

Translation or adaptation? *The Outrageous Saint and A Bond Honoured* two English "versions" of *La Fianza Satisfecha*

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At the time when *La Fianza Satisfecha* was written (between 1612-15 approximately), it was considered monstrous and shocking, being only interpreted on religious grounds: despite the fact that the hero's sins took him beyond the limits of repentance and salvation, he was not destroyed in the end. That is the reason the play was never reprinted again until Menéndez y Pelayo included it in his academy edition of Lope de Vega - in the late nineteenth century - but, thence, it was to be, once again, condemned to oblivion.

In the early thirties, Valbuena Prat rediscovered the play, interpreting it as a pre-Freudian case study of incest, sadism and other sexual aberrations, turning it into a work of contemporary interest:

We must look at Leonido as we would look at a neurotic. From this point of view, the extreme violations of our present ethical code - such as the incest, parricide, and sadism which abound in this play - will not appear as rhetorical exaggerations but as symptoms enabling us to diagnose the exact nature of Leonido's disease. His hatred of his own kin and his desire to insult his family will be seen as consequences of his pathological state of mind. Within this framework we shall see that Lope has created a type that is

enormously true to life, (Valbuena Prat, 1962 [1931]: 44).

In the post-war period, following Valbuena Prat's train of thought, Willis Barnstone translates the play into English, in the belief that it "adapted with ease to the concerns and anxieties" of his time - and he explains why he chose to change its title into *The Outrageous Saint*.

Leonido's problems remain those of the unsettled lone man of our day who is painfully aware of his accidental absurd world with outrageous action. He rejects in order to find. He must discover his individual freedom and identity before he can be at peace with himself and the world. To do this he becomes an outrageous saint, (Barnstone, 1962:57).

Barnstone put a great effort in trying to keep the versification and rhyme present in the original, but, as regards content, the result is rather unfortunate, presenting deficient and erroneous interpretations. A few examples should be enough to illustrate this point. Where Lope writes: "Humillad, viejo labrador, / a mi alfanje la cerviz" (Whitby & Anderson, 1971:132a), Barnstone translates: "get ready, you old rattletrap / to taste the neck of my sword" (Barnstone, 1962:80a), where the real meaning would be: "Humble your neck, old peasant, to my cutlass" (Rogers, 1968:150).

Barnstone's literal translation abounds in elementary misunderstandings, which reveal his poor knowledge of Spanish: "*Mi noble celo, / padre, te intenta vengar*" (Whitby & Anderson, 1971:114b) is mistranslated as "*My dear lord / and father. He wants to hurt you*" (Barnstone, 1962:63b), when all it meant was: "my noble zeal / father, tries to avenge you". There are a number of others, such as the delightful "de ellos apartado / medio tiro de trabuco, / dándoles la seña cierta" (Whitby & Anderson, 1971:125b) interpreted as "fired my blunderbuss with half / a load" (Barnstone, 1962:74b), and which actually meant "signaled to them from half a musket's range away" (Rogers, 1968:150).

The thought that *La Fianza Satisfecha* dealt with problems of the time must have been the general opinion, because immediately afterwards, in 1966, John Osborne writes an adaptation - *A Bond Honoured* - , which surprised a lot of critics, who argued that:

The Spanish *comedia* seems an unlikely kind of play to appeal to Mr. John Osborne. Osborne is a nonconformist if ever there was one. In his serious work he has almost never shown a dominant interest in

plot. He has never attempted serious drama in verse and his dialogue is distinguished by its contemporary naturalism; he generally confines the action of his plays to a comparatively short time and restricted space and he prefers to let everything important happen between scenes or before his plays begin, (Rogers, 1968:146).

