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Spanish Versions of *The Merchant of Venice*, V.i: Jessica and Lorenzo's Puzzling Exchange in Moonlit Belmont (1992-2001)

Versiones escénicas españolas del *Mercader de Venecia*, V.i.: El enigmático diálogo entre Jessica y Lorenzo bajo la luna de Belmont (1992-2001)

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ABSTRACT

Aware that it is the task of the translator of complex texts to make them accessible to his/her audience —particularly in the case of theatrical texts that await enactment on the part of actors— the present article focuses on two theatrical versions of Molina Foix's Spanish translation of the love duet in *The Merchant of Venice*, V.i., looking at the remarks made by the translator to make the text's complex mythological allusions understandable to the actors performing in J.C. Plaza's 1992 and H. Heyme's 2001 Spanish versions of the play. As their versions show opposite approaches to the text —one of them fully romantic; the other completely dark— a thorough analysis of its structure and sources has been undertaken that uncovers the text's subtle ironies and ambiguities, which any actor or actress should be aware of when attempting a nuanced enactment of the lines.

Keywords: Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice*, Jessica and Lorenzo's love duet, mythological allusions, sources, Spanish translation, adaptation and reception 1992-2001

RESUMEN

Conscientes de que el traductor de un texto complejo debe intentar hacerlo accesible a su público —especialmente en el caso de textos teatrales destinados a ser interpretados en un escenario— el presente artículo presta atención a dos versiones teatrales de la traducción española del acto V, escena i, del *Mercader de Venecia*, realizada por Molina Foix, analizando los comentarios del traductor sobre complejas alusiones mitológicas que faciliten su comprensión por parte de los actores de las versiones teatrales de J. Carlos Plaza (1992) y H. Heyme (2001). Dada la interpretación radicalmente distinta de estas versiones —una de ellas romántica; la otra, sombría— se ha realizado un análisis detallado de las fuentes y estructura del texto que ha puesto al descubierto sus sutiles ironías y ambigüedades, aspectos de los que debe ser consciente todo actor o actriz que aspire a realizar una interpretación adecuada del texto.

Palabras clave: Shakespeare, *El Mercader de Venecia*, V.i., dueto de amor entre Jessica y Lorenzo, alusiones mitológicas, fuentes, traducción, adaptación y recepción españolas 1992-2001

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1. Introduction

The love duet Jessica and Lorenzo share in Act V, Sc. i of *The Merchant of Venice* has been a bone of contention for translators and theatre directors alike. Its complex web of mythological allusions has made it difficult for them to grasp its ultimate meaning —often hidden beneath its surface— as the diversity of interpretations of the passage on the part of scholars shows. If —as Pavis contends— «the translator-as-dramaturge must provide in the text (or subsequently in the mise-en-scène) an array of information that the original audience needs to understand situation or character» (2005: 136), the first step for a translator and stage director should be to «foreground what is neglected [...] silenced [...] in the text» (Coyle, 1998: 4, qtd. in Mahon, 2002: 50). This implies returning —as Pavis suggests— to the «text/performance couple, which is constantly challenged by textual as well as stage practice» (2008: 125). This idea is similar to that expressed by Pechter, who highlights the importance of the «text-centered sense of the play's possibilities», of «the kinds of performances [...] encouraged —or even authorized— by the words in the script» (1999: 9).

Bearing this in mind, we aim to cast light on the Spanish stage versions of this particularly complex scene as translated and discussed by Vicente Molina Foix in his edited translation of the play (1993), and adapted for the María Guerrero Theatre by José Carlos Plaza in 1992, and for the Abadía Theatre by Hansgünther Heyme in 2001.

2. Methodological Framework

Before focusing on the opening lines of the play's last scene, which pose the greatest challenge for those approaching it —whether as readers, editors, translators, stage directors or actors— it is important to be aware of the play's elusiveness. In Robin Russin's words, «[the play] is open to a range of argument and interpretation because its essence lies beneath the surface, contained in and revealed by a strategy of ironies and antitheses» (2013: 115), what Halio calls «the many currents and counter-currents [that] flow within *The Merchant of Venice*» (1993: 58). This play —as Wheeler points out— «does not resolve the tensions and ambiguities it creates» (1991: xiii) but constantly «tests the values it appears to assert» (1991: xiv). That is why —as Sokolova points out— «the discoveries of actors and directors have become as important in filling in the silences of the text and its projections of the modern world as that of literary critics» (2009: 105).

Taking the previous remarks into account, this essay starts by close reading the play's most perplexing lines, trying to identify the passages Shakespeare presumably took from different sources, and looking for clues to the order of the mythological allusions followed by Jessica and Lorenzo in their love duet. This is something that has not been attempted this far, and which may contribute to a better understanding of the passage by future editors, translators, stage directors and actors.

Our identification of the text's likely sources takes into account the context of production of Shakespeare's tragicomedy, so that we approach Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, as well as his *Legend of Good Women*, or Ovid's *Metamorphoses* bearing in mind what their reception must have been like in Elizabethan England. A variety of texts by Shakespeare's contemporaries shows that the ambiguities found in this passage are not distant from the subtle ironies

Lyly, Gascoigne or the authors of *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* relished in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. They are not distant either from the witty Ovidian juxtapositions filtered through Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, and also found by Shakespeare in Golding's English rendering of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Gillespie, 2016: 313, 316).

This awareness of the tone and approach of Shakespeare's Ovidian and Chaucerian sources may cast light on the complex nature of Jessica, not only as a Jewish daughter, but also as a Christian wife. In this regard, we relate the love duet to Jessica's previous elopement with Lorenzo—and her abandonment of her father's house and religion—and look for clues to Jessica and Lorenzo's last exchange where they allude to their past. Our analysis also focuses on the relevance of this scene to the overall structure of the play, and, more specifically, to its denouement, as the ending of this tragicomedy is in line with Jessica and Lorenzo's equivocal exchange, that, to a certain extent, prefigures Portia and Bassanio's «happy» ending.

For the elucidation of Jessica and Lorenzo's love duet and its structural significance in the play, we discuss the contributions of a substantial number of relevant critics, some of whom regard the scene as the epitome of romantic love, whereas others acknowledge the tensions behind their exchange.

Focusing on the Spanish version of this scene, we also pay attention to Vicente Molina Foix's remarks in the prefatory materials to the edited version of his Spanish translation of the play, where he offers actors and readers his own interpretation of the scene. As he took active part in the production, his collaboration with the stage director and actors could be taken to approach Bassnett's ideal of cooperation between the translator and «the members of the team who put a playtext into performance» (1998: 107).

Bearing in mind that «in theatre, the translation reaches the audience by way of the actors' bodies» (Pavis, 2005: 131), we analyse José Carlos Plaza's 1992 performance of this scene and compare it to Hansgünther Heyme's 2001 rendering of the same passage. In order to assess their respective productions, we look at the amount of text actually delivered on stage in each case, as well as the actors' and actresses' modulation of their voices, together with their accompanying gestures.

