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THE SPANISH RECEPTION OF MOLINA FOIX AND PLAZA'S 1992 VERSION OF *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*: A REASSESSMENT

PURIFICACIÓN RIBES TRAVER
purificacion.ribes@uv.es
University of Valencia
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9356-9161

Abstract

This paper reassesses the Spanish reception of Vicente Molina Foix and José Carlos Plaza's Spanish version of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, premiered at the María Guerrero Theatre in Madrid in 1992. Taking into account the interdependence between text and performance, it focuses on the strategies adopted by Molina Foix in his translation of this complex Shakespearean tragicomedy. Bearing in mind that the text is a score for the actors to perform, it assesses to what extent the performance of their parts is as nuanced as the score may suggest. It then compares that analysis with the statements published by the translator of the text, the stage director and a number of newspaper reviewers and scholars on the nature of the Spanish production. It concludes by showing to what extent the paratext of a play may mediate between a performance and its target audience.

Keywords: Theatre translation. Spanish reception. *Merchant of Venice*. 1992. Molina Foix and Plaza.

Resumen

El presente artículo realiza una nueva valoración de la recepción española de la versión de *El mercader de Venecia* realizada por Vicente Molina Foix y José Carlos Plaza, y representada por primera vez en el teatro María Guerrero de Madrid en 1992.

Teniendo en cuenta la mutua dependencia de texto y representación, presta atención a las estrategias adoptadas por Molina Foix en su traducción de esta compleja tragicomedia shakespeariana. Partiendo del hecho de que el texto constituye la partitura que deben interpretar los actores, este trabajo valora la medida en que la interpretación actoral reproduce los matices de esa partitura. A continuación, compara ese análisis con las declaraciones del traductor del texto, del director escénico, así como de estudiosos y críticos teatrales, sobre la naturaleza de este montaje. Concluye mostrando hasta qué punto el paratexto de un texto puede mediar entre la representación y el público al que va destinada.

Palabras clave: Traducción teatral. Recepción española. *El mercader de Venecia*. 1992. Molina Foix y Plaza.

1. Introduction

Vicente Molina Foix's Spanish version of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* premièred at the María Guerrero Theatre in Madrid on 11 December 1992. It was produced by the National Dramatic Centre (Centro Dramático Nacional), that was at the time directed by the play's stage director, José Carlos Plaza. The fact that Vicente Molina Foix was then literary advisor to the C.D.N. might have affected the decision of choosing his translation for what was repeatedly advertised as the first production of *The Merchant of Venice* by a professional company since the Spanish Civil War (Plaza 1993; Ladra 1993: 79; Sanderson 1993), even though Cayetano Luca de Tena had directed a Spanish version of the play that was successfully performed at the Teatro Español in 1947 (Ribes 2024).

The play was rehearsed over a period of two months, and ran for eight months. It remained at the María Guerrero from 11 December 1992 until 28 March 1993, and was performed in fifteen different towns during its national tour, that started on 1 April and finished on 18 July 1993.[1] It had a budget of over 60 million pesetas (€360,000), which allowed for a sumptuous performance that paid great attention to visual and aural detail, including its setting, costumes and background music. The play was seen by over 100.000 spectators (Several authors (1993a), and most reviews celebrated

1. The primary source of our analysis is the video recording made by the INAEM on 2 February 1993.

the production's high quality and success. The praise covered a variety of aspects, such as the close and fruitful collaboration between text translator and stage director, the translation's theatrical nature, the clarity of its language, its careful attention to rhythm, the actors' performance of their parts, the play's criticism of prejudice, and the production's pleasing visual spectacle. The text, moreover, was published by the C.D.N., together with a rich paratext (Genette 1982) that included several sections on the text's translation and its stage directions. It is the aim of this article to examine that material and compare it to the actual stage version, so as to decide to what extent the target audience may have been affected by these paratexts. What it ultimately attempts is a thorough reassessment of this Spanish production of *The Merchant of Venice* as well as of its critical reception—not yet undertaken—whose findings may call into question the highly positive remarks the production received when it was originally performed. The essay applies a textual-oriented and a performance-oriented approach, and provides an in-depth analysis of both the original and target texts as well as of the Spanish performance and its critical reception.

Aware of the paramount importance of language in any Shakespearean text, and the particular complexity of this tragicomedy (Mahon 2002: 80; Halio 2021: 55), this study pays close attention to the nature of Molina Foix's Spanish translation of the play, and looks into the way that text has been enacted by actual actors and actresses and received by spectators, reviewers and scholars. Our analysis takes into account Jauss's (1970) emphasis on the audience's horizon of expectations, as, in this particular case, the play had seldom been performed in Spain before 1992, so that many spectators and reviewers were new to it, and could not compare their experience of attending this performance to a previous one with a different outlook on the play. The same applies to the actors, who required special guidance for their roles, which probably explains the detailed information the translator offers in his edited version of the text on the way the different characters should be understood.

2. Molina Foix and Plaza's version of *The Merchant of Venice:* text, performance and paratext

When the CDN stage version of *The Merchant of Venice* had been running for five months, Sanderson celebrated the production's great success, and related it to the happy collaboration between translator and stage director: "El éxito de este montaje se debe a una feliz confluencia de texto y dirección" (Sanderson 1993). This fruitful collaboration has been repeatedly regarded as the ideal situation for any performance to succeed. As Bassnett points out, "Ideally, the translator will collaborate with the members of the team who put a playtext into performance" (Bassnett 1998: 107), an idea Johnston underlines regarding his own experience: "I count myself supremely fortunate […] to have joined forces with some truly great directors and actors in the process of putting my translations onto the stage" (Johnston 2015: 7).

