

CRITICAL AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS IN
ÁLVARO CUNQUEIRO'S SHAKESPEAREAN
ADAPTATIONS IN GALICIA

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Abstract:

Translations, adaptations and reception of William Shakespeare and his works in many literary systems have been successfully analysed over the past two decades. However, there are still peripheral communities such as Galicia that refuse to review the role played by the English bard in the reconfiguration of their literary tradition in the twentieth century. In this article, we will examine the role of two Shakespearean adaptations written by Álvaro Cunqueiro (1911-1981) in the twentieth century. In addition, we will try to prove the value of both works as instances of veiled criticism of the dictatorial regime, while also hinting at the Galician writer's and adaptor's own biography.

Keywords: *Shakespeare, Cunqueiro, Francoism, veiled autobiography and criticism*

Polysystem theorists have argued that developing cultures and cultures in crisis are likely to turn to translation to fill gaps or provide new models for literary production (Even Zohar 1990, 1993). By translating a specific literary work into any Spanish official language, we are reinforcing the system and adapting new repertoires to the necessities of the target community. Although many drama translations were not specifically commissioned, they reflect the interests of individual writers, and only a few were originally conceived for theatrical production. However, through conscious or unconscious translation choice, "translations and translators are linguistically positioned within the interplay of the different cultural fields that inform their moment" (Buffery, 106). As for Shakespeare, the cultural and social impact of his works has surpassed the Anglophone literary systems beyond unimaginable borders and has been adapted to these specific cultural fields. Studies such as *European Shakespeares* (1993), *Four Hundred Years of Shakespeare in Europe* (2003), *Latin America*

Shakespeares (2005), *Shakespeare in Japan* (2006), *Shakespeare in Transition: political appropriations in the post-Communist Czech Republic* (2010), or *Shakespeare in the Spanish theatre: 1772 to the Present* (2010), have successfully proved the adaptation of several Shakespearean plays under these new conditions in non-Anglophone literary systems.

In the Spanish literary system, some translated works such as Fernando de la Milla's *Hamlet* (1928), for example, prove how "certain characteristic episodes were discarded as well, namely, the Fortinbras-Norway plot, the hero's trip to England, the dumb show (3.2), the King's prayers, and even the deaths of Hamlet and Laertes. [...] However, the Ghost [...] became [...] important in this version, although most of the earlier productions had avoided having a ghost on stage" (Portillo, and Salvador, 185). Other playwrights, however, come to adapt these plays to the dominant social and political model, such as Socialism in the former USSR, adding crowds on specific scenes to represent the proletariat, or amplifying comic elements in specific dialogues to raise the optimistic tone in the community (Bennett, 318-28).

Fragile and controversial elements in Shakespearean plays have also been adapted or discarded depending on the social and cultural needs in a specific community, or following the morals of the translator/adaptor. Revenge in *Hamlet* represents one of these controversial issues arising when introducing Hamlet to a new audience and literary system. For instance, examples include substituting or eliminating revenge in Hamlet's adaptations (Pujante, and Gregor, 305-317), following the dominant moral and political situation of that historical period, or a more obvious manipulation of the protagonist by introducing Hamlet as "a romantic, Christian, even Roman Catholic, young prince, forever hesitating, forever repenting for his previous conduct and who, far from being carried away by passion and revenge, appeared as an innocent victim in a corrupt and wicked world" in José María Pemán's *Hamlet* version (1949) (Portillo, and Salvador, 187). In other communities such as Catalonia, this phenomenon does not go unnoticed in their literary system, which releases a version "translated and arranged for the Catholic stage" (Traduhit i arreglat á l'escena catòlica) by Father Gaietà Soler in 1898, clearly designed for indoctrinating young men, where female characters are omitted. In addition, representations of different versions of Hamlet, a character known for his lack of activity and doubtful personality, have also proved successful in criticizing the inaction of the central government in Madrid in the conflict and final loss of the Spanish Empire in the Disaster of 1898 (Buffery, 28). Hamlet was to be identified by Joan Maragall with the situation of Spain and its indecision, inability for action and entrapment in the past (Maragall, 131-6).

