

“BETWIXT OUR NATION AND THE ASPIRING FRENCH”: SPANISH PATRIOTISM(S) THROUGH SHAKESPEARE’S CRITICAL RECEPTION (1764-1834)¹

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Abstract:

The paper focuses on the critical reception of Shakespeare’s work in Spain, beginning with the second half of the 18th century, showing how the Spanish literary scene became a space for critical controversy that illustrates the aesthetic differences between neoclassical and *dissident* criticism at the time. The paper demonstrates that this initial aesthetic conflict conceals ulterior issues dealing with the identity of Spanish drama and of Spain as a nation, the decaying quality of Spanish theatrical production at the time, and the neoclassical political programme for moral instruction and social reform.

Keywords: *Spanish critical reception, neoclassicism, paradigm change, cultural identity*

Spanish culture in 1764 can be partly characterised through the frame of the Enlightenment, a period of French inspiration where Spanish literature tended to imitate French literary models. With limited exceptions, Shakespeare’s dramas were adapted from previous French neoclassical versions since, in their initial form, Shakespeare’s plays clashed against neoclassical aesthetics. Voltaire, the most influential literary figure in Europe at the time, defined Shakespeare’s works as “a collection of plays meant for booths at the fair”,² so the fact that Francisco Mariano Nipho inaugurated the Spanish reception of Shakespeare in 1764 with an enthusiastic eulogy contradicts the stability of the Spanish Enlightenment as a culturally homogeneous period. The preponderance of

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² J. J. Jusserand, *Shakespeare in France under the Ancien Règime* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1899), 375.

neoclassical criticism is manifest in the initial Spanish reception of Shakespeare, but Nipho's positive appreciation of the English playwright is also maintained by other authors during the period. Therefore, the Spanish reception of Shakespeare starts out as a space for critical controversy that illustrates the aesthetic differences between neoclassical and *dissident* criticism. These aesthetic discrepancies are, in fact, associated to the ideological appropriation of Shakespeare by the different factions. As we will see, the initial aesthetic conflict conceals ulterior issues dealing with the identity of Spanish drama and of Spain as a nation, the decaying quality of Spanish theatrical production at the time, and the neoclassical political programme for moral instruction and social reform.

Thus, this body of texts offers a manifestly ambivalent vision of the playwright: in some, Shakespeare's plays are described as aesthetically ludicrous or amoral; in others, his plays are flawless samples of original stagecraft. Confronting a heterogeneous scenario, this paper intends to contribute to the ideological distinction between the two factions involved in the early Spanish critical reception of Shakespeare. Thus, in addition to the work already advanced on the subject,¹ this essay relates each group's critical evaluations to the Spanish socio-political context to expose the political, social and moral motivations concealed behind the apparently aesthetic assessments of both interested parties. This paper maintains that Shakespeare's early critical reception in Spain is affected by two opposing views of national identity: on the one hand, neoclassical critics — as dominant cultural caucus — appeal to French literary models to reject Shakespeare's work in order to consolidate their agenda for social reform; on the other, dissident criticism holds Shakespeare as a

¹ For an early discussion on eighteenth and nineteenth-century critical reception of Shakespeare in Spain, see Alfonso Par, *Shakespeare en la literatura española*, 2 vols. (Madrid and Barcelona: Victoriano Suárez and Biblioteca Blanes, 1935). For more recent discussions, see *El manuscrito shakespeariano de Manuel Herrera Bustamante*, ed. Ángel-Luis Pujante (Santander: Sociedad Menéndez Pelayo, 2001); Ángel-Luis Pujante, "Limando asperezas: Juan Andrés y Shakespeare", in *Amica Verba. In honorem Prof. Antonio Roldán Pérez*, ed. Ricardo Escavy et al., vol. II (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 2005), 859-871; Keith Gregor and Ángel-Luis Pujante, "The Four Neoclassical Spanish Hamlets: Assimilation and Revision", *SEDERI*, 15 (2005), 129-141; Ángel-Luis Pujante, "Manuel Herrera on Shakespeare: A New Spanish Manuscript from the Romantic Period", in *Spanish Studies in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, ed. José Manuel González (University of Delaware Press, Newark, 2006), 21-42; and Keith Gregor and Ángel-Luis Pujante, "Conservatism and liberalism in the four Spanish renderings of Ducis's Hamlet", in *Shakespeare and European Politics*, ed. Dirk Delabastita, Jozef de Vos and Paul Franssen (Newark/London: University of Delaware Press/Associated University Presses, 2008).

mirror of Spanish Golden Age drama to overcome the nation's (cultural) inferiority complex and to recover the dimming lustre of Spanish theatre.

