

The Schlegel model and Shakespearean translation in Spain¹

Ángel-Luis Pujante
Universidad de Murcia
apujante@um.es

I

Discussing three different Shakespearean translations into Dutch from 1877 to 1971, Dirk Delabastita observes that the Schlegel model in German turned out to be highly inspirational, and points out that the influence of the Schlegel-Tieck translations “situates itself on a more general plane, in the fact that it has established itself as a type of blueprint for what a Shakespeare translation can and should be like” (Delabastita 2004: 111).²

This may sound too categorical. We know that there is no single method or model for translating literature, as this activity has always involved making decisions, sometimes highly disparate, according to certain predetermined aims and within a certain socio-cultural framework. Besides, we are often told that, if the work to be translated is a play, it can be translated for the page, but also for the stage (though both orientations should not be mutually exclusive). Moreover, if the playwright in question is Shakespeare, one may even wish to offer “study translations”, i.e., philological prose translations accompanied by a vast number of footnotes which “translate” some linguistic or

¹ This paper is part of Research Project HUM2005-02556, financed by the Spanish Ministry of Education and FEDER. For reasons of space, in this paper I restrict myself to Spanish. Therefore, translations into the other languages of Spain and those produced in Latin America will not be examined.

² August Wilhem von Schlegel (1767-1845) was the initiator of, and the theorist behind, these Shakespearean translations. It is in this respect that we can speak of “the Schlegel model”. Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853) collaborated with Schlegel in these translations, particularly by supervising the renderings with which his daughter Dorothea and Graf Baudissin completed the so-called “Schlegel-Tieck translations”.

cultural difficulties of the text in a complementary way, such as the Shakespeare *Studienausgaben* in German-speaking countries.

Yet, having said this, I think Dirk Delabastita is right in claiming that the Schlegel-Tieck renderings have established themselves as reference translations, which seem to be valid after more than two hundred years, and perhaps the best model for a translator who aspires to produce a poetic equivalent of Shakespeare's plays. Schlegel translated Shakespeare by applying his theory of "organic form", whereby the formal aspects of a literary work are not only an external ornament, but an integral and significant part of the "organism" –and he therefore rejected the translation of verse into prose, because he believed that metre was one of the original and essential prerequisites of poetry. He aimed at a kind of fidelity whereby the same or similar impressions were produced in the translation as in the original. In consequence, he reproduced the contrasts of medium in the original (prose / verse, blank verse/rhymed verse), striving to recreate the original in the same metre and to keep the same number of lines as in the Shakespearean text, and even producing metric-syllabic renderings of the songs in the plays so that these can be sung in German to the same tune as in the original. This treatment clearly involves the most rigid application of his translation principles: as I have shown elsewhere (Pujante 2001), Schlegel did not have access to the original scores and seems not to have known the tunes by ear.³ Other than that, even though Schlegel's translations were dictated by his ideas about the poetic text as such and despite the fact that he does not seem to have looked upon his translations as theatrical texts, his aim to achieve a rendering that takes up the same space as the original *also has practical implications for the translation of poetic drama as theatre* –more of this later.

³ The validity of this method as regards the treatment of the songs can be seen not only in the fact that the English songs can be sung in his German renderings using the original tune, but also the other way round: Mendelssohn used Schlegel's translations of the songs in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when he composed his *Sommernachtstraum*, but in English-speaking communities these songs are sung with Shakespeare's English lyrics, since both the German and the English words fit the musical bars and stresses without any need for adaptation.

Schlegel did not leave us a systematic or specific monograph on poetic translation, but only a number of scattered remarks and considerations from which a number of translation principles can be established. This has already been done (Atkinson 1958; Gebhardt 1970), and it is not my purpose to go into them in detail here. However, I would like to bring to mind two remarks of his which I think are particularly relevant to the purpose of this paper. In the prologue to his 1802/1803 *Geschichte der klassischen Literatur*, after stating that a poem in another language should be recreated in the same metre, he also qualified: “as far as the nature of the language allows” (“so viel nur immer die Natur der Sprache erlaubt”). He explained that translators needed to deviate from this, in part because it is very difficult and also because they had grown fond of this practice, which was commonly accepted. Bearing in mind these two reasons, he, however, proclaimed “the greatest stringency” (“*die größte Strenge*”) as a general law (Schlegel 1964 [1802-1803]: 17-18).