Thus, theatre acts on numerous occasions as an agent that influences an active process of social mobilization and regeneration, in order to issue critical opinions, to indoctrinate the audience, or as *agent civilisateur* as Clara Calvo has

shown in the performances portrayed during the Napoleonic invasion of Spain (Calvo, 110). In this sense, although there are publications and critical issues that have noted the reception of William Shakespeare in Spain and Catalonia during the twentieth century, especially the relationship between censorship and Franco's dictatorship in Spain since the end of the Civil War (1936-1939) until the 1970s, the Galician reception of William Shakespeare and his works has been rather neglected until very recently (Míguez Ben 1993, Monleón 1993, Carvalho Calero 2000). Only two Galician intellectuals stand out as particularly important in Shakespeare's reception in Galicia during the twentieth century: Antón Villar Ponte and Álvaro Cunqueiro. The former playwright and translator is cited in many scholarly works as the translator of the *Merry Wives of Windsor* (1920?), adapted to the Galician stage at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, neither the original text nor the material around its performance has been found, with the exception of a few reviews. Therefore, the adaptations of Álvaro Cunqueiro, born in the early twentieth century in a conservative Galician provincial town, are pioneer works in the Shakespearean reception in his native community, although to this day his contribution has not been acknowledged by Galician scholars. Operating under the need to recreate a theatrical tradition that had been lost for several centuries in the Spanish context, Cunqueiro was mandated to create a play with foundational aspirations in order to put an end to the marginality of Galician literature and its tradition. In order to fulfill his objective, the Galician writer drew on world myths in his narrative, poetic and dramatic corpus. Hamlet, thus, became the regenerative myth which framed his theatrical invention. Following this tendency, he also created a version of *Romeo and Juliet* as a play-within-a-novel in *As crónicas do Sochantre*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* version which was radio broadcast. Our aim is to prove the extent to which two of these works contributed to the reception of Shakespeare in contemporary Galician literature and show the importance of these works as instances of the writer's autobiography during Franco's dictatorship as well as of veiled criticism of the social and cultural situation of the peripheral and marginalised Galician community.

Álvaro Cunqueiro (1911–1981), one of the leading writers of twentieth-century Galician literature, was an extremely prolific author and his published works include a great deal of poetry, essays, translations, drama and fiction. His accomplishments as a linguist allowed him to explore a wide variety of foreign literary systems and thus his work is also characterised by an easy familiarity with classic literature. A writer often considered to be a re-maker of ancient myths for modern times, he had to deal with a rather poor theatrical tradition in Galicia after a modest but intense stage activity during the twenties and thirties. When Cunqueiro was writing *Don Hamlet* (1958) and *A noite vai coma un río* (1960) only Galaxia Press worked, struggling with official hindrance, for the recovery of Galician culture. Institutions such as *Escola Dramática Galega*

(Galician Drama School) and *Escola Rexional de Declamazón* (Regional Performance School) had no alternative but to close, and theatre studies were slowed down until the 1980s, which had an influence on interpretative quality. In the sixties, actors and directors willing to restart the history of Galician theatre had no references except for those provided by the cinema and theatre on TV. Old theatres, very active during the 1920s and the Republican years, were turned into cinemas due to the lack of interest on the part of Franco's officials. The authors who insisted on writing plays in Galician knew they were writing an invention called "theatre to read". Cunqueiro himself, in the interview with the writer signed by Manuel Pérez Bello and published in the issue n. 110 of *Grial*, shows his uneasiness with a theatre scene that makes performance almost impossible. There is writing, of course, but the author is aware that theatre is an art that demands staging, the communication through the actor's live and actual voice on the stage. When asked about his dramatic work, the writer declared he would not write a play again without being sure the audience would see it on the stage: "I have three, four, five unfinished short plays, notes here and there, not developed because I do not enjoy publishing them anymore. I will not publish another play. If I finish any of them, I will make sure they will be staged" (Lago et al. 486). Cunqueiro's adaptation of a play by the Irish writer Lord Dunsany *A sentencia dourada (The Golden Doom)*, published in *Grial* magazine in 1980, one year before Cunqueiro's death, is the only exception we can trace. It reminds us of his previous *Romeo e Xulieta* in the treatment of symbolism and space:

Now I introduce the reader to a play written by Lord Dunsany. It is not a translation, as I add some scenes and dialogues from my imagination. [...] I believe that, if Lord Dunsany, a dreamer, knew of my interference in his short play, he would not take it as an offense. (Cunqueiro, 87)¹

Función de Romeo e Xulieta, Famosos Namorados (Romeo and Juliet, Famous Lovers)

Such was the moribund state of culture in Galicia at the time that Cunqueiro's *Función de Romeo e Xulieta, famosos namorados* (1956) is not even a real play. The improvised, almost inexistent play in five scenes is actually part of a longer narrative, *The Chronicles of the Subchantor*, which won the Critics' Award in 1959, turning thus into an essential book among the works of Cunqueiro. It is set in Brittany in Northern France, one of the Celtic regions par excellence, and escapes from realism in a time when fashion went against social narratives, its link being the stories of a group of ghosts executed during the French Revolution. Hence the story tells the adventures of executed ghosts like Madame

¹ All translations ours, unless stated otherwise.