Shakespeare and the Spanish Enlightenment

In the reigns of Spanish kings Carlos III and Carlos IV (1759-1808) social, economic or foreign policy was supervised by consecutive Prime Ministers like Floridablanca, Campomanes, Aranda or Godoy, *de facto* political leaders of the *enlightened* nation. During the second half of the eighteenth century, Aranda was considered one of the most progressive politicians in Spain; as example, Voltaire, a personal friend of Aranda, resorted to renovating symbolism when in his *Philosophical Dictionary* he described him as the man who “started to cut the heads of the inquisitorial Hydra”,¹ that “hydra” alluded by Voltaire being the Spanish Inquisition, an archaic emblem of the old Spain which started to loose influence during the softer rule of Enlightened Absolutism. Spanish Enlightened Absolutism was characterized by the influence of these progressive political figures in the Crown's projects for social reform and their affinity to the ideals of the French Enlightenment. Historiographers like Defourneaux, Herr, Sarrailh or Mornet have pointed out the influence of French *philosophes* during this period of Spanish history.²

In the field of literature, the “Enlightenment” is described by Spanish literary historiography as the “Neoclassical period”; both labels used frequently as interchangeable terms. Three authors stand as paradigms of Spanish neoclassical aesthetics. These leading figures of neoclassical Spanish literature are on the one hand Father Feijoo and Jovellanos — essayists whose interests covered economy, law, politics, history, maths or physics, as much as literature — and, on the other, Leandro Fernández de Moratín, the quintessential playwright of Spanish neoclassical drama and controversial translator of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

The list of neoclassical criticism on Shakespeare's work includes Father Juan Andrés, who discusses some of Shakespeare's dramas individually for the first time in Spanish in 1784. Echoing some of the complaints put forward by French criticism, his Poetics advance most of the commonplaces that will recur in later Spanish neoclassical criticism. Juan Andrés complains about Shakespeare's defects, and describes his style as “affected”, “high-flown”, “dissolute” or “obscene”, especially inadmissible when attributed to high characters such as kings, princes or noblemen. He also abhors Shakespeare's mingling of different mythological traditions, the appearance of spirits or

¹ François Marie Arouet [Voltaire], *Diccionario Filosófico*, ed. Ana Martínez Arancón (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, [1764] 2000). All translations by the author.

² *España y la Revolución Francesa*, ed. Enrique Moral Sandoval (Madrid: Pablo Iglesias, 1989).

personified animals on the stage, or even “common people”, like tailors, shoemakers or gravediggers:

Dissolution and obscenity are rarely seen in Spanish drama, but they continuously resonate on the English stage without offending the cultured and with the enjoyment and praise of the people [...] Is there a man more stolid than the King Lear, and women more vile, more ungrateful and more cruel than his two daughters Regan and Goneril? Is there a character more indecent, improper and unworthy — not of a queen, but of a prostitute — than Cleopatra?¹

Two years before, another Jesuit priest, Father Javier Lampillas, had already listed briefly some of Shakespeare’s shortcomings, offering yet another recurring accusation of French criticism, namely, the fact that Shakespeare continuously ignored the Aristotelian dramatic unities of action, time and space.² All these ideas were repeated by Esteban de Arteaga, a third Jesuit priest that closes in 1789 a body of criticism that mirrors the neoclassical ideal imported from France:

When one reflects on the enormous defects that the English poet allowed in his scrupulous accuracy of imitating nature; [...] when not only the rules of unity, action and time are unobserved, but also those of geographic and historical conformity; [...] when one realises the immoderate and irregular conduct of most of his compositions; [...] when one observes his style, at times inopportunately pompous and at times morally relaxed and diffused, at times pregnant and obscure and at times cold, puerile and stuffed with antithesis and wordplay, the reader cannot help being upset when watching such an imperfect and base performance of nature.³

Soon after, in 1798, Shakespeare is translated into Spanish by the nation’s leading neoclassical playwright, Leandro Fernandez de Moratín. His translation of *Hamlet* includes a prologue and a brief biography of Shakespeare in which Moratín continues and enlarges the catalogue of reproach against Shakespeare, providing the most extensive instance of neoclassical criticism on Shakespeare in Spanish up to the present date. To the recurring observations

¹ Juan Andrés, *Origen, progresos y estado actual de toda literatura* (Madrid: Antonio de Sancha, 1784-1806).

² See J. J. Jusserand, *Shakespeare in France under the Ancien Règime* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1899), 375, and Francisco Xavier Lampillas, *Ensayo histórico-apologético de la literatura española contra las opiniones preocupadas de algunos escritores modernositalianos* (Zaragoza: Blas Miedes, 1782-1786).