These two points need to be made more specific. Schlegel’s first qualification implies that his model can probably not be applied so strictly when translating into a different kind of language, for example a Latin language like Spanish in relation to English. Let us look at this from the opposite angle: translating a Portuguese rhymed epic like *Os Lusíadas* into English or Dutch inevitably leads to the question of what form to use in the translation (whether prose, rhymed verse, blank verse or free verse). Translating it into Spanish would very probably make this question redundant, as the distance between Spanish and Portuguese in written form is so slight that it would make little sense to render Portuguese poems into Spanish prose. Certainly the first and canonical rendering of *Os Lusíadas* into Spanish (1580, by Benito Caldera) looks almost like a carbon copy of the original in the reproduction of the words, lines and rhymes.

Clearly, the distance between English and German or Dutch is not the same as that between Portuguese and Spanish, but the successful application of the Schlegel model in German after him suggests that “the nature of the language” (i.e. the family relationship between English and another Germanic language) should make it easier to apply than when translating into Spanish –if only because the “family relationship” involves common language resources that are not shared by other language families. Be that as it may, it would seem that the

absolute application of the Schlegel model for Shakespearean translation into Spanish is not an easy task –for one thing, the average word-length in Spanish can be much greater than in English–, and that it calls for a flexibility that Schlegel himself contemplated. However – and this brings us to his second point–, Schlegel also concluded that, whatever the case might be, “the greatest stringency” should be a general requirement. But how precisely can such stringency be applied when one has to begin by being flexible in the application of the model?

In this paper I propose to examine if, and to what extent, the Schlegel model has been attempted in Shakespearean translation into Spanish, as well as to consider the degree of “stringency” which has been applied to it. The examination will centre on a number of Spanish translations of Shakespeare from the 18th century to some contemporary renderings.

II

The first translation of a Shakespeare play directly from English into Spanish (*Hamlet*, 1798), written by playwright Leandro Fernández de Moratín, was, however, not intended for the stage. His notes accompanying the translation show that he had Le Tourneur’s French translation in prose near at hand, if not at his elbow –and Le Tourneur’s prose translations were clearly for the page (for the “fauteuil”), not for the theatre. This may explain, at least in part, Moratín’s choice of prose. However, being an accomplished poet, he made an exception with specific passages of *Hamlet*. Like Le Tourneur, Moratín translated the songs in rhymed verse, but, unlike him, he also rendered the first actor’s speech in Spanish blank verse (blank hendecasyllables), and the play-within-the-play in rhymed hendecasyllables. Yet the number of lines in the translation turns out to be higher than in the original: the first twelve and a half lines of the first actor’s speech become sixteen and a half in Moratín’s translation, and the same happens with the rest of the speech. This is also the case in the play-within-the-play: the first six lines (three couplets) of the original yield eight lines –the rhymes being present in the even lines only–, and so with the rest. In other words, he did translate these passages in Span-

ish blank and rhymed verse, but with obvious amplification. And in the songs he departed even further from the original metre and structure. Moratín did not read German, and, to the best of my knowledge, had not heard of Schlegel when he produced his translation –he learned of Schlegel later and, as a die-hard neoclassicist, he deplored the influence of the Romantic “sect” (Rodríguez 1991: 59). His verse renderings of these *Hamlet* passages could not possibly be based on the Schlegel example, but rather on the model for Spanish neoclassical tragedy, which used the hendecasyllabic line with alternating rhymes, even in the translations of the alexandrine couplets that pervade French neoclassical tragedies.

