because of both the scarce interest in the pieces as well as the problematic translations, proves beyond doubt the improvisation and arbitrariness with which this project was built.

French-born theatre worked in Spain during the second half of the 18th century as a model worthy of imitation, and, independently of the concept of imitation which was held during the period, the reality of the publications and of the billboards shows that the first resource or the first step in this process of imitation lay in translation. But it also involved the real knowledge of the pieces and the resources used by the authors, the whole process of assimilation, and yet at the same time, rejection of this theatre. If we look at dramatic sub-genres, it is no wonder that the type of theatre which was most highly considered was that of the tragedy, both because of its elevated character as well as because it was the mode which was most frequently and best illustrated in the second half of the 17th century and throughout the first half of the 18th. The names of Racine, Corneille and Voltaire appear frequently in Spanish texts from the period when mentioning the masters of the genre, with their particular differences. It is not limited to common authors and translators; a writer with the stature of Jovellanos, in the prologue (1772) of his tragedy *La muerte de Munuza* or *El Pelayo*, expresses himself with simple obviousness:

I did not try to imitate either Greeks or the Romans in the formation of this tragedy. Our neighbours imitated them, copied them, took advantage of their light and arranged tragic drama to the taste and the costumes of our times; it was more natural that I should imitate our neighbours than the Greek poets. [...] If [Horace] were alive today and gave us rules, perhaps he would command us to read Racine and Voltaire. (Jovellanos 1984: I, 360)

However, it was not all praise when dealing with the “French” tragedy. Other texts from the period referred to the coldness of this genre of pieces, the monotony of the versification, the tyranny of the rules, the very decadence of the genre –especially towards the end of the century– which had fallen from the elevation and dignity of the productions of Racine and Corneille. On occasions this criticism is shown in satirical tone, as can be observed in the *Prólogo o introducción a la tragedia Combates de amor y ley*, which precedes the version with the title *Zaïre*, by Voltaire, published in 1765 (Cádiz, Manuel Espinosa; the quotations are from pages 13 and 17). In this prologue the *Gracioso*, the *Graciosa*, and the *Vejete*, characters from classical Spanish theatre, lament the fad of the tragedy, which has left them out of work. One of them thus describes the tragedy of Voltaire:

*Allí el Galán su cariño
le explica con puñaladas:
la Dama quiere, y no quiere,
y muere cuando la matan:
y me alegre, porque al fin
se ve morir en las tablas
de amor a una presumida.
Porque yo nunca pensaba
que esto se pudiera ver
ni aun fingido. También se halla*

*un Hermano a lo monsieur,
un Viejo, que una vez habla
y después se muere el pobre
de gusto: ¡qué buena danza!
Allí nunca se merienda
ni se come; pero andan
las escenas a montones,
y cinco son las jornadas,
las unidades son tres.*

There the gentleman his affection
explains with blows:
the lady loves and does not love,
and dies when they kill her:
and I am happy, because at the end
you see an arrogant woman
die of love on the stage.
Because I never thought
that this could be seen
or even feigned. You also find
a Brother to *monsieur*,
an Old man who speaks but once,
and after the poor man dies
happy: what a great dance!
There they never snack
nor eat; but the scenes
change frequently,
and five are the days,
the unities are three.

The three characters are about to kill themselves when the Lady of the tragedy appears, who tells them that they will not lose their jobs because of the new genre, since at the events, as well as the tragedy, they will continue to produce interludes, dances, and ditties, to which the *Gracioso* replies:

*Pues si es así luego al punto
lluevan tragedias de Francia:
que si las gracias no mueren
serán tragedias con gracia.*

Well, if this is so, then straightaway
let tragedies rain from France:
If humour does not die
then they will be humorous tragedies.

More than a few tragedies rained from France, but there were not enough of them for the genre to flourish in Spain. It happens that, beyond very restricted cultural circles, this genre never enjoyed sufficient popular support among the spectators.⁶ Although nobody questioned the quality of Racine or the force of some of the tragedies of Voltaire and the other writers of the 18th century, soon the mark of the classical tragedy became too narrow for even the restricted public to which it was addressed. It is true that when the attempts of Olavide, Aranda and others began to catch on and form a corpus of translated and original tragedies, the period of this genre had already passed, at least as far as its acceptance by the general public is concerned. Indeed, a new genre, drama or romantic comedy, would burst onto the scene of the Spanish theatre, pushing aside the tragedy. It is also true, as has already been stated, that the original Spanish

⁶ In this point, I follow the commentaries of Ríos (1997); also belonging to this work, of synthetic character are several ideas concerning the translation and reception of comedies and French dramas, expressed by Lafarga (1997b) and García Garrosa (1997), which I have taken advantage of for the corresponding genres. Cf. /Sala Valldaura (2005).

tragedy had already been separated from the classical model, and thus created for itself national, historical themes, establishing thus an affiliation with the more serious part of the theatre from the Spanish Golden Age.

