

THE “OTHER” WILLIAM AND THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY IN SPANISH STAGE DEPICTIONS OF SHAKESPEARE¹

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The paper will consider the rise and consolidation of Shakespeare as a character of Spanish drama from his first appearance in Ventura de la Vega’s translation of Duval’s *Shakespeare amoureux* in 1831 to his role in *El otro William* by Jaime Salom, first produced in 1997. After a brief consideration of the possible reasons for this peculiar piece of Bardolatry — Romantic obsessions with the figure of the author, the pervasiveness of the jealousy question as explored in the immensely popular *Othello*, the backlash against France’s cultural hegemony, etc. — the paper will attempt to situate Salom’s piece in the context of more historicizing approaches to Shakespeare’s presence in Spain and elsewhere. The explicit anti-Stratfordianism of *El otro William*, spelt out in the author’s preface, will be shown to be a paradoxical reminder of the enduring nature of that presence, even in works which purport to deny Shakespeare’s authorship of the plays traditionally attributed to him.

One of the most remarkable facets of Shakespeare’s presence in Spain, indeed something which has distinguished Spanish theatre from that of most of its European neighbours, including Britain, is Shakespeare’s appearance as a character on the Spanish stage. Shakespeare’s Spanish début as a character dates back to the early nineteenth century, and he has reappeared periodically on stage up to the present day. The aim of this paper is to explore the motives behind what I have described elsewhere as this “metaphysics” of Bardic presence,² paying special attention to the most recent and also the most provocative instance of the phenomenon, Jaime Salom’s play *El otro William* (1994).

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As was generally the case with the first translations of Shakespeare's work into Spanish, the origins of the character are solidly French. It was Ventura de la Vega who in 1828 first delighted Madrid audiences with his portrayal of "Shakespeare enamorado," a translation of Alexandre Duval's stage success *Shakespeare amoureux*, which Catalan playgoers had seen some two decades earlier in the original French version at the Teatro in Barcelona.³ A few years later, another French depiction of the English playwright (Clemence Robert's Hugoesque novel, *Guillaume Shakespeare*) was the inspiration for Enrique Zumel's drama of intrigue and sexual jealousy, a sordid love-quadrangle centring round Shakespeare, Medianoche, Isabel and the unfortunate Ariela — not to mention Shakespeare's late wife Ana Hattarway (*sic*).⁴ This adaptation from the French was followed some years later by Tamayo y Baus's wholly original *Un drama nuevo*, where Shakespeare finds himself embroiled in yet another love-intrigue, this time involving Yorick, Yorick's young wife Beatriz and her sensitive lover Edmundo.⁵ The enduring success of *Un drama nuevo* — the play would be made into a film in 1947 — was matched at the end of the century by the Italian operetta *¡Shakespeare!*, one of a string of Italian productions based on Shakespeare's life and works to tour Spanish theatres in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶

³Alfonso Par (1936: 1, 75) cites an enthusiastic article from the period in the *Diario de Madrid*: "Los amores de un poeta trágico que tanto ha honrado el teatro inglés por la energía de sus pensamientos y la inculta verdad de su pincel, serán sin duda un cuadro agradable a los ojos de este ilustrado público [i.e. at the Teatro Príncipe where the play was first performed]." The *Diario*'s ignorance as to the full range of the poet's work is attributable to the fact that *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet* and the ubiquitous *Othello* were the only Shakespearean works (via their French "translations") to have been performed in Spain to that date. The French original, *La pièce à l'étude, ou Shakespeare amoureux*, was performed on 15 August 1810 at the Teatro in occupied Barcelona to mark the anniversary of *la naissance et de la fête de Napoléon le grand* (see Par 1935: 1, 3, 159), a fact which both confirms the extent of French control over the import of Shakespeare in Spain and suggests the heroic proportions with which the playwright-as-character was endowed.

