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VARIATIONS ON *MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING*: BEATRICE AND BENEDICK IN TARGET-LANGUAGE ADAPTATIONS

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Abstract

Drama texts are characterized by the transient nature of their stage reception and their malleability. This implies a close relationship with the context of performance while it also explains why they are frequently subject to varying degrees of adaptation. This article will study variations on Shakespeare's comedy *Much Ado About Nothing*, first revising different approaches to its performance in the original language, and then analysing two adaptations which involve translation: a Spanish play, Jacinto Benavente's *Los favoritos*, and a French opera, Hector Berlioz's *Béatrice et Bénédict*, both inspired by the two most attractive and witty characters in the bard's text, Beatrice and Benedick, who have been the object of a number of versions and adaptations and therefore encourage exploration in different contexts. Slightly different ways of dealing with the main elements in the play will be observed in these two target texts, for instance regarding the general tone, or issues such as the concepts of marriage and love; ultimately, these aspects also highlight the suppleness of drama texts, particularly of classic works, which tend to move easily between languages and cultures, historic periods or artistic genres.

Keywords: *context, gender, drama text, textual performance, opera, adaptation, transposition, transformation, intersemiotic translation*

Introduction: Plays and Contexts

Drama is perhaps the verbal art form most closely linked to the context in which it was first conceived and received. This has important implications for its translation: as Aaltonen puts it ("Drama Translation" 105), plays "open up windows to societies and cultures, helping us to make sense of complex realities. Their coming into being is always tied to a particular socio-cultural context. Their translations have the same tie." This in fact reveals two essential features of theatre texts: their transience and their malleability.

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Even when they deal with timeless issues or are set in a culturally 'unmarked' context, plays 'speak' to, and about, their receivers, especially when they are theatre audiences, who interpret and experience them in the 'here and now' of the theatre performance. This explains why, when they become the script for a new production, drama texts are usually adapted, in varying degrees. Any change in time and/or in space will imply different expectations on the part of the new receivers (audiences, actors and actresses, directors, critics and reviewers, etc.) as well as, most probably, different stylistic and theatre conventions. All these elements may clash with the immediacy characterising the reception of the spoken word, indeed of the whole stage performance, which is "unique, unrepeatable" (Törnqvist 13), so some kind of change to the text usually becomes inevitable if the direct, but fragile, two-way communication between stage and auditorium is to be successful.

At the same time, the double nature of drama texts, as both literary texts and performance scripts, makes them akin to the performing arts, which are extremely malleable, open to the readings of the various participants in a performance and in successive productions. "Directors', designers' and actors' views of each character and of the play as a whole are physicalised on the stage and audience reception is mediated by them" (Mateo, "Isabella" 37). New interpretations will be added when a play, particularly a classic, travels in time or goes across linguistic and cultural borders in translated form: the new contexts will 'appropriate' the text and, in the latter case, the translator's reading will add to those of the other participants in the production. In fact, Marvin Carlson's concept of supplementation – for the way in which subsequent readings of a play, including its various performances, relie on, add to and finally replace the written text (qtd. in Aaltonen, "Drama Translation" 109) – can also encapsulate translation, since this is yet another interpretive act:

> Seen this way, theatre translation and performance have a great deal in common. Both are subsequent readings of a source text which they replace. (...) The study of translations (like the study of performances) can reveal what indeterminacies different types of translations have revealed, and how these have been supplemented at different times by different agencies and why. (Aaltonen, "Drama Translation" 109)

All these reasons make drama texts particularly suitable for the study of "the many contexts of translation", which are the focus of this issue of LINGUACULTURE, particularly if we look back on a classic play, which has lasted in time in various forms, languages and performing styles. Most plays by William Shakespeare will nicely illustrate how drama may travel in time and space, opening itself to different values or cultural assumptions, and new interpretations or technical possibilities. The acclaimed opera and theatre director Jonathan Miller explained this very clearly in an interview on Shakespeare in the 1980s:

> It seems to me important to recognise that a play has an afterlife different from the life conceived for it by its author. There are all sorts of unforeseeable meanings which might attach to the play, simply by virtue of the fact that it has survived into a period with which the author was not acquainted, and is therefore able to strike chords in the imagination of a modern audience which could not have been struck in an audience when it was first performed (in Cox 84).

Given that "no theatre text is fixed for all time, and no stage translation is definitive" (Windle 167), the link between plays and translation contexts is a strong and very obvious one. This is manifested in the need for some kind of adaptation most drama scripts seem to show when they are revived on stage, especially if it is in a target-culture theatre. As Zatlin (1) puts it, "in theatrical translation (...) some betrayal is a necessity." Consequently, the dividing line between translation and adaptation is of a "tenuous nature," as Georges Bastin has pointed out (qtd. in Windle 160), which, in any case, reflects the fuzziness characterizing the terminology and definitions in the study and practice of drama translation (concerning concepts such as *version, adaptation, speakability, theatre/drama translation*, etc.), an issue which has been amply discussed in the literature (cf Aaltonen *Time-Sharing*; Bassnett; Espasa; Mateo "Power Relations," or Windle). Moreover, the process of staging a play has also often been conceived of as a kind of "translation" (Zatlin 3).[1]

This article will analyse several *transpositions* (in Törnqvist's use of this word as an umbrella term for different types of systematic shifts in drama texts, between languages and/or media [7]), which one of Shakespeare's mature comedies, *Much Ado About Nothing*, has undergone. This play has not really needed translation to illustrate various contexts, since its stage history in the English language, particularly in the 20th century, shows a wide range of settings, as Cox records (74-75): Sicily; other Italian, Spanish or Mediterranean locations; Spanish colonial America, Latin America, the USA, and an Arabian Nights context; time-wise, it has been placed in every century from the Renaissance onwards.