When dealing with the situation of the comedies in the 18th century, one must almost inevitably compare it with the tragedy, not only because of the intrinsic differences between both, but also because of the different way each one works within the Spanish dramatic system. Diverse causes justify this comparison: the different historical trajectory of both sub-genres in the Spanish dramatic tradition, the different relationship which in a purely classical (or if one desires, neoclassical) context, they maintained with the principles and the rules of classical aesthetics.

When French comedies begin to be translated in Spain, i.e. midway through the century,⁷ this genre, in spite of being presented –or being seen– as a product of classical aesthetics, was not so new or different from the tragedy, which enjoyed so little tradition in Spain. The huge wealth of the comedy from the Spanish Golden Age which reigned during the better part of the 18th century, contributed to the arrival of the modern comedy and prepared the way for its favourable reception.

In another vein, the situation of the comedy in the context of classical French theatre was always secondary with respect to the noble genre, the tragedy. For this reason, the rules were applied to it much less stringently. This permissiveness did not hamper the appropriate esteem of the comedies composed –as they said during this period– “with all the rigour of the art,” not only from a strictly formal point of view, concerning the unities, as well as the content: theatrical decorum, authenticity, moral teaching, etc. Besides, the great internal diversity of the comical sub-genre and the innovations introduced in French theatre during the course of the 18th century represented a real deviation from the established norm and contributed to undermine the increasingly weakened edifice of classicalism.

However, not only did the French comedy spark interest in Spain, as is evidenced by the inclusion of some titles in the reform programmes, but also there were numerous French comedies translated in the second half of the century, and many of them exercised an exemplary role, coinciding with the strengthening of the “regular” comedy in Spain, starting with *La petimetra* (1762) by Nicolás Fernández de Moratín.

In the field of criticism, the appreciation for the French comedy seems to be primordially linked to the strong personality of Molière and the work of several of his immediate disciples. The praise of Molière which Juan Andrés gives in his literary history may be cited as a prime example. In it he describes the situation of the comedy in France in the 17th and 18th century. He presents him as the creator of the modern comedy and the renovator of theatre, situating him far above the Greek and Roman comics:

Then came Molière and, versed in the reading of not only the ancient and modern comics but also the other poets and best writers of antiquity, and gifted by nature of a singular talent to know the ridiculous side of men and how to present it with delicacy to the ears of his hearers, he silenced the taste of the comical theatre and made them feel the true pleasure of a good comedy. The strange accidents, the complicated plots, the crude taunts, and the vulgar shams gave way to natural and realistic situations, to ingenious dialogue, to well-expressed characters, to charming and delicate jabs, to pleasant lessons concerning morality and good taste, to the sweet and useful philosophy. (Andrés 1784-1806: IV, 178)

This does not hinder him from alluding to the decadency of French comedy throughout the 18th century, of which only two works are spared: *La métromanie* by Piron y *Le méchant* by Gresset. By the beginning of the 19th century, Manuel García de Villanueva, in tracing the scene of French theatre, insists on the limited interest of comedy in his neighbouring country, without even sparing Molière himself, whom he reproaches for a somewhat exaggerated treatment of his characters:

⁷ There exists, as far as I know, only one exception of a fragmentary adaptation of *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* by Molière, done in 1680 for the court in the Buen Retiro in Madrid: cf. Cotarelo (1899) and Serrano (1995).

Molière studied the ridicule of the city and even the court; thus, the marquis, the fops and, in a word, all the defects which he observed, offered him many other characters: he dealt with them with admirable grace and refined mockery; he used to overdecorate things because he believed that this exaggeration was necessary to put more force on the spectators, who were in the habit of viewing portraits even more overdecorated than his own. (García de Villanueva 1802; 186)

Around the same time, the editors of *Memorial literario* and of two other periodicals allude to the scarce interest in French comedy, normally due to the review or critique of some translation:

Those sublime geniuses of the 17th century no longer shine [in French theatre] nor even the excellent ones from the 18th century. [...] Comedy distances itself perhaps as much from that of Gresset, that of Pirón and that of Destouches, as the comedy of these distances itself from that of Molière. [...] The new comedy of Collin and of Picard have not gone beyond the class of mediocre, so that French theatre, once so rich and so excellent, today presents no more than a few composition which do not go beyond the class of pleasant toys. (II, 1802, 60-61)

Moreover, the “regular” comedy (of French origin) was involved in theatrical controversies concerning the validity and applicability of baroque theatre. Those who denied the bread and butter of the theatre from the Spanish Golden Age saw in foreign theatre a model worthy of emulation; on the other hand, its defenders insisted upon pointing out formal and ideological obstacles to “modern” theatre, subject to the rules and the conventions, which were not sufficient when wit was lacking. In this sense, one may again appeal to the editors of *Memorial literario*:

In all things, true reforms consists not in destroying but in rebuilding; not precisely in uprooting an abuse, but in preventing that another should happen to it, and make unknown beauty to be born while preserving those which before had existed. For, in the end, we had in our comedies generally good language, good and even excellent versification, sometimes elevated thoughts, ingenious ideas, interest, action, characters, and all the richness of drama, since they were flooded with the defects so universally known. All was ruined, and just by heeding the three unities, which are easy to meet when that is all you seek to do, we thought to have made a great reform; but it was necessary that this should happen to Lope, Calderón and Moreto, since there was no Molière or Racine, Regnard, Destouches and Rotrou. Lope and Calderón were the idols of a barbaric age, but they will also be read and studied in a cultured age; but who will read our flaming dramas? (II, 1802, 56)