If we study Osborne's work more closely, we can understand what appealed to him from *La Fianza Satisfecha*. In the Spanish *comedias*, the humour was normally provided by special comic characters, whose mockery offered a challenge to established values. One of Osborne's plays - *Luther* - "comes much closer than the others to the manner of the Spanish *comedias* with its anti-illusionist presentation, its widespread action chronicling a whole career, its pageantry and public oratory" (Rogers, 1968:146). What the protests of the Englishman found in common with the affirmation of the Spaniards was vehemence. Lope would have understood Jimmy Porter's desire in *Look Back in Anger* to write a book "in flames a mile high. [...] recollected in fire, and blood." (II.i.54). The playwrights of the Spanish Golden Age did not shrink from the recognition of human depravity. Not only were they unshockable, but they often sought to shock. The restraints under which they wrote, were those under which they thought and lived their whole lives, and went far deeper than considerations of good manners or good taste: those restraints were moral fervours. It may have been this quality what made Counter-Reformation Spain appealing to Osborne.

Moral fervour is also, in my opinion, what distinguishes Osborne from earlier Romantics, both foreign and Spanish, who without it have been capable of feeling and reproducing only the more superficial excitements of the *comedia*. Like that of the Spaniards, Osborne's passionate concern with morality is linked to a concern with religion - a preoccupation which in him may seem at first surprising, but which turns out to be remarkably persisting, (Rogers, 1968:147).

John Osborne himself, in the Author's Note to the play, tells us what interested him about *La Fianza Satisfecha*, and how, rather than translating, he wrote an adaptation:

In 1963, Kenneth Tynan, Literary Manager of the National Theatre, asked me if I would adapt *La Fianza Satisfecha* by Lope de Vega. It was in three acts, had an absurd plot, some ridiculous characters and some very heavy humour. What did interest me was the Christian framework of the play and the potentially

fascinating dialectic with the principal characters. So I concentrated on his development (...) and discarded most of the rest, reducing the play to one long act. *A Bond Honoured* is the result, (Author's Note: 9).

The first performance of *A Bond Honoured* was given at the National Theatre, London, on 6th June 1966. The reviews were most unfavourable:

... Have the theatrical fashions set by the Court and National Theatres gone just about as far as the flesh and blood in the audience can take? Those questions are asked by a friend of ours who conducted, yesterday, a one-man poll of the reactions of critics to John Osborne's adaptation of Lope de Vega's buried-for-350-years play.

Until recently, the pollster suggests, scarcely a critic would have dared to risk a charge of being squeamish or bored. Lope, by modern standards, had the lot. Our friend found that the doyen of London dramatic critics, W. A. Darlington, of the *Daily Telegraph*, summed up the hero most economically - "He seduces his sister (who seems very willing), blinds his father, kills his mother, renounces to Christianity, becomes a Moslem, and behaves as badly in his new faith as he had in the other one", (*The Times*, 8 June 1966:13e).

This reaction provoked Osborne to send retaliatory telegrams to the more hostile critics and to declare that: "if he was director of a theatre he might well decide to do away with critics' first nights". He received support from, among many others, Arnold Wesker, who said: "I am largely on Mr. Osborne's side because I think the position of the critics is fatal to all branches of art - music, ballet, painting and so on. It seems that the critic's function in history is to be wrong," (*The Times*, 10 June 1966:12e).

The play's reception gave rise to a correspondence in several newspapers. In a letter to *The Times*, Joanna Macfadyen assured that:

... the evening was one of memorable theatre: muscular writing, ideas as fresh as today's morning, miraculously produced and acted. The play? John Osborne's *A Bond Honoured* adapted from a play by Lope de Vega.

The enormous subject: I do what I will, I say what I am doing, and a fig for hypocrisy and society's conventions. The development of the megalomania which reaches proportions that prevent the rest of society leading any kind of life they might like to live:

But society is equally to blame because it bows to strength however evil. It does not use the mirror of evil to reappraise its own image and fight back; 400 years old and still valid, (Macfadyen, 1966:13d).