We will here study, however, transpositions which do involve translation and in which the new reception context does not necessarily imply a resetting of the play. Section **2** will centre on an example of what both Aaltonen and Törnqvist would agree to call *adaptation* –"when a translation/transformation involves significant voluntary deviations from the source text, I shall, in conformance with common usage, resort to the term *adaptation*" (Törnqvist 8). Jacinto Benavente's late 19th-century Spanish comedy *Los favoritos* has been

[1] "Drama, as an art-form, is a constant process of translation: from original concept to script (when there is one), to producer/director's interpretation, to contribution by designer and actor/actress, to visual and/or aural images to audience response ... there may be a number of subsidiary processes of translation at work" (Gostand in Zatlin 3-4).

selected for these purposes. In section **3**, Hector Berlioz's opera *Béatrice et Bénédicte* (1862) will illustrate how adaptation may be combined with the type of transposition Törnqvist calls *transformation*: "transposing a play from a verbal semiotic system to an aural, visual or audiovisual one" (7), which in fact corresponds to what Roman Jakobson called *intersemiotic translation* (114): "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems." The opera also exemplifies what Törnqvist (93) classifies as three-stage transpositions –"translation + radio/screen script + performance" –, which in this case would consist of translation + libretto + stage performance, where the first or the second stages would additionally include adaptation.

These two target texts have had *Much Ado About Nothing* as their point of departure, with its two most attractive characters, Beatrice and Benedick, providing the main inspiration. But the variations on Beatrice and Benedick have also taken place in English-language theatres, in transpositions from page to stage in the original language – i.e. in what Törnqvist classifies as one-stage transpositions –,[2] as theatre practitioners' approaches to these two characters have been diverse. Section **1**, therefore, will present an overview of the stage history of these two characters in their source-language context.

1. Beatrice and Benedick on the English Stage

Much Ado About Nothing (1598) belongs to Shakespeare's dramatic maturity (Humphreys 45), when the bard could skillfully draw on Italian Renaissance sources (Ariosto and Bandello in this case), adapting them to his own purposes while he introduced new elements and characters–like Dogberry and his watch or the couple formed by Beatrice and Benedick, all of them his own, really successful, invention. Ever since it was first performed, in 1613, the comedy has been a popular one. It initially remained in the repertory until theatres were closed by Parliament in 1642 (Cox 3); afterwards, its popularity has continued throughout the centuries,[3] becoming, for instance, the seventh most popular of the bard's plays at the end of the 18th century and, nowadays, a staple of the Shakespearean repertory both in Britain and in the USA (McEachern 79).

In *Much Ado*, the playwright showed great dexterity in the construction of the plot, incredible agility in the dialogue and the handling of wit, and remarkable skill in the variety of tone, bringing together seriousness and broad humour, laughter and tenderness, verse and prose; indeed, his courting of

[2] One-stage transpositions also include written translations, in Törnqvist's classification, while two-stage transpositions are those consisting of: source text + target text (translation) or radio/TV/film script + stage/radio/TV/film production (Törnqvist 169).

[3] This comedy, however, has not been so popular with critics, who, though conceding it is very witty, have thought it lacking "in that profounder quibbling that characterizes Shakespeare's later work" (McCollom 67).

tragedy between comic scenes has often made audiences (and critics) uneasy about what the appropriate response to the play should be (cf. Everett 76; Humphreys 48-51; McEachern 50-51). This contrast in tone is matched by the symmetry which characterizes the plot and many situations and themes in the play (McEachern 61-62). On the one hand, parallelisms enhance the differences between some characters and the two story lines: the main serious Hero-Claudio plot (about the false accusation of infidelity against the innocent bride and her consequent public disownment by her fiancée on the wedding ceremony) and the comic sub-plot of Beatrice and Benedick (the "merry war" between these two individualists who try to hide their mutual love behind a mask of repulsion to marriage and their rejection of social conventions). On the other hand, parallelisms also serve to highlight the similarities between characters and to reinforce the humour, as in the two garden scenes in which Beatrice and Benedick are separately hoaxed into falling in love with each other.

It is precisely the latter story line that has fascinated the audiences from the beginning. The predominance of their appeal over that of the serious couple is attested very early, by the alternative name *Benedicte and Betteris* with which the play was initially registered and referred to in documents of the time (Humphreys 34, 60). This "theatrical dominance of the Beatrice and Benedick material" has been at the centre of the play's popularity and contributed to its perception as a comedy rather than a tragedy,[4] despite its "unusual emotional palette" (McEachern 119). Beatrice's and Benedick's wit, verbal agility, cleverness and truth of feeling have made them the real protagonists of Shakespeare's play, to the detriment of Claudio and Hero. So much so that they have been the object of numerous adaptations and imitations, from the Restoration to modern times (110). Indeed, "the popularity of these inevitably allied antagonists is confirmed by their own 'excerptability'" (109), which has manifested itself not only in English language theatre versions but also across linguistic and generic borders, as the examples in the next sections illustrate.

Beatrice and Benedick's "theatrical dominance" is also revealed in the play's stage history. "The centerpiece of any production of *Much Ado* is the battle of wills and the war of words between Benedick and Beatrice" (Kahan 1). Moreover, the two characters have proved particularly fruitful on the stage for the exploration of different interpretations and contexts (Kahan 11). An interesting evolution can be observed throughout theatre history, particularly regarding the performance of Beatrice, which responds to varying conceptions of this female role, and of womanhood as a whole.

[4] Although, admittedly, the play has received different categorizations by critics and researchers: some place it in the group of Shakespeare's 'problem plays,' while others think that Beatrice and Benedick's, as well as Dogberry's, comic scenes necessarily align it with his romantic comedies (McEachern 54; Newman 111).

