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## Translating the armed struggle: Alfonso Sastre and Sean O'Casey in Spain

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### ABSTRACT


This article considers why the controversial Spanish playwright Alfonso Sastre, working within the constraints imposed by the Franco dictatorship (1939–75), chose to create versions of two plays by Sean O'Casey, an Irish dramatist who made his name in Dublin's Abbey Theatre in the 1920s. It argues that Sastre's adaptations of *Red Roses for Me* and *The Shadow of a Gunman* were his way of evading censorship and calling for political change in Spain, and thus constitute clear examples of translation as political activism and cultural resistance.

### KEYWORDS

Activist translation; theatre censorship; Franco dictatorship; Alfonso Sastre; Sean O'Casey

Translation never takes place in a vacuum; it always happens in a continuum, and the context in which the translation takes place necessarily affects how the translation is made. (Bassnett 1998, 93)

Since the 1990s, there has been increased debate about the political aspects of translation and some important works have been published on the subject: Venuti (1992, 1995, 1998); Tymoczko (1999, 2010a, 2010b); Tymoczko and Gentzler (2002); Bermann and Wood (2005); Baker (2005, 2006, 2007); Cronin (2006); Brownlie (2007). Specific studies have also been published on translation and censorship, including a special issue of *TTR* (Merkle 2002); a forum in *Translation Studies* (Kuhiwczak et al. 2011); Ní Chuilleanáin, Ó Cuilleánáin, and Parris (2008); Woods (2012). In the Spanish context, various analyses consider aspects of translation and censorship under Franco, including those by Gutiérrez Lanza (2002), Hurlley (2007), Vandaele (2010) and Merino-Álvarez (2016).<sup>1</sup> It is within this context, and drawing on the work of Mona Baker (2007) and Maria Tymoczko (2008, 2010b) in particular, that this article considers the versions of Sean O'Casey's work produced by Spanish playwright Alfonso Sastre (1926–) as examples of activist translation. While under the Franco dictatorship most translators of foreign works bowed to normative pressures to produce pro-regime or politically acceptable works, Sastre employed translation to oppose the regime. This study explores the theatrical context in which Sastre operated and suggests why he was drawn to the works of Sean O'Casey (1880–1964) at particular moments in Spain's political history. Detailed assessments of Sastre's versions of *Red Roses for Me* and *The Shadow of a Gunman* illustrate

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the strategies employed by the dramatist in order to make a bold case for social and political change in Spain. While this article focuses on examples from the Franco period, it is also proposed that Sastre's use of translation as a form of resistance against state power did not end with the death of the Spanish dictator.

Mona Baker (2005, 12) convincingly argues that the translator is never neutral and in her book *Translation and Conflict* (Baker 2006) she suggests a narrative approach to understanding how translation and interpreting are used politically. Applying her ideas to the context of Spain under Franco, we can see how those who wished to attack the authorities might focus on undermining "the stories that sustain them" (ibid., 3) and instead present alternative narratives in order to mobilize support to achieve social and political change. The regime created its own official public narratives, initially focused on the salvation of Spain from the threat of communism and later, in the 1960s, on the peace and stability provided by the regime. These narratives were not only promoted by the regime, but were also protected by censorship. Dramatists such as Alfonso Sastre not only distanced from these official narratives, but also produced alternatives to them.

In addition to the use of foreign drama to introduce challenging ideas about political, social and moral change into a restricted and censored environment, Sastre, as we shall see, employed paratextual framing devices, drawing attention to certain parallels between Ireland and Spain, and inviting those in the target culture to interpret the words of O'Casey in a particular way. In her discussion of framing narratives in translation, Baker describes the process "as an active strategy that implies agency" (2006, 106), and Tymoczko, too, has commented on the importance of framing in activist translation: "explaining how it should be read, what inferences should be drawn, and what ideological import the translation has in the receptor context" (2010b, 234). Indeed, Tymoczko has argued that "translators have reframed translations and supplied an alternate place of enunciation, so as to package subversive texts and ideas in ways that are difficult for the censor to object to" (2008, 26). It is this particular use of translation as a means of evading censorship that I focus on here.

The control of the stage was part of the Franco regime's cultural policy, which aimed to naturalize a certain set of values and to deny others (Boyd 1999). Aside from the promotion of certain authors and works, the regime censored authors whose work reflected moral values or political allegiances that were contrary to its own (Neuschäfer 1994; O'Leary 2004, 2005; Muñoz 2005; Thompson 2007). If a play was foreign, however, this was considered less problematic. This fits with Tymoczko's general observation that "translation is often less controlled than cultural production from within a culture itself" (2008, 26). Certain translators, dramatists and theatre practitioners took advantage of this, Alfonso Sastre among them.

Sastre is one of the so-called Realist Generation of dramatists that emerged in Spain in the late 1940s. As Anderson (1971), Bryan (1982), De Paco (1997), Martínez-Michel (2003) and O'Leary (2004) have shown, he was a politically engaged author who used his theatre to denounce the injustices of society and, by extension, the dictatorship; it was inevitable, therefore, that he would clash with the authorities.<sup>2</sup> He was seen as a rebellious and daring figure of the opposition by critics, both local and foreign (see García Lorenzo 1975; Pasquariello 1965–66). By 1969, when he created the first of his versions of O'Casey's works, Sastre was considered a troublemaker by the regime. The difficulties he experienced staging and publishing his own work led him to create adaptations of

foreign works, and these tended to be treated less harshly by the censors (De Paco 1993, 316–317). There were several reasons for this: temporal and spatial distance from Spain could mitigate any social and political commentary contained in the plays; the authorization of challenging foreign drama allowed the regime to claim liberal credentials it did not really possess; and the restriction of such plays to university and club theatres meant the regime could limit production runs and audiences without damaging its reputation by being seen to censor internationally renowned works.