Clarina, whom the subchantor falls in love with, and Colonel Pierre Coulaincourt, who was executed for crimes that are explained throughout the narration. Under these circumstances, the subchantor of the choir of Pontivy is kidnapped by the ghosts:

In my novel *The Chronicles of the Subchantor*, the story is about several dead characters on a horse carriage and the Subchantor of Pontivy. In broad daylight, they look like people in flesh and blood, before crossing the boundaries of death, whereas by night the skeletons come to light. Being mistaken for the Italian comedians who were going to perform the play of *Romeo and Juliet* in a Breton village of France, they had no other option but to go on stage and improvise the following play, with an agreed text, as it seems, by colonel Coulaincourt of Bayeux and madame Clarina of Saint-Vaast. Scene V is taken from the Subchantor's notes. (Cunqueiro, 199)

As Cunqueiro pointed out from the very beginning, the ghosts in the narrative are taken for Italian players coming into France in order to stage an English drama which was originally set in Verona. The play-within-the-novel, consequently, breaks with literary genres and their limits, with literary conventions such as the traditional Elizabethan device of the play-within-the-play. Cunqueiro works on the Shakespearean plot to fit the tastes of Galician people for fable and myth. Geographical, cultural and linguistic incongruity, cultural starvation, siege and desperation are present in Cunqueiro's impossible Verona as in moribund and almost inexistent Galicia under Franco's regime. Given the impossibility of a Galician dramatic tradition in the twentieth century, Cunqueiro's *Función* reaches its audience as a play-within-a-novel. In a way that is similar to its having never been staged in contemporary Galicia, the play as such finally vanishes within the narrative as soon as the players get back to their original skeleton appearances.

The story of *Romeo and Juliet* has been told in many different ways by authors from all over the world and it always seems to have appealed to the audience. According to Purificación Ribes, this fact had been previously noticed by important authors like H. B. Charlton, M. C. Bradbrook, I. Evans, D. Cole or H. Levin. But G. Melchiori is the first to take a step further in order to point to the stylistic variety of the play as a consequence of the political situation of England at the time and its appeal to Elizabethan audience (Conejero, and Ribes, 9-11). Clara Calvo explains, quoting Norman Jones, that William Shakespeare was already born in a moribund culture. The English nation was going through a time of extraordinary change in society, politics, economics and religion by the time that he wrote his works. That is, a change in the culture and the relationship between the individual and his / her environment. The trigger for these changes, although not the only cause, was undoubtedly the religious conflict emerged

from the clash between Catholicism and the Protestant Reform (Pujante, and Calvo, 191).

Besides the stylistic contrasts, this Shakespearean tragedy also shows related conflicts like idealism-realism, comedy-tragedy, or youth-maturity. Ribes highlights the moral distance which separates the young couple from the world of adults among the permanent obstacles to be overcome by them. While Romeo and Juliet live with intensity every moment of their lives, their parents and the representatives of maturity remain anchored in a past of memories. They are totally unaware of the interests of the new generations, which will increasingly become more isolated (Conejero, and Ribes, 32). Thus, these conflicts are also applied to location and displacement in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. However, what happens with these oppositional locations in Cunqueiro? Is his version *Romeo e Xulieta, Famosos Namorados (Romeo and Juliet, Famous Lovers)* a representative biographical document of the Totalitarian Francoist Regime in Galicia, as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* was during its Elizabethan staging?