Beatrice has been considered the wittiest character created by Shakespeare (McCollom 75) and she has certainly been endowed with an acute intelligence, independence of mind, a great talent for irony, a tender heart and a strong sense of loyalty and honesty, which make her joke about the manners and social conventions she dislikes in Messina as vigorously as she defends her wronged cousin Hero. These features turn her into a really attractive role for actresses, and indeed the greatest performers of each period in Britain's theatre history have performed it. The different interpretations throughout the centuries evidence the changes in what successive societies considered "feminine" or unladylike, so approaches to Beatrice have ranged "between women of feeling and women of wit" (McEachern 106), more or less scornful or merry, aggressive or pleasant, witty or sensitive (Cox 2). Thus, Restoration Beatrices flaunted her verbal agility, which audiences found attractive, in line with the libertine spirit which prevailed in upper-class London then (Cox 84; McEachern 103). The 18th century also enjoyed Beatrice's sharp wit but paid more attention to the fact that her verbal elegance was a sign of her social status (Cox 84; McEachern 103). By the beginning of the 19th century, this female role was typically performed as a shrew, but this century's productions did away with most of the bawdy humour, adapting the tone of the play to the taste of middle-class audiences (McEachern 81), so the role became more refined and "feminine" by those standards, mostly through the interpretation of Ellen Terry, who gave a Beatrice often described as "sunny" and "merry", rather than as "caustic" (106). In the 20th century, after the Second World War, Beatrice recaptured her initial spirit thanks to performers like Katherine Hepburn or Maggie Smith, who gave fiery, self-assertive and independent Beatrices, contesting the gentle tradition of the role as well as the stereotypical assumptions of womanhood and patriarchal ideology which had prevailed in productions from the 19th century (Cox 62, 66; McEachern 106). Cox (66) remarks that, although not all the Beatrices of the late 20th century were so aggressive, most have tended to be assertive and dominant, clearly looking superior to their Benedicks.

The role of Beatrice's antagonist–a witty, intelligent and independent character too, well aware of his vulnerability and of the theatricality that governs the world of Messina[5] but also his own disdain for marriage and women (Sanderson 16) – has also been variously interpreted, ranging between "the gruff and the urbane", the "vivacious humorist, or (…) elegant courtier" and, more recently, "as somewhat dissolute" (McEachern 106). He too has shown different combinations of opposite features (Cox 2), and has reflected changes in society–becoming, for instance, more idealized, gallant and less witty in 19th-century

[5] The play has been described as "a comedy which foregrounds masking, theatricality, the acting of roles, and the uncertain boundaries between illusion and reality" (Cox 7).

performances. One of the most highly acclaimed Benedicks was by the celebrated actor John Gielgud, in his own production of 1949, when he "played the role more as the courtier than the soldier, poised, sophisticated, suave, urbane (…), with a hint of vanity (…), offset by constant touches of self-mockery (…) and intellectually refined" (Cox 61).

Beatrice and Benedick have normally been at the centre of decisions about stage productions of *Much Ado About Nothing* (Cox 2), showing variation not just on their characters but even on features like their age (Kahan 2). In Shakespeare's time, they could, in a way, be considered "cultural anomalies" (Cox 6),[6] which may partly explain why they were so attractive to contemporary audiences, an appeal which has not dwindled with the passage of time.

Beatrice's interpretation has probably proved more complex and interesting, due to traditional concepts of womanhood which clashed with those elements in the play challenging popular stereotypes in this regard, which might be highlighted in some portrayals of this female character. According to Cox (4-6), established gender ideologies were already under pressure in Shakespeare's time, and the humour of comedies like this one was used to sublimate those anxieties. In the late 20th century, the gender revolution "profoundly influenced the performance and reception of *Much Ado*, foregrounding the play's gender issues and bringing radical changes to the representation of Beatrice" (Cox 66), as shown by Hepburn's and Smith's performances. Feminist approaches to the stage production have introduced fresh views of various types: questioning, for instance – in Di Trevis's 1988 version for the Royal Shakespeare Company – whether the couple's marriage in the final scene was actually meant as a "happy end" by the playwright, in line with feminist critics of Shakespearean comedy (Cox 78). Another effect of these approaches has been the change in gender that some roles in the play have experienced, which has also had manifestations in foreign productions: thus, certain parts denoting authority, like Leonato or Don Pedro, have become female roles in some Spanish productions of the early 21st century.[7]

Curiously, another effect of feminist approaches to the play has been that the Hero-Claudio plot has started to attract more attention and recover its status as the main plot (McEachern 125), displacing Beatrice and Benedick's comic 'sub'-plot, whose roles have consequently sometimes been performed on a quieter less sparking note (Humphreys 48).

The main issues of *Much Ado about Nothing* that have attracted directors' and critics' – as well as researchers'– attention have generally been:

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[6] The couple stood "in equivocal relation to the romantic conventions of mediaeval and Renaissance literature" (Cox 5).

[7] This is interesting too if compared to the "gender disruption"that took place on Renaissance stages, when female roles were all performed by male actors (Cox 5).

-the tone: whether to consider the play as a light-hearted comedy or a problem play, and how to balance the comic and darker elements in it;

-gender and power issues: how prominent to make patriarchal or social-class values and power relations; whether to endorse or to contest them;

-and how much weight to give each of the two plots.

The following quote from McEachern nicely sums up the decisions which are crucial for the play's effect:

> In the case of *Much Ado's* production history, the presiding question has usually been one of how 'light' or 'dark' a production is: to what degree is the war between the sexes (...) a 'merry' one (...). To what degree (...) can the play be rendered a 'happy' comedy, a portrait of regenerative energies triumphing over obstacles to sexual and social union (...), to what extent the play belongs to Benedick and Beatrice (McEachern 80-1).

2. Beatrice and Benedick in Spanish Theatre Adaptation

Much Ado About Nothing seems to have reached Spanish stages rather late, for there seem to be no records of performances before a production in Barcelona in 1964[8] –while the first translation of the play was published in 1872. It may have been due to the heavy reliance on language shown by its humour, which Lanier (33) also cites as the reason for the relatively few adaptations of the comedy that exist in translation. One example in Spanish, precisely based on the Beatrice and Benedick plot, is Jacinto Benavente' s play *Los favoritos*, included in his collection *Teatro Fantástico* (1892).