Some of the directors' choices are compared to certain Anglophone productions which—in Middleton's view—do greater justice to the character of Jessica than the critical remarks of some critics who—according to her—«vilify» the character by highlighting the pain she inflicts on her father (2015: 294). Our assessment of this statement, however, is more in line with Halio's remark that Jessica's feelings towards her father reveal less ambivalence than has often been admitted (2002: 373).

We conclude this section by highlighting the usefulness of making a text «readable for a reader/spectator» (Pavis, 2005: 135), especially in the case of complex mythological allusions that cannot be easily understood by contemporary readers/spectators. Making those texts readable implies looking at their likely sources, taking into account how they were valued at the time of the text's composition. It also implies making sense of their tone, when—as is the case here—they are part of an ambiguous exchange, where one character tries to outwit the other while avoiding direct confrontation. It finally involves looking at its structural function, especially if it anticipates the tone of the play's ending, as a proper understanding of the passage may entail a satisfactory theatrical choice. A thorough understanding of a text by its editors,

textual critics, translators, stage directors and actors, favours good stage productions, both in the source and in the target language. Fully partaking of this principle, the present article analyses José Carlos Plaza's and Hansgünther Heyme's stage versions of Vicente Molina Foix's Spanish translation of this text, for, as Pavis points out, «as soon as one [...] focuses [...] on the nature of the text, then one can hope to be more precise in the elucidation of the play as a textual, semiotic system, a literary and theatrical work» (2012: 298).

3. Close Reading of Jessica and Lorenzo's Love Duet

When faced with Act V, Scene i, 1-24 of *The Merchant of Venice*, with its dense web of mythological allusions, more than one contemporary reader may feel baffled. Few of us are now acquainted with the stories of Troilus, Criseyde, Pyramus, Thisbe, Dido, Aeneas, Jason, Aeson, or Medea, that Jessica and Lorenzo briefly recall in their verbal exchange—a tight verbal exchange that takes the form of a linguistic competition. In it, both speakers start their lines with the words «in such a night» while completing the iambic pentameter the other speaker leaves unfinished. This tight exchange ends by alluding to the couple's past—and indirectly, to the uncertainty of their future life together—and precedes their remarks on the sweet music that is sounding in moonlit Belmont (V.i.55-88). This music is also heard by Portia when she arrives in Belmont and expresses her fears that it might awake the Moon, who is sleeping by Endymion's side (V.i.109-110).

Our analysis of this complex text agrees with Valls-Russell's contention that «myths [...] contribute to the generic irresolution of Act V» (2021: 128). It also shares her view that

retracing the patterns, identifying the way Shakespeare mingles, cuts and repositions the threads casts a new light [...] on the overall design of the play and foregrounds off-centre characters, more especially Jessica (126)

bearing in mind that «Shakespeare's transformative process invites multi-layered responses» (128).

In order to attempt this challenging task, it is important to review the information provided by scholarly editors of the text—especially Jay L. Halio (1993) and John Drakakis (2023), some of whose remarks go back to previous editors such as Malone (1821) or Furness (1888)—and to make some suggestions that may cast additional light to readers, translators and actors.

We start by specifying that we fully share Halio's general remarks on the nature of these allusions that «include violations of a bond—to father, family, or city—at the command of love» (1993: 212). We also share his conclusion that «in so far as the lovers (except Thisbe) are themselves betrayed [...] the allusions may seem inappropriate in the mouths of these newly-weds, even as they tease one another, joking half-nervously, perhaps, about love's transience» (1993: 212). This shrewd remark could—in my view—guide the difficult enactment of this passage, which—as Halio observes regarding the play—«cries out for complex interpretation, and good actors and directors should be able to render it» (2002: 373).

Halio's notes—in line with previous editors—also guide the reader to the potential sources of this passage. In this regard, he specifies that «the classical allusions to Thisbe, Dido, and Medea derive ultimately from Ovid and Virgil, but those to Troilus are from medieval

sources», and —probably following Furness (1888, vol. 7: 239)— adds: «Possibly Chaucer suggested them all to Shakespeare, since Thisbe, Dido, and Medea appear together in *The Legend of Good Women*, which immediately follows *Troilus and Creseyde* in old collections»¹ (1993: 211).

Halio —in line with Malone’s observations (1821: Vol 3, 134)— also informs the reader that «Medea’s [treatment] derives from Golding’s translation of Ovid» (1993: 211), and —following Malone (1821: Vol. 3, 135) and Furness (1888: Vol. 7, 239) — explains that «Dido’s is transposed from Chaucer’s Ariadne» (Halio, 1993: 211).

Halio starts by discussing Lorenzo’s opening lines:

[...] in such a night
Troilus, methinks, mounted the Trojan walls
And sighed his soul toward the Grecian tents,
Where Cressid lay that night. (V.i.3-6)

He informs the reader that «Chaucer describes Troilus looking at the moon, walking on the walls of Troy, and facing toward the Greek tents where he *believes* his lover, Creseyde, sighs for him» (1993: 212. My italics). By saying that Troilus «believes» his lover sighs for him, Halio seems to imply that he is mistaken in his assumption, probably on the evidence of Criseyde’s later behaviour, that turned her into the epitome of female betrayal. Even though the reader may assume that Lorenzo is thinking of this famous couple of lovers —with the blame traditionally laid on Criseyde— the possibility that Shakespeare were alluding to this story in a less straightforward manner could perhaps be considered as well. When looking closely at the Chaucerian story, we realize that, at this point, Criseyde was actually sighing for Troilus:

Full ofte a day she syghed eke for dystresse [...]
 O Troilus, what doest thou now she seyde
 Lord whether thou yet thinke vpō Creseyde (Thynne, 1542: Fol. ccvi)

This hypothesis would be in line with the ambiguous reception of the text in Elizabethan England, where Lyly, in his *Euphues*, pointed to the exaggeration of Troilus’s faithfulness: «Though Aeneas were to fickle to Dido, / Yet Troilus was to faithful to Cressida» (qtd. in Windeatt, 1992: 374).

Drakakis —like Halio, and Furness before him— recalls that the order of the tales as they appear in *The Legend of Good Women* is replicated in this passage (2023: 368), and also that the closest parallel to the story of Dido appears in Chaucer’s *Legend of Ariadne* (368). Like his predecessors, however, he refrains from suggesting possible implications of the order followed by the mythological stories in this verbal exchange, or the inspiration Shakespeare could have drawn from *The Legend of Ariadne* for the story of Dido.

Drakakis does not overlook the importance of the structural constituents of the passage, and, accordingly, focuses on the repetition of the phrase «in such a night». He recalls that Puttenham (qtd. in 367) associates this rhetorical figure —epimone— with the refrain of a lyric, probably hinting at the lyrical tone of the passage. He moreover explains that —in Wright’s view— «the half-lines shared between the lovers signal the *union* of Lorenzo and Jessica» (qtd. in 367. My italics).

This interpretation—which Drakakis seems to share— somehow comes into conflict with his observations on the ironic undertones of the allusions to Criseyde and Dido. It differs from his reading of Jessica's «I would out-night you» (V.i.23) at the end of the passage, which he interprets as «outdo in mentioning nights» (Onions, qtd. in 2023: 369). It also disagrees with his views that «the citing of these precedents develops into a competition between the lovers in a possible anticipation of future friction» (369).