³ Esteban de Arteaga, *Investigaciones filosóficas sobre la belleza ideal, considerada como objeto de todas las artes de imitación* (Madrid: Antonio de Sancha, 1789).

already mentioned, Moratín adds two characteristics that exemplify the problematic features of Shakespeare’s writing for the neoclassical dramatic model: the inability to maintain the Aristotelian precept of *mimesis*, providing situations which are hard to believe under neoclassical convention, and the lack of morally didactic elements. In his prologue to *Hamlet*, Moratín includes a neoclassical *manifesto* for drama:

[Drama] demands the most prudent economy of characters, situations, ornaments and episodes. A plot without violence or confusion, with characters masterfully imitated from nature [...], simplicity for language and style [...] and] a moral ending.¹

For the neoclassical mind Shakespeare’s plays continually fail to mirror these attributes. Tomas de Iriarte, Manuel García de Villanueva, Jose Joaquín de Mora or José Gómez Hermosilla reproduced similar attitudes towards Shakespeare’s dramas.²

These views are characteristic of what Spanish modern historiography refers to as the elite of the Enlightenment, a group of magistrates related to the military forces, the restricted educational circles or the church. This exclusive faction — associated to the Absolutist Spanish Crown of the Enlightenment and their Primer Ministers — shares a determinate set of ideals, namely, the support to the King against individual jurisdiction, an agenda of social reform interested in promoting social productivity and economic activities, and a strong drive towards moral (catholic) utilitarianism.³ Thus, while the group’s social position privileged those authors that conformed to their political inclinations, the relationship between political affiliation and artistic aesthetics can also be seen to extend to Shakespeare’s critical reception. During this period, Shakespeare is

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

² See Amador de Vera y Santa-Clara, *Los literatos en Quaresma* (Madrid: La Gazeta, 1773?); Manuel García Villanueva, *Origen, épocas y progresos del teatro español: discurso histórico al que acompaña un resumen de los espectáculos... y un compendio de la historia general de los teatros hasta la era presente* (Madrid: Gabriel de Sancha, 1802); Anon. [José Joaquín de Mora], “Curso di Literatura Dramática del Signor A. W. Schlegel. Curso de Literatura Dramática, traducido del italiano con notas por el Señor Juan Gherardini. Milan 1817. Juicio de esta obra”, *Crónica Científica y Literaria*, 130 (1818); José Gómez Hermosilla, “Reflexiones sobre la dramática española en los siglos XVI y XVII”, *El Censor*, 38 (1821),VII, 131-141; and José Gómez Hermosilla, “Blanca y Montcasin, o los Venecianos, tragedia de Arnault en cinco actos traducida al castellano por don Teodoro de la Calle”, *El Censor*, 54 (1821), IX, 435-445.

³ Javier Varela Tortajada, “La élite ilustrada ante las nuevas ideas: actitudes y contradicciones”, in *España y la Revolución Francesa*, ed. Enrique Moral Sandoval (Madrid: Pablo Iglesias, 1989), 55-72.

reviewed by Spanish politicians as much as by literary figures; as in many other areas of culture, the Spanish neoclassical letters stand in close dialectical relationship with the Spanish political Enlightenment.¹

Dissident Criticism

But Spanish critical reception of Shakespeare during the Enlightenment is not limited to neoclassical discourse, for there are multiple conflicting voices that undermine the neoclassical literary paradigm. One of the traces of these social tensions is the creation and common use of the term “afrancesado” in the Spanish language. Coined by these dissident figures, it derogatorily refers to those who support French politics, arts or manners. Shakespeare’s positive evaluation during the Spanish Enlightenment comes from this rebelling, anti-French social sentiment.²

Francisco Mariano Nipho was the first Spaniard to talk about Shakespeare and also the first to initiate a tradition of positive evaluations of the English playwright that rebel against French culture and its literary values. Charging against French adaptations of Shakespeare’s drama, Nipho subscribes the English view on their playwright:

The effect of the French’s pen on Shakespeare is rather a trim than a mirror [...] If, out of nature’s hands, all the spirits in England would fuse themselves in one, the result would be a new Shakespoaar [*sic*]. The evidence for this is that even today, and after two hundred years, the poet is the idol of his entire nation, which finds no defects in his works and, if they are found, they are appreciated; I would consider this great English talent less, had he none.³

José Joaquín de Escartín thought that Shakespeare’s dramas were quite useful to learn history and that his talent exceeded French neoclassical drama as a whole.⁴ Father Eximeno, a fourth and less strict Jesuit priest, disregarded

¹ See texts 1 to 17 in *Shakespeare en España: Textos 1764-1616*, ed. by Ángel-Luis Pujante and Laura Campillo (Granada y Murcia: Editorial Universidad de Granada/Edit.um, 2007).

² The term “afrancesado” is recorded for the first time in Spanish in 1742, according to Mark Davis’ corpus

(Mark Davies <<http://www.corpusdelespanol.org>> – [4/7/2007]), or in 1758 according to the Real Academia Española (REAL ACADEMIA ESPAÑOLA: Banco de datos (CORDE) [en línea]. *Corpus diacrónico del español*. <<http://www.rae.es>> [4/7/2007]).