We must bear in mind, however, that both the text's translator and the theatre adaptor of *The Merchant of Venice* were conscious of the difficulties this complex text posed for actors and audiences alike. J.C. Plaza pointed out that he had paid special attention to the visual elements of his production because he was aware that contemporary audiences were not easily engaged with complex language. Three days before the end of the play's tour, he declared: "El teatro de hoy ha de ser muy visual y auditivo para que interese. El llamado teatro explicativo ha muerto" (quoted by Montero 1993), thereby justifying his production's high aesthetic appeal: "[Este] montaje espectacular […] corresponde a una sociedad visual como la nuestra" (quoted by Martínez 1993). This aesthetic emphasis did not go unnoticed by critics, some of whom showed their approval of Plaza's choice, whereas others missed a greater emphasis on the play's verbal texture. Thus, whereas Jesús Vigorra regarded it as a "bellísimo espectáculo […] gozoso para los sentidos y agradable para el corazón" (Vigorra 1993), Joaquín Ollero concluded: "[La dirección] es más brillante en lo escénico que en lo dramático," and viewed the production as "algo superficial y esteticista" (Ollero 1993). José María Pons went further in his condemnation of what he regarded as a superficial approach to the play's intensely dramatic scenes:

> José Carlos Plaza, con todos los medios a su alcance, no ha conseguido arrancar ninguna chispa de ingenio, dejando carentes de fuerza los momentos de mayor intensidad dramática (Pons 1993).

Although José Carlos Plaza was aware of the play's ambivalent nature, he also realized the difficulty this ambivalence posed for the actors. Thus, he fittingly described this Shakespearean tragicomedy as

> una comedia divertida con una envoltura casi de cuento de hadas, pero tras la que se encierra la tragedia de dos o tres pueblos que no llegan nunca a entenderse porque la raza blanca se cree en posesión de la verdad (quoted by Piña 1992a: 67).

However, he also experienced the difficulty of finding a proper balance between the comic and the darker scenes, something he stated while rehearsing the play:

> Intentamos reflejar el espíritu shakesperiano en una comedia divertida pero difícil para los actores, debido al equilibrio entre las escenas cómicas y trágicas (quoted in Several authors 1993b).

Even though he highlighted the play's currency due to its exposure of racism and religious intolerance, not all reviewers were capable of discerning those elements in the production. Thus, whereas Plaza stated that *The Merchant of Venice* "toca una llaga abierta en esta Europa mercantil y racista en que vivimos," and added: "Es una obra contra el racismo, contra la hipocresía de la religión" (quoted by Levín 1993), Itziar Pascual read the play differently:

> Shakespeare nos muestra una Venecia de carnaval y disfraz, de lujo y fiesta, donde es posible la convivencia entre pueblos, razas y culturas diferentes. Una Venecia ideal (Pascual 1992).

This questionable remark on the peaceful coexistence of different racial and religious groups in Shakespeare's Venice might have been prompted by the play's actual performance, as well as by some statements made by the translator. Molina Foix, in his rehearsal notes on Act I, scene ii, where Shylock agrees to lend the Venetian Antonio 3,000 ducats, claims that

> Shylock ve por primera vez una posibilidad de pactar con los cristianos, de ser admitido con todas sus creencias y costumbres, de llevar a cabo una

> reconciliación del pueblo judío y el pueblo cristiano (Shakespeare 1993: 56).

He repeats this idea when discussing his change of attitude in Act III, scene i, where Shylock discovers the elopement of his daughter Jessica with the Christian Lorenzo, and is mercilessly teased by Solanio and Salerio. This presumed change in attitude is understood by Molina Foix as follows: "Hasta ahora el plan de Shylock era realmente una broma con deseo de congraciarse con los cristianos" (*ibid.*: 69). It is not surprising that José Pedro Carrión, the actor playing this role, makes a similar remark when assessing his part: "Él quiere ser amigo de los moradores de Venecia" (Carrión 1993)—an idea even Susan Fischer echoes:

> It clearly had occurred to Shylock for the first time that the bond might be exploited as an instrument of retribution, whereas initially it had been conceived as mere sport in order to ingratiate himself with the Christians (Fischer 2009: 285).

Ladra's perception of the performance, however, widely differs from these opinions: "No se le ve a este judío […] contemporizando con los cristianos, como podría deducirse de algunas de las notas del cuaderno de dirección" (Ladra 1993: 81).

What José Pedro Carrión does succeed in conveying, however, is Shylock's mordant sense of humour as contained in the text's delaying technique when Shylock keeps repeating Antonio's and Bassanio's words regarding the loan they ask from him, which contrasts with their impatient reaction at his apparent reluctance to give in to their request. This, however, should not be mistaken for a willingness to seek reconciliation with the Venetians, as the play's context goes against this reading. This misunderstanding might have been prompted by Carrión's unemphatic delivery of the lines that express his deep contempt for his Christian borrowers. Thus, when Bassanio invites him to join them for dinner: "¿Queréis cenar con nosotros?" his reply—not an aside in this production—"Sí, y oler carne de cerdo," is delivered in such a spiritless way that its pungency goes unnoticed. This lack of energy marks most of the actor's performance, and fails to express Shylock's deep hatred for the Christians when, in Act II, scene v, II. 14-15, he tells his daughter Jessica: "Iré con odio para comer a costa del

cristiano" (Shakespeare 1993: 167). Carrión's enactment of Shylock's later reaction at the discovery of his daughter's elopement with the Christian Lorenzo equally falls short of expressing the depth of his suffering at her betrayal.