If “regular” comedy suffered over time the loss of prestige which we have indicted, something similar happened to the third genre in contention, the drama or the romantic comedy (cf. Lafarga 1995). By its formal characteristics –authenticity, naturalness, seriousness– and by its contents –exaltation of the bourgeois spirit, the middle classes, work, family, sensibility–, drama presents itself as the most adequate formula to realize theatrical reform, combining the social preoccupations of the comedy of manners and the seriousness of the tragedy. Thus at first it appeared in Spain, even in its initial stages of development, under the label of *comédie larmoyante*. The same year, in his *Memorias literarias de París*, the writer commented on the type of theatre which harvested the greatest success during the time in which it remained in the capital of France:

Mr. de La Chaussée, of the French Academy, is the author of excellent comedies, to which he has given the epithet of *larmoyante*, because of the tender affections which the author elicits in them with great art. (Luzán 1751: 79-80)⁸

⁸ It is wise, nevertheless, to be aware of the differences between this type of theatre and drama per se, as Diderot would later define it; the *comédie larmoyante* never implied a rupture with the dramatic conventions in existence. Therefore, it is less surprising that it would occur to a classicist such as Luzán to translate La Chaussée, and in any case it seems that he was propelled more by moral than poetic motivations. What is more, he treated it as an isolated event, since he had to wait almost twenty years for another similar piece to appear in Spain. Concerning this, see Barbolani (1991) and Saura (2000).

It is known that Olavide at the circle of Seville in 1773 debated about the new genre and held a sort of competition among the fellow members, out of which came two of the outstanding Spanish works in the sphere of serious theatre: *El delincuente honrado* by Jovellanos, and *El precipitado* by Trigueros. Even when, according to the testimony of Ceán Bermúdez, “it was made public everything there was to say about the comedy in prose to the *armoyante* [sic] or tragic-comedy which was then in fashion in France,” the truth is that what was said would have to be of the *drame* in the manner of Diderot, of a dramatic conception distinct from the *comédie larmoyante* by La Chaussée. It was he alone who could inspire the Spanish works cited.⁹

Shortly before these experiences, various works of this type had been included in the repertoire of the company of the Royal sites; it seems that the first one which this company offered in the court, since they had already rehearsed it at Seville, was the *Eugenia* by Beaumarchais in the version of its first director, Louis Reynaud. And to this one, others must be added, among which is *El desertor* by Mercier, the distinguished author of dramas, in the version which Olavide may have made during the previously mentioned circle of Seville.

In any case, the theatrical activity by Olavide in Seville¹⁰ and the initiative from Madrid by Aranda and Grimaldi were decisive in making drama known in Spain. The French models read, analysed, translated and imitated made the birth of Spanish drama possible. From the middle of the decade of 1770 the translations of French drama were performed in public theatres: before 1780 at least eleven versions appeared on stage in Madrid, Barcelona and Seville. The “French” drama was no longer a matter of a circle of Enlightened men or a spectacle reserved for a minority.

But with the arrival of the genre to the greater public, a new stage in translations was initiated. There were no longer versions entrusted to Enlightenment authors (Olavide, Iriarte), nor works of “art and rehearsal” written under the auspices of the new poetic norms or imbibed with the “Enlightened” spirit. The versions which appear in the decades of 1780 and 1790 –as well as the original texts– answer to less elevated motivations and are carried out with great liberty in their execution, straying in part from the poetic side of the genre and introducing characters, situations and resources linked to traditional theatre. And yet they preserve something of the initial dignity and elevation of the preoccupation with social problems – inequality, injustice–, and the exaltation of “bourgeois” virtues.

The new genre, which was presented in Spanish theatrical circles as something imported, had its supporters and its opponents. Already at the beginning of the 1780’s some voices were heard in favour of the drama, like that of the Duke of Almodóvar in his *Década epistolar*, in which he expounds for several pages on the genre, mentioning numerous titles and authors, only to end up making considerations about its denomination and contents:

Since such new dramas could not be called tragic-comedies, and since it was necessary to give them the epithet, albeit somewhat strange, of *comedias lastimeras*, for our better understanding. Abandoning the question of their name, I will say to you, Sir, that in truth they are dramas which interest, full of noble sentiments and discrete thoughts well adjusted, an uneasiness and a pathetic sweetness which suspends and affects the soul. [...] In favour of their good qualities, teachings and merits (it is understood in the pieces of this class in which such circumstances concur), I pardon their defects and the part in which they are lacking legitimate statutes of good comedy concerning certain rules that are justly and constantly assumed. (Almodóvar 1781: 245-246)

Around the same time, reviews and commentaries about the dramas which were on stage or being published begin to appear in the press. These were sometimes critical and even satirical, initiating thus a controversy which would be prolonged until well into the 19th century. Juan

⁹ García Garrosa (1991) has in fact demonstrated a certain degree of relationship between *El precipitado* by Trigueros and the dramas of Diderot.