And, in a similar letter, John Arden, very wisely, remarks the critics should have taken some considerations into account before writing their derogatory reviews; from the four points he makes in his letter, the first and the last are specially becoming for the purpose of this paper: "How far has Mr. Osborne kept to Lope de Vega's original, and if he has departed from it, has he radically altered the meaning of it, and, if so, how? (...) Most Renaissance writers, of whatever country, wrote tragedies in verse: Is Mr. Osborne's in verse, or is he transposing a verse original into prose, and - if so - how? (Arden, 1966:11c).

There was a faint renewal of hostilities on the occasion of the broadcast on the BBC Third Programming of *A Pledge Redeemed*, Joe Burrough's translation of *La Fianza Satisfecha* on 22nd December 1966. (As far as we know, there is not published version.) A letter from Richard Schechner in *Encounter* in February 1967, suggesting that Osborne must have worked from *The Outrageous Saint*, rightly deserved the sharp reply, calling it "cheery speculation" and "unreadable nonsense", from John Osborne himself, in a letter to *Encounter*, April 1967. In June 1967 Alberto Adell describes *A Bond Honoured* as "something of a charade, half-existentialist, half-catholic" in which Osborne, in his "haste", has "forgotten" to make Leonido's repentance sincere." (Adell, 1967:7). Adell, in his "haste" probably "forgot" to read the Author's Note to Osborne's play, where he clearly stated that it was an adaptation (not a translation), and as such, does not necessarily have to reproduce the original exactly.

In our view, it is untrue to say that Osborne has done "little more than put Barnstone's translation, with slight pruning, into prose." To that respect, we entirely agree with Rogers, who argues: "I think it can easily be proved that if he used the Barnstone version at all - and he has called it "an unreadable nonsense" - he used his own or someone else's knowledge of Spanish to come closer to the original." (Rogers, 1968:150). And he goes on to prove his assertion with a few examples, but he puts an end to the argument in a footnote, where he explains that since his paper was completed, Osborne wrote to him to say that he had worked from a literal translation provided by the national theatre.

Why did Osborne choose that literal translation and not the one by Barnstone? We think his calling *The Outrageous Saint* "an unreadable nonsense" is extremely revealing of his reasons, but a close study of the text can also contribute to explain that point.

To start with, Osborne's translation of the title: *A Bond Honoured*, has nothing to do with Barnstone's *The Outrageous Saint*, but is very close to the Spanish original: *La Fianza Satisfecha*.

Where the original reads: "¡Nombre de viejo me ofreces / cuando el de padre *obscureces* ...!" (Whitby & Anderson, 1971:114b), Osborne translates: "You call me old man because you have *darkened* the name father." (1966:35), which is more fortunate than Barnstone's: "You grant me the name old man / and *suppress* the word father." (1962:63b). Recalling one of Barnstone's absurdities, mentioned above: "My dear lord / and father. He wants to hurt you." (1962:63b), from the Spanish: "Mi noble celo, / padre, te intenta vengar" (Whitby & Anderson, 1971:114b) we can conclude that Osborne - whose version, more succinctly, gets the sense right - did not depend on that translation: "Father, you'll be revenged" (1966:35). Quoting Rogers (1968:169):

Where Osborne translates he does so with invigorating ruthlessness and a firm grasp of essentials; where he alters the story, he tends to clarify causes but to obscure consequences. He preserves, even intensifies, the religious fervour of the original, but the meaning is radically altered and becomes extremely mysterious.

And that scholar also states how much *A Bond Honoured* owes to translation and to what extent it is an adaptation. Commenting on the introductory note to the play - which was quoted above -, he says: "This note is misleading in a number of ways: setting aside the question of authorship, it is not true that Leonido rapes his sister in the opening moments, though he does make the attempt. While this is happening off-stage, we learn a good deal of Leonido's character and circumstances." Regarding structure, he adds: "*A Bond Honoured* is published not in one long act but in two short ones, both of which contain material from the source play. [...] Quantitatively it may be true that he has discarded "most" of what does not concern the hero." (1968:155) and as far as the characters are concerned, they are basically the same, except some additions of Osborne's, such as Marcela's maid, who appears in one scene which in the original is only narrated; he does not include the shepherd in his list, though he inserts that figure in Act II, ii; and

changes in the spelling of a few names. If, to all these, we add the fact that Osborne wrote the play in prose, instead of in verse, as the original, we can conclude that *A Bond Honoured* is, as Osborne announced in his author's note to the play, an adaptation.