This volume by the Spanish playwright and theatre director (1866-1954), Nobel Prize Winner in 1922, encapsulates the spirit of renewal and innovative proposal he brought forward against the dominant aesthetics in Spanish drama at the turn of the century. Particularly in his initial creative period – for his works acquired a moralizing tone with the passage of time (Huerta and Peral 74-75) – Benavente challenged the grandiloquent style and superficiality that characterized the drama of his time, producing texts which showed psychological depth, dramatic conflict, lyricism, irony and social satire (Díez de Revenga 97). With plays like those included in *Teatro Fantástico* or his most highly acclaimed text, *Los intereses creados* (1907), Benavente reveals a solid and curious playwright, open to diverse styles, contexts and tones (Montero Alonso 157, 169). However, this particular volume had – and has had since then – very little editorial or critical repercussion (Huerta and Peral 10-11) even though, when some of its plays were first put on, in the early years of the 20th century, the playwright had already seen more than thirty of his plays on stage,

[8] According to the reviews of this production, directed by Enrique Ortenbach, Beatrice and Benedick's witty tone was toned down, since they were played on the same courtly note as the "noble" plot.

earning the applause of Spanish theatre audiences and the trust of the most renowned Spanish performers of the time (Montero Alonso 170). Still, the Spanish playwright was not so popular with the country's theatre critics, who were rather harsh with his drama work (Díez de Revenga 90).

Benavente was well versed in classical theatre, both Spanish and foreign. In fact, he published adaptations of works by other foreign writers like Alexandre Dumas or Edward Bulwer-Lytton; but it was Shakespeare that he particularly admired.[9] He used various of the bard's plays as source texts for his own production (for instance, translating *King Lear* and *Hamlet,* and adapting *Twelfth Night* as *Cuento de amor*, apart from the text presented in this section); he drew inspiration from the English playwright for some of his own titles (*El bufón de Hamlet, La historia de Otelo, La noche iluminada*,[10] *Titania*, etc.) (Huerta and Peral 59), and a lecture he gave in the USA in1922 was entitled "Some of Shakespeare's women" (my translation) – Beatrice, however, was not included. Benavente felt attracted to the atmosphere of freedom and mystery he found in Shakespeare's plays, which encouraged equivocal sexual relations (Huerta and Peral 60). He followed him in using the motif of disguise in his plays, of being *vs* seeming – so central in some of the bard's comedies, like *Much Ado* – in order to create sexually indeterminate characters (61), maybe hinting at his own homosexuality. According to Huerta and Peral, through his examples of ambiguous love, Benavente presented sexual difference as enriching, if one manages to transcend social conventions and moral prejudices (74) – which may explain why he became interested in *Much Ado About Nothing*, with its denunciation of social impositions, false appearances and the world of masks and deceit.

In Benavente's early dramas – like *Los favoritos* – in which his spirit of social and theatrical renewal came to the fore, the conflict between transgression and canons is represented by a series of female roles which moved between the acceptance of the patriarchal society they lived in and an unconventional way of thinking (Serrano 389). The writer was very interested in women: he wrote about them and gave them prominent and complex roles in his theatre – though this may also have been due to the fact that the Spanish actresses of the time were better than the actors (Serrano 391). While he saw that it was women that mostly suffered the imposition of social conventions and the limitations on their realization as happy and autonomous beings (390-91), Benavente also knew that

[9] Two relevant studies in this regard are: Peral Vega, Emilio. "Shakespeare en España a principios del siglo XX: Jacinto Benavente."*Paso honroso. Homenaje a Amancio Labandeira.* Ed. Julio Escribano Hernández et al. Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 2010. 235-258. Print; and: Sheehan, Robert L. *Benavente and the Spanish Panorama. 1894-1954.* Estudios de Hispanófila, 37. N.C.: Chapel Hill, 1976. Print.

[10] Literal translation of the Spanish titles quoted: Love tale, Hamlet's buffon, The history of Othello, Lighted night, Titania.

women were their own worst enemy, as the title of another of his lectures read: "La mujer y su mayor enemigo" (Díez de Revenga 93). Nevertheless, Benavente's texts had their roots in the 19th century and he could not really be called a feminist, so although his female characters questioned social practices and revealed his own dissatisfaction with the society of Spain's turn of the century, in the end he does not allow them to abandon the established system, making them, on the contrary, give in to it (Serrano 391, 406-07).[11]

All this is reflected in his adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing*: from its Beatrice and Benedick plot he drew inspiration to create a one-act play with just four characters: Celia and Octavio, holders of a dukedom in Italy, and Beatriz and Benedicto, the duchess's and the duke's favourites, respectively. The setting is the same as in Shakespeare's text: Renaissance Italy and garden scenes. The two couples are contrasted, as they are in the original comedy – Celia and Octavio representing the marriage of convenience, albeit happy and romantic, while Beatriz and Benedicto are engaged in a constant battle and both seem to find marriage repulsive. However, it is only the latter couple that are truly based on Shakespeare's characters, the other two characters just sharing with Hero and Claudio their role as the wits' counterparts, since their individual characterization differs considerably from the tragic couple in *Much Ado*.

Like her predecessor, Beatriz is intelligent, witty, independent; she thinks social conventions on marriage clearly detract from her and her friend's freedom, and her concept of love is based on equality. Benavente has made her particularly learned and studious: in his adaptation she is a voracious reader and the author of some novels, regarded as an erudite and wise woman both by Celia and the other members of the ducal palace. But Beatriz has contemplated her learning as a weapon against possible fits of passion and unequal love:

> Beatriz: (…) Eso he buscado en el estudio, una defensa contra los arrebatos del corazón, una atalaya desde donde dominar con mi superioridad a este tirano que se llama hombre y se cree superior a nosotras, porque en el reparto de la naturaleza se ha reservado todo lo que brilla, triunfos militares, glorias del arte, conquistas de la ciencia, todo es suyo, para venir después a deslumbrarnos con ello y arrebatar nuestro corazón amante, por admiración o por vanidad. Es preciso equilibrar la partida, fuerza contra fuerza.Para ellos las armas, la lucha; para nosotras el estudio, las ciencias. Que mi amor nazca del entendimiento para ser feliz, eso quiero. (Benavente, Ed. Huerta and Peral 229-30).[12]

[11] In any case, as Serrano points out (411), "with his theatre, Benavente did not break social patterns or moulds but, through the choice and composition of the elements of his texts, he made it possible for his women to still be the object of new interpretations in the 21st century" (my translation).