The same applies to the character's most famous monologue, which he delivers after Solanio and Salerio mock him for his misfortune, later to ask him whether he intends to take revenge on Antonio, whose ships have presumably been wrecked. Molina Foix, aware of the importance of this monologue, claimed to have paid special attention to it—"La obra es un mensaje de igualdad entre los hombres, por eso hemos recalcado el monólogo del judío" (Piña 1992a: 67)—and the critic from *La Vanguardia* drew attention to the high demands of this important monologue: "J.P. Carrión […] tendrá que poner al máximo sus aptitudes al tener que hacerse cargo de la escena más cuidadosamente trabajada por Molina Foix" (Several authors 1992). His enactment of the role, however, does not seem to have met the critic's expectations, as Carrión sometimes failed to pay the required attention to pauses, and his intonation not always agreed with the content of his lines. Shylock's successive rhetorical questions, moreover, lost their effectiveness, as they were not properly emphasized. It could be said in his defence, however, that the confusing use of question marks in the translated text could have interfered with a correct delivery of the lines, as they were placed at the beginning of the successive conditional clauses, instead of at the beginning of the interrogatory clauses that follow them. Thus, Shylock's famous lines: "If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die?" (III.i.54-55) were not rendered as "Si nos hacéis un corte ¿no sangramos? Si nos hacéis cosquillas ¿no reímos? Si nos ponéis veneno ¿no morimos?," with the question marks preceding the interrogatory clauses, but as "¿Si nos hacéis un corte, no sangramos? ¿si nos hacéis cosquillas, no reímos? ¿si nos ponéis veneno, no morimos?" (Shakespeare 1993: 205).

Rhetorical questions are particularly effective for the depiction of Shylock's sarcasm during the trial scene, which, if not properly delivered, loses its force. This is the case with Shylock's quick-witted retort to Portia's request for a surgeon to assist Antonio when Shylock cuts the pound of flesh he owes him. Although, on this occasion, the rhetorical question is

properly rendered in Spanish, Carrión (1993) delivers it as a statement. Thus, when Portia tells him: "Y ten a tus expensas un cirujano / que cierre sus heridas si sangra mortalmente," Shylock's reply: "¿Está así mencionado en el pagaré?" is rendered as "Está así mencionado en el pagaré," which, not only makes his pungent answer lose its barb, but even misconstrues its meaning.

There are occasions, however, where, no matter how properly he might have been able to enact Shylock's lines, the text's translation makes it difficult for him to achieve the intended aim. This is the case, for example, with his curt answers to Portia during the trial scene, where he claims what is due to him according to the bond he had signed with Antonio. Thus, Shylock's reaction to Portia's speech on mercy, where she urges him to abandon justice for mercy, loses its effectiveness, as the words he utters do not seem to correspond to the text's actual meaning. Shylock's reply to Portia's request for mercy—"My deeds upon my head! I crave the law, / The penalty and forfeit of my bond" (IV.i.201-202)—is translated into Spanish as "¡Caigan mis actos sobre mi cabeza! Ansío la ley, / el castigo y el desquite del pagaré" (Shakespeare 1993: 273), where the first statement, "¡Caigan mis actos sobre mi cabeza!," is properly translated, but the second sentence, "Ansío la ley, / el castigo y el desquite del pagaré," misunderstands the term "crave"—defined in the OED, v.1.a.) as "to demand (a thing), to ask with authority, or by right"—as "ansío" does not reflect Shylock's energetic demand, but merely his yearning for it. Saying "ansío la ley" is not the same as "exijo el cumplimiento de la ley," and the choice of words affects the actor's performance.

The truth, however, is that Carrión's enactment of his role, no matter how accurate the translation might be, tends to lack the energy required to express his suffering at the hands of the Venetians, as well as his thirst for revenge. This is how Jesús González Soler, for example, perceives it: "José Pedro Carrión hace un Shylock discreto, pero no llega a emocionar" (González Soler 1993). We wonder whether this is the reason why Molina Foix establishes a contrast between Portia's and Shylock's oratorical powers that is hard to find in the Shakespearean text. In his view, "Porcia gana en ímpetu y elocuencia a la aparatosa pero antigua retórica del judío" (Shakespeare 1993: 87), which could be related to Ana Belén's

more nuanced delivery of her lines in the trial scene. The character's cold manipulation of Shylock's reactions, however, is substantially diminished in the production, as his feeble reaction to her words reduces the potential tension of their verbal exchange. This somehow explains the great attention awarded to Portia's "mercy" speech, that precedes their verbal *tour de force*, and which is highly appreciated—though perhaps not always properly understood—by Molina Foix, who claims that Portia introduces

> una de las líneas maestras del pensamiento shakespiriano: la clemencia. La de unos y otros. La clemencia como forma de entendimiento. Como verdad superior a cualquier justicia y a cualquier ley (Shakespeare 1993: 78).

Chema Muñoz, the actor playing the role of Antonio, also says: "Mi parte preferida es el discurso de la clemencia, en el que el autor se acerca a los ideales platónicos de belleza y justicia" (quoted by Pavón 1993: 62).

Celebration of clemency was common among Humanists, as Thomas Elyot's *The Book of the Governor* (1531), with its emphasis on the need for a ruler to be merciful, shows. Queen Elizabeth I's translation of Cicero's speech "Pro Marcello" in 1592, moreover, reveals the importance awarded by rulers to this virtue at the time the play was composed. Therefore, Molina Foix's contention that "Porcia […] ha intentado ingenuamente transformar el mundo" (Shakespeare 1993: 79), and that "[Shylock] se condena con la frase 'caigan mis acciones sobre mí'" (*ibid.*: 78) cannot be uncritically shared, as they show that he has not quite realized that Christian "mercy" goes against the Jewish sense of justice, which implies that Shylock's forced conversion to Christianity as a prerequisite to save his life and retain part of his goods does not agree with the Jew's sense of what is right. Douglas Lanier's assessment of the play's concept of "mercy" comes closer, in my view, to its actual meaning:

> The 'mercy' offered to Shylock reveals a much darker side of Christian behaviour, the extent to which 'merciful' scapegoating is a way to exterminate the Other and perpetuate an elite's power and hypocrisy (Lanier 2019: 113).