The situation described by Shakespeare is quite familiar for Galician people living under the grinding contrasts of Franco's dictatorship. The beginning of Francoism meant the death of Galician culture as well as the silent, clandestine fight for a new democratic era against a power which faced the interests of democratic generations. And secrecy itself involves deep conflicts, incongruity, nonsense, isolation and even death in an unequal fight for change. Romeo's letter, hence, the only clear reference to the Shakespearean play in the "función", is not even real. Once the performance is over, a girl in the audience finds out that the letter that had just been read by the deceased girl playing the role of Xulieta was empty of Romeo's beautiful, idealised words: "Mother, mother! There was no Romeo, neither memories, nor lilies! (Cunqueiro, 213)". According to Xosé María Paz Gago, these final words uttered by the girl in the courtyard:

...condense the unconceivable message, the storyline and existential emptiness, the tragic humour of the theatre of the absurd: if there is no bald singer in *Cantarice Chauve*, if there is no African pachyderm in *Rinoceronte*, if Godot never turns out in *Waiting for Godot*, Cunqueiro makes his most impersonal character in *Función de Romeo e Xulieta*, the little girl by the window in Comfront. (Paz, 469)

The citizens' gossiping also introduces Xulieta in the third scene and provides a setting of fear and siege in the first. The whole idea of the arrival of the letter, too, is narrated by the expectant citizens of Verona and their guessing at the beginning of the "función":

A SOLDIER

It is said there is some mail from Mantua coming along the river!

A WOMAN

Another soldier told me that Mantua was being burnt.

AN OLD MAN

Then, it must be from Venice.

A WOMAN

Someone saw some mailman from Venice approaching the river on horseback

A MERCHANT

There is no Venetian mailman on horseback he would have chosen a maritime route. He will be from Sienna, if Mantua was finally burnt. (Cunqueiro, *As crónicas do Sochanre* 203)

In Cunqueiro's version, these constant interruptions are drawn on stage with secondary dialogues, which extend throughout the play, and the lyric discourse, aroused by an impossible passion, used in Xulieta's reflections and Romeo's letter. These should be considered one of Cunqueiro's best poetic efforts according to Paz Gago (469). Hence the messages of fear and misfortune, together with the depiction of the situation of Verona and its citizens at the time, do similarly reach Cunqueiro's readers through the secondary characters' permanent interruptions and gossiping. In the following lines, the plague is announced by "as xentes" in the audience:

CITIZENS ON THE WALL, THE SQUARE AND THE WHOLE VILLAGE

The Black death has arrived! The comedians brought the Black death! The Italian Black death has arrived! Love brought the Black death in its bones! Look at Death! The Black death! The Black death! (Cunqueiro, 211)

Secondary and external information by means of gossiping is the only available information in the plays by Shakespeare and Cunqueiro symbolising, in the latter, Galicia's marginal position in the Spanish state during Franco's regime and the role of exiled intellectuals responsible for reviving local culture from an outward position. Miscommunication, frustration and alienation inside Galicia are similarly posed throughout the play by Cunqueiro. Secondary characters' permanent interruptions asking for food in the second scene give an idea of the starving conditions of the population under siege:

A WOMAN

Will they bring some bread, sir?

AN OLD MAN

Will they bring some Mantua's wheat?

A SOLDIER

When are they going to sell Venetian oxen in the market again?

A WOMAN

We want bread! A small piece of bread, sir!

A CORPORAL

If someone gave us some food, we would calmly listen to the news from Sienna. (205)

Paz Gago reminds us that Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is an expression of the lack of information and communication among his characters. This impossibility of communication among them, so typical in the theatre of the absurd, is also used in the Galician version. Even if Cunqueiro's characters do not really interact and there is no official narrator in his work, readers can easily manage to know the plot unofficially, through the secondary –external-to-the-main-plot- characters' gossiping. They are part of the actual audience of the "función", knowing as much plot as the citizens of Verona do. Thus, the cruel reality of the "función" is portrayed by its secondary characters while the ideal story of the protagonists is proved to be absolutely not real and virtually inexistent both in and outside the "función" itself. It is completely outshone by this secondary disjointed narrative made out of gossiping and guessing. In the end, isolation, alienation, secrecy, lack of communication and incongruity were part of everyday Galicia under Franco's regime as much as of Cunqueiro's version of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