Sokolova's interpretation is akin to that of Drakakis in that she—like him— interprets the rhetorical devices employed by Jessica and Lorenzo in their linguistic exchange as appropriate for their romantic duet, while she alludes to the tensions some critics have discovered in the passage. Thus, in her view,

Act 5 opens in the gardens of Belmont with an elegantly patterned exchange between Lorenzo and Jessica, an artful exercise in copious variations on the theme of night (repeated 10 times in 24 lines) through rich mythological reference. (2009: 93)

She regards this pattern as appropriate for the text's presumed romantic nature: «Bandinago (joking remarks) would have been for the Elizabethans the hallmark of romantic love» (93). Without pointing to any conflict with this statement, however, she makes the following remark:

Both critics and theatre practitioners have paid attention to the tensions lurking under the surface of peace and harmony. The mythological allusions to Troilus and Cressida, Pyramus and Thisbe, Dido and Aeneas, Medea and Jason are all examples of doomed love. (93)

These somewhat contradictory assessments of the relationship between a form presumably associated with the expression of romantic love, and a content which does not exclude underlying tensions points to the difficulty of making sense of this passage without looking into the stories they recall. This, in turn, makes it easier for a reader, translator or actor to decide whether the employment of epimone within the half-lines the speakers share highlights the union and romantic nature of their relationship, or, rather, something slightly different.

In order to make full sense of the passage, it is also necessary to set it within the context of the play, as the mythical figures Lorenzo and Jessica mention bear some resemblance to their past—and presumably to their future life as well. These enigmatic allusions, moreover, may also be related to the uncertain future of other couples in the tragicomedy, more specifically to that of Portia and Bassanio—and maybe Nerissa and Gratiano as well— whose lines immediately follow those of Jessica and Lorenzo after their arrival in Belmont.

Lorenzo could have grounds to fear Jessica's future behaviour, as he was acquainted with her agency and her capacity to betray those who trusted her. As a matter of fact, it was Jessica who had sent Lorenzo written instructions for the night of her elopement, taking advantage of her father's absence from home. Besides, in her farewell couplet she did not show the slightest hint of regret at the likely reaction of her father when he would discover that she had abandoned her family, her religion and her reputation. She did not feel any remorse either when she stole money and jewels from her father and gave them to Lorenzo. Her behaviour during her temporary stay in Genoa before reaching Belmont did not depict her as a considerate daughter, either, as she rushed to trade for a monkey the ring her father had given her deceased mother upon their engagement, and whose painful discovery triggered her father's thirst for revenge on the Christian community. While in Belmont, looking after Portia's estate, she was unaware

of what was going on in Venice, where Portia made sure Shylock could not take revenge on Antonio, but forced him to convert to Christianity, depriving him of half his goods in compensation for having attempted against the life of a Venetian citizen who had agreed to pay a pound of his flesh, should he not return his loan by the set deadline. When Portia, at the end of the play, gave Jessica and Lorenzo the deed of gift her father had been compelled to sign in their favour, she did not inquire about his lot, but graciously accepted it, while Lorenzo rejoiced at his good luck.

This character, who had been the recipient of Jessica's stolen goods; who had arrived late the night Jessica —disguised as a boy— eloped with him; who had wasted away a considerable part of Shylock's fortune, starts a dialogue in Belmont's moonlit gardens that —as Lanier points out— «indicates the general direction of Lorenzo and Jessica's romance, from mutual infatuation to a strained relationship» (2019: 161-162).

Their conversation starts with Lorenzo's indirect accusation to Jessica of resembling Criseyde, that character the Elizabethans identified with female fickleness. However, neither Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, nor Shakespeare's duet should be taken at face value, as it is suggested in *The Legend of Dido* that the narrator has done «as he pleased» when recounting Criseyde's story, with the consequence that men no longer trust truthful women:

And of Creseyde, thou hast sayd as the lyste
That maketh men to women lesse tryste
That ben as trewe as euer was any stele (Thynne, 1542: Fol. ccxviii)

It is worth recalling that Shakespeare's contemporaries gave voice to Criseyde, who, in *The paradise of daintie deuises*, placed the blame on Troilus for being unwilling to compromise and make her his lawful wife: «If Troylus would haue vowed his wife, / We might haue dwelt in former ioy» (Edwards, 1580: 37).

The secret —and unlawful— nature of love relationships is a recurrent trait in the stories Jessica and Lorenzo exchange in Belmont, for it is not only Criseyde that never marries Troilus, but the same applies to Thisbe, who —like Jessica— intends to elope with Pyramus in the middle of the night, although their premature death prevents them from succeeding. Aeneas does not marry Dido —Queen of Carthage— either, but reduces their bond to a promise he secretly makes her in a cave, later to break it. Jason similarly breaks the promise he makes Medea —heir of Colchis— of marrying her if she helps him get the golden fleece. Instead, he goes to bed with her, and later abandons her for Creon's daughter. The women that some of these male characters end up marrying possess traits their previous partners lack, such as belonging to the appropriate country, or being submissive and silent. This is the case, for example, with Lavinia, who eventually marries Aeneas —the man who was destined to found Rome. This was bound to be Jason's case, too, who would have married Creusa— the king of Corinth's daughter— had it not been for Medea, who hindered it by killing them.

Jessica's elopement disguised as a boy in the middle of the night is not too distant from these women, who —like her— face shame, renounce their family and country, and give their ungrateful partners all that they have —money and jewels— in exchange for nothing. Criseyde is the only one who —unlike Jessica— does not abandon her father, but remains by his side in the Grecian camp: «My father nyll for nothyng do my grace / To gone ayen, for ought I can hym queme» (Thynne, 1542: Fol. ccvi). She is also the only one who shows concern for

her reputation, should she be discovered while trying to reach Troy, even though she later tries to dismiss her fears: «who myght haue sayd, y^t I had done amys / To steale away wyth suche one as he is» (Fol. ccvi). It is therefore unfair for Lorenzo to suggest that Jessica, who has renounced her family and honour for him, may be compared to Criseyde, who did not out of fear. Besides, if Jessica's male disguise and her giving away her mother's ring for a monkey—the image of lubricity—could associate her with prostitution², it must be born in mind that it was all done for his sake.

Jessica's allusion to Thisbe's fateful story, in reply to Lorenzo's mention of Criseyde:

In such a night
Did Thisbe fearfully o'ertrip the dew,
And saw the lion's shadow ere himself,
And ran dismayed away. (V.i.6-9)

brings to mind the reverse of Criseyde. Thisbe—unlike her—did abandon her father's house in the middle of the night, putting her reputation at stake, and risking her life for someone who—like Lorenzo—arrived late to the appointed place, and, indirectly, brought about their tragic end. Had Pyramus arrived earlier, he would have realized that Thisbe was not dead, but merely in hiding from a lioness whose mouth was besmeared with blood. Had he not remained at home so long, he would not have mistaken for Thisbe's own the blood in the garment she had let fall while fleeing from the beast, and would probably not have taken his life out of despair. This, in turn, would have most likely prevented Thisbe's fateful end as well.