Ana Belén's remarks on the character she plays, however, reveal a completely different perception of the role: "[Portia], aunque es cristiana, sabe cómo

comprender la grandeza del judío" (quoted by Sánchez 1992), which speaks of the difficulty for actors to understand this play's complex meaning, something Carrión's assessment of the role he plays similarly evinces, as he goes as far as to say: "[Shylock] es de una maldad tan profunda que me ha emocionado como intérprete" (quoted by Torres 1992: 44). This shows that he has not found in the character he plays grounds for his deep resentment and thirst for vengeance. This interpretation of the ultimate meaning of the trial scene is not limited to the actors performing it, but also extends to some reviewers, like Fran Díaz-Faes, who says: "El 'no acumular' cristiano vence al espíritu mercantil hebreo" (Díaz-Faes 1993).

Molina Foix's remarks on Portia's attitude on her return to Belmont after the trial where she, disguised as a judge, has successfully saved Antonio's life and presumably Shylock's soul as well, reveal that the ambivalence of the play's second plot has not been quite understood, for he says:

> Porcia vuelve a su mansión […] radiante para recordar a Bassanio—y en él a todos los hombres—que el terreno de su nueva vida en común es el de la ficción, el juego y la música (Molina Foix 1992: 99).

Antonio's presence in Belmont, however, questions this complete harmony, for, although the production has not openly shown his homoerotic attraction towards Bassanio, it has nevertheless made clear that there is a strong affective bond between both characters, a bond that had made Antonio risk his own life to support Bassanio's love venture in Belmont, as he had accepted Shylock's penalty of a pound of his own flesh, should he fail to return the 3,000 ducats he had borrowed from him to help his friend marry the rich heiress in Belmont.

Although Antonio's enactment of his part is self-restrained, and agrees with Shakespeare's ambivalent portrayal of his relationship with Bassanio, José Carlos Plaza draws attention to Venetian society's potential intolerance of the character's possible homosexuality. In order to do so, he has Antonio actually enact a few lines that Salerio delivers in the play, where he describes the character's farewell of Bassanio. Plaza employs the device of interpolation for the audience to compare Antonio's actual behaviour with Salerio's malicious report of his actions. Although the Shakespearean text does not impose a specific reading on these lines, Plaza has Salerio

deliver them in a teasing way, so that his homophobia is made clear to the audience. By placing lines 35-49 from Act II, scene viii before scene vii, and repeating them again in the following scene, he offers the audience the possibility of comparing Antonio's actual enactment of the lines—which is self-restrained, and turns him into an admirable character who risks all that he has to help his friend—with the Venetians' prejudices against same-sex desire. In Susan Fischer's view, however:

> Salerio's reporting of Antonio's verbal and non-verbal communication was a reasoned account of what he, along with the audience, had actually witnessed (Fischer 2009: 283).

Had Salerio's account been as "reasoned" as she suggests, it would be difficult to share her conclusion that "the staging of this scene effectively reinforced the production's outcry against 'othering'" (*ibid*.: 284).

No less debatable than Fischer's remarks on this interpolation is Juan Jesús Zaro's contention that "En la traducción de Molina Foix […] se apunta a una relación amorosa en gran medida ignorada en traducciones anteriores y posteriores" (Zaro 2007: 141). Zaro tries to prove his point by explaining that the word "love" has often been translated as "amor" by Molina Foix, something that could be questioned, as both "love" and "amor" have a variety of meanings in their respective languages that allow for the text's rich ambiguity. Thus, the definition the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) provides for *love* n1,I.1.a:

> A feeling or disposition of deep affection or fondness for someone, typically arising from a recognition of attractive qualities, from natural affinity, or from sympathy and manifesting itself in concern for the other's welfare and pleasure in his or her presence (distinguished from sexual love at sense I.4a); great liking, strong emotional attachment (Several authors 2023b)

is so inclusive that, limiting its translation to the term "amor" might prove too restrictive, even though the *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* (*RAE*) similarly offers the following definition for the term in 3.m.: "Sentimiento de afecto, inclinación y entrega a alguien o algo" (Several authors 2023a).

Shakespeare's subtlety in the depiction of his characters is not limited to the choice of isolated words, but goes beyond that, and includes his

ability to modulate his rhythmic and rhyme patterns according to the different situations his characters find themselves in. This importance has been highlighted by the text's translator in different paratexts where he explains how he has addressed this challenge, which, in Sanderson's view, has been successful, as he concludes: "Se aprecia en [la traducción] no sólo su conocimiento de la lengua, sino su oído poético y su sentido del ritmo dramático" (Sanderson 1993). In this regard, Molina Foix specifies the following:

> He traducido *El mercader de Venecia* en verso irregular, respetando lógicamente las partes en prosa y las secciones con rima, para las que he utilizado el endecasílabo rimado (Shakespeare 1993: 1).

And, when discussing his choice of rhyme and metre in the caskets' scene, he says:

> Toda la parte rimada, y más "formal" de los mensajes y la resolución de los tres cofres la hice en endecasílabo rimado en consonante, salvo un par de asonantes (*ibid*.: 221).

The fact that Molina Foix has chosen not to follow a strict metrical pattern makes sense, as it somehow reflects the original's rhythmic flexibility, for the five iambic pentameters of the play's blank verse, which Shakespeare varies as the context requires, sound natural in English. This can be satisfactorily rendered as free verse, which is probably what Molina Foix means by the term "verso irregular," a verse form whose use Juan Mayorga detailed in the speech he delivered when appointed to the *Real Academia Española* on 19 May 2019:

> Afirmaba Eliot, y Bousoño repetía, que para el verdadero poeta no hay verso libre porque éste siempre ha de estar determinado por la ley del ritmo. El de Bousoño, como el de Heráclito, se adapta al pensamiento (Mayorga 2019: 13).