Sastre was drawn to Sean O’Casey’s (1942) *Red Roses for Me*, set during the labour struggles of 1910–14, and *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923), which focuses on the Irish War of Independence (Anglo-Irish War, 1919–21), for what they could offer a politicized dramatist and anti-regime activist seeking to convey an ideological message to the public during Spain’s dictatorship. Sastre’s renditions, *Rosas rojas para mí* (O’Casey 1969) and *La sombra de un hombre armado* (O’Casey written and published as *¡Irlanda, Irlanda!* in 1973, republished in 1990, and published as *La sombra de un hombre armado* in 1998), represent conflicts that are both alien (Irish) and familiar (the class struggle; the fight against an oppressor) and, although he does not domesticate the characters or setting, his representation of these works at specific points in time invests them with local meaning. By foregrounding aspects of the text relevant to his own political purpose, Sastre used theatre translation to call for social and political change.

Sastre’s translations and adaptations of foreign dramas can therefore be seen as an extension of his own political theatre as they are consistent with the variety of strategies he employed to get his message across to the Spanish public. First, by choosing to adapt works by the socialist O’Casey, Sastre was already making a political statement. Secondly, with his versions of both *Red Roses for Me* and *The Shadow of a Gunman*, he employed the Aesopian strategy of discussing Spain by talking about parallel situations elsewhere – in this case, Ireland. Finally, and most strikingly, in his version of *The Shadow of a Gunman*, Sastre adopted a framing technique to encourage the reader or spectator to interpret the play in a very particular way.

One of Sastre’s greatest challenges, coming from a different theatrical tradition, was how to capture what O’Casey conveyed in his use of language. The vibrancy of the language, as well as the information the tenement dwellers’ Hiberno-English gives us about the society depicted, combine to complicate the task of the translator. Sastre made radical choices, at times sacrificing humour and poetry in order to convey his ideas more effectively.

Within the published introductions to both plays, Sastre (1998a, 1998c) portrays O’Casey as a politically committed dramatist who used his skill as a writer to promote social change, and as a revolutionary figure who was prepared to fight for what he believed in. The parallels between the two authors are implicit, and Sastre’s description of O’Casey constitutes support for political engagement and suggests that literature, and these plays in particular, contain a message for the reader and audience. Without ever mentioning the Spanish situation (a wise move, given the censorship in place), Sastre reinforces the discourse of resistance to the regime and associates it with an older, international struggle for workers’ rights and radical social change. Thus, Sastre draws on both his own reputation as a dramatist of the opposition and O’Casey’s authority as a known writer and activist to bring home his message about the need for action.

### Sastre and O'Casey: "eternamente compañeros"

Both Sean O'Casey and Alfonso Sastre identified with socialism and the workers' struggle, and both, albeit in different ways, engaged with the question of nationalism.<sup>3</sup> While I have found no evidence to suggest that O'Casey was familiar with the work of Sastre, the latter saw himself and the Irishman as comrades, who used their committed theatre in the struggle for political change. In addition to producing versions of the plays, Sastre's interest in O'Casey can be seen in his poem "Homenaje a Sean O'Casey" [Homage to Sean O'Casey] penned in June 1969, which formed part of the programme notes for *Rosas rojas* and which reveals that the Irishman was an inspiration for his Spanish comrades at a moment of oppositional insurgence against the dictatorship (Sastre 1998b, 12).<sup>4</sup> In Sastre's phrase, O'Casey was "el gran ejemplo de un escritor combatiente" [the great example of a combatant-writer] (1998a, 6).

In this view of O'Casey, Sastre is at odds with both Seamus Deane and Raymond Williams. For Deane, O'Casey is a moral rather than a political playwright in whose work the ordinary is made falsely heroic in order to denigrate nationalist politics (Deane 1985, 108–109); for Williams, O'Casey is problematic because he focuses not on the insurgents and the reasons for their actions, but rather on people's confused indifference to politics: "the feelings of the fighters, in that real history, are not dramatically engaged at all; all we see and hear is the flag, the gesture, the rhetoric" (Williams [1968] 1976, 164). Yet the O'Casey that Sastre first focuses on is not the author of the 1920s struggling to represent a nationalist identity in the making, but rather the leftist dramatist of the 1930s and 1940s, who, as James Moran writes, "seeks to reverse the earlier cynicism that he had shown towards politics" (2013, 105). Sastre's reading of O'Casey as first and foremost a politically engaged writer is therefore consistent with the dramatist that O'Casey was by the 1940s and 1950s, when Sastre would have come across his work.<sup>5</sup>

Sean O'Casey was born in Dublin in 1880 to a lower-middle-class Protestant family. Active in the nationalist cultural movement, the Gaelic League, and in the clandestine revolutionary group the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), his nationalism was allied to a firm commitment to improving the employment and living conditions of the working man. The year 1911 was a defining one for O'Casey: his involvement in the railway strike and his union activity led to his dismissal from his job with the Great Northern Railway Company. This hardened his belief in the syndicalist movement and the struggle to achieve a workers' republic. Later, as a member of the Irish Citizen Army (ICA), which "conducted its military operations under the flag of the *Plough and the Stars*" and was, according to James Connolly, "the world's first Red Army", O'Casey embraced the armed struggle against repression of workers during the 1913 strike and lockout.<sup>6</sup> After the failure of the strike, however, he began to believe that the leaders of socialism and nationalism did not address the same constituency, and he left the ICA because he reckoned that it had abandoned its principles in favour of a Gaelic nationalism that would never deliver a socialist republic. It is this same shift and disillusionment with nationalism that is portrayed in his early plays, such as *The Shadow of a Gunman*, while the class struggle is the focus of many of the later works, including *Red Roses for Me*.<sup>7</sup>

O'Casey rose to prominence in the Irish theatre at a time when cultural and social reform went hand in hand. His characters represent Irish society struggling with its nascent post-revolutionary self-image and his theatre is clearly influenced by his

international socialist outlook. The complexity of his work arises from his portrayal of the gap between the promised new structures and the often inward-looking society that appeared in the aftermath of the War of Independence and the Civil War, in which workers' rights had been lost amid the struggle for a new nationalism (see Grene 1999; McDonald 2004; Murray 2004).