1823 saw a further step in Shakespearean translation directly from the English and a little closer to the Schlegel model. It was taken by José M. Blanco White, then living in London as a Spanish emigré, and was limited to three Shakespearean passages which he translated in blank Spanish hendecasyllables. The translations were published in *Varietades o El Mensajero de Londres*, a newspaper he himself edited in London. They were prefaced by a note on the language of Shakespeare in which he wrote: “There are few passages in Shakespeare that are susceptible of [translation], and none that, being translated, preserves the delicious aftertaste left by the original” (“Pocos pasajes hay en Shakespeare que sean capaces de ella, y ninguno que después de traducido conserve el sabor exquisito que deja el original”. Blanco 1823: 74). Nevertheless, he translated some extracts from Shakespeare. One of the passages he translated, the Mowbray speech about his banishment (*Richard II* 1.3.154-173), turns out to be surprisingly compressed in the Spanish: the twenty lines in the original yield only nineteen in a rendering with poetic feel, fluency and naturalness. In this case he clearly went beyond the Schlegel method, but came short of it in the other two passages, both from *Hamlet*: his translation of the “To be or not to be” soliloquy needed forty-three lines for the thirty-three of the original, and that of the Polonius-Reynaldo dialogue (in 2.1), ninety-six for the eighty-one in Shakespeare.

Blanco White’s admiration for Shakespeare, which continued for the rest of his life, was shown again in the late 1830s, when the publication of Charles Knight’s *The Pictorial Edition of the Works of Shakespeare* (1838-1843) led him to write a number of essays and notes on the playwright and some of his plays. In his essay on *A Mid-*

summer Night's Dream he quoted (in English translation) from Tieck's notes on this comedy (Shakespeare 1825-1833: 352-353), written for the Berlin "Schlegel-Tieck" edition, referring to Tieck as "the celebrated annotator of Schlegel's German Shakespeare" (Blanco 1840: 45). As Tieck's notes featured in the third volume (1830), Blanco White must have come across the Schlegel-Tieck translations between this year (if not before) and 1840. In other words, he had the German translation before his eyes in these years and could see what they were like. It was also in 1840, a year before his death, that he translated a last Shakespearean passage into Spanish, this time from *Twelfth Night* 1.1.35-41 (Méndez 1920: 426). His rendering is poetic and fluent, but the seven lines in the original yield nine in the translation. Once more, he had to fall back on amplification. In this respect, and despite his awareness of the German translations –and therefore of the Schlegel model–, he did not apply it, either because he did not intend to, or because he thought it could not be applied consistently in Shakespearean translation into Spanish blank verse.

It was also in the late 1830s that the first Spanish translation of *Macbeth* directly from the English appeared. The translator, José García de Villalta, who had learned a great deal about European Romanticism during his English exile and must have known Schlegel and his translations, produced a verse rendering of the play which was, however, far removed from the Schlegel model. He cast the English blank verse into a variety of Spanish metres and even used rhyme where there was none in the original. In this respect, his translation was culture-oriented, Spanish classical drama from the Golden Age to the Romantic period being heavily rhymed throughout. Published and staged in 1838, the failure of his *Macbeth* in the theatre may have led other Spanish companies to avoid "authentic" Shakespeare for a number of years and may even explain why the first Spanish translations of Shakespearean plays which were closest to the Schlegel model took several more decades to appear.

III

These new translations were undertaken by two men of British descent: Jaime Clark, who was born in Naples and had come to live in

Spain as a teenager, and Guillermo Macpherson, a Gibraltarian –and therefore bilingual. Their Shakespearean translations began to appear in the early 1870s. In their renderings they cast the original blank verse into Spanish blank verse (blank hendecasyllables) and the rhymed lines as such. Clark acknowledged having used, among other texts, “the far-famed German translation by Schlegel and Tieck, the help of which has made my task considerably easier” (“la afamada traducción alemana de Schlegel y Tieck, cuyo auxilio ha facilitado notablemente mi tarea” Clark 1873: xxvii). Macpherson does not seem to have made such an explicit acknowledgement, but he quoted Schlegel in his prologues to his translations, and his extensive library, rich in Shakespeare, must have contained all or some of the Schlegel translations.