This is a golden principle that also applies to the use of rhyme, especially if, as is the case here, it has a specific rhythmic pattern in English that may affect its tone. That is why the choice of hendecasyllabic lines for the translation of all rhymed lines in the play regardless of their length and metrical pattern may require some justification, as rhymed verses are not of a standard length or metrical pattern, and there seems to be some reason

behind their differences. Thus, the incantatory tone of the casket's scroll is aptly rendered in catalectic trochaic tetrameters:

> You that choose not by the view
> Chance as fair and choose as true.
> Since this fortune falls to you,
> Be content, and seek no new.
> (III.ii.131-134)

Bassanio's cold reaction to the discovery of Portia's portrait in the casket is expressed in rhymed iambic pentameters that sound extremely formal, especially when recalling that the scroll has unravelled his good fortune:

> A gentle scroll. Fair lady, by your leave,
> I come by note to give and to receive,
> Like one of two contending in a prize,
> That thinks he hath done well in people's eyes
> Hearing applause and universal shout,
> Giddy in spirit, still gazing in a doubt
> Whether those peals of praise be his or not.
> (III.ii.139-144)

This formal tone contrasts with Bassanio's spontaneous address to Antonio shortly before his trial, where, in blank verse, he tells him that he is ready to lose his life for him: "The Jew shall have my flesh, blood, bones, and all / Ere thou shalt lose for me one drop of blood" (IV.i.111-112).

The scroll's rhymed catalectic trochaic tetrameters are rendered by Molina Foix in hendecasyllabic lines unvaryingly stressed on the sixth syllable:

> Tú que no te has guiado por la vista,
> Elige bien, y la verdad te asista.
> Y ya que la fortuna te ha tocado,
> Alégrate, no busques a otro lado.
> (Shakespeare 1993: 219)

This is the same metrical pattern he uses to translate Bassanio's elaborate address to Portia, which, in the original text, is written in rhymed iambic pentameters:

Pliego gentil. Os pediré permiso:
Vengo a dar, y a tomar, con este aviso.
Como un contendiente en una lucha
Que piensa haber ganado cuando escucha
El aplauso sonar como estallido,
Pero mira confuso y descreído
Dudando de si es él el aclamado.
(*ibid*.: 219)

Shakespeare occasionally uses rhyme as a structural device. This is the case with the rhymed song Bassanio hears when he is about to choose one of the three caskets that are set before him, as it directly connects with the remark he then makes in an aside regarding the deceitful appearance of things—which may refer to the glowing surface of the golden and silver caskets that do not contain the lady's portrait, hidden in the less glamorous casket. The song's emphasis on the deceitful appearance of things:

A song whilst Bassanio
comments on the caskets to himself

Tell me where is fancy bred,
Or in the heart or in the head,
How begot, how nourishèd?

[ALL]
Reply, reply.

[ONE FROM PORTIA'S TRAIN]
It is engendered in the eye,
With gazing fed, and fancy dies
In the cradle where it lies.
Let us all ring fancy's knell.
I'll begin it. Ding, dong, bell.

[ALL]
Ding, dong, bell.
(III.ii.63-72)

prompts Bassanio's following remark:

BASSANIO
(*Aside*)
So may the outward shows be least themselves.
The world is still deceived with ornament.
(III.ii.73-74)

The fact that his aside starts with "so" makes clear that Bassanio has taken the hint, as there is a connection between the content of the song he has just heard and the choice he makes soon afterwards. However, for some reason that neither Molina Foix nor Plaza explain, this song is omitted from the performance despite the fact that this production lasts for over three hours, and hardly omits anything. By leaving the song out, Bassanio's initial subordinating conjunction "so," translated as "y," draws attention to the fact that some lines that are now missing from the text must have preceded it. This brings to mind Lluïs Pasqual's perceptive remark about Shakespeare's careful attention to detail:

> Shakespeare es enorme en precisión. Y esa precisión […] que se va desarrollando […] en las escenas […] es algo que […] mantiene el ritmo de secuencia teatral (Pasqual 1993: 452).

On a smaller scale, we may draw attention to the song's initial triplet, whose rhyming words, "bred," "head" and "nourishèd" happen to rhyme with "lead," precisely the material the correct casket is made of, which led John Weiss (*Wit and Humour in Shakespeare*, 1876: 312, mentioned by Drakakis [Shakespeare 2010/2023: 296]) to suggest that it offered Bassanio a clue; but this version, that prides itself on its careful attention to rhyme, seems to overlook this, since

> Tell me where is fancy bred,
> Or in the heart or in the head,
> How begot, how nourishèd?
> (III.ii.63-65)

that rhyme with "lead," is rendered as

> Dónde nacen, di tú, caprichos de amor,
> ¿Es en el corazón o en la cabeza?
> ¿Y quién les da el ser, quién les da calor?
> (Shakespeare 1993: 215)

which fails to reproduce the triplet, and whose two rhyming words "amor" and "calor" do not rhyme with "plomo."

The stage director, probably aware of the importance of the song that has been omitted from the performance, somehow compensates for its absence by means of gestures on the part of Portia, who coughs when Bassanio

approaches the gold casket, so as to avert the possibility of his opening the wrong casket. These gestures are in line with the scene's farcical style, which replace subtlety with broader gestures that may be more easily grasped by the audience. This hypothesis, however, would fail to explain why long passages full of mythological allusions have been retained, even though their meaning is no longer clear to most spectators. Whether this is a feasible hypothesis or not, the fact is that this scene is performed in a farcical style, which makes Ladra's observation on Portia's deep suffering somewhat surprising. In his view, "Hasta la llegada de Bassanio, [Portia] ha estado sometida a una tortura psicológica continua" (Ladra 1993: 81), a remark that echoes Molina Foix's allusion to "la depresión en que [Portia] está a punto de caer, por no atreverse a revocar la decisión de su padre" (Shakespeare 1993: 54).