[12] (Literal translation, mine): "That is what I've sought in study, a defence against love raptures, a vantage point from which to look down on that tyrant, man, who considers himself superior to us women, since in the distribution of nature he has kept for himself

For this reason, she is also regarded as proud. In fact, learning and wisdom in a woman are quoted by Benedicto as dangerous weapons in one of their repartees.

Celia is certainly different from Beatriz, at least as regards her attitude towards social conventions and marriage, which she accepts and rejoices in. She herself was married to the Duke as part of a peace settlement between him and her father, but she has learnt to love her husband. This is what she, more or less, shares with the Hero of *Much Ado*; however, unlike Hero, Celia is a strong character and shows a touch of feminism in her analysis of men's selfishness – in her view, men prefer women to be ignorant and weak so as to defeat them more easily. Celia is sensible, thoughtful, clever (she arranges the hoaxes for Beatriz and Benedicto) and sensual. Indeed, in a long speech at the very beginning of the play, she contrasts her reliance on instinct, her sensuality and ignorance with Beatriz's intelligence and erudition, and asks who is the happier of the two. If Beatriz represents the positive qualities Benavente gave to unconventional women (Serrano 392), Celia typifies the mother-wife the playwright included in his gallery of women roles (393): she is portrayed as clearly wiser than her husband but she willingly accepts their disparate intelligence, celebrating their sensual love and peaceful marriage. She is a clear example of the description Serrano gives for Benavente's wives (394, my translation): "Most of Benavente's wife characters are aware of their unfair situation but do not decide in favour of their freedom; on the contrary, they find peace in their surrender." In my view, Celia's role is hardly a secondary one in the play; in fact, Benavente gives her the final speech in the text.

This playwright's male roles frequently correspond to the stereotyped authoritarian, weak or puerile man who treats women contemptuously or violently, or else is happy to have a mother-wife as his partner (Serrano 393) – an example of the latter being represented by Octavio in this play. The Duke might occupy the same place as Claudio in the original play, but in fact the only feature they may be said to share is their being portrayed as rather unattractive characters: Claudio is usually disliked because of his immaturity, his dependence on what others think of him and his idealized vision of love and distrust of women, which lead him to believe the false accusation against his fiancée without further reflection, and to consequently treat her with extreme cruelty. For his part, the Duke appears as an insecure, conventional and rather simple man; but, unlike Claudio, he acknowledges his weaknesses and his wife's

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everything that shines, military victories, art wonders, scientific achievements – everything is his – in order to come and dazzle us with all that, captivating our loving hearts, out of admiration or vanity. A balance must be achieved between the players in this match, a balance of forces. For them, weapons, fighting; for us, study, science. Let my love spring from intelligence in order to be happy, that's what I want."

superior intelligence, and his clumsiness actually becomes a means of humour in the scenes with Celia preparing the hoaxes. He is therefore more comical and harmless than Claudio.

As in *Much Ado*, Benedicto is Beatriz's antagonist, fighting the 'merry war' which is the gist of the story. He is as witty, quick, bright and articulate as Beatriz. Their repartees denote the two characters' intelligence and independence of mind, as in the case of their predecessors. But a slight change of tone can be observed in the adaptation: Benedicto is now gentler to her than she is to him. Their mutual attacks have a great share of humour in them, because of the way in which they mockingly overturn each other's comments and play with language in order to be witty or ironical. However, Beatriz's words are at times unpleasant and usually harsher than his and she makes some bitter accusations against Benedicto; in fact, Celia will later censure her cruelty towards him. This makes the general tone of their scenes a somewhat graver one than in Shakespeare's text.

Like his antagonist in the Spanish adaptation, Benedicto reveals an interest in learning and culture, and rejects marriage. He opposes wit to true love, and has a poor concept of women, as vain, frivolous and manipulative. So both Beatrice and Benedick deal with topics that were prominent in Shakespeare's original, like gender issues or the concept of love and marriage, but resort to different jokes and specific contents. The social value of marriage – and the danger seen in being single – are also brought up in other characters' speeches.

The main differences between *Los favoritos* and *Much Ado* concern the plot. Two important changes can be observed. Firstly, the climax of the original text, Beatrice's problematic "Kill Claudio," uttered to Benedick as proof of his love (IVi), has naturally disappeared with the removal of the "main" story line; and the love test is no longer between Beatriz and Benedicto but between Octavio and Celia: since their favourites cannot stand each other, the duke and duchess argue as to which of them will be prepared to let their own favourite go, in order to have some peace in the palace. This, and Celia's common sense, is what actually prompts their efforts to reconcile them, – by using the same hoaxes as in Shakespeare's comedy. The second plot change precisely concerns these stratagems, since the trick on Beatriz is not really staged, but only reported, probably for length reasons since Benavente aimed at a one-act play. Both ploys, however, are based on the same idea as in the original: making Beatriz and Benedicto believe that the other one loves him/her. The parallelism is here reinforced by the fact that Celia uses exactly the same words for both to hear, describing to each of them the other's despair at his/her cruelty. The repetition of Celia's speech (even if, in one case, it takes the form of reported speech) enhances the humour of the second scene (Benedicto's deceit),

providing the audience with that feeling of superiority and involvement which is so essential to humour.