It is interesting to note that Clark, despite admitting that he used the German renderings to some advantage, was not so Schlegel-like in the way he translated the blank verse or the rhymes –unlike Macpherson, who was more strict in this respect, even if his very probable debt to Schlegel was not recognised explicitly: there are some passages in Macpherson which appear to be based on Schlegel’s solutions. Thus, Clark’s rendering of the initial sonnet in *Romeo and Juliet* is an irregular poem of twenty-two lines, certainly fluent and rhymed, but not a sonnet. Macpherson translates it exactly as an Elizabethan sonnet, i.e. fourteen lines, with the final couplet. In his translations of the songs, Macpherson is also more accurate than Clark in his attempt to keep not only the rhymes, but the same or a similar number of lines –although he did not produce metric-syllabic translations which could be sung to the original tune. As far as the translation of the original blank verse is concerned, both Clark and Macpherson ended up writing more lines in the translation than there are in the original, but it appears that Macpherson tried to keep a tighter control over the number of lines than did Clark. Even so, he could not avoid amplification.

Clark’s and Macpherson’s translations opened up possibilities which, as we have seen, had been partly attempted in Shakespearean passages, but not in whole plays. However, although their renderings met with success, particularly Macpherson’s, these possibilities were not further explored in the next few decades, let alone fulfilled. Prose translations were being published in competition, a process which

culminated in Luis Astrana's 1929 publication of his rendering of Shakespeare's complete works –in prose. Astrana defended his prose translations by asserting that it was impossible to translate Shakespeare in verse (Shakespeare 1961 [1929]: 19). However, some prose translations are more equal than others, and Astrana's were very special; they look as if he had set out to translate *against* Macpherson, Clark and any other verse translators in general. If Macpherson was striving hard to find the best words within the line, making suitable combinations with an eye on verbal verse economy, Astrana worked in the opposite direction. Leaving aside his tendency to uniform high-sounding style, in his prose translations he not only used many more words than in the original, but seemed bent on producing the most sesquipedalian renderings in the language. Let us take but one example, the first fourteen lines of *The Merchant of Venice*. They contain 110 words and 134 syllables. In Astrana's translation there are 124 words, but no less than 218 syllables.

Astrana's translations met with notable and durable success, partly because they offered Shakespeare's complete works for the first time, and partly because they enjoyed a wide commercial distribution, both in Spain and in Latin America. Despite their shortcomings and however controversial, they have a very personal mark and had, and still have, their adepts. They were challenged in the 1960s by José María Valverde's rendering of the complete plays. His translation, also in prose, was far removed from Astrana's grandiloquence, and it is much easier to read. And, commenting on Astrana's rendering, he pointed out: "My translation is also a failed translation because it is in prose" ("Mi traducción es también una traducción fracasada porque está en prosa" (Castro et al. 1984: 18).

The limitations of Astrana's and Valverde's translations seem to have led to the avoidance of prose in the most significant contemporary translations of Shakespeare into Spanish. As for the use of verse, the practice of translating Shakespeare's plays into Spanish blank verse has not disappeared altogether after Astrana and Valverde, but it has limited itself to particular cases, i.e. it has not been applied to projects involving all the plays or at least a large selection of them. Such projects were initiated in the 1980s, but in them Spanish blank verse was not considered as the ideal medium for the translated texts.

IV

Prose translations such as Astrana's lead us to the basic problems of translating Shakespeare's plays. Producing prose translations, as he did, with so many polysyllabic words was the most extreme form of opposing the Schlegel model. As is well known, wordy translations such as his end up being paraphrases rather than translations proper, and not only run counter to the poetic structure and spirit of the original, but also to its dramatic nature. Drama is a brief genre and, unlike the novel, concentrates on the essentials of human action in conflict. The duration of a performance does count, as Eric Bentley made clear by suggesting that the first draft of a dramatic dialogue might contain such notes as "Here character A speaks for fifteen seconds". He therefore criticised the habit of many translators of rendering short sentences into long utterances "to get in all the meaning" (Bentley 1966: 79). It is not a question of translating drama with the chronological accuracy of dubbing, but it is obvious that, if the theatre used such translations as Astrana's, the "two hours' traffic" of a Shakespearean original would become three hours' tedium.