Decades later in Spain, Alfonso Sastre, too, would expose the inequalities in society and represent the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Operating in a nationalist-Catholic dictatorship that not only imposed systematic censorship on the arts but also sought to harness culture to promote what it considered to be the correct moral and political conduct of its subjects, Sastre came to be seen as a thorn in the regime's side, determined to criticize the injustices that it created and sustained (see DeCoster 1960, 123; García Lorenzo 1975, 136–137; Gies 1975, 94). From the beginning of his career he was critical of Spanish culture and was involved in a series of attempts to reform the theatre, from *Arte Nuevo* in the 1940s, to *Teatro de Agitación Social* (TAS) in the 1950s, and the *Grupo de Teatro Realista* (GTR) in the 1960s (Sastre 1965, 240). Sastre was evidently a playwright with a mission to use the theatre to effect social and political change.

Both Sastre and O'Casey wrote about matters and events experienced by their audiences, and the moral dilemmas of their characters reflect the predicaments of ordinary people in times of upheaval and crisis. Another factor that unites the two dramatists is confrontation with officialdom in their respective societies. Just as O'Casey did in Ireland, Sastre rejected a nationalist-Catholic vision for Spain, and the former's critical judgement of the Catholic Church's alliance with Irish politics and culture would have appealed to Sastre. O'Casey was also critical of Franco and what he saw as a policy on the part of the Vatican to create a series of Catholic states (Murray 2004, 272). The two dramatists clearly shared a similar outlook, as well as a determination to stage political theatre, despite opposition from influential quarters.

### Translating O'Casey as political activism

A consideration of his dramatic output, translations and commentaries reveals the centrality of the political message to Sastre's purpose. By using foreign works with non-Spanish settings, Sastre was able to speak to home audiences about armed struggle and a workers' revolution at a time when the Franco regime's censorship prohibited anything which was considered to be an attack on the regime, the Church and the head of state (Orden 9 febrero, 1963, 3930). During a period in which he struggled to get authorizations for his own plays, Sastre's translations of O'Casey can be read as acts of subversion and resistance, which challenged prevailing cultural and political conditions.<sup>8</sup>

According to Ronan McDonald (2004, 136), "Sean O'Casey is best remembered for his engagement, artistic and otherwise, with Irish history during a crucial period of turmoil and revolutionary change", and it was during turbulent periods of civil unrest and political transformation in Spain that Sastre turned to his theatre. O'Casey's plays, though distanced both geographically and historically from Spain, would be reminiscent of what Mona Baker (2007, 165) has termed "public narratives" that were closer to home, such as student and worker protests and political transformation in Spain in the 1930s, and which were considered relevant again in the late 1960s and the 1970s.



The beginning of a transition of sorts in Spain, with the naming of Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco in 1973 as Franco's successor as head of government (in addition to the 1969 naming of Prince Juan Carlos as his successor as head of state) led to a palpable sense of change in the air. This was accompanied by a rise in violent opposition to the regime and an equally violent reaction to it. This upheaval and uncertainty had obvious parallels with the 1920s Ireland described by O'Casey; Sastre understood this and framed the plays accordingly. Baker writes of translators: "consciously or otherwise, they translate texts and utterances that participate in creating, negotiating and contesting social reality" (2006, 105). It is clear that this is Sastre's intention: there is nothing neutral, unconscious or passive about his role as adaptor and translator.

### ***Red Roses for Me (1942)/Rosas rojas para mí (1969)***

O'Casey's play is set "a little while ago", and the specific political context is not made explicit (1942, i). The reference to railway workers suggests that it is set during the 1911 railway strike, which would have resonated in Great Britain where O'Casey was living when he wrote the play, and where 1911 saw railway worker strikes also. The lack of historical specificity allows the public to associate the action of the play with the more well-known 1913 Strike and Lockout (which set the Irish Transport and General Workers Union and other unions against William Martin Murphy's Employers' Federation), or simply to associate it with "the Great Unrest" that swept through Britain and Ireland in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> The Dublin described by the great labour leader James Connolly (1913) in his article, "Glorious Dublin", published at the height of the lockout, is the city portrayed by O'Casey in *Red Roses*. Connolly wrote that "the Dublin fight is more than a trade union fight; it is a great class struggle, and recognised as such by all sides" (n.p.).

*Red Roses* was one of O'Casey's more successful late plays in both Britain and Ireland (Murray 2004, 282–289). Its timing was significant for its author and later, in translation, for Sastre. O'Casey penned this hopeful piece at a time when socialism was on the rise again in Europe. Although it was in fact a reworking of his 1919 play *The Harvest Festival*, it reflects a shift in O'Casey's theatre away from criticism of nationalist politics and towards a celebration of political action (Moran 2013, 104–105). It focuses on the heroic exploits, and ends with the tragic death, of Ayamonn Breydon, an enlightened working man, who becomes a strike leader defending socialist principles in the face of strong opposition and police brutality. Nicholas Grene describes Ayamonn as one of O'Casey's "idealised self-portraits in which he can play the hero, as courageous as he is clever", and notes that he is "positively Christ-like" (1999, 124, 125). Brendan MacNamee, too, signals Ayamonn's "symbolic role of Christ", his "mystical rapture" and "the crucifixion that follows hard on the rapture" (2004, 296). For MacNamee, however, Ayamonn manages to convince, as he "is totally of the people", and "his passions arise out of, and remain firmly attached to, their all-too-tangible sufferings" (299). He argues that "O'Casey's central point is that reality and idealism cannot be separated", a claim that links this play to the political message of his earlier works (299). Yet one could counter that all of this, rather than making Ayamonn a more convincing character, instead turns him into an unrealistic one, a far cry from the more unappealing, but more credible, cowards and naive fools of the earlier plays, whose actions and inactions highlight a

palpable and complex disillusionment with the new Ireland. Furthermore, self-sacrifice, rebirth, and the martyr trope, which were rejected by O'Casey when used by Irish nationalism, are embraced by him here for his heroic syndicalist, Ayamonn. This play does not deliver the demythologizing of war seen in the Dublin Trilogy, but rather the mythology of an earlier great class struggle.