In 1971, Whitby and Anderson, Hispanists with expertise in the language and the *comedia* - whose edition of *La Fianza Satisfecha* has been used for reference in this paper -, put the play in a truer perspective:

What must be remembered is that Leonido is not a whole man, but a character in a play, and the only subconscious he can possess must come from his creator... A "Freudian" analysis of Leonido's "subconscious", therefore, is an "analysis" of something that does not exist, (Whitby & Anderson, 1971:62).

Wardropper agrees and adds:

Leonido's peculiar form of criminality cannot be ignored if the play is to be fully apprehended. [...] That Leonido seems to have no redeeming feature is an important fact, raising the important question of his uniqueness. It is also important to try to find out why, unlike the other great sinner-heroes, he does not merely commit great crimes against society but commits them by preference against his own family, shorn of psychoanalytic dogmatism, which has aroused the curiosity of the non-Hispanists and which has been too hastily brushed aside by the Hispanists. (Wardropper, 1972:204-05)

At the time of his conversion, Leonido acknowledges that he has spent his life "llevando por blasón hacer afrenta" (Whitby & Anderson, 1971:2162). Indeed, he has insulted, degraded and dishonoured, and in such acts he found "gusto" (Whitby & Anderson, 1971:43) and "gozo" (Whitby & Anderson, 1971:305), but he felt he could not act otherwise having been predestined to that way of life: "Tal he nacido" (Whitby & Anderson, 1971:278), he says. Nevertheless, although Leonido's purpose, in general, is to abuse everybody, he specializes in affronting his own kin. His phrase "por dar a mi sangre afrenta" (Whitby & Anderson, 1971:282) suggests that he has a particular reason for hating his clan. At this stage, it is worth pointing out that his hatred is expressed more through dishonouring than through killing: "Jamás di muerte a nadie" (Whitby & Anderson, 1971:683), he says - untruthfully, for we learn later (Whitby & Anderson, 1971:2570) that he has killed his mother - "pero a infinitos afrento", and he goes on to explain his motives:

que gusto verlos sin honra
por ver que lo sienten ellos.
En esto todas mis fuerzas
fundo, porque sé de cierto
que estar sin honra un honrado
es vivir estando muerto,
(Whitby & Anderson, 1971:685-90).

Dishonour is a living death. At the time of his conversion, Leonido realizes that he too has "vivido muriendo" (Whitby & Anderson, 1971:2161). In other words, he is what he has made his victims: to dishonour is to be dishonoured. Basically it is spite, arising from his dim awareness that he is a living corpse, and we deduce there is something horrible and deathly about him, from the natural phenomena which occurred the moment he was borne:

Fue tan horrible a los hombres,
que con ser casi en Invierno
dieron sus truenos espanto
y sus relámpagos miedo,
(Whitby & Anderson, 1971:650-54).

Lope does not offer the reader the solution to the mystery, nor do Barnstone in his translation nor Burrough in his script for television, but John Osborne interpreted that stormy birth as a consequence of something horrible which could have taken place the moment of his conception: the fact that his father had raped his mother. It is precisely that detail which turns the wicked and nonsensical Leonido into a rounded character, providing the reader with the roots of his cruel behaviour.

That is what differentiates John Osborne's adaptation from the original play and its subsequent translations, and it is also what leads us to consider *A Bond Honoured* as a more consistent and meaningful piece of work than *La Fianza Satisfecha*.

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