¹⁰ As F. Aguilar Piñal (1974 85) points out: “Based on the literary competitions of the Sevillian Alcázar the Spanish scene could boast about acceptable translations, arrangements and adaptations of the best that our European neighbours –Italy and France– could offer us.”

Andrés contributed to the debate with his pages dedicated to “serious dramas from the French;” although he did not like everything about the new genre, he in the end takes up its defence in the name of usefulness and moral teaching:

I do not see why one must spurn a theatrical composition which, under whatever name one would dare to give it, knows very well how to wound the heart with passionate affections and inspire a useful morality, and may perhaps even serve to accomplish the desired end of the theatre: to delight and instruct, which is what the heroic tragedy and the burlesque comedy do. (Andrés 1784-1806: IV, 356)

Besides being a conscientious professor and critic, Santos Díez González, grants favourable treatment to what he calls “urban tragedy” in his *Instituciones poéticas* (1793: 111-125), dedicating an entire chapter to it in which he includes, not only a definition of the genre, but also sections about the material, the form and the purpose of this type of theatre. And later, in the unsigned prologue of the collection of *Teatro Nuevo Español*, he justifies the inclusion of “those which modern people call serious or pathetic comedies, or urban tragedies; while this new dramatic class was not well received initially by many of those with a vote in dramatic poetry, it has nevertheless made such a place for itself in all of the prestigious theatres in Europe, that it would be rare for us not to include it in ours as well” (1800: I, xx-xxi).

While texts, such as those previously mentioned, which contained a serious treatment of the genre were published, this also became the subject of criticism and taunts. Thus, Mor de Fuentes, in the prologue to his comedy *La mujer varonil* (1800: 3), rails against what he considers to be “new vandalism” which once again engulfs [the art] in the barbaric state of its first origins and will cut it off from the path of agreeable regularity for a long time, not to mention the path of sublime perfection.” Shortly thereafter, he published the comedy *El gusto del día* (1802), in which its author, Andrés Miñano, with little grace ridiculed dramas and launched an attack in the prologue against the genre. The press also replied to Miñano: first in the *Memorial literario* (IV, 1803, 245-253) with a certain degree of modesty, proving that comedy without humour was just as much if not more valid than the other; then, with greater virulence, *El regañón general*, in a set of false letters in favour and against the genre. However, the feeling of the paper seems to be favourable towards the genre, concerning which it says:

I will not say that it is the best dramatic genre, that which moves us to tears and whose use has been introduced much, but we must not hold it to be bad. Tears which are born of gentleness and not of pain cause infinite pleasure in sensible men, and when in the comedies of this class the author knows how to move the heart, presenting us virtue with its beauty and guilt with all of its remorse, he shows us a singular work and a talent worthy of regard. (n. 29, 7 September, 1803, 227)

The controversy over the genre did not end there, but rather it was projected into the 19th century in line with the publication or performance of new sentimental comedies.

Translation, Translations, and Translators

The concept of translation in the 18th century, still closely linked to the opinion known as *belles infidèles*,¹¹ as well as the lack of intellectual property and copyright together with translation activity based on free dealings with texts, allowed for the names of the author and the titles of the original works to be hidden. Finally, the more favourable economic conditions granted to the original works in relation to the translations, as well as the discredit of the very work of translation, contributed to the fact that some translated works passed themselves off as originals. All of this makes it difficult to establish reliable repertoires of translations. It has been slowly and laboriously established, resorting on occasions to the comparison of texts or simply finding translations by chance.

¹¹ For an overview of the situation of translation in 18th century Spain, see Lafarga (2004) and García Garrosa and Lafarga (2004 and 2009).

In the field of theatre, because of the sheer volume of the texts produced during the century, as well as because of the peculiar conditions of the creation, dissemination and performance of the plays, this problem appears to be even greater. On occasions in what surprisingly appears in the titles of 18th century “translations,” the boarder between translation, version adaptation, arrangement, recasting, etc. is very subtle. It is naturally a matter of perspective or attitude in the treatment or manipulation of another person’s text, sometimes obstructed by the subsequent usage of the same. The words of Ramón de la Cruz which he replied to Napoli Signorelli about the borrowings which he had used are often quoted:

I have not “limited myself to translate,” and when I have translated, I have not limited myself “to various French farces and particularly to Molière, as *Jorge Dandín, El Matrimonio por fuerza, Pourceaugnac...*” I have taken the plots, scenes, and thoughts which I have pleased from other French and Italian poets, and I have adapted them to Spanish theatre as it seemed fit to me.¹²

This would be a bold declaration if it were not for inconvenient fact that Cruz almost never indicates the origin of his texts. Instead he introduces his pieces as originals –especially in the case of his interludes– even though they are not, at least as far as the arguments and the general scheme of the work is concerned. Fortunately, not all of the translators (or adapters, arrangers or refiners) of foreign pieces worked like Ramón de la Cruz, and while they do not always declare the original author, they frequently give a clue in the title by using expressions such as “translated from the French,” “arranged from French to Spanish,” “set in Spanish,” or “accommodated to our customs.” Overcoming these disadvantages, we have been able to put together a repertoire of theatrical translations in the 18th century (cf. listed by genres in Lafarga 1997a: 201-421) which may in no way be considered completely closed.