Yet for this very reason, for the simplicity and hope of its message, it was a play that spoke to Sastre and to a Spanish audience in 1969, the year that the government declared a state of emergency in response to increased opposition from students and workers. The political context of the solidarity shown by the unionized workers in their battles with the Employers' Federation, their rallying for a cause, and the strength of their protest in the face of police brutality made this a significant piece to stage in Spain. The story of *Red Roses* is one of resistance, camaraderie and the power of mass civil action and, as such, it articulated the concerns of Spanish students and workers who, inspired by protests elsewhere and incited by the violence of the regime, were calling for change. *Rosas rojas para mí* was staged by the Teatro Nacional de Cámara y Ensayo in the Teatro Beatriz, Madrid, on 6 October 1969. José María Morera directed and Francisco Nieva designed the set. The critical reaction to the play was positive, although, interestingly, the focus was on the political parallels with events in Northern Ireland, rather than any possible parallels with Spain.<sup>10</sup>

Sastre saw *Red Roses* as the most representative and autobiographical of O'Casey's works and argued that it shows "la necesidad para los trabajadores de llegar a veces a la lucha armada y al sacrificio de su vida" [the need for workers sometimes to reach the point of armed struggle and the sacrifice of their lives] (16).<sup>11</sup> Given both the subject matter and Sastre's notoriety, it is unsurprising that the censors who viewed the play insisted that one cut be made. The line "sin cesar en la lucha" [fighting without end] was eliminated from the chorus Ayamonn sings towards the end of act III.<sup>12</sup> What is more surprising is that the play was authorized at all, although, as Sastre knew, the strategy of employing a foreign work with a non-Spanish setting was often enough to evade harsh censorship.

While the play's poetic language posed some problems for the translator, its politics offered a solution to the issue of discussing revolution in a society where expression was not free. Comparing *Rosas rojas* to O'Casey's original text, it is clear that Sastre's is a linguistically timid translation, though it remains true to the spirit of the original. Many of the changes made are explicable by the difficulties of translating the poetic and colloquial language of O'Casey's characters and by Sastre's attempts to make the text more intelligible within the target culture. He assimilates O'Casey's text to Spanish linguistic and poetic norms in an attempt to convey his political message without dislocating the audience. Evidence of such acculturation can be seen, for example, in the scene where Ayamonn's girlfriend Sheila discusses her parents' disapproval of their relationship. The Spanish version simply eliminates the poetic, non-political, section highlighted below in bold:

SHEILA – I daren't. My mother would be at me for ever if I failed to go. I've told you how she hates me to be near you. **She chatters red-lined warnings and black-bordered appeals into my ears night and day, and when they dwindle for lack of breath, my father shakes them out of their drowsiness and sends them dancing round more lively still, dressed richly up in deadly black and gleaming scarlet.** (O'Casey 1942, 23)



In the scene where the hero Ayamonn and his mother are rehearsing Shakespeare, however, the Spanish version seems to miss a significant political point about how, during a period of class tension and workers' revolt against the establishment, the reference to regicide would be particularly welcomed by the audience:

MRS. B – Th' killin' o' th' king be th' Duke o' Gloster **should go down well**, an' th' whole thing should look **sumptuous**. (O'Casey 1942, 6).

SRA. BREYDON – Cuando el duque de Gloucester mata al rey, **puede quedar estupendo**: además, es una escena tan **bonita** (When the Duke of Gloucester kills the king, it will look great: also, it's such a pretty scene) (O'Casey 1998b, 26).

Yet, on other occasions, Sastre adapted the text to create a political point relevant to the target culture, inserting politicized dialogue at various points in the text in order to address his Spanish audience. Ayamonn's "Let him be, man; he sang a merry song well, and should have got a fairer greeting" has an additional statement in the Spanish version: "¡Además, qué preocupaciones en un momento en que tenemos que librar una batalla sin cuartel!" [and what a thing to worry about at a time when we must fight an all-out war] (103; 120). Ayamonn's criticism of his countrymen, "we pray too much and work too little", becomes "rezamos demasiado y no trabajamos y luchamos lo bastante" (we pray too much and work **and fight** too little) (105; 122). The song sung by Ayamonn, who is joined by a chorus of ordinary people, in the original refers to "thy people together shall build a brave city", and in Sastre's version claims "unido el pueblo, el gran proletariado" [the united people, the great proletariat] (113; 127). Furthermore, a short exchange between the Protestant Rector and the Police Inspector is replaced by Sastre with an extended dialogue; the relationship between the two men is also different. In the original, the Rector is terse with the Inspector, chiding him: "Inspector Finglas! Remember you wear the King's uniform! Quiet, quiet, man!" (97); in the Spanish version, the Rector says: "calma, querido amigo, calma" [be calm, my dear friend, be calm] (113). This modification implies friendship between the two men and hints at political alliance; it is undoubtedly tailored to a Spanish public in a dictatorship in which the forces of law, order and repression were supported by the Church.

### ***The Shadow of a Gunman (1923)/¡Irlanda, Irlanda! (1973)/La sombra de un hombre armado (1998)***

Alfonso Sastre's version of *The Shadow of a Gunman*, which is based on a translation that he commissioned from his brother, José, is an assertive treatment of the theme of armed struggle at a time when the Franco regime was weak and opposition to it was growing. Sastre's *La sombra de un hombre armado* was never staged, though it was published under the title *¡Irlanda, Irlanda!* in 1973, and republished as *La sombra de un hombre armado*, together with *Rosas rojas para mí*, in 1998 (O'Casey 1998b).<sup>13</sup> Looking at Sastre's version, one might initially question his understanding of the play and of O'Casey's political argument; alternatively, however, it can be read as a consciously combative piece, one that reveals much more about the social and political struggles in Spain at the end of the dictatorship than about Ireland in the 1920s.