It is worth bearing in mind that, although Jessica's allusion highlights Thisbe's fear, its Ovidian source also records Pyramus's cowardly reaction at the mere sight of the lion's footprints: «[Pyramus] seeing in this subtle sande the print of the Lions paw, / Waxt pale for feare» (Golding, Book 4: 44v), as well as his late arrival: «The night was somewhat further spent ere Pyramus came there» (*ibid.*).

Pyramus's slowness—that resembles Troilus's own—is not distant from Lorenzo's, as Salarino's and Gratiano's remarks make clear the night of Jessica's elopement:

SALARINO
His [Lorenzo's] hour is almost past.
GRATIANO
And it is a marvel he outdwells his hour,
For lovers ever run before the clock. (II.vi.3-5)

Pyramus's love, moreover, seems to be less elevated than Thisbe's, as symbolized by the place each of them chooses to thrust their sword into when taking their lives (Pyramus's guts vs. Thisbe's heart (Golding, Book 4, 44v; 45r).

Chaucer's *Legend of Thisbe of Babylon*, that precedes *the Legend of Dido, Queen of Carthage*, concludes that «a woman can / Ben as trewe and louynge as a man» (Thynne, 1542: Fol. ccxxi). Before starting the series of legends where faithful women are betrayed by deceitful men, the narrator highlights that «Of trewe men I fynde but fewe mo / In all my bokes, saue thys Piramus» (Fol. ccxxi). This underlines Jessica's tactful way of replying to Lorenzo's accusations of infidelity when comparing her to Criseyde, as she chooses a legend where both members of the couple prove loving and faithful—even though not exactly to the same extent.

Lorenzo's next allusion to the tragic story of Dido, who, having given Aeneas everything that she had —honour, power and wealth— was forsaken by him, speaks of the character's callousness:

In such a night
 Stood Dido with a willow in her hand
 Upon the wild sea banks and waft her love
 To come again to Carthage. (V.i.9-12)

This is particularly clear if we take into account that Shakespeare chooses details from *The Legend of Ariadne* that highlight Theseus's lack of scruples. Thus, Lorenzo is not happy to simply recall that Aeneas had abandoned Dido in the middle of the night, but also describes Ariadne's despair at the sight of the ship where the man she loved was leaving the shores of her country. In that story Chaucer explains that Theseus had left her for her sister, who surpassed her in beauty:

Whan Ariadne hys wyfe a slepe was
 For that her suster fayrer was than she
 He taketh her in his hand and forth goth he
 To shyppe, and as a traytour stale away (Fol. ccxxvii)

He took no notice of Ariadne, who tried to draw his attention by waving a handkerchief tied to a pole [here a willow]:

she cryed, O turne agayne for routh & synne
 Thy barge hath not al hys meyne inne
 Her kercheffe on a pole stycked she
 Ascaunce he shulde it wele yse. (Fol. ccxxvii)

Jessica's reply to Lorenzo's provoking words with her allusion to Medea's rejuvenating of Jason's father, though seemingly amiable, may be read as a warning to Lorenzo of what may happen to him, should he behave like Jason. Although she alludes to Medea's generous healing of Jason's father:

In such a night
 Medea gathered the enchanted herbs
 That did renew old Aeson. (V.i.12-14)

anyone acquainted with Ovid's rendering of the story³ could recall Medea's grim murder of Aeson's rival —whom she drowned in his own blood in front of the old man's daughters— as well as the way she took revenge on Jason by killing the woman he later intended to marry, and even their own children.

Jessica's words could also bring to mind Medea's reaction at the tender love Jason felt for his father, and her regret that she had not felt anything similar when she betrayed her own by helping Jason steal the golden fleece, or when she abandoned him and her own country. That is why Lorenzo's reply, hinting at Jessica's own behaviour, must have deeply hurt her, for Jessica —like Medea— abandoned her father, stole money and jewels from him, and betrayed her country for a stranger.

In Turberville's 1567 translation of Ovid's *Heroides* —a collection of letters written by women to the men who had deceived and deserted them— we distinctly hear Medea's regret at

a behaviour strikingly similar to Jessica's own: «My father I betrayde, my natiue soyle, / And kingdome I forsooke» (1567: 71v), as well as her wish for revenge: «She sigth, she sude, she sobde, she manast eeke / To be reuengde vpon the guilefull Greeke» (69r).

Lorenzo's next hurtful words:

In such a night
Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew,
And with an unthrift love did run from Venice
As far as Belmont. (V.i.14-17)

are met with Jessica's retort, where she points to Lorenzo's deceitful ways:

In such a night
Did young Lorenzo swear he loved her well,
Stealing her soul with many vows of faith,
And ne'er a true one. (V.i.17-20)

This statement resembles Chaucer's remark at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde* on those «false folke [...] / That wyth her great wyt and subtylte / Betrayen you» (Thynne, 1542: Fol. ccxii). However, Jessica's hint at Lorenzo's likely falsehood is met with his patronizing reply, where he highlights Jessica's beauty and equates her with «a little shrew», thus reducing the sharpness of her accusations, which he turns into slanders he does not take seriously:

In such a night
Did pretty Jessica, like a little shrew,
Slander her love, and he forgave it her. (V.i.20-22)

Jessica's reply: «I would out-night you, did nobody come» makes clear that this «little shrew» may be found to be less submissive than Lorenzo would like her to, in the same way as Lorenzo's «vows of faith» may prove untrue.

The verbal exchange between Jessica and Lorenzo is briefly interrupted by a messenger that announces the imminent arrival of Portia and Nerissa at Belmont. What follows is Lorenzo's long monologue on the beauty of the moonlit night and the virtues of music, with a very brief remark by Jessica, who does not seem to be particularly willing to listen to music, as she grows melancholic when it sounds. This reaction meets with Lorenzo's ambiguous reply, for, on the one hand, he interprets it as the sign of her «attentiveness», whereas, on the other, he associates it with a spirit «fit for treasons»:

LORENZO
How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here we will sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears. (V.i.54-56)
[...]
JESSICA
I am never merry when I hear sweet music.
LORENZO
The reason is your spirits are attentive. (V.i.69-70)
[...]
The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,

Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;
 The motions of his spirit are dull as night
 And his affections dark as Erebus.
 Let no such man be trusted. (V.i.83-88)

When looking at the whole of the passage, it is difficult to agree with Sokolova's remark that «Lorenzo interprets Jessica's reaction [...] as emotional refinement» (2009: 93), or with Valls-Russell's statement that «Jessica's silence suggests that she is fine-tuned for her new life» (2021: 137), as Lorenzo's warning that «the man that hath no music in himself [...] [is] dark as Erebus», and not to be trusted (V.i.83, 86-88) suggests the opposite. The observations of Lewalski and Drakakis on these lines nevertheless agree with those of Sokolova and Valls-Russell, as Lewalski claims that «here [in Belmont] gentile and Jew, Lorenzo and Jessica, are united in each other's arms, talking of the music of the spheres» (1999: 343), and Drakakis concludes that the passage places its «emphasis upon "harmony" and the transformation of jarring discourse into a concord that, ideologically speaking, draws together music and religion as the stabilizing elements» (2002: 161).