Other autobiographical elements that we could find in the narrative are associated with objects, surnames and place names found in his work that are directly related to the experiences of the author or with his home community. For example, the landscape of *As crónicas do Sochantre* is proved to have been inspired by Galicia: "The countryside and towns, rivers and fords, roads and ruins, I have drawn them as my native land, Galicia, being both Breton and Galician landscape, Atlantic realms, *Finisterrae*, in flora and fauna alike, and vaguely distant provinces" (Cunqueiro, 186). These autobiographical data, his early years in Mondoñedo, a clerical and conservative Galician village, an influential father during the postwar occupation, or the wealthy family of his mother will be essential in order to understand the writer's ideological development, his education and personality. As a consequence, Mondoñedo was an indispensable part of Cunqueiro's works. In the following lines, the Galician writer describes his hometown in the Index of proper names at the end of his novel *Merlin and Company*: "Mondoñedo .- A City of Galicia, famous for its bishops and its horse-fair held around St. Luke's day. Señor Cunqueiro, who put these stories into fair form, was born there. It is rich in grain, water, and Latin" (Cunqueiro, 135). Similarly, and following this tendency of universalization of Galicia, Cunqueiro confesses in an interview with Carlo Ricci:

One way or another, there is always a bit of Mondoñedo in my books. [...] Every small town that I write about is somehow my city, no matter how different they are. I don't mind whether it's a Greek village Odysseus reaches or

a town in Brittany, where the Subchantor arrives with the spirits. Every village has a bit of my city. (Ricci, 337)

However, there are more subtle features present in this autobiographical work and they should be analysed not only in a literary context but also, from a biographical perspective. One of these early autobiographical elements that prove the value of the “Romeo e Xulieta, Famosos Namorados” as a document reflecting the tensions created in the 1940s and 1950s in Galicia is mirrored in the choice of literary genres. In other words, the play is written as an episode of a novel: *As crónicas do Sochantre*. There is enough evidence to prove a connection between Cunqueiro’s selection and use of several genres and his biography, depending on several personal circumstances reflected in the several stages of his life (Armesto, 1987). In fact, after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Cunqueiro abandons his avant-garde poetry almost completely to become a prolific essayist, journalist and practitioner of archaic poetic productions, coinciding with his public conversion to the Falangist movement in November 1936. (Spitzmesser, 36; Rodríguez Fer, 13-9). In another period, when the writers reconciled with Galician culture and Francisco Fernández del Riego, back in Mondoñedo Cunqueiro published *Merlin and Company* (1955, translated by Colin Smith, 1996) and started his narrative career, gradually dissociating himself from the regime and its Falangist thesis. The Galician writer thus embarked on a period when his narrative works stood above other literary genres. In this sense, this new stage coincides with the creation of the *As crónicas do Sochantre* and a depression caused by a strong sense of isolation from former Galician nationalist colleagues. These intellectuals would reproach Cunqueiro in later years, not his silence towards Galician culture, but his willing support to Falange (Jarazo, 181).

Following these events, the Galician writer opted for seclusion in a severe depression. Leaving Madrid as a professional setback in his career, his economic and marital crisis, or his radical change of life in a small provincial Galician village are some decisive factors in his depressive state. But Cunqueiro will gradually reappear during this period through several collaborations to cultural and literary magazines and Galician periodicals. He let his interest in essay and article writing come second in order to let his creative writing skills come first. However, not every Galician intellectual was willing to accept the return of Cunqueiro and his literary activity. Largely despised by Spanish newspapers, and loathed by many print media in Spain after the war, Cunqueiro’s return was not well received. And these feelings are evidently present, not only in the almost inexistent relationships between characters in *As crónicas*, but also in the coldness and dispassion that relates to human experience in this play (Spitzmesser, 107).

Another feature that leads us to identify this novel, where the adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* is included, as an autobiographical document of Francoism is the chronological position of this novel in its narrative development. Cunqueiro's career in fiction is to some extent, curiously parallel to Franco's totalitarian regime. His narrative career, based at the beginning on a secure atmosphere, will gradually become chaotic and obscure, leading to a complete collapse. In metaphorical terms, this process could be defined as a shift from initial formation to final deformation (Spitzmesser, 30). In his first novel in this period, *Merlin and Company*, this work represents a laudatory song to a previous golden age. Set during the French Revolution, this novel approaches this historic period as a negative event. However, his other novel *As crónicas*, set in the same historical period, reflects the need for a drastic change, a revolution that ends with the dominant Absolutism (i.e. the similarities between Absolutism and totalitarian regimes) and ends an agonic corrupt regime. Coinciding with the most difficult years of Franco after the Civil War, Cunqueiro creates in *As crónicas* and "Romeo e Xulieta" an atmosphere of desolation and death, alienation and darkness typical of both regimes. *El año del cometa*, his latest novel, continues this trend and focuses on the impossibility of rescuing the myth and assuming the new socio-political order by announcing the imminent fall of Franco's regime, which also coincides with the end of his career as a novelist (Spitzmesser, 19). Even Cunqueiro reconciled his crisis as a novelist and the external circumstances around his narratives in his last interview with Cesar Carlos Morán.