Perhaps the main change is in the general tone of the play: having eliminated the serious plot, Benavente's adaptation is not problematic in terms of its enjoyment as a comedy. That the Spanish writer had a comedy in mind is also indicated by the fact that he finished his play with what is probably a less ambiguous "happy ending" than in Shakespeare – the union of his two antagonists seems stronger and Celia's closing speech celebrates life, sensuality and romance, tipping the balance of the different views of love in the text towards her side.[13]

First performed in Spain in 1903, *Los favoritos* has received very scarce attention from either critics or researchers, particularly if compared to other works in which Benavente also drew his inspiration from Shakespeare. Interestingly, though, it saw a recent production in Madrid in 2010, whose director, Ainhoa Amestoy, reintroduced some of Shakespeare's original material in the textand had a pianist on the stage – maybe echoing the importance of music in the source text; it received very good reviews. Shakespeare's Beatrice and Benedict continue to hold appeal on Spanish stages, either in productions of translations of *Much Ado*, or in adaptations: the couple were, for instance, incorporated into a 1989 performance in the Galician language by the Centro Dramático Galego, which adapted *The Merry Wives of Windsor* adding elements from *Romeo and Juliet, The Taming of the Shrew* and *Much Ado* (Gregor 135-6); and Beatrice was part of a monologue by the Spanish actor Rafael Álvarez "El Brujo," *Mujeres de Shakespeare* [Shakespeare's women], which toured around Spain in 2013.

3. Beatrice and Benedick in French Opera Adaptation

Musical adaptations occupy a special place in the relatively small number of adaptations made of *Much Ado* in modern times, "especially when compared to other Shakespearean comedies of its stature" (Lanier 25-26). Charles Villiers Stanford composed a four - act opera based on this play, with libretto by Julian Sturgis and the same title as the bard's original; but, although it received enthusiastic reviews at its première at the Royal Opera House in 1901, this opera is rarely performed today (Mares 29). Among the "recrafting of *Much Ado* to musical form," Lanier also registers: a comic operetta in Russian by the Soviet composer Tikhon Khrennikov (*Much Ado About Hearts*, 1972); an orchestral suite on the play by the American composer Erich Korngold; a few popular

[13] Benavente typically gave his plays a Spanish Golden Age ending, in a mood of festivity or Christian resignation, which, according to Serrano (389-90), may explain why audiences of the time did not grasp the spirit of transgression and renewal that otherwise pervaded this playwright's texts.

musicals, like Hy Conrad's 1978 *Ta-Dah!*, a British musical adaptation of *Much Ado* produced by Bernard Taylor in 1997 (blending Elizabethan and Broadway-style music), or a modern Shakespearean burlesque – *Much Adoobie Brothers About Nothing* –a Los Angeles 2006 production which combined the original plot with songs by a rock band from the 70s; finally, and more recently, Caleen Sinnette Jennings' *Hip-Hop Much Ado About Nothing* (2004) – in which the action is set in a hip-hop club, *Mariachi Much Ado About Nothing* – featuring Mexican music, and *The Boys Are Coming Home*, by Leslie Arden and Berni Stapledon (2005) – set after World War II in America (Lanier 26-28).

Reflecting on the fact that a comparatively low number of operas based on Shakespeare's theatre production have been successful–if one considers that the playwright "has proved the single most popular source of inspiration for opera," having originated (directly or obliquely) at least 270 operas in over 300 years, Wilson (338) concludes that, although music and song hold a significant place in the bard's texts, "most of the plays in their original form are not well suited to operatic treatment."[14] Only Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can be considered a full-length opera entirely based on the original play and having a regular place in the operatic repertoire; other successful operas inspired by Shakespeare's texts are more or less close adaptations (Wilson 339). Among them, Verdi's masterpieces, *Macbeth, Falstaff* and *Othello*, as well as the musical drama that stands out among all the musical recraftings of *Much Ado* mentioned above, Hector Berlioz's opera *Béatrice et Bénédict*.

Using the "secondary" plot of Shakespeare's comedy and creating both the words and the music for it, Berlioz composed an "opéra-comique" in two acts, which would be his last major work – the composer would die only seven years after the première in 1862 (Cairns 12). On its first night, the piece inaugurated the new theatre at Baden-Baden (Germany) with great success, being revived the following year with the addition of a couple of numbers (10). Although Berlioz's libretto is in French, French audiences would have to wait till 1890 to see the opera staged in Paris.[15] Today, the overture is frequently performed on its own in concerts and has numerous recordings; the opera itself

[14] "Some of the plays (...) are more obviously suited to operatic setting than others" (Wilson 339). Thus, *The Tempest* has been particularly fruitful; *Romeo and Juliet* has also lent itself easily to opera adaptation, while *Hamlet*, understandably, presents most difficulties.

[15] Berlioz himself conducted a German version of the opera in Germany in 1863. His work, however, would have to wait even longer than in France to be put on stage in the United Kingdom, where it was first produced in Glasgow in 1936. It has not been performed in Spain yet.

is not very regularly performed, but it has seen several productions in the present century, both in Europe and the USA, having some important recordings too.[16]

Some consider *Béatrice et Bénédict* the composer's "most surprising work" and indeed French reviews of the time talked about a "new" Berlioz (Cairns 10). The opera was certainly a humourous lighthearted counterpart to the composer's dramatic symphony *Roméo et Juliette* (1839) or to his ambitious work *Les Troyens* (1863), and showed that he was also capable of good humour and mordant wit (Holoman 364).[17] Ever since the Romantic movement had rediscovered Shakespeare's work in France, Berlioz – who has been considered as the main representative of Romanticism in music – had always been a Shakespeare enthusiast and had long nurtured the idea of turning one of the bard's works into an opera (Alier 84; Deloge 2).