Like Jessica —although for a different reason— Portia wants that music to stop sounding, as, in her view, it may awake the Moon, that she imagines happily sleeping by Endymion's side: «Peace! How the Moon sleeps with Endymion /And would not be awaked» (V.i.109-110). These lines, again, have been the object of different interpretations, as Lewalski is persuaded that they «suggest eternity, for Diana, enamoured of Endymion's beauty, caused him forever to sleep on Mount Lamos» (1991: 343), whereas Anderson says that «the Moon could only visit the shepherd Endymion in his sleep», concluding that «their passion has all the perfection and all the insubstantiality of dreams» (1985: 131). It is not difficult to relate Diana's situation to Portia's own, as her marriage to Bassanio has not been consummated yet, in spite of which she has already heard him say that he was ready to sacrifice her in order to save his friend Antonio (IV.i.278-283). Portia's «Endymion», moreover, has already given his marriage ring to the «judge» that saved Antonio's life, and, even though Portia —by recovering it— apparently recovers Bassanio's unwavering love, the threatening tone of her address casts some doubts on their future happiness:

Lie not a night from home; watch me like Argus.
 If you do not, if I be left alone,
 Now, by mine honour, which is yet mine own,
 I'll have that doctor for my bedfellow. (V.i.230-233)

Although Jessica and Lorenzo's duet seems to prefigure the verbal exchange between Portia and Bassanio at the end of the play in a way that anticipates an uncertain future, a number of critics have read the relationship between both scenes differently. Thus, critics such as Bullough, Drakakis and Skovmand read both scenes in a positive light, and regard the first one as the anticipation of the second, whereas Sokolova finds a contrast between the first duet's presumably romantic nature and the second exchange's harsher tone. In Bullough's view, «[Jessica and Lorenzo] prepare with poetic conversation the atmosphere of love, music and sweet humour suited to the revealing of Portia's disguise and the ending of the play» (1966: 457). This idea is shared by Drakakis: «The Lorenzo-Jessica prolepsis serves to draw off the potential serious consequences of human inconstancy» (2002: 161), and expressed even more

clearly by Skovmand: «[Jessica and Lorenzo's] exchange is placed as an opening mood setter in the final act of the play [...] it functions as a prequel in "minor" to the "major" romantic resolution of the play» (2003).

This assessment differs from Sokolova's own, according to whom,

Portia's quibbling leads the audience away from romance to an awareness of a harsher reality; her sententious language stresses the gap between the ideal and the actual [...] The language of relativity undermines the vision of the night's transcendental moon-lit harmonies by bringing in a more pessimistic vision. (2009: 94)

Although the variety of interpretations of the structural relationship between both scenes points to their ambiguity, the close reading of the text we have undertaken in the previous pages makes it difficult to agree with any of these two interpretations. In our view, the «playful but uneasy banter» that Lampert discovers in Jessica and Lorenzo's duet (2004: 16) shows that Belmont, is «not an untroubled Paradise» (Anderson, 1985: 130), where, in Lewalski's view, «all losses are restored and sorrows end» (1991: 343).

4. Performing Jessica and Lorenzo's Love Duet on the Spanish Boards (1992-2001)

The previous analysis of Jessica and Lorenzo's love duet and its anticipatory function in the context of the play leaves little doubt that the text is full of ironies and ambiguities that have been read in a variety of ways. It has been our intention to make sense of them by looking into their presumable sources —taking into account the play's context of production— before analysing how they have been performed on the Spanish boards, persuaded that —as Pavis points out— the «text-performance couple» is «a very good barometer for judging mise-en-scène» (2008: 124).

In what follows we are paying attention to the way this scene has been understood and performed in José Carlos Plaza's 1992⁴ and H. Heyme's 2001⁵ Spanish theatrical productions, that used V. Molina Foix's translation as their point of departure, even though Plaza's production staged the text almost in its entirety, whereas Heyme's reduced it by one third⁶.

Molina Foix was not only the text's translator, but also literary advisor to *The Centro Dramático Nacional*, which produced Plaza's stage version, and published Molina Foix's annotated translation of the play. Special attention has therefore been paid to the remarks collected in his «Cuaderno de Dirección» on the characters of Lorenzo and Jessica, some of which seem to have inspired Roberto Enriquez's and Ana Labordeta's performance of their parts. This is the case, for example, with his depiction of Lorenzo as sensitive (1993: 74), and Jessica as sweet and feminine (61), and above all, with his reading of Belmont as an «Edén ficticio y lírico imaginario», that he deems highlighted by Lorenzo and Jessica in their presumed «le-tanía mitológica del acto quinto» (88). This reading, however, disagrees with Molina Foix's remarks on page 81 where he points to the tragic nature of these mythological references that suggest Jessica's fears about her future relationship with Lorenzo: «Todas las referencias que se hacen en la escena son amorosas pero trágicas. Tisbe y Píramo, amores rotos, engaños, Medea y Jasón, Troilo y Crésida, Dido y Eneas; melancolía e incertidumbre. Surge el miedo de Jessica frente al futuro y sobre si creer o no creer, en broma, las promesas de Lorenzo» (81).

Despite these contradictory statements, the actors performing these parts in Plaza's version did not seem to have taken any notice of them, but chose the first option, in agreement with the production's overall sunny approach, as Ladra's review of the performance also shows:

Tal vez no exista en el universo entero lugar alguno desde el que con tan extrema claridad se perciba el rumor de las esferas celestes girando armoniosamente en su movimiento diurno como pueden ser los jardines de Belmont. Así les debe parecer al menos esta noche a Lorenzo y Jessica que, dueños por unos días de esta terrestre Arcadia, esperan la llegada de sus legítimos propietarios tumbados en el césped de la pradera y arrullados por la suave melodía que ejecutan los músicos del castillo ¡Quién les habría dicho que gozarían de semejante paz [...]! (1993: 72)

Villán's allusion to the «delicadamente triviales y líricas escenas del castillo de Belmont» (1992: 57) points to a similar appreciation of the actors' performance of their roles in this scene, a scene that is very seldom mentioned in the over one hundred reviews we have had the opportunity of analysing. González Soler, clearly unaware of its true dimension, deems the scene redundant: «La historia paralela de Lorenzo y Jessica [...] no añade nada a la historia principal». Centeno regards it as part of «[un] cuento infantil, donde no falta la bella y sus pretendientes, el avaro pérfido, los enamorados huidos» (1992), a reading that agrees with its performance «en tono de comedia desenfadada, divertida» (Centeno, 1992).

Although some critics seem to have missed the tragic side of this tragicomedy: «La tragicomedia “El mercader de Venecia” parece haber acentuado aquí el matiz de comedia», and conclude that «la prudente versión Plaza/Molina Foix [...] quedará como un interesante trabajo teatral, quizá demasiado armonioso» (Barea, 1993), the truth is that most reviewers celebrated the production's amiable tone, which was further highlighted by its aural and visual appeal. This was the case with Vigorra (1993), who defined it as «un bellissimo espectáculo [...] gozoso para los sentidos y agradable para el corazón» (qtd. in Ribes, 2025: 4).