In the thematic sphere, *As crónicas* is articulated as a spooky Gothic fantasy rooted in the macabre dances and the Medieval Galician myth of the Holy Company. However, in more detailed analysis, there are two non-complementary interpretations which define the novel and the play of *Romeo and Juliet*. On the one hand, *As crónicas* is defined as the end of the relationship between death and Absolutism, hidden beneath the grotesque Medieval "Dance of Death" and the demystification of the official Franquist ideology (Spitzmesser, 21) and, on the other hand, as a grotesque eschatological carnival with Bakhtinian connotations which exorcise the evils of a repressive society, prohibitions, restrictions, and fear (Kristeva, 90).

All in all, such a dramatic event as a Civil War caused a severe trauma and disruption in Spanish society, not only in the social and political realm of the country, but also in its citizens' everyday life. As Hernán Vidal has incisively noted, the most destructive of these breaks was "the fragmentation of the community between winners and losers... requiring the maintenance, expansion and secretive administration of a powerful repressive apparatus by the fascist state" (Vidal, 27-8). The social body of the country was divided into two irreconcilable halves. The most obvious binary opposition in Franco's society was the existent gap between the official and real history, typical duality of

totalitarian regimes (Spitzmesser, 59). Thus, *As crónicas* and “Función de Romeo e Xulieta” should be praised as a document that embodies the social breakdown presented in the form of a fantastic story. It should also be understood, as an instance of (veiled) autobiography that develops within the context of the Francoist regime.

O incerto Señor Don Hamlet, Príncipe de Dinamarca (Don Hamlet: The doubting Prince of Denmark)

Don Hamlet could be considered to be one of the works that marked the beginning of modern Galician theater. In this free version of the myth of Prince Hamlet, Álvaro Cunqueiro is disguised as a halberdier amongst Fortinbras’ troops arriving in the kingdom of Denmark after the tragedy took place. This halberdier, the writer’s alter ego, recounts the events that perhaps happened before they arrived, as he was not present at that time in the events. In this play, Cunqueiro reinterpreted the Hamletian myth in the fashion of Classical Greek tragedy and Nordic folklore with a unifying element: Freudian Oedipal theories. The Galician writer, thus, resumes this universal myth into a vision where incest and Oedipal relationships become the protagonists. As a consequence, Cunqueiro’s Hamlet is the son of Queen Gertrude –Gerda in the Galician version- and King Claudius – King Halmar -, and not the late King. Being aware of the difficulties of cultivating a classic myth such as Hamlet in Galicia during the Spanish postwar, Cunqueiro explains to the reader that his version was indebted, when it comes to a variety of sources, not only to Shakespeare, as one of his favourite writers, but also to numerous books, versions and schools of thought:

Let me also warn you, before my "Don Hamlet, Prince of Denmark" comes to light, that my version "sounds like" Shakespeare. I had no reason to hide from that voice. [...] I have given more than enough evidence of my creative ability, [...] all my friends and my few followers also know how tireless a reader of Shakespeare I am. [...] And when I read aloud to a friend my "Hamlet", I knew that if they recognised Shakespearean voices in my words, I was right in the expression of my tragedy. (Cunqueiro, 25)

This Galician version, as complex and obscure as Shakespeare’s, was harshly attacked by critics and audience even before its publication or theatrical debut. Critics analyzed this drama as a parody of the Shakespearian play performed in the seventeenth century. Unfortunately, they did not pay attention to the novelty involved in the secret father-son relationship and the incestuous relations with the Queen. The following example, taken from Santiago Fernandez’s article “Historia de unha montage teatral” (The history of a theatrical performance), is illustrative of the critics’ concerns about this play:

We should praise, as he fully deserves, Cunqueiro's creation of a "Galician theatre". This Cunqueirian concern, successfully materialised in "Don Hamlet", is traditionally successful in Catalonia, which offers a regional theater of undoubted merit. Cunqueiro's effort to create, drawing on such an unsuitable issue, what should actually be that [Galician] theatre is debatable. Recalling the myth of Hamlet only leads us to a loss of dramatic interest in the play. The great imagination, knowledge and careful prose of Cunqueiro could have been used for a subject of more dramatic energy and more appealing to our modern audience. [...] Cunqueiro lacks ability, creates a basic stage choreography and does not fuel the action until the final scenes. His excessively rhetorical characters, prolonged scenes and abuse of monologues and dialogues [...] are anachronous if someone tries to sympathise with a prince of Denmark speaking in Galician. (Fernández, 418-419).