Based on an episode from O'Casey's own experience, *The Shadow of a Gunman* is set in May 1920 during the War of Independence in a tenement room shared by the pedlar

Seumas Shields and the writer and supposed IRA (Irish Republican Army) gunman, Donal Davoren. The interaction of the two men and the constant interruptions of Davoren's attempts to write by other residents are both comical and revealing of differing attitudes towards the ongoing conflict, as well as of the everyday hardships of life in the tenements. Davoren fancies himself as a romantic hero and does not disavow the others' belief that he is a gunman on the run from the authorities. As he says to himself, "Minnie is attracted to the idea, and I am attracted to Minnie. And what danger can there be in being the shadow of a gunman?" (O'Casey 1998a, 32). Seumas's workmate, Maguire, who has left a bag in the room, does not go to work that day, claiming to have to "catch butterflies" in Knocksedan (8). Later, it emerges that Maguire is in fact an IRA man, involved in a guerrilla ambush at Knocksedan. The bag that he left with Seumas is full of bombs. The discovery of the contents of the bag coincides with a raid on the house by the British paramilitary force, the Auxiliaries.<sup>14</sup> Seumas and Davoren, despite earlier bluster, are shown to be cowards; it is Minnie who acts, thinking that she is saving Davoren by grabbing the bag and attempting to escape. What O'Casey highlights in the play, however, is not the fight itself, but rather the negative effects on the poorest slum dwellers of the nationalist revolution.

P.S. O'Hegarty wrote of the play: "It shows the other side of the heroic medal which to many is the whole of the war; and it does so with a naturalness, a humor and a bite which have proved quite irresistible"; for his part, theatre director and actor Denis Johnston, who was a friend of O'Casey, hailed *The Shadow* as

the first play of a new postwar mentality – the first to break away from a false sense of values that had been slowly poisoning us – the first time we heard expressed on the stage emotions that we were as yet hardly conscious of feeling ourselves. (O'Hegarty 1927, 317; Hethmon 1961, 53)

In the play, the glorification of the revolution is belittled; the romance of the war is set against a meaner reality that shows a population more concerned with day-to-day survival than with any great ideals. The character Seumas Shields argues:

I believe in the freedom of Ireland, an' that England has no right to be here, but I draw the line when I hear the gunmen blowin' about dyin' for the people, when it's the people that are dyin' for the gunmen! (O'Casey 1998a, 40).

Davoren who, unlike Shields, claims that he has no fear of dying, is shown to be just as weak when the British Auxiliary troops raid the house.

*The Shadow of a Gunman* is a play that punctures romantic myths about the nationalist armed struggle and, for McDonald, it is "unique in its self-doubt and embitterment" (2004, 143). His reading of *The Shadow* as an expression of O'Casey's movement from disillusionment with politics to a denunciation of the delusion that inspires so many to get involved contrasts with Sastre's interpretation. While one can grant, as Robert Brazeau (2008, 26) does, that the play shows the negative impact of capitalism and imperialism on the working man, it is about more than socialism: it makes clear that nationalism provides no succour to the working man in his hour of need and, in fact, compounds his difficulties by offering him a myth to heal his very real problems.

O'Casey's criticism of the nascent state's origin myth and his lament for the loss of a socialist dream in favour of a nationalist fable is less evident in Sastre's version of the play. The Spanish dramatist's intention was not to bring O'Casey's message to a

Spanish audience, but rather his own one, and it was a message of revolt. When Sastre created his version of the play, Spain was experiencing a turbulent period of political unrest. The dictator was elderly and frail. His successor as prime minister, Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, who would be assassinated at the end of 1973, offered no hope for the legion of Spaniards clamouring for social and political change. Sastre's version suggests that he interpreted the play as pro-revolutionary and, although this may be at odds with O'Casey's message, it both fits with the Spanish public's ideas about Ireland and reveals much about the historical moment in which the translation was presented.

Overall, the Spanish translation of *The Shadow of a Gunman* is faithful to the content of the original, although Sastre acculturated the language to his own public, thereby losing some of the humour of the original. The difficulty of translating the witticisms and creative wordplay that O'Casey employs in his work is best illustrated by the scene in *The Shadow of a Gunman* in which Mr Gallogher appeals to Davoren to use his ostensible connections in the IRA to resolve a domestic dispute with a neighbour. The challenge here goes beyond the translation of his malapropisms to include the question of how to render the deeper sociocultural and political meaning. Bernice Schrank observes that, with his use of language, Mr Gallogher "tries to disguise his powerlessness in pomposity" but, as she convincingly argues, his impotence remains apparent (1978, 26). His pretentious formal discourse, in addition to providing many laughs, also gives the audience information about the constantly changing political situation.<sup>15</sup> While the memory of the War of Independence was still very much alive for the spectators who first saw this play a few short years after the events that it describes, one can assume no such knowledge on the part of the Spanish public, a fact that made the task of José and Alfonso Sastre all the more complex. In this scene, as well as gently mocking certain characters' "notions of upperosity" (O'Casey 1998a, 153), and humorously portraying the tenement dwellers' use and abuse of the English language, O'Casey also derides the belief that a new Irish authority will show any more interest in the plight of the poor than the representatives of the British Empire did. In the Spanish version, much of the humour from the wordplay is lost and, for example, Mr Gallogher's laughable reference to his "unvarnished respectability" is rendered in the Spanish as "mi conducta intachable" [my irreproachable behaviour] (O'Casey 1998a, 27; 1998b, 208). Minnie too, appears wiser than in the original. Her guilelessly admiring response to the letter's greeting, "That's some swank", becomes the more shrewdly questioning "¿no les parece un poco rimbombante?" [does it not seem a little showy?] in the Spanish (25; 205).

The most notable difference between the original and the Spanish version is not the text itself, however, but the paratext: Sastre's addition of an epilogue and a prologue in a political framing of the play for the Spanish public during the Franco dictatorship.