⁴*Guillermo Shakespeare*, actually inspired on a translation of Robert's novel by F. Málaga, ran from 27 to 30 March 1853 at the Drama in Madrid, but was never revived. Zumel himself took the part of Shakespeare (see Par 1936: 1, 194-198).

⁵The play was premièred on 4 May 1967 at the Teatro de la Zarzuela. The success of this production can be gauged by an account of the première where, the reviewer asks, "¿Hace falta que el público se desbordó en delirantes aplausos? Verdad es que los actores lo merecían... Todos salieron a la escena a recibir el homenaje de cuantos tuvieron la dicha de ver el estreno..." (cited in Tamayo 1979: 47).

⁶Cashing in on the operatic successes of composers like Verdi and Rossini, actor-directors like Rossi, Salvini, Novelli, Zacchoni, etc. would become household names on the European, including Spanish, circuits. As far as Shakespeare was concerned, Par (1936: 2, 8) maintains "Sin exageración, puede afirmarse que [thanks to these companies] por primera vez nuestro público se enteró de lo que eran dichas obras". For a full account of the impact of Italian companies in Spain during the period, see Bonisi & Busquets (1995).

Though it would be rash to ascribe a common basis to these productions, love and its corollaries —courtship, marriage and infidelity— as well as the turbid world of the theatre would seem to have a place in each. It’s perhaps no accident that one of the most popular plays of the early part of the nineteenth century in Spain was the tragedy *Othello*;⁷ and though jealousy was not, I would suggest, the chief concern of the play’s first adapters, the “green-eyed monster” is most definitely on the prowl in Zumel’s and Tamayo’s plays —notably in the latter, where Iago is reincarnated as the dishonest and scheming Walton, who maliciously informs Yorick of the Beatriz-Edmundo liaison. Shakespeare’s role in this later comedy is restricted to that of avuncular counsellor, desperately trying to avert the potential tragedy of illicit love, but gradually losing his grip on the situation till, in an act of hot-blooded revenge, he murders the play’s villain Walton. Far less vehement is the Shakespeare of Zumel’s mid-century tragedy, who, after the poisoning of Ariela by Medianoche and Isabel’s withdrawal to a nunnery, slopes rather ignominiously off to his native Worcester (*sic*), to be comforted by his daughter Susana.

Both Zumel’s and Tamayo’s plays acknowledge the fact that the historical Shakespeare was very much a “man of the theatre.” In his prologue, Zumel engineers an improbable encounter between the aspiring young actor and three of Elizabethan London’s established playwrights, Greene, Marlowe and Middleton together with the theatrical impresario Tohnsson, who is impressed by Shakespeare’s declamatory skills and hires him as an actor. A slightly more informed vision of the Elizabethan stage is provided by Tamayo, who sets the intrigue of his play against the rehearsals and performance of an imaginary revenge tragedy, where Yorick plays the role of the outraged Count Octavio who discovers and of course avenges the infidelity of his wife by murdering her lover, played by Edmundo. The theatrical rivalry between Yorick and Walton is thus given a metadramatic scenario, in which Walton, in the role of Landolfo, will be the one to hand the revelatory note to Octavio. Both play and play-within-the-play are fused with the irruption of Shakespeare, who announces the “real” deaths of Edmundo (on stage) and Walton (in the street outside the playhouse). The theatre is thus used as both the “scene” and “substance” of a tragedy founded on the familiar trope, so beloved of Shakespeare and Tamayo’s compatriot Calderón, of the *theatrum mundi*.

⁷Thus according to Par’s estimate (1936: 1, 1), in the period 1776-1832, the so-called “época galoclásica”, there were no fewer than 116 separate performances of the tragedy in the theatres of Madrid and Barcelona alone. The play’s success was due largely to the skill of the actors who took the main roles, rather than to the play-text used (in the vast majority of cases, Teodoro de la Calle’s much maligned translation of J-F Ducis’s 1792 adaptation of the play). So successful was the play that, from 1828 on, it spawned a number of parodies, chiefly *El Caliche, o la parodia de Oteló*, which Par attributes to J. M. Carnerero.