This impression is in line with Plaza's belief that spectators are no longer ready to understand complex texts, and can only be seduced by spectacular productions: «el teatro de hoy ha de ser muy visual y auditivo para que interese. El llamado teatro explicativo ha muerto» (qtd. in Montero, 1993). That is probably the reason why Gordon, when discussing Act V, focused on «los espectaculares trajes lucidos por los protagonistas en el último acto» (1993), completely ignoring the ambiguous nature of the exchanges between Jessica and Lorenzo, which prefigure those between Portia and Bassanio.

Although the play's translator and most reviewers were persuaded that *The Merchant of Venice* had not been performed in Spain since the Civil War (González-Santiago, 1993; Royo, 1993), the truth is that Molina/Plaza's version shares a surprising number of features with González Ruiz/Luca de Tena's 1947 version of the play. This could be surprising if we take into account that their ideological standpoints greatly differ from each other, as, whereas the post-war production was placed at the service of the political regime's national-catholic propaganda⁷, the 1992 version claimed to share the socialist agenda of the party then in power. As Ribes's analysis of the critical reception of the Francoist version has shown, most reviewers (Díez Crespo, Morales Acevedo, Miner Otamendi, among others) praised its high visual appeal (Ribes 2024a: 216, 218, 222), and some of them celebrated Jessica and Lorenzo's married happiness. In this regard, Díez Crespo —like Ladra forty five years later— linked it to moonlit Belmont: «la serenidad resplandece en una noche de luna, cuando la luna duerme

como Endimión y los amantes cruzan sus besos en una celestial armonía» (qtd. in Ribes 2024a: 219). Neither Díez Crespo in the 1947 version, nor Ángela Labordeta in the 1992 production, realized Jessica and Lorenzo's anticipatory function regarding the tensions in Portia and Bassanio's love relationship, as these reviewers celebrated the perfect conjugal happiness of both couples. Thus Díez Crespo rejoiced in «los rayos de luz de ese amor que despiden Porcia y Jessica» (1947, qtd. in Ribes 2024a: 219), and Labordeta, not only exclaimed that «Jessica [es] capaz de abandonar a su padre por amor» (1993), but also highlighted «la gran historia de amor de Porcia y Bassanio» (*ibid.*).

Susan Fischer's perception of Jessica and Lorenzo's love duet was different, as, aware of the disquieting content of its mythological allusions, she noted that the actors delivering these lines had totally ignored their disturbing nature: «Lorenzo and Jessica appeared outwardly at peace as they danced their way through the fates of tragic lovers which they recited in unison» (2009: 289).

Other reviewers, conscious of the difficulty of making sense of these mythological allusions for contemporary audiences and critics, regretted that they had not been removed altogether. This was the case with Paz Gago, who, taking into account that the performance lasted for 3 hours and thirty minutes, said: «Sobra el diálogo amoroso entre Jéssica y Lorenzo al principio del V acto, que se hace interminable» (1993). This brings to mind Pavis's observation that «It is [...] possible for the dramaturge/translator to make cuts in his version destined for the target audience», and his conclusion that «This procedure often works better than incomprehensible allusions that would disconcert the target audience» (2005: 136).

Even though we fully agree with Pavis's statement in those cases where it is not possible to make sense of them, we suggest that digging into the meaning of the text may prove fruitful and cast light on puzzling allusions. This, in turn, may guide the actors and actresses in the difficult task of interpreting their parts, that should be as nuanced as the text itself suggests. Being aware of the dark undercurrents of the mythological allusions Jessica and Lorenzo exchange in moonlit Belmont, for example, would have precluded an interpretation that subverts their meaning, and could have given rise to an exciting verbal competition where each partner tries to outwit the other in a way that combines humour with veiled warning.

Hansgünther Heyme's 2001 production of the play, although based on the same Spanish translation as Plaza's, offered a radically different interpretation of the scene. Although his version was shorter than Plaza's, it nevertheless retained the entirety of the mythological allusions in the love duet, and completely deprived it of the ambiguity and irony Shakespeare could find in Golding's translation of the *Metamorphoses*, or in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and his *Legend of Good Women*. Although the elocution of David Luque and Lidia Otón —the actor and actress performing the roles of Lorenzo and Jessica— was good, and the accompanying gestures of both members of the couple appropriate to the production's interpretation of the roles, its approach was nevertheless too dark —ignoring the text's rich ambiguity⁸— and in line with the interpretation of the play's previous sections.

Thus, the lines where Lorenzo had shown admiration for Jessica the night of her elopement (II.vi.54-58) were carefully deleted in Heyme's production⁹, and the only time Lorenzo expressed his love for her: «Maldito sea si no le doy mi amor» (Molina Foix, 1993: 177; II.vi.53) followed Jessica's announcement that she was going to fetch some more ducats for

him: «Voy a cerrar las puertas y a dorarme / con algunos ducados más, antes de ir junto a ti» (177; II.vi.50-51), a clear indication of the mercenary nature of Lorenzo's interest in Jessica¹⁰.

When the duet scene opens in moonlit Belmont, Jessica is carelessly lighting a cigarette and looking with satisfaction at her cigarette case —symbols of her new belonging in the less sober Christian society. Lorenzo then enters the stage, ominously referring to the moonlight. When Jessica approaches him, he alludes to Troilus's yearning for Criseyde when he mounted the Trojan walls:

[...] en una noche igual
debió de escalar Troilo las murallas de Troya,
y su alma suspiró hacia las tiendas griegas,
donde esa noche Crésida dormía. (301; V.i.3-6)

Lorenzo and Jessica are close to the tub that presides over the stage while she listens, enraptured, to his words, but he breaks the spell by suddenly sprinkling her face with water, which Jessica does not take for a joke, but for the aggression it is. She immediately replies with Thisbe's story, and, when recalling her fear at the sight of the lion: «al ver antes la sombra que al león, / escapó aterrada» (301; V.i.8-9), Lorenzo roars in such a way that she is taken aback, almost in tears. Lorenzo further torments her by recalling Dido's craving for Aeneas's return when he set sail for another country, leaving her behind:

En una noche igual
Dido, con una rama de sauce en la mano
pidió a su amor con señas, en la playa de un mar bravío,
que volviera a Cartago. (301; V.i.9-12)

At this point, it is clear that he is intent on inflicting her as much pain as possible, even though there is no apparent reason for that, and she doesn't seem to expect it.