Since it would be impossible –and redundant, since it has already been done elsewhere– to bring together here even a superficial comparison of the authors and works of the French repertoire which was translated in the 18th century, in the following lines I will refer to the translation of the dramatic modalities which are most interesting dramatic, not only because of their own prestige but also because of the results they achieved.

First of all is the tragedy. Because of its prestige, the French tragedies of the 17th century are presented both in print and on stage, exactly the same as what happened in France. Corneille and Racine, whose rivalry on stage was taken advantage of by later critics to turn them into two opposing poles of tragic art, suffered an uneven fate in Spain. Corneille’s was decidedly less, although he surpassed his rival by a few years: indeed, his *Cinna* appeared in 1731, in the version of Francisco Pizarro, the Marquis of San Juan, although it bares the censure of 1713; an imitation of the same tragedy, titled *El Paulino* was produced years later (1740) by Tomás de Añorbe y Corregel, and pompously presented itself on the cover as “the new tragedy according to the French style, with all the rigour of the art.” By the beginning of the 19th century, the most often performed version of Corneille is *El Cid*, belonging to Tomás García Suelto (1803), who merited the enthusiastic praise of Quintana.

The tragedies of Racine enjoyed greater success (overview in Tolivar 2001), beginning with *Iphigénie*, which rather than being a translation, was adapted according to Baroque tastes by José de Cañizares around 1715 (*El sacrificio de Efigenia*), and performed from 1721 onward, although unpublished until the middle of the century. The prose version of *Britannicus* by Juan de Trigueros appears in 1752 under the pseudonym Saturio Iguen, a version which was later versified by Tomás Sebastián y Latre (1764). The brilliant translation of *Athalie* by Eugenio Llaguno appeared in 1754, together with a very interesting prologue. In the same decade a translation of *Andromaque* was undertaken, which was not published until 1789 by Margarita Hickey, and thus a very free version, with the subtitle *Al amor de madre no hay afecto que le iguale*, appeared first. Done by Pedro de Silva (who used the pseudonym *José Cumplido*), the

¹² He says this in the prologue to the edition of his *Teatro* (1786-1791: I, lvii). This text can now be read in the publication of *los Sainetes* by J. M. Sala Valldaura (Barcelona: Crítica, 1996, pp. 299-317).

play was performed on various occasions from 1764 onward.¹³ In 1768 another translation of *Iphigénie* was published, in this case with faithfulness to the text, owing to the Duque de Medina Sidonia (Alonso Pérez de Guzmán). The same tragedy was arranged by Cándido María Trigueros in 1788. At the end of the decade of 1760 or the beginnings of the next, there are several versions by P. de Olavide of *Mithridate* and of *Phèdre*, which were not published until much later. Several translations and adaptation of the Biblical tragedy *Esther* appear towards the end of the century and the beginning of the 19th: the one by Juan Clímaco Salazar (known as *Mardoqueo*), the one by P. José Petisco and, although anonymous, the ones attributed to Félix Enciso Castrillón and to Luciano Francisco Comella, as well as various other compositions (oratorios, melodramas) with arguments proceeding from the Racinian tragedies.

Despite the injunction that weighed on Voltaire's works –one must remember that besides a few individual condemnations, he was banned *in totum* by the Inquisition in 1762– his tragedies achieved extraordinary dissemination in Spain. Less frequently performed than those of Racine, the tragic theatre of the philosopher enjoyed various translations, the majority of which were published. It is also frequently true that the translators avoided mentioning the name of the original author; and on the other hand, the philosophic content of the pieces impelled some of the translators to introduce substantial modifications. The titles, as well, suffered notable changes, although one must not attribute such modifications necessarily to an attempt by the translator to throw the censors off but it seems rather that they were merely acting according to fashion. Thus *Alzire* becomes *El triunfo de la moral cristiana* in the version by Bernardo María de Calzada (1788) and *La Elmira* by Juan Pisón y Vargas (1788), while *Zaïre*, considered to be Voltaire's masterpiece, appears with titles such as *Combates de amor y ley* (1765) and *La fe triunfante del amor y cetro* (1784) –known in successive editions as *Xayra*– in the respective versions of a certain Juan Francisco del Postigo and Vicente García de la Huerta. There is, in fact, a first version of this same tragedy, by Margarita Hickey, before 1759 which remained unpublished, another translation by Fulgencio Labrancha (1768), and the one which premiered in 1771, attributed to Olavide. In his prologue, García de la Huerta hints that his text is a rewriting of this same translation, which he intends to situate at a higher level and offer “to the enthusiasts the just idea of a poetic translation.”¹⁴ Other tragedies by Voltaire were translated during the period, on occasions by well known people like Tomás de Iriarte or Olavide. The former produced a version of *Orphelin de la Chine* for the theatre of the Royal sites, although it was not published until 1787 in a collection of his works. It is, together with his version of *El filósofo casado* by Destouches, the only translation that he included among his works. On the other hand, Olavide, besides the version of *Zaïre* cited previously (*La Zayda*), performed and published on different occasions, produced two other Voltairean versions which were never published: *Casandro y Olimpia* (a version of *Olympie*) and *Merope*, although some critics have attributed this version to the Italian original by Scipione Maffei. In fact, the confusion between the two tragedies even appears on the cover of the manuscript of another version of the Voltairean tragedy, attributed to the poet José Antonio Porcel (*Merope castellana sobre la francesa de la italiana del marqués de Maffei*);¹⁵ allusion which is not repeated when the text is published in 1786: *Merope, Tragedia puesta en verso castellano*. Other famous translators of Voltaire in their period were Bernardo de Iriarte, Mariano Luis de Urquijo and Lorenzo María de Villarroel, the marquis of Palacios. The first, brother of Tomás, was commissioned in 1765 to translate *Tancredè* for a party hosted by the ambassador of France to celebrate the wedding of the Prince of Asturias, the future Carlos IV. This version, of which several editions were made, was one of the arguments that were employed against him by the Inquisition, as a result of an accusation of one of his brothers, a Dominican monk, and in spite of which he fared rather well. Another person who found himself involved in an inquisitional process was Urquijo, although not so much because of he had the audacity to include the name of Voltaire on the cover of a