The Schlegel model clearly avoids this pitfall, even if it was not originally intended for the stage. However, its metric solution poses difficulties when applied to languages such as Spanish, as we have seen in the translations of passages by Moratín and Blanco White, and of whole plays by Clark and Macpherson. In their renderings one can certainly observe successful hendecasyllabic lines matching the respective iambic pentametres in the original, but not consistently from beginning to end. At worst, either the line-per-line translation brings about omission of expressive resources concerning imagery, style and meaning itself –especially when translating rhyme–, or the iambic pentametre spreads over into one-and-a-half, two or even more lines. This latter method, as can also be seen in their translations, runs the risk of padding, i.e. adding words which have no antecedent in the original in order to complete the fixed number of syllables in the translated line. In other words, the result could be as wordy as a prose translation.

The new Spanish projects of Shakespearean translation initiated in the 1980s (those of the Instituto Shakespeare and my own) adopt

free verse to render the original blank verse –which is also the case of quite a few contemporary translations of individual plays by Shakespeare and of new translations of the plays into Catalan and into Spanish in Mexico.⁴ Presumably, they all involve an attempt to avoid the drawbacks of prose translation and the risks of previous verse rendering –at least, mine do. It is not possible to determine the precise influence of theory and previous translation practice on this particular decision on the part of all of us; to the best of my knowledge, these other translators have not written specifically on this point. Therefore, what follows will only derive from my own theory and practice, but I trust that, *mutatis mutandis*, this can be subscribed by all those using free verse in preference to prose or blank verse for their Shakespearean translation.

Free verse has risks of its own, not least that of not being verse, but if used competently, it makes it possible to translate meaning without damage to style and imagery and without giving up rhythm that is sufficiently steady and measured. Valentín García Yebra, who has written widely on the theory of literary and poetic translation, and has practised it in various forms, came to this conclusion: “A good prose translation is better than a bad verse translation, but a good verse translation is better than a good prose translation. And a good free verse translation would be better than either of the two previous ones.” (“Es mejor una buena traducción en verso que una mala traducción en verso; pero es mejor una buena traducción en verso que una buena traducción en prosa. Y una buena traducción en versículos libres sería mejor que cualquiera de las dos anteriores.” (Castro et al. 1984: 13).

Another risk of free verse as applied to line-by-line translation of Shakespeare is the lack of control over the number of syllables in the translated text. It is here that we should be reminded of Schlegel once more: if because of “the nature of the language” it is not possible to recreate a full Shakespearean play in Spanish in the same metre and as economically as in the original, the translator using free verse has all the more reason to pay attention, and apply “stringency”, to the number of syllables per line. Failure to do so can result in the transla-

⁴ I refer to Salvador Oliva’s translations into Catalan, and to the Shakespeare project spearheaded by Professor Enriqueta González Padilla at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

tion becoming too long and wordy, and therefore ending up with the same kind of amplification as in prose translation or expanded blank verse, as we saw in the renderings of the past using this form.

Experience shows the free verse lines of between ten and a maximum of fifteen syllables are both a feasible and a desirable solution to the problem of translating the iambic pentameter into Spanish. If such a translation were to be used in the theatre, let us bear in mind that Spanish-speaking actors tend to deliver their lines at a somewhat faster pace than their English-speaking counterparts, with the result that despite the average higher number of syllables in the translation, its delivery can take virtually the same time as that of the original (Zatlin 2005: 75-76). Other than that, the most absolute stringency as Schlegel applied it can be restricted (it is my case and partly that of the others just mentioned) to the rendering of the occasional rhymed lines in Shakespeare, thus translating them as such with the same or almost the same metre as in the original, and therefore making it possible for the songs to be sung to the same tune as the original, as in Schlegel's translations. In this way, the adoption of "flexible stringency" for the rhymed passages would also contribute to reproducing the variety of verse and style that is so characteristic of Shakespeare.