### **The paratext: framing *The Shadow of a Gunman***

Although the initial translation of *The Shadow of a Gunman* was done by José Sastre, it was Alfonso who added the prologue and the epilogue as a framing device to suit the contemporary Spanish moment. This is clearly not an example of the invisible translator, or the translator as bridge or "in-between", but rather the translator (or perhaps better termed, adaptor) as political activist. Sastre frames O'Casey's play both spatially and temporally. He describes his additions as dramaturgical and documentary, but with a certain

highlighting function (Sastre 1998a, 5).<sup>16</sup> This is interventionist translation, a deliberate and conscious attempt to mobilize O'Casey's text for political purposes in Spain and to create an inspirational model for would-be Spanish revolutionaries. The socialist agenda that binds Sastre and O'Casey comes unstuck on the issue of Irish nationalism, however, and, more specifically, on the brand of nationalism represented by the Irish Republican Army.

O'Casey's scathing critique of the romanticized IRA gunman is obscured in the Spanish text, to be replaced by a newly mythologized contemporary IRA.<sup>17</sup> The Spanish prologue opens with the sound of machine-gun fire and drums. We are at the funeral of an IRA gunman and uniformed, masked men fire shots in the air. The lights fade and when they come up again we are at a press conference where hooded members of the IRA address the audience about how lessons can be learned from O'Casey and from historical political action. This image plays to the contemporary Spanish audiences' perceptions of the armed group. Stage directions tell us that the prologue closes and the epilogue opens with the bells of the Angelus, thus pandering to certain expectations of Irishness in Sastre's audience. The masked characters then trace the IRA's links to the 1913 lockout, which it is claimed is the subject matter of *Red Roses*. They assert that, although the lockout failed, it was then that "el proletariado irlandés aprendió la necesidad de armarse contra sus enemigos" [the Irish proletariat learned the necessity of taking up arms against its enemies] (O'Casey 1998b, 171), and they recount that O'Casey, as secretary of the Irish Citizen Army, was "un escritor combatiente" [a combatant-writer] (172). They also note that O'Casey wanted the Irish Volunteers, the armed nationalist group that was established to defend Home Rule and later played a significant role in the 1916 Rising, to join with the militant workers during the strike. While this is accurate, what Sastre and his characters do not indicate is that the Volunteers failed to support fully the Irish Citizen Army during the lockout and, when they did join forces at the time of the Easter Rising, it was the more middle-class Volunteers who took the lead over the minority ICA; their nationalist goals took precedence over the latter's socialist ones. For O'Casey, the merging of the two to press for nationalist objectives was a betrayal of the workers' revolution that he favoured, and he did not take part in, or support, the Rising.

Moreover, Sastre, in his dramatic prologue, incorrectly merges the workers' struggle with the nationalist one at a time when, in Ireland, the workers' struggle had already been lost. Though accurate in its reference to the situation of workers and the existence of guerrilla warfare and colonial oppression, the suggestion of a workers' revolt is erroneous (O'Casey 1998b, 173). The War of Independence, which is the focus of this play, was not a struggle for workers' rights and was led, not by labour leaders, but by mostly middle-class nationalists, the very people that O'Casey, as a supporter of a workers' revolution, criticizes. Sastre's own interests undoubtedly coloured his view of O'Casey's plays and influenced his modifications to the works. In fact, he seems unaware of the hostility shown to O'Casey by many nationalist revolutionaries and the literary critics associated with the Irish cultural nationalism that came to dominate in post-civil war Ireland.<sup>18</sup>

By leaving the audience with the fruitless death of young Minnie, the cowardice of Seumas and of Davoren, the shadow of a gunman, O'Casey ends his play with a challenge to the myth of Irish nationalism favoured by the likes of Patrick Pearse.<sup>19</sup> Yet Sastre does not reject the heroic nationalist tradition and instead, in his framing of the play, deliberately presents a link between it and the present. This echoes what Sean Kinsella, in his

article on the cult of violence in the Irish revolutionary tradition, termed “an intimate identification on the part of those who are fighting in the present with those who have fallen, and those who are yet to come” (1994, 24–25). Sastre, like many Irish nationalists (though not O’Casey), links current and future revolutionary acts to a revival of an older struggle. O’Casey’s original ending is not only hopeless but, in its portrayal of a self-pitying Davoren, is also highly critical of those who romanticize IRA gunmen and who fail to take any practical steps to improve their lot and that of their fellow man. Minnie, after all, is not a hero but rather a victim, and not only of the British troops, but of Irish nationalism:

- MRS GRIGSON: Poor little Minnie, poor little Minnie Powell, to think of you full of life a few minutes ago, an’ now she’s dead!
- DAVOREN: Ah me, alas! Pain, pain, pain ever, for ever! It’s terrible to think that little Minnie is dead, but it’s still more terrible to think that Davoren and Shields are alive! Oh, Donal Davoren, shame is your portion now till the silver cord is loosened and the golden bowl be broken. Oh Davoren, Donal Davoren, poet and poltroon, poltroon and poet!
- SEUMAS: (solemnly) I knew something ud come of the tappin’ on the wall!  
*Curtain.* (O’Casey 1998a, 62).

So, the original ending of the play punctures the notion of redemptive violence, which was such an important part of the mythology of Irish nationalism; the Spanish version reverts to the myth. Sastre does not include Davoren’s lament at the end of the final scene, thus removing the emphasis that the original places on his falsity and his disillusionment. Instead, Sastre simply has Davoren burst into tears. Moreover, Seumas’s statement is repeated and is suggestive, rather than conclusive. Finally, instead of ending with the curtain, the stage fades to darkness before scenes of the IRA and Minnie’s death are shown (perhaps projected), and then fades to darkness once again before the epilogue begins.

In Sastre’s epilogue, the actors from the prologue return and pass judgement on the Anglo-Irish Treaty that formed the Irish Free State: “el pacto dejaba al Ulster como colonia inglesa y el resto del país como Dominio de la Corona, en una situación neo-colonial. Las aspiraciones de los revolucionarios habían sido traicionadas” [the pact left Ulster as an English colony and the rest of the country with dominion status, in a neo-colonial situation. The aspirations of the revolutionaries had been betrayed] (O’Casey 1998b, 257). In the civil war that followed, the actors assert, “se asesinó implacablemente a los patriotas y revolucionarios” [patriots and revolutionaries were relentlessly killed] (258). The Spanish dramatist clearly identifies with the anti-Treaty members of the IRA, and dismisses those who supported the Treaty. O’Casey, on the other hand, had little time for those involved in the War of Independence (either pro-Treaty or anti-Treaty IRA), as is clear from *The Shadow of a Gunman*.