Even the readers that followed Cunqueiro week after week in his newspaper *Faro de Vigo* mercilessly attacked the play. Their justification was based on the impossibility of this Hamlet, written in such an unsuitable language as Galician, to address philosophical and Freudian theories. Other complaints referred to the inappropriateness of associating Shakespeare to the Galician culture, and consequently to the lack of a real consolidation of Galician theatrical tradition in the modern era. Cunqueiro usually replied to these issues in literary columns like the one quoted below:

I have received an anonymous letter, which I found in my mailbox in Pontevedra, which tells me that it is stupid of me to write a dramatic piece in Galician about the doubts and death of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark; that the play was written in English by Mr Shakespeare, and that it is immense vanity for me to compare myself with him; that if I wanted to create a theatre in Galician I should look for a topic in our daily reality; that, if it ever crossed my mind to stubbornly rewrite *Hamlet* again, translating Shakespeare was enough. Etc.. etc.. (Well: I was also called a vacuous writer by the anonymous hand). [...] I write these lines not as an answer to the anonymous letter, which is a string of inconsistencies and disrespectful remarks; but because with this writing, there are already twelve, twelve letters precisely [...] against my version. (Cunqueiro, 25)

Other allegations of the era, that also includes Luisa Villalta, correspond to the continuous dialectic confrontation between the realm of imagination and reality, understood in realist novels as an active commitment to the social problems of that time. Finally, the English bard's authoritative recreation of the myth of Hamlet is also an issue amongst critics and audience, who see in Cunqueiro's version an irrelevant adaptation when compared to Shakespeare's (Villalta, 28-9).

Another feature of this play is the interference of the author in his work from the very beginning. He alludes to the halberdier that tells the previous story developed before their arrival at the palace. Thus, the narrator becomes the biographer who recounts the events that befell the royal family. At this point, where Shakespeare's play ends, Cunqueiro begins to tell his version. It is legitimate to think, although not explicitly expressed, that the story is told by Horatio, Hamlet's witness. This story is both engaged and refined through many versions and possibilities where, as in a fable, the boundaries between reality and imagination are diluted. The implied author is placed in the fiction as a secondary character, as we already have an autobiographical author that is, consciously, intertwined with myth (Villalta, 45).

In connection with the halberdier in the troops of Fortinbras as an implied author, Cunqueiro removes the Fortinbras plot for several reasons, but mainly in order to eliminate war references in his work, given the repressive climate and censorship. This elimination also involves the removal of the theme of revenge. In Cunqueiro's version, Fortinbras is not needed to restore a new regenerative realm. In the Greek tragedy, however, Hamlet is given the status of a hero who, by committing suicide, purges his Kingdom's sins and regenerates the status quo without further revenge. In other words, he seeks for a non-revengeful re-establishment of peace in order to prevent his own destruction.

If Shakespeare's *Hamlet* uses the power of theatre to try and restore the order of the Old King through the punishment of the guilty, Cunqueiro's play includes variations on Shakespeare's story with the explicit intention to make his so-called loose Shakespearean pieces fit. But in fact, the Galician author makes Shakespeare's *Hamlet* fit through the elimination of the original idea of violent punishment and revenge. In a post-war environment, and envisioning the end of Francoism, Cunqueiro –always in disguise and hidden behind his own play– uses such a tragedy of revenge as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to question the need for revenge in the years of cultural *openness* during the last decades of Francoism.