This farcical style has also been adopted for the trial scene, so that Shylock's suffering is substantially reduced, and is also evident in the final scene, where Portia solves the misunderstanding that might have arisen from the fact that Bassanio had been pressed by her in disguise to give "him" the ring he had received from his wife. Although, on his arrival at Belmont, she made him think she had had an affair with the young judge who had saved Antonio's life, which explained the fact that the ring was again in her power, she solves the mystery before Bassanio actually fears that she has been unfaithful to him. And her warning about the possibility of her revenge on him, should he fail to keep his marriage vows, is made in a humorous way. The play's wordplay on the word "ring," moreover, is delivered in quick-witted exchanges between Bassanio and Portia that at no time sound threatening. That might explain Molina Foix's allusion to the happy future he envisages for them in Belmont—a feeling that some reviewers share when summarizing their overall impression of the performance: "José Carlos Plaza se decanta decididamente por el lado del juguete amoroso y por el tono de farsa y exageración" (Villán 1992: 57). This makes Alberto de la Hera reach the following conclusion on the relative priority of one plotline with respect to the other:

> La historia del amor constituye el centro argumental. […] Un argumento en sí mismo secundario […] es el tema de la disputa entre el judío y el mercader (Hera 1992).

This impression is probably affected by their actual performance, as Haro Tecglen suggests regarding the actress who plays the role of Portia: "La presencia de Ana Belén inclina mucho la representación hacia la frivolidad y la picardía de muchachita" (Haro Tecglen 1992b: 29)—something not everybody values to the same extent, as Javier Villán shows: "Ana Belén puebla de mohínes, pequeñas gracietas y superficialidad un personaje que, sin duda, requiere más intensidad" (Villán 1992: 57). It must be said, however, that—as Ana Belén herself highlights—"El teatro es un trabajo en equipo. […] Cuando estás en el escenario, todo lo que tú hagas depende de cómo lo haga tu compañero" (quoted by Montero 1992: 52). This implies that in scenes of tense verbal exchange and high dramatic tension it is necessary for the actors and actresses involved in them, not only to understand what they are saying, but also to bring out the text's dramatic energy together. That—as we have briefly noted—was not fully achieved in the play's trial scene, where Carrión's low-key performance would have prevented Ana Belén's proper enactment of her part, had she thoroughly understood her role, which, in view of her remarks, she only partly did:

> [Portia] es uno de los personajes más positivos que escribió Shakespeare […] Ella es lista, divertida, pero con un sentido del humor muy inteligente (Ferrando 1992a: 59).

This assessment of her role would agree with the tone of the ring scene as it was actually performed, ignoring the scene's darkest undertones—with her feelings of resentment at Bassanio's past behaviour, or her fears about his future infidelity, suppressed. In this scene she was lucky enough to have the collaboration of Toni Cantó, who performed the role of Bassanio in the same light-hearted and quick-witted vein she chose for her own.

It is worth noting that Bassanio's role in the play is far more limited than Portia's, which has not always been noticed, as Alberto de la Hera shows: "A Toni Cantó le falta emoción, le falta pasión; es un enamorado frío y distante" (Hera 1992). This remark—which was probably prompted by the actor's performance of the casket scene—seems to indicate that the reviewer has not paid due attention to the actual text Toni Cantó enacted, which, in view of its content, as well as its elaborate language and rhythm, constrained the possibilities of a spontaneous performance. Something

similar occasionally happens with the assessment of Chema Muñoz's performance of Antonio, as reviewers such as Julio Martínez do not seem to have perceived the role's subtle ambiguity: "Esperábamos más de Chema Muñoz, tozudamente inexpresivo" (Martínez Velasco 1993: 93). This is fortunately not the case with López Mozo, who states: "su comedimiento es meritorio" (López Mozo 1993: 16); or with Chema Paz Gago's accurate perception of the role: "[Chema Muñoz es un] espléndido actor receptivo, de los que saben escuchar, y en silencio habla a los espectadores con su gesto y su mirada" (Paz Gago 1993).

This accuracy in the perception of roles, however, is not always present in the play's paratext, as Molina Foix's allusion to "[el] espíritu moderno, mundano, locuaz, despilfarrador, pero convincente, de Porcia" (Shakespeare 1993: 90) reveals. An attentive reading of the play might show to what extent this rich and intelligent heiress, who offers herself and her fortune to Bassanio, makes sure her unthrift husband does not waste her fortune away, as her active part in the courtroom scene shows. In it, although she has prompted her husband to spend as much of her money as necessary to prevent Antonio's death, she foils Bassanio's attempt at paying Shylock the 3,000 ducats Antonio owes him, under the pretence that the Jew has indirectly attempted against his life. As, at the time of the trial, Antonio's ships have not yet returned, Portia makes sure her husband is not indebted to his friend—something she brings about by having half of Shylock's fortune taken away from him and given to Antonio as a penalty for his behaviour. It is therefore no surprise that, in the play's final scene, it is precisely Portia who reveals to Antonio that his ships have safely arrived in Venice's port, which removes her husband's further financial obligations towards him. Although Portia holds the reins in Belmont, Ana Belén enacts the role in such an amiable way that few reviewers seem to notice the tight control she holds over everything and everyone there. And, although López Mozo states that "[Portia] no siempre coincide con la que dibujara Shakespeare" (López Mozo 1993: 16), Carlos Ferrando's conclusion that "Ana Belén interpretó una Porcia de belleza y frescura sin par" (Ferrando 1992b) shows an admiration for that approach to her role.