¹³ Margarita Hickey apparently mocks Silva's baroque title on the cover of her edition and, in passing, the dominant mode towards mid-century, indicating that in his *Andrómaca*, “following the style of the country, he gave it the following title: *Ningún amor aventaja en nobles y heroicas almas al amor de gloria y fama*.”

¹⁴ The aforementioned translator of the *Combates de amor y ley*, presents the work on the cover as “a tragedy according to the most modern style of the best theatres of Europe.”

¹⁵ The title is, on the other hand, quite eloquent for what some understood as translation in the 18th century.

translation of *La muerte de César* (1791), but rather for a discourse which accompanied it “concerning the current state of our theatres and their need of reform,” which disturbed the comics and the impresarios. As for the Marquis of Palacios, he lists among his dramatic production a translation of *Semíramis* which was never published or even performed in all probability. Another version of the same tragedy, although it was reduced to only one act by the prolific playwright of the end of the century, Gaspar Zavala y Zamora, enjoyed a much better fate and was performed several times.

Apart from the three great ones, other French tragedies were known in Spain thanks to the translations, although the plays were not always performed and in some cases were not even published. One may remember Crébillon Sr., whose *Rhadamiste et Zénobie* was twice translated, once by Antero Benito and again by the already cited Zavala; and Gresset, whose *Eduardo III* Valladares de Sotomayor translated; and J.-F. de La Harpe, two tragedies of whose, *Les Barmécides* and *Le comte de Warwick* were performed in Spanish by José Viera y Clavijo; and Legouvé, the author of the frequently cited *Muerte de Abel*, which appeared in two versions (by Antonio de Saviñón and Magdalena Fernández Figuero); and Lemerrier, whose *Agamenón* Eugenio de Tapia translated; and the already named Lemierre, whose most famous work, besides the *Hipermenestra* translated by Olavide, *Veuve du Malabar*, which in the work of Zavala was titled *El imperio de las costumbres*; and Alexis Piron, who, besides *Gustavo* in the translation of M. Maestre, was known for his *Hernán Cortés*, in the version of the Duque of Medina Sidonia; and N. Pradon, rival of Racine, to whom we owe the original of *Bayaceto* by Ramón de la Cruz (*Tamerlan ou la mort de Bajazet*) and others.

When considering the presence of French comedies and playwrights in Spain, one notices first of all the permanence of Molière throughout the century, contrasted with the sporadic and sometimes unexpected appearances of other authors. This finding leads to another: namely, the difference between a comic playwright of the 17th century and the rest, who are from the 18th century, or to put it differently, between the presence of the great master –not without dispute– and of those who follow him, either near or far.

Molière was a French comic author translated early on into Spanish: as has already been indicated above, a palace function in 1680 included an interlude titled *El labrador gentilhombre*, an adaptation of various episodes from *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* and especially of the class of diction –enlarged in this version with a section in French– and the taunt which the protagonist endures in the celebrated Turkish ceremony. In fact, the first translation of his work in the 18th century did not appear until 1753: it is *El avariento* a work by Manuel de Iparraquirre, announced as “a famous comedy,” which included in its prologue furious praise of the “incomparable” Molière. Almost fifty years later, another version of the same comedy appeared, published in the *Teatro Nuevo Español* (1800), by Dámaso de Isusquiza, who carried out the challenging task of adapting the play in Spanish. One of the most notable translations, both for the quality of the translator and for the circumstances in which it appeared, was that of *Tartuffe*, done by Cándido María Trigueros titled *Juan de Buen Alma* (also known as *El gazmoño*). This version premiered in Seville in 1768 and then as well in Madrid; and although the translator included various modifications, they were not sufficient to hide the satire of the religious hypocrisy, which caused the comedy to be banned by the Inquisition in 1779. A translation of *Anfitrión*, which premiered in 1802, has been attributed to the censor Santos Díez González; and yet, the fact that the censure –not very favourable– was signed by the very same Díez should perhaps be sufficient to cast doubt on said authorship. In all, the most interesting translations belong to the beginnings of the 19th century: *El hipócrita* (*Tartuffe*) by Marchena is from 1810; his *Escuela de las mujeres*, as well as *El enfermo de aprensión* (*Le malade imaginaire*) translated by Alberto Lista, are from 1812; and the famous versions of Moratín *La escuela de los maridos* and *El médico a palos* *Le médecin malgré lui* are also from the years 1812-1814.