³ Francisco Mariano Nipho, *La nación española defendida de los insultos del Pensador y sus sequaces* (Madrid: Gabriel Ramirez, 1764), 125-127.

⁴ José Joaquín Escartín, “Comentario sobre Shakespeare”, *Correo literario de la Europa* (1782).

Aristotle's unities, valued that Shakespeare ignored their use, and mentioned him amongst the great names of European drama:

Had they not closed their eyes and covered their ears to the rules of unity, France would never have Corneille, Racine, and Molière, nor Italy would have Metastasio and Goldoni, nor England would have Shakespeare, nor Spain would have Lope de Vega.¹

In 1818, an anonymous writer describes *Othello* as “one of the best tragedies of English drama”, and seems quite amazed by the “strange mixture of shocking buffooneries and first-rate beauties”.² Then in 1823, José Blanco-White, describes the English playwright as a “true poet”, unmatched in his “use of language, [...] the tone of his thoughts and the originality of his talent”; he adds:

The great English poet's merit [...] is so unique and his beauties are [...] mounted in the language that he wrote [...] Amongst the authors we know there is no one that resembles Shakespeare in this use of language. One expression, one word alone from this extraordinary man says more to those that understand than a whole volume from others.³

For Juan Donoso Cortés, in 1829, “no other writer [shows] such a profound understanding of the human heart” and his characters are “frightening”, yet that does not seem to be a negative quality since, for Donoso Cortés, Shakespeare's dramas are flawless.⁴ Finally, in 1834, the year of the Spanish Romantic Movement's official start, Mariano José de Larra points out that *Romeo and Juliet*'s ending is “the kind of thing that cannot be found in the classic Racine; the kind of thing that is only legitimate to the sublime audacity of Shakespeare”.⁵

¹ Antonio Eximeno, *Don Lazarillo Vizcardi* (Madrid: Sociedad de Bibliófilos Españoles, 1800-1806?).

² Anon., “Sobre una representacion de *Otelo* en Londres”, *Crónica Científica y Literaria*, 145 (1818).

³ Anon. [José Blanco White], “Shakespeare: Traducción poética de algunos pasajes de sus dramas”, *Variedades o el Mensajero de Londres*, 1 (1823), 74-79.

⁴ Juan Donoso Cortés, “Discurso de apertura en el Colegio de Cáceres”, in *Obras completas de Don Juan Donoso Cortés, Marqués de Valdegamas*, ed. Hans Juretschke (Madrid: Editorial Católica, 1946).

⁵ Mariano José de Larra, “Representación de *I Capuletti ed i Montecchi*”, in *Obras de D. Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro)*, ed. Carlos Seco Serrano (Madrid: Atlas, [1834] 1960).

Dominant Aesthetic Discourse and *Populist* Appropriation

These examples of positive evaluation clash against dominant neoclassical discourses and challenge the uniformity of Shakespeare's critical reception during the Spanish Enlightenment. After illustrating the opinions of the two possible factions, there are different ways of interpreting this process. There is, of course, an explanation based on aesthetic literary history. According to Spanish literary historiography, Spanish pre-romantic literature starts to surface at the beginning of the nineteenth century, while the Romantic Movement finally takes a predominant position in Spanish culture around 1834.¹ If Shakespeare's European prestige owes greatly to romantic vindications, his Spanish critical reception should follow the same aesthetic evolution. This description is fairly accurate if we look at the period's thirty-five texts which comprise Shakespeare's critical reception in Spain: during the eighteenth century, these texts seem to give more prominence to Shakespeare's defects while, as 1834 approaches, Shakespeare's evaluation shifts slowly, culminating in Larra's enthronement of the English playwright. Being one of the paradigmatic figures of Spanish Romanticism, Mariano José de Larra's flattering comments on Shakespeare are especially propitious to this aesthetic interpretation. Still, this view could be complemented with an ideological contextualisation of those involved in the Spanish critical reception of Shakespeare.

The manifest separation between high/low culture or centre/margin dichotomies is associated during the Spanish Enlightenment to the political factions of the period. As mentioned in relation to the Enlightened Prime Ministers, Spain's political configuration favoured a Neoclassical conception of art, since just as the leading political figures surrounding the Spanish crown adhered to the ideas of the Enlightenment, the intellectual and artistic elite continuously supported and produced works within the models of French aesthetics. Both the political and cultural servility of Spain towards France is well documented. During the Seven Years' War, the third "Pacto de Familia", a treaty in which Spain agrees to support French troops in their war against the British in North America, gave way to a period of fluent foreign relations between the two reigns. At the time, France and Spain even considered the possibility of granting double nationality to their citizens, but this amicable situation disguised Spain's weaker status in the pact, as Prime Minister

¹ See Juan Luis Alborg, *Historia de la literatura española* (Madrid: Gredos, 1980); *Historia de la Literatura Española*, ed. Juan Manuel Prado (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 1984); and *Historia de la Literatura Española*, ed. Ángel Valbuena Prat, 9th ed. (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1982).