In keeping with the autobiographical elements in Cunqueiro's *Don Hamlet*, the wind's role is established as a unifying element which connects Elsinor with the writer's native village, Mondoñedo. The howling wind outside the castle (19-20) consciously becomes in Cunqueiro's final "Note" to his play the wind in Mondoñedo: "This play was written in the Autumn of 1958. The wind blew in Mondoñedo as Western winds blow in Elsinor" (99). However, this statement is not an occasional reference. In many articles published in the Galician Press over several decades, the Galician writer confers a mythological status to the wind (Armesto, 17), as many Elizabethan writers did at the time of the Spanish Armada. Cunqueiro also empowers the feeling of repression inside the castle with this symbol. We are, in fact, faced with an oppositional scheme between the alienation represented by the tamed environmental elements and the wind, the vicious ivy or the furious landscape outdoors, representing irrational

passion and liberty: “There is no other place so windy in the world as Elsinor. Everything has to be kept within the castle walls: people, cattle, and the garden. It is the wind to be blamed for! [...] That’s the reason why everyone enjoys a pale complexion in Elsinor. Who wants to go out of Elsinor?” (Cunqueiro, 20). By letting the wind and the natural forces freely into the castle, King Hamlet is able to release the tensions that threatened the status quo established during the Usurper’s reign. As a result, actions will finally overflow the universe of Cunqueirian characters at the end of the play with the death of both the Queen and King of Denmark and the suicide of Prince Hamlet:

Hamlet. Nobody ever let the wind find its way in Elsinore. A Royal amendment, my dearest Polonius. A supreme decree. It shall be written. From this moment on, wind should be allowed in. King Hamlet is not afraid of the howling wind. Tell Ophelia I put her name on my lips when dying. Ropes [sparto grass] are so rough these days! (Cunqueiro, 97)

Other autobiographical elements of the Galician writer are rather personal. Armesto Faginas, Cunqueiro’s official biographer, establishes a comparison between his personality and Hamlet’s family laziness: “Vague, fantastic, easy-going, lazy, [...] a dreamer...” (Armesto, 289). The Galician writer also refers to the impossibility to tell facts from fiction: “When he was asked about his favourite saint when he prayed, he used to cite Saint Expedito among several: “because he is in charge of quick decisions and it takes me too much effort to do so”.” (Armesto, 291; Villalta, 32-3).

In the end, this play perfectly reflects Brecht’s artistic vision about human nature. Behind the “angst” or horror of a whole generation of European intellectuals destroyed by the totalitarian regimes nurtured in Europe during the twentieth century, there is a scepticism in Álvaro Cunqueiro and his play *O Incerto Señor Don Hamlet* that tries to reflect the existential crisis of Galician and Spanish society in the forties and fifties. Unfortunately, this veiled criticism has been difficult to detect by critics and audience until very recent times. In fact, the role of both plays, and especially *Don Hamlet*, as a revealing energy that exceeds the boundaries of censorship and repression, will only be manifested by Cunqueiro during his final years:

- Topics such as classical Greek and Latin literature are often the subject of your books, why do you like the classics so much?
- [...] I lived the Civil War and subsequent years and I had an intellectual and moral concern about the futility of vengeance. This is what "A man who looked like Orestes" is about. I have been a reader of Shakespeare since I was a child and they are all in it. One day I was surprised that "Hamlet" did not fit within his work. There was a missing piece. I came to realise that this great drama of human maturity was the Oedipus complex.

In other words, the murderer of his father, who married his mother, was his true father. Then everything fits and the mother wants to marry her son to avoid revenge. After I wrote my *Hamlet*, other writers would come to this discovery. Clearly, eternal human passions are all the same since the creation of classic myths. Human beings, since then, have had no new passions. Everything is in the Greeks. It is curious, but during the German occupation of France, a Frenchman translated Homer. During Franco's, Segarra, in Catalonia, translated Shakespeare [...]. I know that censorship was ferocious against a few paragraphs in Segarra's translation, as Shakespeare was often a political opinion. Thus, the classics are sometimes the way a man can say what he is not allowed to verbalise in a situation without much freedom of speech. (Outeiriño, 12)

All in all, Álvaro Cunqueiro's adaptations of these two Shakespearean plays have been essential in the creation of a foundational dramatic tradition in modern Galicia. By paying tribute to William Shakespeare and his works, one of his major literary influences, Cunqueiro has also been able to forge a subtle veiled criticism against Francoism that crosses the limits established by censorship. As Levi-Strauss and Barthes have argued myths are never an abstract entity. In every historical period, myths have a particular specificity, determined by the method of production of the time. In essence, myths constitute a semiotic system articulated in a conflicting situation like a dictatorship. In other words, each society, class or generation consciously produces values that govern their community. Myths are also part of these values. Álvaro Cunqueiro has definitely placed universal myths such as Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet into Galician literary and cultural traditions, using them as agents that, in the end, consciously or unconsciously reveal the social reality of his time as well as elements of the author's own biography.

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