The ending of the epilogue is where Sastre strays furthest from O’Casey’s original, but it is also where his own political intention is most explicit. It concludes with the dramatic reiteration of a section of the earlier dialogue between Seumas and Maguire, when the latter leaves the bag of bombs in the corner of the room and makes his enigmatic statement about going off to “catch butterflies” at Knocksedan. This is followed by the remarkable stage directions that completely undermine the disillusionment of O’Casey’s original and instead end the play with the suggestion of redemptive violence:

MAGUIRE: No puedo, Seumas, no puedo. Si esperara a mañana, a ver si me entiendes, todas las mariposas podrían haber muerto. Dejaré este saco aquí hasta la noche. Adiós, adiós, adiós!

[Can't be did, can't be did, Seumas; if I waited till tomorrow all the butterflies might be dead. I'll leave this bag here till this evening. ... Goodbye ... ee!] (O'Casey 1998a, 9; 1998b, 260)

(Su sombra, al alejarse, se hace gigantesca y parece empuñar, hacia lo alto, una metralleta. Canción de guerra, irlandesa. Va cayendo el telón final)

[(His shadow, as it moves away, becomes gigantic and seems to wield a machine gun in the air. Irish war song. The curtain falls)] (O'Casey 1998b, 260)

## Conclusion

While one might criticize Sastre for the latitude he takes with O'Casey's theatre, it should always be remembered that he was writing for a target audience in Spain in the late 1960s and early 1970s. His decision to comment on politics and social transformation using texts in translation allowed him to discuss radical change indirectly. It is unlikely that the nuances of O'Casey's quarrels with his erstwhile political companions were known to a Spanish audience, so Sastre was simply using his Irishness as a frame, rather than focusing on the minutiae of political divisions within the Irish political scene of the early decades of the twentieth century. In Spain in 1969 and 1973, after all, reference to Ireland and the IRA was shorthand for a revolutionary (and sometimes romanticized) armed struggle. While his translation of O'Casey's work at this particular moment is entirely consistent with his political activism, it is curious that one of the plays that Sastre employs to put his message across is precisely one in which the idealistic armed struggle is denigrated. Yet we must acknowledge that Sastre's reading of O'Casey as a political activist was a coherent one at the time.

The gap between O'Casey's originals and Sastre's versions of *Red Roses for Me* and *The Shadow of a Gunman* also raises the interesting question of responsibility to the original text and to the intention of the original author. Indeed, one might ask whether Sastre's versions could have damaged O'Casey's reputation in Spain by introducing his work in a politicized manner that was tailored to the specificity of a particular time in the country's history; or whether they enhanced his reputation, by introducing him to a public that might otherwise not have encountered his theatre. Given what he has written about Sean O'Casey, it seems unlikely that Sastre knowingly changed the spirit of the Irishman's work; much more likely is that he assumed that O'Casey's early nationalism and lifelong socialism had led him to support the nationalist struggle also.

It is also worth noting that Sastre returned to O'Casey's plays in 1998, when he published them with HIRU, the company he founded with his wife, making reference to recent political developments in both the source and target cultures, an action consistent with Tymoczko's observation that "translators' strategies for accomplishing their social or ideological goals are legion, highly localized in time and space, shifting as culture shifts" (2010a, 9). Sastre's publishing company is another site of activism and in 1998 he still saw O'Casey's plays as relevant to contemporary struggles, in Ireland and elsewhere (Sastre 1998a, 6).

In the end, Sastre's adaptations of O'Casey's work, regardless of considerations of them as good or lesser versions of the originals, are evidence of his political commitment and his



use of translation as an ideological tool. In defiance of the regime's censorship Sastre deliberately, although not always successfully, embraced his role as a threat to stability, and even advocated revolution. The fact that this interventionist mode of translation continued beyond the dictatorship, with his publishing company's stated aim of making available works that would otherwise be inaccessible to the Spanish reader (Forest, n.d.), fits with Venuti's suggestion that "the political intervention performed by translation in postmodern culture may be more usefully imagined as a local, small-scale activity of resistance against dominant discourses and institutions" (2008, 22). The inaccessibility mentioned is not simply a question of the foreignness of a text, but also a reference to the political themes and content of the texts selected for publication by HIRU, a company with a publishing record that reflects the literary interests and ideological agenda of its founders Eva Forest and Sastre. Sastre's contemporary publishing work is, therefore, an extension of his ongoing literary and political rebellion. Hence, his use of O'Casey's plays at specific points in Spain's past is not only part of an understudied phenomenon in Spanish theatre history – turning to translation to evade censorship – but also part of the personal, ongoing, shifting ideological battle of Alfonso Sastre with the forces of the Spanish state.