These early depictions of Shakespeare, reinforced by the vast repertory of Shakespearean dramas appearing on the nineteenth-century Spanish stage, as well as a growing tendency outside the theatre to produce ever more colourful accounts of the playwright's life,⁸ take it for granted that Shakespeare was the author of his works. This indeed is what gives a certain "authority" to representations which tend to collapse the difference between the life and the works. Spanish theatre-producers remained, in other words, largely aloof to the authorship controversies that were rocking the foundations of England's nascent Shakespeare "industry,"⁹ whilst the scholarship of the period was concerned more with comparing Shakespeare with Spain's Golden Age classics Calderón and Lope, or with using the English playwright as a scourge with which to lash French neoclassicism, than with refuting the abundant evidence which pointed to the man from Stratford as the progenitor of his plays. These concerns were reflected in an interest, bordering on obsession, with translations and stage adaptations of his work, tragedies like *Hamlet* and *Othello*, many of the comedies and, as we have seen, stage incarnations of the "man himself."

At first sight, this is what makes Jaime Salom's recent play, *El otro William*, premièred in 1998, such an innovative and refractory member of the saga. In his introduction to the play, Salom regards it as common sense that Shakespeare could not have written the plays attributed to him. "[S]i nos referimos," he writes,

a los conocimientos de música, artes plásticas, heráldica, caza, hípica, esgrima, derecho, astrología, ciencias secretas, historia natural, relatos de viajes, estrategia militar y marina, vida de la Corte, religión, lenguaje o vocabulario que tan concienzudamente se contienen en su obra monumental, ¿no están en oposición completa e irreductible con los elementos conocidos de la biografía del Shakespeare de Stradford [sic]?¹⁰

The contradiction is what has prompted Salom, metaphorically emulating Delia Bacon, to dig around in Shakespeare's tomb in a dramatic quest for the truth and, rejecting what he calls the "fe del carbonero" with its "misticismo shakesperiano tan poco racional como convincente," to posit William Stanley, sixth Earl of Derby, as the most likely candidate as author of the plays of Shakespeare.¹¹

⁸See López Román (1993), for an appraisal of some of these.

⁹See, for instance, Bate (1997: ch. 3) for an entertaining account of the different Shakespeare "authorship controversies" in nineteenth-century England.

¹⁰Salom, (1998: 20), "Introducción". All future page references are to this edition.

¹¹Though Salom omits to mention his sources, the candidature of Derby is, he claims, "fruto de una larga investigación y estudio sobre la biografía de este interesante personaje" (1998: 21).

The plot of the play reproduces the circumstances in which Shakespeare assumes the authorship of the "other" William, Stanley. The action commences with Stanley's accession to the earldom following the death of his brother, and just as Stanley is musing upon his next play, "Romualdo y Juslinda..., o quizá mejor Romeo y Julieta" (27). The dead Earl's widow informs Stanley he has been disinherited and suggests he seeks a loan from a usurer called Shylok to pay his dues to the Crown, feed his people and repair roads and bridges; the alternative, she proposes, is to marry her, thus uniting his title and her fortune. Stanley is appalled by the suggestion, especially by the widow's thinly veiled accusation that he was her husband's poisoner. Disconcerted, Stanley is advised by his servant and lover Mary to seek the hand of the Earl of Oxford's daughter. Meanwhile, he confides in Costrand his secret "affliction" to writing poems, sonnets and plays, and posits it as a solution to his financial worries, intimating however that Costrand or someone else sign his works, since "algo vergonzoso debe tener el teatro cuando ningún noble podría, sin menoscabo de su dignidad, otorgar su apellido a ninguna de esas composiciones" (38). Costrand suggests a young actor called Shakespeare, "un truhán que ha corrido detrás de todas las mozas de la región" (39), including Mary, and, though unschooled, with a sickly penchant for writing plays, though none of them is ever accepted (43).