From *Much Ado*, he retained Beatrice and Benedick's "merry war," while Hero and Claudio's plot lost its main component, the bride's calumniation; so we now only have this couple's happy romantic reunion after the war, which serves as a counterpoint to the two witty and sparkling characters' respective gulling. Berlioz stayed very close to Shakespeare's text in those parts he preserved, practically translating directly from it; so much so that, in the trilingual CD insert of the Philips recording, for the English version of the French libretto Shakespeare's original has been reused (including the spelling for Benedick), as a note indicates (p. 68). This does not mean, however, that Berlioz intended a "setting" of the comedy; what he did was to borrow its secondary plot "and worked it into a divertissement" (Cairns 12-13). For these purposes, he did away with all the sombre elements of the source: apart from Hero's tragic story, Don John is gone and Claudio's role has practically become a silhouette. He also replaced the comic scenes of Dogberry and his watch with a character of his own invention, the ridiculous old *maître de chapelle* Somarone (probably based on Shakespeare's Balthasar, who has also disappeared). With this buffoon's scenes – the "Grotesque epithalamium," a disastrous music rehearsal with his singers, and a drinking improvisation with the chorus – Berlioz could take more advantage of the musical medium for the sake of humour than Dogberry's malapropisms and verbal comedy afforded him, while he also took the opportunity to attack the prevailing academicism in French music of the time (Deloge 2). The composer therefore showed fine craftsmanship in understanding and overcoming the difficulties presented by the

[16] For instance, the 1977 Philips recording (remastered as a CD), mentioned in the Works Cited section below; or a 1981 Deutsche Gramophone one with the Orchestre de Paris conducted by Daniel Barenboim, and Placido Domingo, Yvonne Minton and Ileana Cotrubas in the cast.

[17] This opera by Berlioz has been described as "la plus légère et la plus gaie de ses oeuvres lyriques, (une) oeuvre qui allie verve et humour, légèreté, tendresse et poésie" (Deloge 1).

transposition of a Shakespeare play into the opera medium: "The quality and verbal intricacy of Shakespeare's plays and, not least, audience familiarity with them, demand that the opera be not simply a musical version of the play but a valid artistic endeavour on its own terms" (Wilson 339). And *Béatrice and Bénédicte* is no doubt "the work of a very experienced composer" (Cairns 12).

He skilfully made the two sparkling characters the centre of attention, as the title itself reflects. The libretto revolves around their taunts and witty repartees, through which they try to hide their true feelings to each other. Their mordant irony is also a weapon these two adversaries use against conventional marriage, but, as in the original, the irony will somehow turn against them for they will end up signing their wedding contract. Their baiting starts soon after the opera begins, in a duet in which Berlioz, on the one hand, directly translates some sentences from Shakespeare, but on the other, he exploits the possibilities of operatic singing in order to convey the full meaning of the scene. Thus, the arrangement of the aria helps highlight the parallelism between the characters' "inside" and "outside" feelings. They sing a stanza together in which both use the same words just changing the corresponding pronoun: "Mais, quel plaisir étrange / Trouve-je à l'irriter! / Comme un coeur qui se venge, / Je sens le mien bondir et palpiter."[18] The same happens when one sings after the other:

> Bénédict: Dieu du ciel, faites-moi la grâce / De ne pas femme m'octroyer, *montrant Béatrice /* Blonde surtout!
>
> Béatrice: Dieu du ciel, faites-moi la grâce / De ne pas m'imposer d'époux, *montrant Bénédict* / Barbu surtout![19] (Act 1, Scenes 8-9, Duet)

The hoaxes are very similar to Shakespeare's (although Beatrice's is not really staged but narrated afterwards, as in Benavente's adaptation). And they are equally successful: in an exuberant aria at the end of his garden scene, Bénédict reflects on Béatrice's qualities and charms, realizing he loves her. And in her extended aria in Act 2, she also admits she is falling in love. Both persist in their baiting and in masking their love till the end, when, as in the original, they claim they take each other out of pity and love each other "no more than reason." The irony against Bénédict's initial resolution to remain a bachelor is enhanced in the final scene both by the music and the visual stage directions Berlioz included in the libretto: the young man's self-mocking words in Act I,

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[18] In The English translation (Cairns 82), this implies changing the corresponding pronoun: "Why, what curious pleasure / I find in baiting *him//her*! / I feel my heart leap and bound / As though it were bent on revenge."

[19] "God in Heaven, do me the grace / To furnish me with no wife, *indicating Beatrice* / Least of all a blonde one!"
"God in Heaven, do me the grace / To lay on me no husband, / *indicating Benedick* / Least of all one with a beard!" (Cairns 82)

"Ici l'on voit Bénédict l'homme marié" (directly borrowed from Shakespeare's "Here you may see Benedict the married man"), appear now written in placards carried by four men, while Héro, Ursule, Claudio, Don Pedro and the chorus all sing them to the same music of the allegretto trio in Act I, when the young man had first uttered them. Nevertheless, the vulnerability of Béatrice and Bénédict's marriage contract is perhaps made more explicit in Berlioz's libretto than in Shakespeare's play: the final words of the opera are " (...) pour aujourd'hui la trêve est signée; / Nous redeviendrons ennemis demain,"[20] which the couple sing together – the rest of the cast adding "Demain, demain!"

As Cairns explains, despite its light-hearted tone and its simplification of the source plot, Berlioz's opera follows Shakespeare's comedy closely in having the concept of love at the centre of the story and as a complex object of analysis. In *Much Ado*,

> Shakespeare (…) abandoned the ideal dream-world, (...) and the romanticising of sexual attraction of his earlier love comedies, in favour of a sophisticated realism which calls the whole conventional pattern of institutionalised romance into caustic question, and exposes the differences between the complexity and ambiguity of private feeling and the social rituals which are supposed to embody them (Cairns 14).