## Notes

1. Merino Álvarez's work, particularly with the TRACE project, is an important resource for studying theatre translation and censorship in Spain. (TRANslations CEnsored, [www.ehu.es/trace](http://www.ehu.es/trace))
2. He was one of the protagonists of the "posibilismo/imposibilismo" debate involving several other dramatists (Alfonso Paso, Antonio Buero Vallejo and Fernando Arrabal) and their various attitudes towards censorship. Sastre took the line that to write what was "possible" to stage, rather than what one *wished* to stage, was tantamount to collusion with the regime; his stance was therefore "imposibilista". It is interesting, therefore, that the strategic use of translation to get one's message across could in fact be considered an example of "posibilismo".
3. Sastre's own non-theatrical writing also gives an insight into his political and theatrical development; see Sastre (1956, 1965, 1970). For a discussion of O'Casey's politics and how they influenced his theatre, see Lowery (1983); Newsinger (2004); and Murray (1998). See also the fourth volume of O'Casey's (1949) fictionalized autobiography, *Inishfallen Fare Thee Well*.
4. It ends with the lines: "¡Descansa en guerra / Sean O'Casey! / los tuyos no te olvidan/ni te recuerdan viejo queridísimo / sino que te acompañan / con estas rosas rojas / recogidas aquí entre compañeros" [Rest in war / Sean O'Casey / your own will not forget you / nor will they remember you, beloved elder / but rather they will accompany you / with these red roses / picked here amongst comrades] (12).
5. Moran notes that "[O'Casey's] left-wing plays of the 1930s and 1940s consistently spend time introducing a communist hero called Jack, who is often a veteran of the Spanish Civil War" (2013, 103). While the protagonist of *Red Roses* is not Jack, he shares many of his traits and we can assume, given his admiration for O'Casey, that Sastre was aware of the Irishman's stance on the Spanish conflict.
6. See "The Great Unrest", in *In the Cause of Labour* ([www.marxist.com](http://www.marxist.com)), and "Connolly on the Origins of the Lockout", in *Cork Multitext Project*, [http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Connolly\\_on\\_the\\_Origins\\_of\\_the\\_Lockout](http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Connolly_on_the_Origins_of_the_Lockout), and the National Library of Ireland's website, <http://www.nli.ie/1916/pdf/3.3.2.pdf>. O'Casey (1980) himself wrote the history of the ICA in 1919.
7. Sastre (1998c, 17) mistakenly credits him with being involved with the ICA's preparations for the Easter Rising.

8. Sastre turns his attention to adaptations of foreign plays from the mid-1960s until the mid-1970s and very little of his own work is submitted to the offices of the censors. This coincides with his membership of the outlawed Communist Party (from 1962) and his increased public criticism of the regime. In a 1974 survey of theatre censorship in Spain, Sastre wrote: “No existo. He sido borrado de todas las listas ... salvo de las listas negras, por supuesto” [I don’t exist. I’ve been removed from all the lists ... except the blacklists of course.] (Rivera and de las Heras 1974, 5)
9. Murray (2004, 81) takes the view that the 1911 railway strike is the background to the play. Sastre (1998b, 7), on the other hand, links it to the 1913 Strike and Lockout.
10. Various positive reviews from *Ya* and *Madrid* as well as *ABC* are quoted in advertisements for the play in *ABC*, 22 October 1969, p. 90, and the review in *ABC* on 8 October is glowing.
11. Sastre (1998c, 16) acknowledges that *The Plough and the Stars* and *The Silver Tassie* showed the futility of this struggle, but it is worth mentioning that he does not say the same of *The Shadow of a Gunman*. *Red Roses* was published twice in Spain in 1969: Sean O’Casey, *Rosas rojas para mí*, versión de Alfonso Sastre, in *Primer Acto*, 114 (November 1969): 31–64; Sean O’Casey, *Rosas Rojas para mí*. Trad. Alfonso Sastre. Madrid: Escelicer (1969). O’Casey was already known to readers of *Primer Acto*, as his “Bedtime Story” (“Cuento para la hora de acostarse”) had been published in volume 80 in 1966 (38–42).
12. This seems to have been an insertion of Sastre’s. It appears in neither the English text nor in the published Spanish version. The files consulted are held at the Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte (MECD). Archivo General de la Administración (AGA). See MECD. AGA [73/09724]. 85.254. File: 258/69.
13. There is no record in the state censorship archives of any application to have it staged. This may reflect a lack of interest in O’Casey or, more likely perhaps, a reluctance on the part of theatre companies to tackle such a politically sensitive theme.
14. For a description of the raid upon which it is supposedly based, see *Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well* (O’Casey 1949, 44–60). See also Bowyer Bell (1989, 21–22); Foster (1990, 498).
15. The original text mentions Republican courts, a reference to the 1919 Dáil policy of establishing an alternative social and political infrastructure in Ireland, which, it was hoped, would gradually replace the British one. The Dáil itself was the Irish Parliament established by the victors of the 1919 General Elections, who set up an alternative rule in Ireland, rather than taking their seats in Westminster (Bowyer Bell 1989, 19–20).
16. In an edition published by HIRU as *¡Irlanda, Irlanda!*, Sastre (1990, 5) also drew the reader’s attention to his addition of an historical-political frame, and commented that a knowledge of twentieth-century Irish theatre is important for Basque theatre practitioners.
17. In 1973, the conflict in Northern Ireland saw a rise in tit-for-tat killings. It was also the year of the United Loyalist Council Strike, the so-called “Border Poll” and attempts to set up a power-sharing executive for Northern Ireland that culminated with the Sunningdale Agreement. Car bombs were used by the IRA in two attacks in London in March 1973 (see <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch73.htm>). This was the year in which Sastre incorporated a vision of the contemporary IRA into his version of O’Casey’s *The Shadow*. It was also the year that ETA used a car bomb to assassinate Prime Minister Luis Carrero Blanco on 20 December. The following year both Sastre and his wife Eva Forest were imprisoned for their alleged role in the bombing of Café Rolando in Madrid on 13 September 1974, and she was also accused of involvement in the political killing of Carrero Blanco. Eva was imprisoned from September 1974 to June 1977, and Alfonso from October 1974 to June 1975 (see *ABC*, 1974, 1977; Eade 2007).
18. For two analyses of this hostility towards O’Casey, see Newsinger (2004) and Krause (1997).
19. The poetic Catholic, Celtic rhetoric of Irish nationalism and Pearse’s idea that “bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing” and that “without shedding of blood there is no redemption”, is completely undermined by O’Casey in this play. Patrick (Pádraic) H. Pearse, quoted (by the voice of the Man) in *The Plough and the Stars* (O’Casey 1998a, 182, 184), and taken from his 1913 article, *The Coming Revolution*. Reproduced in University

College Cork's Corpus of Electronic Texts (CELT). (Accessed online at <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/online/E900007-003/text001.html> and <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E900007-008/>)

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