Salom endows the young actor with a past: a glover's son who is caught poaching venison and has fled to London, where he has performed a number of trades before fulfilling his childhood ambition of becoming an actor. The lefthanded "Shakpso" or "Shaksper" ("En cada documento lo escriben de una manera distinta," 44) accepts the imposture for three and half pounds and agrees to sign *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and show the manuscripts to his director. On his exit, Stanley explains his motives to the audience:

¿Que por qué elegí a un tipo como él y no a alguien más culto y educado?
 Pues para que nadie pudiera creer jamás que ese ignorante fuera el autor de
 mis dramas... ¿Cómo iba a conocer ese pillete el lenguaje y los sentimientos
 de reyes y nobles si no ha pisado otros salones que las cuerdas y las cocinas?
 ¿Y cómo habría situado la acción en tan diversos países si no se ha movido
 de los barrios bajos de Londres? ¿Qué podría saber él de reyes, de medicina,
 de alquimia o de música? ¿Y de historia...? (47-8)

What indeed? The first act ends with Stanley's reluctant marriage to the Earl of Oxford's insipid daughter, celebrated with a performance of the "other" William's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which Stanley's watches "embobado," while the new Countess snoozes.

If the first act is adorned with references to comedies like *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Two Gentlemen* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with all but

passing allusions to *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, Act Two begins very firmly in the mode of tragedy. A harrassed Shakespeare informs Stanley of the Earl of Essex's attempted uprising, sparked by a public performance of *Richard II* at the Globe, and in a Iago-like gesture of fake innocence, increases Stanley's discomfiture by handing him (in return for money) the handkerchief Stanley has given his wife, which Shakespeare claims to have discovered in Essex's bedchamber. Stanley confronts his wife with the "evidence," with which he attempts to strangle her, only to be prevented by the irruption of Costrand and the widowed Countess. The seething Stanley muses:

Pero, ¿y si ella fuera inocente y todo hubiera sido un engaño urdido por ese pícaro para sacarme veinticinco libras? ¡Qué cruel burla del destino! ¡Qué diabólica duda! Compondré una tragedia con esta inquietante intriga para advertencia de maridos. (68)

Stanley is harassed still further by the return of the Countess and his brother's widow with a legal suit concerning misuse of his brother's inheritance and —an even more heinous crime!— his secret writing activity which quite possibly includes "lecciones de brujería o peligrosas doctrinas papistas" (71). Stanley confesses his literary inclinations and the pact with Shakespeare, only to be compared with Don Quixote by the implacable widow ("el mucho leer y escribir os ha hecho perder el juicio," 73). After the trial scene, Shakespeare returns in the stage costume of Macbeth and is urged by Stanley to reveal the real name behind the plays and to return the manuscripts. Shakespeare refuses, claiming the plays are his and even brings in Mary who, in the meantime, has become his lover. Stanley taunts him with Greene's celebrated attack on Shakespeare ("A partir de ahora tendrás que conformarte con tus propias plumas de cuervo sin poder adornarte con las ajenas," 83), but Shakespeare holds firm, hoisting Stanley with his own petard:

Yo soy nuestros personajes, les he vivido uno a uno, noche tras noche, mientras que vos os limitasteis a dibujarlo en un papel. Hubieran quedado en meros fantasmas si yo no les hubiera dado vida. Perdonad mi atrevimiento pero a veces pienso que a vos, un gran señor, y a mí, un pobre cómico, la vida nos ha convertido en las dos caras de una misma moneda. (83)

Stanley realizes his predicament and accepts it fatalistically, offering to write his swan-song for the stage and the world which has treated him so unjustly, *The Tempest*. The play ends with Mary lamenting the death of Shakespeare in a drinking bout with Ben Jonson and other friends, and Stanley realizing the painful truth of Shakespeare's final words, but rejoicing in the fact that after death and silence, "las criaturas que yo concebí, mis personajes, levantarán su voz para repetir mis versos una y otra vez sobre los escenarios de todo el mundo y van a ser mis versos, ¡los míos!, ¡los que yo compuse!, los que van a reinar para siempre" (89).