The situation was different, however, with Ana Gracia, the actress that performed the part during the national tour which Ana Belén did not join

because she had other commitments. Ana Gracia was sometimes negatively compared to Ana Belén, and some reviewers, persuaded that the latter's enactment of the role was the most appropriate, referred to "[la] entereza con que Ana Gracia afronta el papel de Porcia, que no está en modo alguno hecho a su medida" (Pons 1993). In this regard, Fernando Herrero said that she was "'menos irradiante' que Ana Belén […] más tendente a cierta sequedad irónica" (Herrero 1993). The truth is that the great attention most reviews had paid to Portia while the role was performed by Ana Belén suddenly vanished when it was taken up by Ana Gracia. Whereas large pictures of the former had been published in most newspapers from December to the end of March, the latter's name was barely mentioned in theatre reviews during the play's tour. Ana Belén's public persona was a key element in the production's advertising campaign, and, when this could no longer be taken advantage of, the popular TV actor Toni Cantó replaced her on the newspapers, that, all of a sudden, showed great interest in an actor that had been barely mentioned during the three previous months. Some reviewers even perceived an improvement in his acting abilities: "Toni Cantó ha dejado de ser un rostro bonito de la tele, ya no es un chico Hermida. Se ha convertido en actor" (Paz Gago 1993). Ana Belén's capacity to draw spectators to the theatre was openly admitted by the press: "La actriz y cantante Ana Belén conserva su 'gancho' intacto para llevar al público al teatro" (Sánchez 1992)— a capacity that was further increased by the encomiastic remarks of José Carlos Plaza, who said: "Ana Belén es el mayor talento escénico que se pueda concebir con la profesionalidad más tremenda" (quoted by Galindo 1992).

The play's advertising campaign did not exclude José Pedro Carrión, who was praised for his "enorme fuerza expresiva [y] espléndida voz al servicio de un Shylock muy teatral" (López Sancho 1992: 89), an opinion that is difficult for us to share. Carlos Ferrando's enthusiastic praise of the actor, moreover, tellingly illustrates that the advertising campaign could be taken to the extreme: "José Pedro Carrión […] impone su Shylock entre los mejores que se recuerdan, incluido el protagonizado por Dustin Hoffman en Nueva York" (Ferrando 1992b). The presence of well-known actors playing secondary roles was also taken advantage of. This was the case, for example, with Fernando Sansegundo [Lancelot], and Carlos Lucena

[Gobbo], who were labelled "secundarios de lujo" (Several authors 1993c: 111), a remark that could be applied to the actor performing Gobbo, but perhaps less so to the one performing Lancelot, who, as Javier Villán perceptively observed, "necesita tascar el freno de su incontinencia" (Villán 1992: 57). This, however, did not prevent Vigorra from saying: "Fernando Sansegundo nos deja contentos de ver sus locuras" (Vigorra 1993), or J.A.M. from openly admitting that his name was an effective marketing strategy: "Fernando Sansegundo […] ya es reclamo suficiente para acudir a un espectáculo musical y visual" (J.A.M. 1993). The production's pleasing visual and aural elements were, in fact, the constant object of attention and praise:

> El vestuario 'brillante' […] la música 'muy agradable' dan el ambiente preciso para que la versión del *mercader de Venecia* que ofrece el Centro Dramático Nacional entre […] por los ojos y deslumbre (Hera 1992).

The advertising campaign was not limited to the praise of the actors and actresses performing in the play, but also highlighted the translation's high quality, as Haro Tecglen's assessment of Molina Foix's translation evinces:

> [La] versión [está] hecha por Vicente Molina Foix, de quien se conoce no sólo su minuciosidad como traductor y su erudición sobre Shakespeare, sino también su valor poético en castellano (Haro Tecglen 1992a).

This assessment is in line with that of Monleón on the published translation, which he regarded as "excellent," and whose "cuaderno de dirección" he praised thanks to the presumed usefulness of its notes, by means of which, in his view,

> [él] describe la visión de cada uno de los personajes y de sus comportamientos, escena por escena […] señalando, siempre que viene al caso, las deliberadas ambigüedades del autor (Monleón 1993: 138).

This, as we have had the occasion to discover in the preceding pages is not always the case. Monleón also expresses his admiration for the edition's final essays: "uno de ellos de Vicente Molina Foix […] que cierran con brillantez y oportunidad el volumen" (Monleón 1993: 138), an opinion we share regarding the quality of the texts by Hazlitt, Schlegel, Heine, and Ortega y Gasset included in the appendix, but less so in the case of Molina Foix's when we read on page 330 that the revival of *The Merchant of Venice*

took place "tras la reapertura de los teatros que siguió en 1660 al fin de la Guerra civil inglesa" (Shakespeare 1993: 330)—a statement that seems to ignore that theatres were closed or demolished during Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth, that immediately followed the Civil War, and preceded the Restoration of the English Monarchy in 1660.

Molina Foix deals with his translation's verbal features, and starts by drawing our attention to his good command of English: "Creo conocer bien la lengua original" (Molina Foix 1993: 221), a prerequisite for a good translation. He informs us of the connections between Marlowe's and Shakespeare's use of verse: "Shakespeare, con la influencia de Marlowe como precursor, tiene un verso muy narrativo" (*ibid*.: 220), a statement we find somewhat puzzling, as what, in our opinion, might have influenced Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* is not Marlowe's "narrative" but his "dramatic" verse. He also lets us know that he has rendered Shakespeare's verse into its Spanish equivalent, something we have already dealt with. His statement: "He traducido la obra en verso irregular, respetando las partes en prosa y las secciones con rima, para las que he utilizado el endecasílabo rimado" (quoted by Monjas 1992) has been widely reproduced—either in its entirety or in part—though not always properly understood, as Julio Martínez Velasco's observation shows: "Molina Foix nos lleva a la sonoridad rítmica shakesperiana usando, como aquel, el endecasílabo en los momentos más apropiados" (Martínez Velasco 1993: 93), wrongly assuming that Shakesperare used hendecasyllabic lines. Enrique Centeno, conversely, attributes the use of blank verse—Shakespeare's metrical line—to Molina Foix's translation when he praises his "hermosa traducción […] hecha en versos blancos" (Centeno 1992).

The translation's linguistic updating has also been the object of attention by a variety of critics, most of whom praise his achievement. Thus, Lorenzo López Sancho says:

> Molina Foix ha depurado hasta el máximo el texto shakesperiano, que en esta versión suena despojado de las expresiones, ya demasiado antiguas hoy, de la magistral traducción de Astrana Marín (López Sancho 1992: 89).