Jessica's reply, with her allusion to Medea's healing of Aeson:

En una noche igual
cogió Medea las hierbas encantadas
que rejuvenecieron al viejo Esón (301; V.i.12-14)

is delivered in a firm voice, but her lines do not seem to make much sense in the context of the scene. These puzzling lines are so charged with meaning that they ask for careful rehearsal so that they may convey the original's mixture of regret for having been extremely kind to Jason's father —while betraying her own— and warning about her future behaviour, should Lorenzo prove as false as Jason did. Lorenzo immediately recalls the moment when Jessica stole from her father:

En una noche igual
Jessica, a hurtadillas, dejó al rico Judío,
y con un amor pródigo escapó de Venecia
y a parar vino a Belmont. (301; V.i.14-17)

He does so while pulling her by the hair. This, again, depicts Lorenzo as a sadist and abuser who, not only detests his wife —for he is far more interested in Gratiano— but also wants to make sure she remains completely in his control. She then lights her cigarette lighter and

recalls the promise her husband had made her of eternal love, as well as her awareness that his vows of love were not true:

En una noche igual
Lorenzo prometió que la amaba,
y el alma le hurtó con votos de lealtad,
ninguno cierto. (303; V.i.17-20)

While she is delivering these lines, Lorenzo puts the light out. He continues to intimidate and scare her by mentioning the night's sweet music, especially when he states that those who cannot enjoy music are treacherous:

El hombre que no tiene música dentro,
ni se conmueve por el acorde de un suave son,
dado es a traiciones, saqueos y tretas [...]
No se puede confiar en tal hombre. (308-309; V.i.83-85, 88)

Fischer summarizes the scene as follows:

In a gesture of pious hypocrisy, [Lorenzo] threw water on her face and «mercifully» granted her pardon for the Hebrew heritage: in such a night / Did pretty Jessica, like a little shrew / Slander her love and he forgave her. (2009: 296)

However, her description and interpretation of Lorenzo's gestures do not quite agree with what took place on stage, as Lorenzo's sprinkling of water on Jessica's face did not accompany the words Fischer quotes here, but followed his previous allusion to Criseyde. What he did here, instead, was painfully pull her hair while reminding her that she had stolen from her father, a gesture that does not seem to suggest Lorenzo's intention of «mercifully» forgiving Jessica for being Jewish.

Although a large number of productions have highlighted Jessica's Jewish heritage in the play's last scene, and have added elements that point to her presumed repentance for her past behaviour towards her father, the truth is that the play —as Halio points out regarding Miller's 1970 production (2002: 373)— does not sustain that interpretation, for Jessica at no point seems to regret having betrayed her father and religion. The same applies to Portia's snubbing of Jessica in Belmont —that Bill Alexander introduced in his 1987 production to add to the play's explicit racism (Edelman, 2002: 70)— and which Heyme replicated in his version, even though the text at no point suggests that reading.

In Heyme's final scene, Shylock's nasal prosthesis —the symbol of his Jewishness— with the straps attached to it, are removed before his christening. Jessica carelessly collects it from the tub where he has been baptised, and takes it with her. It is so small that her action almost goes unnoticed. What is surprising, however, is that, whereas the marks of Shylock's straps disappear from his face after his immersion in the baptismal waters, Jessica's dark brown marks remain in her face even after her conversion and marriage to a Christian man. Their brown-reddish tone probably points to the suffering she experiences after her arrival in fairy-tale Belmont, where Lorenzo abuses her physically and psychologically.

In Heyme's version, violence against someone different on account of her race and religion is replaced with violence against a woman who is subjected to a husband that is only interested in her money —and perhaps fears she may betray him in the same way as she has

betrayed her own father. That is probably why he threatens her psychologically and inflicts physical pain on her at the slightest show of intelligence, independence, or readiness to pay his likely infidelity in kind.

Although Heyme's version of Jessica and Lorenzo's love duet—as well as its potential relationship to Portia and Bassanio's final exchange—have barely been addressed by the critics in the thirty reviews we have looked into, it is surprising to read E. Fernández's understanding of the characters' love relationships. He contends that «la crítica especializada [...] considera que [la obra] reúne en sí misma grandes temas [...] líricos, como los dulces riesgos que cierran [*sic.*] la pasión» (2001)¹¹.

Ana Franco's remarks on the effect of the characters' outfit and gestures on the tone of the play cannot be easily shared either, as—in her view—«las constantes muecas de los actores—ambiguos en su caracterización, con falda y amaneramiento ellos y con peinados masculinos ellas— [...] acercan el texto y divierten durante algo más de dos horas al público» (2001). This ambiguous characterization includes Bassanio, Lorenzo and Portia, but excludes Jessica, whose outfit corresponds to that of a female character. In our view, Bassanio's, Lorenzo's and Portia's ambiguous portrayal seldom makes this text accessible to the audience, and it is difficult to find it amusing, particularly in the love duet between Lorenzo and Jessica, where Lorenzo's looks prove rather disconcerting.

López Mozo's remark on the presumably lighthearted approach of the production, moreover, seems to ignore its disquieting tone. He refers to the actors' performance as «rica en movimientos y desenfadada, como si cuanto hacen formara parte de un juego» (2001: 33). Our previous considerations on the actual performance of this scene make it difficult for us to share his statement. Although López Mozo highlights Heyme's «mérito de aclarar, desde la práctica escénica, el papel de la palabra en el teatro y la importancia que tienen los signos no verbales» (2001: 33), his allusion to its «colorista y *extraño* vestuario» (*ibid.* my italics) seems to point to the difficulties he experiences when trying to make sense of them.

Cordón and Bernal's assessment of this version similarly highlights the importance of its visual components as a means of bringing the text close to its contemporary audience. Their remarks on the clothes the actors wear, however, point to their partial understanding of their meaning. According to them, «más de dos horas de representación [...] sirvieron para hacer llegar un texto clásico a través de un escenario por el que deambulaban personajes siempre descalzos con *llamativas* vestimentas de la época *según se mire*» (2001: 27. My italics)¹². We would have liked to know what the meaning of having barefoot actors on stage could have been, as well as the period these reviewers might be thinking of when alluding to the actors' striking clothes. Cordon/Bernal's allusion to the relevance of the play's setting and costumes has been underlined by Heyme himself:

lo que quisiera conseguir con «El mercader» es hacer un teatro popular para gente que ya tiene nociones del propio texto, pero también para gente que no tiene referencias en absoluto, y, sobre todo, para gente joven, y por eso intento asimismo por medios escénicos o los figurines, el traer el texto hacia el presente. (qtd. in Villora, 2001)

This aim, however, does not seem to have been completely achieved, as Ureña's admission of his inability to decipher its meaning reveals: «llama la atención el decorado, que, sin duda,

tendrá una lectura dentro del conjunto de la obra, pero para el ojo profano carece de relación con el mensaje» (2001).

Heyme, not only emphasizes the relevance of his version's visual components, but also highlights the importance of the words actors and actresses actually deliver on stage, which requires their thorough understanding of the text: «No tiene ningún sentido una iluminación preciosa, un vestuario hermoso, si no se tiene un actor que haya entendido lo que se quiere decir» (qtd. in Villora, 2001). We are under the impression, however, that this has not always been the case. This may be the reason why Ureña —like Paz Gago in Plaza's 1992 version— finds the performance too long, despite being shorter than Plaza's by an hour. He, accordingly, suggests «descargar la última media hora y realizar un desenlace más fluido», as, in his view, «el único fallo [...] es el tramo final, que se hace pesado» (Ureña, 2001).