Although the theatre of Molière boasted of a healthy performance on stage and in Spanish publications, the same did not occur with the other authors, who not only in their period but also currently, are considered to be first class playwrights. The cases of Marivaux (cf. Bittoun-Debruyne 2001) and Beaumarchais (Contreras 1992) are, in this sense, typical. In fact, only two complete translations of Marivaudian texts were ever known in Spanish: *La escuela de las*

madres, programmed by the company of the Royal sites, by an unknown translator, performed later on in the public theatres from 1779 onward and printed in various editions towards the end of the century; and *La viuda consolada* (proceeding from *La seconde surprise de l'amour*), premiered in 1801, anonymous and unpublished. The other plays by Marivaux which circulated were adaptations to interludes by the hand of Ramón de la Cruz, with the inevitable cuts and modifications: *El viejo burlado L'école des mères*, *El heredero loco L'héritier de village* and *El triunfo del interés Le triomphe de Plutus*. Worse fate befell the theatre of Beaumarchais. Even though he was well known in Spain because of his trip to Madrid and his disputes with Clavijo y Fajardo, before 1808 only the *Barbier de Séville* had been translated by Manuel Fermín de Laviano, under the title *La inútil precaución*, (performed in 1780).

Apart from the master and the two celebrated authors already cited, French comic theatre offered various modalities which attracted Spanish translators. Chronologically, the oldest is the character comedy, practised at the beginnings of the century by Jean-François Regnard, the best of the disciples of Molière. The work of this comic playwright which seemingly awakened the most interest in Spain was *Le joueur*, translated by Olavide and performed from the beginning of 1770 on with titles like *El jugador o daños que causa el juego* and *Malos efectos del vicio y jugador abandonado*. In the repertoires of the period this work is sometimes called *El jugador francés*, to distinguish it from *Beverley* or *Jugador inglés*, a translation of Moore's drama through the French version of Saurin. Regnard's piece is, after all, a comedy in spite of the somewhat gloomy Spanish titles. It presents gambling more as a fault than a true vice. Regnard's other comedies which were translated during this period were *El heredero universal (Le légataire universel)*, by Clavijo y Fajardo, and *El distraído* by Enciso Castrillón. The last comedy to appear in Spanish by this author contains a unique feature: the sole act of the original of *Attendez-moi sous l'orme* has been converted into three in the *Citas debajo del olmo* by José María de Carnerero (1801). Therefore, the present author is of the opinion that one should consider this comedy as an original.

From the scheme of character comedy on, Philippe Néricault Destouches, with a moralistic dimension much accused, created a type of comedy which enjoyed great success in its time. As has been indicated above, Tomás de Iriarte translated for the theatre of the Royal sites *El malgastador* and *El filósofo casado* in a theatrical line which he would illustrate later with his original comedies *El señorito mimado* and *La señorita malcriada*. From *El malgastador* various odd editions remain, whereas *El filósofo casado*, of which there are also odd copies, had the honour of being included by Iriarte in the collection of his works because they were written in verse, together –as indicated previously– with the tragedy of Voltaire, *El huérfano de la China*. As far as the other famous comedy of Destouches, *Le glorieux* there were various translations done by famous writers: Clavijo y Fajardo, who titled it *El vanaglorioso* and, towards the beginning of the century, Valladares y Enciso, who strangely enough gave it the same title (*El vano humillado*).

Another dramatic category which was very successful in France and also crossed the frontier was the opéra-comique, related in its form to the zarzuela, which was called by various names in Spain: opéra-comique, opéra bouffe, funny drama and even simply zarzuela. Even though some opéra-comique were translated by important figures around the middle of the century (Favart, Sedaine), the majority belongs to authors towards the end of the 18th or the beginning of the 19th century, such as Marsollier, Révéroni Saint-Cyr, Boïeldieu, Bouilly, Hoffman or Picard. In the translation of this type of works, if they wanted to take advantage of the existing music, considered the difficulty of adapting the new text to the score. The possible solutions to this problem were either to order new music from Spanish composers or to suppress the music plain and simple, converting the opéra-comique in a “staged” comedy. Ramón de la Cruz, for example, did just such with *La espigadera*, an adaptation of *Les moissonneurs* by Favart.