As well as highlighting the play’s undoubted debt to the works of Borges or to Unamuno’s *El otro*, Rafael Borràs cites approvingly Luis Montiel’s suggestion that

al final de la obra... lo leído no es comedia, sino metafísica; que ese teatro está emparentado aún más que con el del barroco con el medieval, o a lo sumo con el de ese barroco que desvela el auto sacramental..., un auto sacramental a lo humano, no a lo divino. (Borràs 1998: 11)

The “metaphysical” dimension is opened by a framing technique in which a modern-day William Stanley, complete with tourist-guide’s cap shows a group of visitors the Derbys’ mansion which has become a kind of museum to the genius of its late sixteenth / early seventeenth-century resident. The framing scene takes place in Stanley’s library, with Stanley’s original table adorned with the skull of Yorick, the Stanley household’s fool-in-residence. William the guide fondles a book called *La vida y hazañas de sir William Stanley*, a book which, as he is careful to explain at the end of the play, “se agotó y nunca más se reeditó... Se prohibió” (89). The play thus encloses within itself the “truth” Salom alludes to in the introduction; the taboo on the Stanley biography is as final as Salom’s reticence as to the nature of his research, while the projection of both Williams as two sides of the same coin remains an interesting, though ultimately unproven, and unprovable, fact.

In Unamuno’s play the mystery revolves around the identity of “the other,” the body found lying in the cellar, the apparent victim of the fratricidal struggle between Cosme and Damián for the love of Cosme’s wife Laura —or Damián’s wife Damiana.¹² Despite the efforts of Laura’s level-headed brother Ernesto and the physician Don Juan, the play declines to offer a solution to the dilemma, but rather appears to accept as valid the Ama’s words in the epilogue:

¡El misterio! Yo no sé quién soy, vosotros no sabéis quiénes sois, el historiador no sabe quién es, no sabe quién es ninguno de los que nos oyen. Todo hombre se muere, cuando el Destino le traza la muerte, sin haberse conocido, y toda muerte es un suicidio, el de Caín. ¡Perdonémonos los unos a los otros para que Dios nos perdone a todos! (114)

The Ama’s words are curiously reminiscent of the end of Tamayo’s *Un drama nuevo*, where Shakespeare bursts on stage to deliver the epilogue, an impassioned appeal to the audience to pray not just for the dead but for their killers too (Tamayo 1979: 144). On another level, however, it anticipates Salom’s drama, by casting doubt on the “authority” of that formerly undisputed figure, the *author* himself. In his play script for the 1932 production of *El otro*, Unamuno offers the following alternative to the lines just cited: *Donde dice:*

¹²Unamuno, (1964). Page references are to this edition of the play.

“*El historiador no sabe quién es*”, *puede decirse*: “*Unamuno no sabe quién es*” (114). Like the unnamed author of his personal “history,” William Stanley, Earl of Derby, does not know who he is; he assumes himself to be the author of Shakespeare, though for both Shakespeare and, more importantly, for posterity, he is “not himself”, is merely the “other William.”