As we have observed, the two theatrical versions of Molina Foix's Spanish translation of *The Merchant of Venice* have opposite views of the play. J. C. Plaza agrees with Bullough's, Drakakis' and Skovmand's emphasis on the romantic nature of Jessica and Lorenzo's love duet, that —according to them— anticipates Portia and Bassanio's happy ending. Heyme chooses a dark approach that also disagrees with Sokolova's reading of the couple's moonlit harmonies as opposed to the play's more pessimistic ending.

Even though Heyme's and Plaza's approaches could be regarded as appealing, the truth is that, after attentive close reading of the love duet, it is difficult to justify them. It would probably be wise to recall, with Russin, that, «as Juliet knew well, the “inconstant moon” was nothing by which to swear true love», and «[Jessica and Lorenzo's] little exchange of allusions ends with only half-playful accusations of slander and false vows of faith» (2013: 126). Although Robin Russin does not explain how those allusions were understood and performed in his 2010 production of the play¹³, his general appraisal of the scene's tone could be regarded as a good point of departure for a performance that aims at reflecting the play's thought-provoking ironies and ambiguities, both in its original language and in translation.

5. Conclusion

Bearing in mind the special nature of theatrical translations —that may be open to a variety of interpretations on the part of stage directors and actors— we have focused on the interpretation of two remarkable Spanish versions of the love duet that Jessica and Lorenzo exchange in moonlit Belmont, both of which use as their text of departure Molina Foix's annotated Spanish translation of *The Merchant of Venice*. We have done so aware of the advantages of a close collaboration between translator, stage director and actors, a situation that Bassnett regards as ideal (1998: 107).

This is particularly necessary in the case of complex scenes whose meaning is not immediately apparent, as is the case with the love duet, with its high number of mythological allusions that most contemporary readers and spectators no longer understand. In the previous pages we have had the opportunity of stating to what extent those allusions are elusive, as attention to the contributions of a good number of relevant editors, scholars and stage directors has shown the difficulty of grasping their meaning. This has also been the case with the play's Spanish translator, whose «rehearsal notes» in his annotated translation aim at guiding the actor's and

actress's enactment of their roles. Their contradictions, however, reveal the text's complexity, as the scene is regarded as fully romantic (1993: 88) and disquieting at the same time (81).

Persuaded that «the translator-as-dramaturge must provide in the text (or subsequently in the *mise-en-scène*) an array of information that the original audience needs to understand situation or character» (Pavis, 2005: 136), and not having found a fully satisfactory interpretation of this complex and suggestive scene, we have undertaken the task of casting some light on Jessica and Lorenzo's tight verbal exchange, so that prospective actors and actresses, aware of the rich interpretative possibilities of the epimone that is part of the half-lines they share, may have the chance of nuancing their interpretation.

In order to do so, we have dugged into its likely sources —Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides*, as mediated through Golding's and Turberville's translations, and filtered through Chaucer's *Legends of Good Women*— and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, paying attention to the ambiguous reception of these texts in Elizabethan England.

We have also undertaken the difficult task of making sense of the brief allusions the speakers of this duet exchange, as well as their order in what is not always an apparently logical sequence.

We have at all times placed the duet in the context of the play, relating it to Lorenzo and Jessica's previous exchanges, and paying attention to its anticipatory function, as—in our view—the love duet's ambiguous nature anticipates Portia and Bassanio's similarly ambiguous exchange, within a play whose indeterminacy has repeatedly been highlighted.

The aim of our study has been twofold: on the one hand, it has undertaken an in-depth textual analysis of a most complex text, and, on the other, it has compared it to two of the most outstanding Spanish stage versions of the play—those by José Carlos Plaza and Hansgünther Heyme—that have taken Vicente Molina Foix's Spanish translation of *The Merchant of Venice* as their point of departure. Aware that the translation of the lines is correct, we agree with Pavis (2005: 136) that it is also the translator's aim—especially if he or she is directly involved in the production of the play—to make the text as accessible as possible to actors and audiences. In order for that to be achieved, it is necessary—as Molina Foix's rich paratext to his edited version evinces—to offer the translator's target audience a guidance to those complex passages, such as mythological allusions, that require further explanation. We hope that our detailed analysis of this text may be of help to future translators in their task of making their work readable to their target audiences.

Our analysis of the two Spanish stage versions that have used Molina Foix's Spanish translation of the love duet in *The Merchant of Venice* has taken into account the previous elucidation of the meaning of the passage, and, while acknowledging their undeniable merits, it has lead us to conclude that, had a more thorough interpretation of the passage been available to its stage directors, the actors' enactment of the duet would have avoided the two extremes their stage versions reveal, as the mythological allusions can support neither a thoroughly romantic approach that ignores their dark overtones nor a grim tone that excludes the subtle ironies present in Shakespeare's sources.

With this study we hope to have contributed to fill an important gap in the study of the reception of translated texts that, as Gambier points out, «has received relatively scant, uneven

attention, in Translation Studies» (2018: 43). We also hope to have suggested a new avenue for researchers that may follow the methodological approach adopted in the present article.

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Notes

1. This is William Thynne's arrangement in his 1532 edition of Chaucer's *Complete Works*.
2. It was common in Italy for prostitutes to disguise themselves as men, as reflected in Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, where Lady Pol takes Peregrine for a prostitute in disguise.
3. It would be difficult to agree with Valls-Russell's suggestion that these mythological lovers [...] may be traced back to Hyginus' compilation of his *Fabulae* (2021: 128), since Medea's rejuvenation of Aeson is not mentioned in this catalogue.
4. For a detailed analysis of the reception of this production, see Ribes 2025. This article does not address Jessica and Lorenzo's love duet, due to the separate treatment its complexity requires.
5. For a detailed analysis of the reception of this postmodernist production, see Ribes 2024b. This essay excludes Jessica and Lorenzo's love duet, due to the independent treatment its complexity requires.
6. The primary sources of our analysis are the video recordings of Plaza's and Heyme's versions, made by the INAEM on 2 February 1993 and 7 March 2001, respectively.
7. For a detailed analysis of the reception of this production, see Ribes 2024a.
8. A. Guzmán (2001: 155), however, seems to have read it differently, as he claims that «Hansgünther Heyme ha preferido ser fiel a la ambigüedad de los personajes de "El mercader de Venecia"» (qtd. in Ribes, 2024b: 127).

9. This goes against Moreno's observation that «el montaje sigue con fidelidad el texto» (2001: 38), and also disagrees with López Mozo's remark that «no [hay] manipulación del texto en esta puesta en escena» (2001: 33). Heyme —while admitting that a substantial part of the text has been reduced (Villora, 2001)— does not explain where those omissions are to be found, or what their effect on the portrayal of characters may be.
10. The pursuit of personal profit is shared by most characters in this production, as pointed out by Franco (2001), Cerdón/Bernal (2001), and Ripoll (2001: 87), among others.
11. E. Fernández, when reproducing Vizcaíno's statement (2001: 59), misreads «encierra» as « cierran».
12. Susana Moreno similarly remarks: «los actores visten conforme a la época, pero van descalzos» (2001: 38), without offering any interpretation of its meaning .
13. It was performed at the Barbara and Art Culver Center for the Arts in Riverside, California, in July 2010.