Floridablanca confesses in his *Political Testament*.¹ In the cultural sphere, Montiano, a neoclassical author of the period, claimed that the eighteenth century should be called “the *century of good taste*, since we [the Spanish people] do not allow anything that has not previously passed through French customs”.²

At the same time, the influence of French culture was promoted from the highest corridors of power through monarchical and governmental censorship. Because of its potentially higher moral and political threat to social stability, drama was scrutinized severely. Censors intervened not only in those plays that failed to show respect for the church, the monarch or his laws, but also those which failed to meet the requirements of morality, good taste or even the Aristotelian dramatic unities; a sort of aesthetic censorship.³ Thus, the basic hierarchical structure of Spanish culture during the eighteenth century allowed Spanish neoclassical authors that pursued French aesthetic paradigms of good taste to occupy the centre of culture while, on the other hand, under the regime of Spanish Enlightened Absolutism the outskirts belonged to anyone that did not conform to neoclassical standards.

Still, Shakespeare was vehemently supported by different critical commentators. In the eighteenth century, while the shadow of France hovered above Spanish culture, many felt the need to defend Spanish letters against cultural invasion. Under these circumstances, Shakespeare became an extremely useful figure to some Spanish critics, for his plays stood tall against French neoclassical drama, offering a model which could be easily related to the past splendour of Spanish Golden Age authors like Lope de Vega or Calderón. In 1782, José Joaquín de Escartín — together with Nipho — vindicated the “great superiority of [Shakespeare’s] talent” over French playwrights. He expressed the following view on the current state of French and Spanish drama:

French poets had not dared to compose their dramas except by borrowing from the Greeks and Romans, or from the Spanish, whose drama they emulated. Now it is the opposite: we, the Spanish, emulate French drama and translate and bargain over their plays.⁴

¹ “The system followed with France until the last revolution [French Revolution] has been that of the most perfect harmony, conforming to the Pacto de Familia, although with the possible precautions that allowed us to live with independence and throw off the yoke which that Court [the French] had always tried to impose on us” (Moñino y Redondo 1962).

² Francisco Aguilar Piñal, *La España del Absolutismo Ilustrado* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 2005), 22.

³ *Ibid.* 184.

⁴ José Joaquín Escartín, “Comentario sobre Shakespeare”, *Correo literario de la Europa* (1782).

Escartín's comments on Shakespeare need to be read within the critical situation of Spanish drama during the Enlightenment. As in most intellectual debate of the Spanish eighteenth century, the comparison with France was unavoidable. In 1764, Nipho declared England's supremacy over France in theatrical matters, underlining the conceptual and expressive qualities of English drama in general and Shakespeare in particular. But Nipho's text is, in fact, a counterattack on previous articles published in a newspaper of neoclassical affiliation that continuously charged against sixteenth and seventeenth-century Spanish drama — especially Calderón and his "Autos Sacramentales". Shakespeare's enthusiastic evaluation by Nipho needs to be understood, within a wider discourse, as a displaced reaffirmation of cultural identity. His attack on French drama on behalf of Shakespeare conceals a defence of national culture against the imported schemes adopted by part of the Spanish intellectual community.

Together with Escartín and Nipho, Donoso Cortés compliments Shakespeare while announcing that Spanish Golden Age Drama will "raise its head at last and flaunt itself big and *sublime* in the middle of Europe, which will admire its creations".¹ Vindicating the lost glory of the Spanish Empire, dissident criticism camouflages Shakespeare's plays as Spanish Golden Age drama and takes advantage of Shakespeare's subversive model to counteract the declining prestige of Spain in European culture. Donoso Cortés's assertions should be read as patriotic cries that articulate the anti-Neoclassical programme which will succeed in establishing, a few years later, a new literary paradigm with the coming of the Spanish Romantic Movement. In this same line, Agustín Durán claimed that the Spanish stage was too often invaded by those who "despise the productions of our national wits and fill the stage with ungracious and unworthy imitations of French pieces".² In an act of pre-romantic militancy, Durán applauds the figures of Shakespeare, Calderón and Schiller, and supports Spanish Golden Age dramas against French Neoclassicism.

Social Programme and the Decadence of Spanish Theatre

Spain's declining prestige around Europe went beyond literature. In the eighteenth century, Spain started to reflect an image of poverty and backwardness that injured the pride of a formerly illustrious nation. The

¹ Juan Donoso Cortés, "Discurso de apertura en el Colegio de Cáceres", in *Obras completas de Don Juan Donoso Cortés, Marqués de Valdegamas*, ed. Hans Juretschke (Madrid: Editorial Católica, 1946).