To conclude: the Schlegel model has been responsible, as Delabastita suggested, for reference translations that seem to be valid in our time, and seems to be the best for a translator who aspires to produce a poetic, and even a dramatic, equivalent of Shakespeare's plays. Its absolute application appears to be more feasible in some languages than in others, but this is something that Schlegel foresaw and for which he admitted a flexible approach, however general and unspecified. As I hope to have shown, the Spanish verse translations which externally seem to have followed the Schlegel model ended up departing from it: instead, a flexible but stringent application of it in contemporary Shakespearean translation has yielded practical results which have come closest to what was advocated in the model.

References

- Atkinson, Margaret E. 1958. *A.W. Schlegel as Translator of Shakespeare*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bentley, Eric. 1966. *The Life of the Drama*. London: Methuen.
- [Blanco White, José]. 1823. "Shakespeare: Traducción poética de algunos pasajes de sus dramas". *Varietades o El Mensajero de Londres* 1: 74-79.
- Blanco White, José. 1840. "The Pictorial Shakespeare". *The Christian Teacher* II: 42-53.
- Castro, A. et al. 1984. *La Traducción: Arte y Técnica*. Publicaciones de la Nueva Revista de Enseñanzas Medias 6. Madrid: Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia.
- Delabastita, Dirk. 2004. "Notes on Shakespeare in Dutch Translation". In *Translating Shakespeare for the Twenty-First Century*, R.C. Homem and T. Hoenselaars (eds). Amsterdam: Rodopi. 99-116.
- Gebhardt, Peter. 1970. *A.W. Schlegels Shakespeare Übersetzungen: Untersuchungen zu seinem Übersetzungsverfahren am Beispiel des Hamlet*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck.
- Méndez Bajarano, Mario. 1920. *Vida y obras de D. José María Blanco y Crespo*. Madrid: Tipografía de la Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos.
- Pujante, Ángel-Luis. 2001. "Translating Shakespeare's songs: the letter and the musical spirit". In *Pathways of Translation Studies*. P. Fernández and J. M. Bravo (eds). Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid. 205-216.
- Rodríguez, Juan Carlos. 1991. *Moratin o el Arte Nuevo de Hacer Teatro. Con la edición facsímil de la Vida de Guillermo Shakespeare y la Traducción de Hamlet de Leandro Fdez. de Moratin*. Granada: Caja de Ahorros de Granada.
- Schlegel, August Wilhelm. 1964 [1802-1803]. *Geschichte der klassischen Literatur*. Stuttgart: W.Kohlhammer Verlag.
- Shakespeare, William. 1825-1833. *Shakespeares dramatische Werke*. Übersetzt von August Wilhem von Schlegel, ergänzt und erläutert von Ludwig Tieck. Berlin: Reimer.
- Shakespeare, William. 1838. *Macbeth*. Trad. José García de Villalta. Madrid: Repullés.

- Shakespeare, William. [1973?]. *Obras de Shakespeare: Otelu, Mucho Ruido para Nada*. Trad. Jaime Clark. Madrid: Medina y Navarro.
- Shakespeare, William. 1885-1897. *Obras Dramáticas de Guillermo Shakespeare*. Trad. Guillermo Macpherson. Madrid: Luis Navarro.
- Shakespeare, William. 1961 [1929]. *Obras Completas*. Trad. Luis Astrana Marín. Madrid: Aguilar.
- Shakespeare, William. 1967-1968. *Teatro Completo*. Trad. José M^a Valverde. Barcelona: Planeta.
- Zatlin, Phyllis. 2005. *Theatrical Translation and Film Adaptation*. Multilingual Matters Ltd: Clevedon-Buffalo-Toronto.