And what of Shakespeare, the Cain-like fool who steals his crown and his fame? William’s “other” steals out of *El otro William* as infamously as he crept in. Mary tearfully recounts how

La noche de su cumpleaños, el señor Ben Jonson y otros amigos de Londres se presentaron en su casa para festejarlo. Parece ser que fue una velada muy animada, que contaron historias atrevidas junto al fuego, hicieron concursos de desvergonzadas epigramas y brindaron una y otra vez por la alegre Inglaterra de su juventud. Al alba, William se sintió mal, poco después cayó en delirio y aunque el doctor trató de reanimarlo, ya no volvió en sí. (87)

Shakespeare dies not as Iago will die, forced under torture to reveal the truth, but as Falstaff or his double, the rollicking Sir Toby Belch, who falls for an able serving-wench called Mary. “Ya no volvió en sí,” by drinking himself to death, Salom’s Shakespeare, author of William Stanley, hides forever the truth of his fraud, becomes an “other”, which is not himself, and so carries the “truth” of Stanley’s authorship to the grave. “He de confesar que a pesar del odio que le profesaba,” owns Stanley, “la noticia de su muerte me conmovió profundamente. *Me sentí como si algo de mí hubiera muerto, como si hubieran desgajado la mitad de mi vida*” (88-9; emphasis added). By dying, Shakespeare the actor becomes Shakespeare the *author*, depriving Stanley of the (for him) dubious authority of the title, and so effectively killing the man who, in Salom’s account at least, gave him ever-lasting fame. Rather than enacting the death of the author, Shakespeare’s demise undermines the concept of authority which, as Foucault and Said have suggested, is the effect of authorship itself. The play’s last scene shows the skull of Yorick, picked out by a spotlight, while all the characters, including Stanley, “bailan una alegre música.” What Stanley refers to as both the sublimity and banality of glory mingle in this tragicomic ending, before the curtain fuses William and Shakespeare in the sphere of mystery to which the play *qua* play belongs.

Such playful fantasies as *El otro William* do not of course remove the fixation with Shakespeare-the-Author on which the Spanish Shakespeare-as-character tradition is built; rather they displace it on to another author, the “other” William, which is the play’s title. This act of displacement is accompanied by the now sadly familiar notion of the incompatibility of Shakespeare’s social status with a necessary knowledge of the courtly world in which aristocrats like Stanley would have moved. However, both the

biographical (im)posturing and, most conspicuously, the need to weave the plots of the plays alluded to into a coherent narrative whole, bespeak a neo-Romantic urge to keep the products of authorship, the plays themselves, under a single presiding genius, be it Shakespeare or Stanley. The “other William” thus cuts both ways —Shakespeare as the other Stanley, or Stanley as the other Shakespeare— and so undercuts Salom’s otherwise undermotivated construction of aristocratic authority. Like the ghost of Hamlet’s father, also called “Hamlet,” *William Shakespeare* continues to haunt Salom’s *William Stanley* as both the ambiguous “other” of the title and as the necessary condition of his afterlife as fictional “authority” of the drama(s).

The foregrounding of Yorick in the final scene, meanwhile, evokes another fiction constructed on and around the dramas of William. I have in mind Salman Rushdie’s little fantasy included in the collection of narratives entitled *East, West*, where Rushdie’s first-person narrator concocts a version of the events preceding and precipitating the tragedy of *Hamlet*. In this Freudian fantasy, the fool of the title is presented as the dupe used by the Prince of Denmark to avenge the seduction or, in Hamlet’s childish imagination, assassination of his mother by his father Horwendillus, as well as the butt of Hamlet’s frustrated obsession with Yorick’s beautiful but bad-breathed wife Ophelia. Yorick murders the King and is caught and beheaded by Horwendillus’s successor Claudius. Fortunately,

Yorick’s child survives, and leaves the scene of his family’s tragedy; wanders the world, sowing his seed in far-off lands, from west to east and back again; and multicoloured generations follow, ending (I’ll now reveal) in this present, humble *AUTHOR*; whose ancestry may be proved by this, which he holds in common with the whole sorry line of the family, that his chief weakness is for the telling of a particular species of Tale, which learned men have termed *chanticleric*, and also *taurean*. (Rushdie 1995: 83)

It’s difficult not to take this confession by one of Yorick’s descendents in Rushdie’s “cock-and-bull” story as a fitting epitaph to the question of authority raised by these representations of Shakespeare.

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