² Agustín Durán, "Discurso sobre el influjo que ha tenido la crítica moderna en la decadencia del teatro antiguo español y sobre el modo con que debe ser considerado para juzgar convenientemente de su mérito peculiar", in *Memorias de la Academia Española* (Madrid: Rivadeneyra, [1828] 1870), I, II.

neoclassical elite of the Enlightenment was also conscious of such reality, yet their idea of cultural and social improvement did not approve of Shakespeare’s amoral and incongruous plays.¹ Spanish neoclassical critics such as Moratín or Gómez de Herosilla agree on the decadence of the Spanish stage, but their agenda goes beyond theatrical matters. For them, Calderón or Shakespeare offer more than just aesthetic problems. As René Andioc has pointed out, for the Spanish neoclassical mind "art occupies a much less important place than morality... the aesthetic controversy is just one of the aspects of a larger ideological conflict".²

In this way, Shakespeare fails to offer a morally useful dramatic pattern. In the prologue to his translation, Moratín complains that the characters in *Hamlet* die regardless of being guilty, which “makes the existence of a fair Providence doubtful”; for Moratín, since “the school of manners that needs to imitate vice and virtue for us to learn” every play should offer a moral ending, while Shakespeare shows himself “uncertain about the purpose of the intended instruction, uncertain about the character shown before the eyes of the spectator to imitate or punish”.³ Other neoclassical critics, like Herrera Bustamante, agree on Shakespeare’s lack of moral intention. On the other hand, dissident criticism handles Shakespearean morality in different terms. Reflecting Schlegel’s romantic Poetics, Agustín Durán believes that theatre needs to suit “the moral necessities of *each country*”,⁴ so by the time we approach the coming of the Spanish Romantic Movement, Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* will be seen as morally useful.⁵ Again, dissident criticism continues to offer a nationalistic discourse, in this case, on morality.

In the Spanish Enlightenment, the neoclassical artistic models aimed at a profound social reform which was revolutionary at the time. From a contemporary point of view, a revolution based on Catholic morality and social immobility is seen as mild or reactionary, an example of what Andioc has

¹ Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, Antonio. “La corona, el gobierno y las instituciones ante el fenómeno revolucionario”, *España y la Revolución Francesa*, ed. Enrique Moral Sandoval (Madrid: Pablo Iglesias, 1989), 5.

² René Andioc, René (1987). *Teatro y Sociedad en el Madrid del siglo XVIII*. 2nd Ed. (Madrid: Castalia, 1987), 127.

³ Inarco Celenio [Fernández de Moratín, Leandro], *Hamlet. Tragedia de Guillermo Shakespeare* (Madrid: Villalpando, 1798).

⁴ Agustín Durán, “Discurso sobre el influjo que ha tenido la crítica moderna en la decadencia del teatro antiguo español y sobre el modo con que debe ser considerado para juzgar convenientemente de su mérito peculiar”, in *Memorias de la Academia Española* (Madrid: Rivadeneyra, [1828] 1870), I, II.

⁵ José Somoza, “El perdonavidas, ó el Capitán Juan Falstaff: escena sacada de los dramas de Shakespeare”, in *Obras de D. José Somoza: artículos en prosa*, vol. II. (Madrid: Imprenta Nacional, 1832).

referred to as the neoclassical “Philosophy of Conformity”. For Andioc, the Neoclassical dramatic model aspired to “ensure the resignation of the working classes”, presenting plays that “punished the attempt to climb above one’s humble [social] sphere”.¹ In this light, it is no surprise that Neoclassical critics like Gómez Hermosilla rejected Schlegel’s distinction between classical and romantic literature which “tended to theatrical anarchy”.² Shakespeare’s kings and princes expressing themselves as low-class scoundrels offered a disconcerting model that clashed against Neoclassical clear-cut distinctions of social strata:

Who will have the patience to behold a mouse, a wall, a lion and the moonlight talk, act and discuss; to witness low and vulgar speeches, the games of shoemakers, tailors, grave-diggers and the rest of the vilest and most despicable plebs; to hear from the mouth of princes and from the most respectable characters such vulgar jokes, indecent words and plebeian rogueries; and, in short, to read continuous oddities and insufferable extravagancies?³

Spanish neoclassicism encouraged the continuity of the established social configuration and seemed threatened by the idea of popular revolt. For the Neoclassical mind, Shakespeare’s plays were oblivious to the dangers of social revolution, and so Moratín complains about Claudius as an implausible character:

Does he not care that Hamlet’s death, carried out by such means, will uncover the treason to everyone’s eyes and that everyone will judge him author or accomplice [of the murder]? Does he not fear the riots of the common people? ... Is it not fair to believe that in this general commotion Claudius will be the victim sacrificed to public vengeance?⁴

Shakespeare’s plays were too often too subversive for a neoclassical conception of society, a conception which was based on the submission and conformity of the lower classes. This “Philosophy of Conformity” is constantly manifested through the neoclassical reception of Shakespeare’s plays, where he is blamed for his success amongst the English local populace, while Neoclassical criticism refers to the audience as vulgar or uncultivated. Spanish

¹ René Andioc, René (1987). *Teatro y Sociedad en el Madrid del siglo XVIII*. 2nd Ed. (Madrid: Castalia, 1987), 185.