One must not forget another greatly popular dramatic category in 18th century France: the so-called *petite pièce* was a one act comedy, often times satirical and anecdotal when it was not parodic, which often appeared as a complement to the tragedy or a longer comedy. This type of work, both in its formal aspects as well as its content, intention and function, was similar to the interlude. For this reason, it is not surprising that a good number of them were turned into interludes in the Spanish theatre, especially thanks to work of Ramón de la Cruz. Thus, a

number of smaller pieces by Legrand, Dancourt, Pannard, or Carmontelle appeared on Spanish stages at the hand of Cruz, who did not hesitate to introduce changes in the titles, cut out scenes and modify the contents.

Notwithstanding, the biggest changes were produced in the process of transforming them into comic interludes with three acts. The most famous, performed on various occasions, was *El casamiento desigual o los Gutibambas y Mucibarrenas*, an adaptation of Molière's *Georges Dandin*.

The attitude of Ramón de la Cruz, even though it is exaggerated, is illustrative of the work of many Spanish translators in his period. Carried along by their ideas of translation, by their confidence in their ingenuity and their creative capacity –one must not forget that almost all were original playwrights– with which they introduced numerous modifications to the pieces which they translated, often with the intention of “accommodating” them to the uses and customs of the country and spectators.

Although modifications of this type –character names, settings, entire replicas, situations– proved difficult to justify in the case of the tragedy (and when it happened, it was often more out of political than ideological motivations), they seemed perfectly acceptable in a comedy because of its greater connection between its subject matter and everyday reality. For this same reason, it is not strange that both in drama and romantic comedy they gave it a theatrical category which was supposed to be, by definition, a faithful reflection of the current situation.

In fact, many of the Spanish versions of French dramas should be considered adaptations, and for various reasons. Even when they retained the intention of the originals, one can find in many of them modifications of a formal type (conversion in three acts or shifts, the use of octosyllable in place of prose, suppression of the stage directions) which brought them closer to the theatre from the Spanish Golden Age. In this attitude, one can see a certain betrayal of the principles of the genre, as Diderot and other theoreticians described them, although perhaps also a desire to affiliate themselves with the Spanish theatrical tradition and the greater guarantee of acceptance on the part of the spectators. For if, as it has been indicated above, the first manifestations of this genre –either translations or original works– were directed to a more select audience, by the very novelty which the pieces represented, in the following years, in the decades of the 1780's and 90's, they reached a greater distribution, with different publications and performances in public theatres. To this period belong the first published translations of Diderot's two great dramas: *El hijo natural* by Bernardo María de Calzada, and *El padre de familia* by the Marquis of Palacios; the widely disseminated version of *Los amantes desgraciados o el conde de Cominges* by Baculard d'Arnaud, a work of Manuel Bellosartes and, above all, Valladares' versions of dramas like *La brouette du vinaigrier* by Mercier, which he titled, changing –among other things– the setting and the profession of the main character, *El trapero de Madrid* or *Le fabricant de Londres* by Fenouillot de Falbaire (*El fabricante de paños*).

The growing success of this type of drama favoured the creation of other originals, but this extreme did not stop the avalanche of translations. These multiplied throughout the first decade of the 19th century, driven in part by the new politic of theatrical reform, which encouraged translations in the absence of originals. Thus, in the already cited collection of *Teatro Nuevo Español* from 1800-1801, as many as nine French dramas or translations from the French (which represents nearly half of the translations) were published, among them Bouilly's extremely famous *Abate de l'Épée* –of which as many as seven editions were made in very few years–, a new version of Diderot's *El padre de familia* by Juan de Estrada, Marsollier's *Cecilia y Dorsán* by Rodríguez de Arellano, and also, as an example of the singular phenomenon of these early years of the century, versions of German dramas, made from intermediary French translations: *Los amantes generosos* or *Minna von Barnhelm* by Lessing, made from the version of Rochon de Chabannes; *El conde de Olsbach* by Brandes or *La reconciliación* by Kotzebue. From this prolific author, however, the most frequently performed drama –and most often printed: up to six editions– was *Misantrópía y arrepentimiento*, in the version done by Dionisio Solís based on the French translation by Molé and Bursay.

The abundance of translations, which prodigiously increased during the first years of the century and came to eclipse original productions, the changes which the new texts presented in the sense of insisting on the pathetic course realism, the very texts themselves of the translations, made quickly and without care to satisfy the demand, ended up nullifying completely the genre. Already in the first years of the century, the melodrama appeared in Spain; in 1803 one of the most characteristic works of the master of the genre in France, Pixérécourt premiered: *El mudo incógnito o la Celina (Coelina ou l'enfant du mystère)*, beginning thus a theatrical tendency which would last into the 1830's.

French theatre was then a constant referent for Spanish theatre in the 18th century. It served as not only a model but also a counterpoint; it was the object of satire although also of imitation, when it was not being inconsiderately ransacked. Its works often fell into the hands of inexperienced or unscrupulous translators who helped to discredit it among its detractors. But also, fortunately, they were occasionally handled by respected and experienced writers who, with great consideration towards the original, knew how to adapt them –in the end they did live in the 18th century– to the aesthetic and ideological conditions of their time.

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