Chema Paz Gago does not quite agree with this: "El texto no se libera de cierta retórica anticuada […] que nunca deja de recordar a Astrana Marín"

(Paz Gago 1993). Some reviewers, as we have seen, go as far as to ascribe the play's exposure of racism and homophobia to Molina Foix's translation. This is the case with Enrique Centeno, in whose view, "la lectura antirracista no aparece de un modo tan evidente en ninguna de las traducciones que conocemos" (Centeno 1992), or with Julio Martínez Velasco, according to whom, "Molina Foix ha introducido un matiz de homosexualidad […] que el original tenía […] pero que las versiones al castellano no reflejaron" (Martínez Velasco 1993: 93).

Although some isolated voices questioned the translation's quality—"[la versión de Molina Foix] no es precisamente una de las mejores traducciones de esta obra" (González Soler 1993)—the fact is that it was shortlisted for the National Translation Award, which was used as part of the advertising campaign on the play's revival that took place on 15.9.1993. On 10 September Carlos Galindo announced: "La traducción de Vicente Molina Foix seleccionada para el Premio Nacional de Traducción que se fallará el próximo mes de octubre" (Galindo 1993).

It is our contention that the carefully-orchestrated campaign we have surveyed must have had some part in the play's outstanding success, as tickets for the María Guerrero were sold out before the play's premiere (Piña 1992b: 64), a commercial success that was also shared by the play's national tour.

3. Conclusions

Juan Mayorga was right when he said:

> Translators have to know two languages to their very core. Theatre translators have to be poets, infusing the tensions of the other language into their own, and they have to be playwrights, because only someone who understands the art of the actor will be able to write the sort of words that rise up from the page to become flesh on the stage ("Prefatory Remarks", Mayorga 2015).

This was happily the case with the 2008 Centro Dramático Nacional's production of Mayorga's Spanish version of *King Lear*, directed by Gerardo Vera, and performed by a well-trained group of actors, with Alfredo Alcón in the title role. On that occasion, the stage was almost bare, and

the costumes were kept simple, so that all the attention was on the play's words, that were most effectively delivered by the actors. The essence of the Shakespearean text was beautifully rendered in Spanish, with occasional changes where the difficulty of the original syntax, or the play's complex structure, required it. Although *King Lear* is regarded by most translators, stage directors and actors as one of Shakespeare's most difficult plays, this production succeeded in conveying its wealth of meaning (Ribes 2017: 141-145). This disagrees with Ladra's observation that "tan sólo el actor inglés es capaz de dar el tono de esas obras que, más que la acción, requieren la palabra" (Ladra 1993: 81). At the same time, it reinforces the need Patrice Pavis highlights of "patiently go[ing] back to [the] analysis and knowledge of the text" (Pavis 2013: 240), and the importance of bearing in mind "the necessary adequacy of speech and gesture," what Patrice Pavis calls the "language-body" (Pavis 1992: 138).

Our reassessment of Molina Foix and Plaza's version of *The Merchant of* Venice has shown the usefulness of paying attention to individual translations (Bassnett 2011: 163), taking advantage of a performance-oriented approach (Bassnett and Johnston 2019: 185). It has also shown to what extent Prescott is right when he claims that

> of all the textual inscriptions of performance, journalistic reviews are the most widely circulated and the most influentially constitutive of memory and value (Prescott 2013: 4).

Our critical analysis of a substantial paratext, that includes over one hundred theatre reviews not previously analysed, together with prefaces and appendices to the edited text, as well as journal articles and book chapters, has made the reassessment of this stage version possible.

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BIONOTE / NOTA BIOGRÁFICA

PURIFICACIÓN RIBES TRAVER is Full Professor of English at the University of Valencia, Spain. She has been the principal investigator for several research projects on the edition, translation and reception of Early Modern English Literature and has gained official recognition for five six-year periods of international quality research activity.

Her publications include bilingual annotated editions of John Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* (Cátedra) and Ben Jonson's *Volpone* (Cátedra); bilingual editions of Ausias March's poems; the co-edition of a volume on the Reception of the Classics (Univ. of Valencia); a number of book chapters on John Donne's religious poetry (Peter Lang), Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (Reichenberger), Burnand's *Venus and Adonis* (Hakkert), the Spanish reception of Lear's Fool (*Folly in Llull, Cervantes & Shakespeare*), the Spanish reception of Jonson's *Volpone* (Delaware), as well as numerous articles on Early Modern English Literature in specialized journals such as *The Journal of English Studies* (Handwritten Miscellanies of the Seventeenth Century); *Modern Language Review* (Editing Tourneur's *Volpone*); or *Comparative Drama* (American Reception of Tourneur's *Volpone* in the 1940s).

PURIFICACIÓN RIBES TRAVER es Catedrática de Filología Inglesa de la Universidad de Valencia (España). Ha sido investigadora principal de varios proyectos de investigación sobre la edición, traducción y recepción de textos del Renacimiento Inglés, y ha obtenido cinco sexenios de investigación de ANECA.

Entre sus publicaciones cabe señalar las ediciones bilingües anotadas de *Songs and Sonnets*, de John Donne (Cátedra) y *Volpone*, de Ben Jonson (Cátedra); ediciones bilingües de la poesía de Ausiàs March; la coedición de un volumen sobre la Recepción de los Clásicos (Universidad de Valencia); capítulos sobre la poesía religiosa de John Donne (Peter Lang); *Venus and Adonis*, de Shakespeare (Reichenberger); *Venus and Adonis* de Burnand (Hakkert); la recepción española del bufón de Lear (*Folly in Llull, Cervantes and Shakespeare*); la recepción española del *Volpone* de Jonson (Delaware), así como numerosos artículos sobre la literatura del Renacimiento Inglés publicadas en revistas especializadas como *The Journal of English Studies* (Handwritten Miscellanies of the Seventeenth Century); *Modern Language Review* (Editing Tourneur's *Volpone*); o *Comparative Drama* (American Reception of Tourneur's *Volpone* in the 1940s).