² José Gómez Hermosilla, “Reflexiones sobre la dramática española en los siglos XVI y XVII”, *El Censor*, 38 (1821), VII, 131-141.

³ Juan Andrés, *Origen, progresos y estado actual de toda literatura* (Madrid: Antonio de Sancha, 1784-1806).

⁴ Inarco Celenio [Fernández de Moratín, Leandro], *Hamlet. Tragedia de Guillermo Shakespeare* (Madrid: Villalpando, 1798).

Neoclassical criticism offers continuous denigrating comments about the audience and attacks on Shakespeare based on his popularity amongst “the people”. For Tomas de Iriarte,

Shakespeare [...] has been carried away many times in his compositions by the degenerate disposition of the people, resulting in absurdities without manners or decency, for the purpose of pleasing them.¹

Social discrimination is also evident in Moratín’s comments about Shakespeare: for him, when Shakespeare’s style,

distancing away from true elegance, degenerates into the gigantic and the affected ... It has something that, although it disgusts the intelligent, pleases the ears of the common people, who do not examine but only feel.²

Both Neoclassical and dissident criticism portray opposing views of Spanish society. Professor Pozuelo Yvancos separated these confronted approaches by two binomial oppositions that, applied to Shakespeare’s critical reception, help to unravel this complicated cultural scenario. The intellectual caucus (dominant/centre faction) of the Spanish Enlightenment aims at a cultural configuration that favours “foreign” and “cultivated” values, while the dissident section of society (dominated/peripheral faction) favours “genuine” and “popular/ordinary” principles.³ The conflict goes beyond the aesthetic *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* of the seventeenth century.

This distinction can be observed through the interrelated processes of both cultural fostering and exclusion that affect Shakespeare’s critical reception in Spain during the Enlightenment. The Spanish Neoclassical elite rejected Shakespeare’s dramas as they rejected their own Spanish Golden Age playwrights. At the same time, dissident criticism defended Shakespeare as it were preserving its own cultural heritage. For dissident criticism, Shakespeare’s boisterous dramas embody the temper of the common people and the sentiment of the Spanish nation; for Neoclassical critics, Shakespeare fails to offer a cultivated model for drama, nothing like the classical temperance of Racine. For dissident criticism, Racine is an overrated outsider; for neoclassical criticism, Shakespeare is too Spanish.

As we mentioned earlier, the hegemony of Neoclassical thought during the Spanish Enlightenment depended on the crown’s favouritism, yet Spanish

¹ Amador de Vera y Santa-Clara, *Los literatos en Quaresma* (Madrid: La Gazeta, 1773?).

² Inarco Celenio [Fernández de Moratín, Leandro], *Hamlet. Tragedia de Guillermo Shakespeare* (Madrid: Villalpando, 1798).

³ José María Pozuelo Yvancos, “Popular/culto, genuino/foráneo: canon y teatro nacional español”, *Teatralia*, 3 (2000), 236-260.

Neoclassical politicians and intellectuals — or “afrancesados” — were accused of disloyalty to the nation due to their inclination towards French culture, fashion and taste. Because of these accusations, Shakespeare’s theatre occasionally received harsher recriminations by the “afrancesados” than Lope’s or Calderón’s, since attacks on Shakespeare were not as readily attributed to anti-patriotism. Thus, we find opposing views on the idea of the Spanish nation and patriotism. On the one hand, Neoclassical patriotism consisted in a programme for social, cultural and political reform that brought the nation closer to the ideals of the French Enlightenment. On the other hand, the dissident view of patriotism entailed an idea of nation that aimed at recovering the dimming lustre of the Spanish Empire, at restoring its lost identity and, in that alternative concept of national identity, there was room for Shakespeare.

Shakespeare and the consequences of the French Revolution

Then, the remaining question is how Shakespeare’s dramas turned from being predominantly rejected to being predominantly acclaimed by Spanish criticism. Again, the aesthetic or literary answer is available: Spanish critics supported Neoclassical drama until the coming of the Romantic Movement and the change of aesthetic and hence literary taste. Within the scope of the development and spread of literary and aesthetic movements in Europe, the answer fits accurately yet, in the case of Spanish Neoclassicism and Spanish Romanticism, other questions can be taken into consideration.

If we follow the traditional division of literature offered by Spanish literary historiography, the Enlightenment begins with the rise of Felipe V after the Spanish Succession War in 1700. Accordingly, it continues until the 1830s, when the exiled liberals return to Spain after the death of Fernando VII, and help consolidate Spanish romanticism. On the contrary, if we pay attention to modern historiography we could infer that Shakespeare’s critical reception in Spain is highly influenced by the consequences of the French Revolution in Spanish society.