In *Béatrice and Bénédicte*, Berlioz uses both Héro and his music to contrast the different views of love. Héro represents the illusion of romantic love and uncomplicated romance. The composer gives the gentle girl a beautiful aria, "Je vais le voir" – perhaps the only grand aria in the score (Deloge 4) – in which she sings with a mixture of emotion, ecstasy and melancholy at the thought of seeing Claudio again but also at saying goodbye to her own youth with her impending marriage. Interestingly, while Béatrice has hardly anything to sing in the first act, Héro practically opens the opera with this aria and is even allowed to close the act with another musical wonder, her long and exquisite *Duo-Nocturne* with her maid-in-waiting, "Nuit paisible et sereine!" Thus, the music gives her back her originally prominent role, which the opera's title seemed to deny her. In contrast, and as in the source text, Béatrice's attitude to love is a more complex one. She disdains love and marriage –for which she is considered proud and not too "human"– being aware that they will take away her mirth, freedom and mockery. The music reflects her hesitations and mixed feelings: in her only grand aria, "Je sens un feu secret dans mon coeur se répandre," which finally comes in Act 2, she moves from a sadder note to an agitated one. Her number is followed by the women's trio "Je vais d'un coeur aimant," also alternating between sweetness and agitation, which constitutes, together with the men's trio in Act 1, another climactic moment in the score (Deloge 4).

[20] "(…) for today a truce is signed. We'll become enemies again tomorrow." "Tomorrow, tomorrow!" (Cairns 146)

Berlioz, therefore, uses the music to comment on the situations, convey the characters' real feelings, or reflect the weight he assigns to each of them. Thus, Bénédict's fast rondo after his garden scene ("Ah!Je vais l'aimer!") in Act 1 reveals he has fallen for the trick; elsewhere, the music may function as an ironic cohesive device, as we saw above in relation to this character's end; and the score also underlines the libretto's ambivalent attitude to love, as Cairns accurately describes: "Romantic love which lasts 'for ever' is – as Beatrice and Benedick are only too warily conscious – an illusion, a convention; hence the parody cadenza which rounds off Hero's aria. But it is a beautiful illusion (…): hence the Nocturne" (Cairns 13-14). This is also conveyed in the couple's final duet, "L'amour est un flambeau," which mixes joy and light-heartedness with a realistic idea of love through the scherzo and the lyrics:

> Bénédict: L'amour est un flambeau…
> Béatrice: L'amour est une flamme…
> Bénédict: Un feu follet qui vient on ne sait d'où...
> Béatrice, puis Bénédict: Qui brille et disparaît…
> Béatrice: Pour égarer notre âme…
> Bénédict: Attire à lui le sot et le rend fou.
>
> Béatrice, puis Bénédict: Folie, après tout, vaut mieux que sottise.[21]

"A mons sens, c'est une des plus vives et des plus originales que j'aie produites," Berlioz said of his composition (Deloge 3). And he also acknowledged the vocal difficulties it entailed for the singers, particularly due to the fact that he interspersed the musical numbers with spoken dialogue, which required equal singing and acting talent on the part of the performers (Deloge 2). Nevertheless, these spoken parts, in which Berlioz mostly translated Shakespeare directly into French, are frequently abridged in stage productions as well as in recordings.

4. Conclusion

The immediacy that characterizes the reception of theatre performances, live events in which the verbal component is supplemented by other semiotic signs which turn the two-way communication process even more complex, makes the relationship between plays and contexts a very close one. This means that, when a play goes across linguistic or cultural borders, there is always some need of cultural readjustment so that the rapport between the text being performed on the

[21] "Love is a torch... / Love is a flame... / A will o' the wisp coming from no one knows where… / Gleaming and vanishing from sight… / For the distractions of our souls… / Attracting the fool and making him mad. / Madness, after all, is better than foolishness"(Cairns 144).

stage and the new audience is re-established effectively. Drama texts are therefore frequently subjected to various degrees of "adaptation," both showing their malleability and proving that no single interpretation or production can be considered final.

This article has illustrated the variations that can be exerted on one and the same play. Throughout its stage history, Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* has been set in different fictional contexts, demonstrating the relevance of its text to various geographical and time settings. From a different perspective, section **1** of this article has presented how the play has also been subject to the influences of the external context: the evolution in the performance of Beatrice in the English-speaking world, for instance, reflects the varying cultural and ideological assumptions of each period, particularly concerning gender issues and the concepts of love and marriage, thus conditioning the overall interpretation of the play. Moreover, each revival of the play, bringing different elements and aspects to the fore, will generate fresh meanings which gradually accumulate and influence subsequent readings and productions of the play.

In sections 2 and 3, we have seen variations on the play involving translation and adaptation: the texts analysed have both focused on the "sub"-plot of Shakespeare's comedy and moved it across linguistic borders, but while Benavente's play *Los favoritos* has remained within the realm of drama, Berlioz's adaptation has transferred it to a different artistic context, opera. They also illustrate slightly different approaches to the main elements in the play. Thus, the ambiguity and complexity of Shakespeare's original have become less problematic in both target texts, as a result of Benavente's and Berlioz's selecting only the comic parts as their source of inspiration. But there are also significant differences between the two adaptations: in the Spanish play, Beatriz and Benedicto's repartees are more bitter, while the ending is, perhaps more clearly, a happy one; besides, the gender issues seem to have acquired more relevance in this text, reflecting Benavente's concern with social problems and with the situation of women. In Berlioz's text, by contrast, the sombre elements have completely disappeared, but the everlastingness of the final marriage between the witty characters seems to be even less certain than in Shakespeare – to say nothing of Benavente. Interestingly, by using the musical component of his genre, the composer has given Hero back some of her originally prominent role. Berlioz's libretto also shows thatchanging the source text to a new genre does not necessarily imply getting further away from it, since some parts of this French adaptation, particularly the spoken dialogues, follow Shakespeare's text very closely.

Much Ado About Nothing has been transposed to other art forms both in translation and in the original language – a famous example being Kenneth Branagh's successful film. All these different transpositions, together with the

adaptations of Shakespeare's comedy studied here evidence the potential for variation shown by drama texts,whose suppleness enables them to move easily between languages and cultures, historic periods or artistic genres.

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