In the years prior to the Storming of the Bastille, many Spanish neoclassical intellectuals expressed their sympathies towards French revolutionary ideals and even Prime Minister Floridablanca approved of the French parliamentary and aristocratic opposition against King Louis XVI.¹ Once it started, the Revolution provoked mixed social response. The Spanish crown hurried repressive measures to keep control over French citizens living in Spain and vice versa, with the aim to prevent revolutionary propaganda from tradesmen, clergymen, visitors or students. Spanish newspapers were suppressed

¹ Cayetano Alcazar, “Ideas políticas de Floridablanca”, *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, 79 (1955).

in February of 1791 after the failed attempt by the Spanish government and the Inquisition to stop French communication with Spain.¹

In any case, in the initial stages of the French Revolution the Spanish crown decided to maintain a neutral position and, although the beheading of Louis XVI in 1792 caused much discomfort at court, the end of the Reign of Terror and the constitution of the Directory in 1795 led to the renewal of the alliance between France and Spain (San Ildefonso Treaty, 1796). Even so, Spain was walking a tightrope by aligning with a government in confrontation with the rest of Europe and which principles both repudiated and feared.² Prime Minister Aranda, who sympathised with revolutionary ideals according to traditional historiography, gave full support to the Old Regime sustaining the monarchical order to prevent the “contagious insurrection”.³ Prime Minister Floridablanca is also said to go through “a fundamental revision of his thought” after the French Revolution. Together with Campomanes, the three Prime Ministers of the Spanish Neoclassical Enlightenment all turned to the monarchic movement of the “contrarevolución” (counter-revolution). Finally, the French invasion of Spain in 1808 by Napoleon’s troops provoked the uniform reaction of the Spanish people against the French Revolution, together with a strong support for the monarchic institution and the church. Spanish historiographer Gil Novales has pointed out how, “apart from being a solely patriotic confrontation of *that which is ours*”, The Spanish War of Independence was “used by reactionary authors to attack not just the Revolution, [...] but the whole of the Enlightenment”.⁴

In this light, Moratín’s complaints about Claudius as an implausible character are charged with historical significance once we take into account that he wrote them in 1798, seven years after the government and the Inquisition closed down the Spanish newspapers (“Does he not fear the riots of the common people? [...] Is it not fair to believe that in this general commotion Claudius will be the victim sacrificed to public vengeance?”⁵ The second edition of Moratín’s translation of *Hamlet*, published in 1825, did not include Shakespeare’s

¹ María Dolores Saiz, “La prensa española de la época y la revolución francesa”, in *España y la Revolución Francesa*, ed. Enrique Moral Sandoval (Madrid: Pablo Iglesias, 1989), 29, 34.

² Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, Antonio. “La corona, el gobierno y las instituciones ante el fenómeno revolucionario”, *España y la Revolución Francesa*, ed. Enrique Moral Sandoval (Madrid: Pablo Iglesias, 1989), 16.

³ AHN 4, 818 [National Historic Archives, Spain]. *Estado*, leg. 4 818 (36).

⁴ Alberto Gil Novales, “La revolución francesa en la perspectiva del siglo XIX español”, in *España y la Revolución Francesa*, ed. Enrique Moral Sandoval, (Madrid: Pablo Iglesias, 1989), 108. Stress added.

⁵ Inarco Celenio [Fernández de Moratín, Leandro], *Hamlet. Tragedia de Guillermo Shakespeare* (Madrid: Villalpando, 1798).

biography. Moratín also omitted some of his critical footnotes to the text and he toned down some of the comments in his prologue. Also, when Juan Andrés revised his *Origin, Progress and Current State of All Literature* in the year of Napoleon's invasion (1808), he also moderated the tone of his critique.¹

At this point in the discussion, the beneficial consequences of such socially traumatic events for Shakespeare's critical reception in Spain should be obvious. As it is widely agreed, Shakespeare's European canonization is closely related to the success of the Romantic Movement but this aesthetic model fails to establish itself in Spain until around 1834. There is, of course, a widely researched pre-romantic movement in Spanish literature and some authors were familiar with Schlegel's poetics (see Durán above, for example) but Spain's critical socio-political situation in this period plays a relevant part in Shakespeare's critical assimilation. Thus, the Spanish critical reception of Shakespeare during the Spanish Enlightenment proves to be the battlefield for opposing factions that respond to the social, political and cultural problems of a tumultuous period.

¹ A lengthier discussion on Juan Andrés's second edition of his work can be found in Ángel-Luis Pujante, "Limando asperezas: Juan Andrés y Shakespeare", in *Amica Verba. In honorem Prof. Antonio Roldán Pérez*, ed. Ricardo Escavy et al., vol. II (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 2005), 859-871.