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Rubén Jarazo Álvarez, Elena Domínguez Romero\*

## **The Absence of Allusion to Warfare in Álvaro Cunqueiro's *Don Hamlet: A Galician Text of the Shakespearian Play*<sup>1</sup>**

The historical evolution of Galicia, a nation in the north-west of Spain, has been determined by the negation of its own tradition and language within the Spanish state, which only accepted the existence of one of the many languages that existed within the territory. Whereas Castilian literature benefited from the protection of the state, Galician, Basque and Catalanian literatures were prosecuted, banned and even subject to a degree of state repression. Galician-Portuguese literature, which developed in the Middle Ages with literary works of enormous importance, was not to be re-discovered until well into the nineteenth century. From this date on, the Galician Literary Revival, or *Rexurdimento* and later movements began a process of cultural normalisation – similar, in many aspects, to the language planning established in countries which felt the influence of Romanticism culminating in the early twentieth century with the work of a number of influential intellectuals, Galicia sought to place herself at the same level of other European nations. Unfortunately, this process was to be dramatically frustrated by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

Some members of these minorities opted, as an alternative route to the so-called “Mediterranean Classicism”, for their integration into the world of “Atlantism” (McKevitt, 2006). The result of this trend was the introduction of the literature of English-speaking countries to the field of Galician culture. We should not be surprised by the fact that Anglophone literature has thus played a major influence on Galician culture. Álvaro Cunqueiro is probably considered the writer who most contributed in offering an original Galician vision of English, French and oriental myths (Ricci, 1971). His major achievements, with novels such as *Merlin and Company* (1955) or plays like *The uncertain Lord Don Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (1958), are not the only prominent case studies so far. In fact, his dispersed international journalistic career in newspapers and magazines over three decades should also be afforded a degree of prominence (Jarazo and Domínguez, 2010). Nevertheless, one of the most well-known achievements of the Galician writer is the publication and performance of his Hamletian adaptation in during the post-civil war period. A Galician adaptation which is somehow accurate to the Shakespearian version, but devoid of certain symbols, characters and plots in order to

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conform to the required norms of Franco's repression and censorship. This is especially significant if we take into account the conservative background of the author, whose play was written in the unofficial Galician language and published by a liberal Press, *Editorial Galaxia*. Encoding and decoding messages in literary manifestations was, in the end, the only possibility to convey the "unofficial Galician culture" at the time. Cunqueiro's *Don Hamlet* constitutes an excellent example of codifying messages during Franquism, especially as far as the absence of allusions to warfare is concerned.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has been considered to be in many cases the anamorphosis of the revenge of the other prince, Fortinbras, rather than the drama of Hamlet's revenge.<sup>2</sup> Authors such as Haverkamp explain that the appearance of Fortinbras' army in the middle of the play –unexpected, poorly motivated, cut in many productions– allows an external political threat to come suddenly into view: a threat from beyond the stage, from an elusive offstage whose dislocation makes it comparable to the threatening spirit at the beginning, similar in a way to the ghost's injection of history and intrusion on the present state of affairs (Haverkamp 178). The author points out that "if all these indications at the margins of the drama are taken and added together, the story of Hamlet appears instantly transformed and displaced into a quite different story: that of the Norwegian conquest of Denmark made possible under the pretext of an invasion of Poland" (178). This suggestion is easily supported by the fact that Hamlet admires Fortinbras' unthinking capacity for action (Taylor, 1970: 101). On the one hand, the Prince contrasts himself unfavourably with Fortinbras: "...Rightly to be great/ Is not to stir without great argument,/ But greatly to find quarrel in a straw/ When honour's at the stake" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 4.4.53-6).

The play demonstrates the difficulty of being able to discern intention from action, thought from speech (Green 4). Besides, Michael Taylor sets out a difference between the Hamlet of the first four acts of the play and that of the fifth, pointing to an abrupt, disturbing anagnorisis in Act V (Taylor, 1971: 159). The play ends with Hamlet giving his "voice" to Fortinbras as the new ruler (5.2.338). As Patrick Colm Hogan points, this is a strange choice, given that Fortinbras should have been the paradigm of the enemy. However, it is consistent with what we could see in other plays: "In part, it shows a mixing-up of in-group and out-group. Somehow, it represents the simple realization that peace is better than war and, without a peaceful ceding to Fortinbras, a war would follow and twenty thousand men would die" (54).

Other critics have also pointed out the opposition between Fortinbras and Hamlet in the Shakespearian version as an analysis between young and old types, or Hamlet's developmental progression from youth to maturity, examining the production and application of these categories as political phenomena (Harkins 334). Before Hamlet has even spoken a word, Claudius ignores the pressing political topic of usurpation, shifting to more advantageous ideological ground: the dangers presented by unruly youths and the necessity of keeping them mastered (337). The king characterises Fortinbras as a troublesome youth suggesting that the danger that the foreign prince poses can only be faced by a man as himself (339). This thought might have also crossed Hamlet's mind when he finally delegates the power in Fortinbras, not only in order to avoid a war, but also to face his uncle. He thus provides his country with the second best alternative to his Claudius.

The character of Fortinbras in Cunqueiro's adaptation of *Hamlet* pursues different objectives: to tell the hidden story behind Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, taking into account old Norse Sagas and Freud's Oedipus complex (Herrero, 1991; Monleón, 1993): "I do not remake, I do not modernise, nor do I explain the myth of Hamlet. I tell a story that

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<sup>2</sup> It is often assumed that minor characters like Fortinbras are usually meant to reveal the personality of the main characters.

perhaps occurred.<sup>3</sup> (IVIC, loc.). In this sense, every new reading of literature allows history to be rewritten, old stories can be reconceived. As part of its ongoing legacy, [both] Shakespeare's theatre [and Cunqueiro] revolutionised Hamlet, reconceptualised the function of literature in a Copernican sense (Haverkamp 171).

As far as this new perspective is concerned, Fortinbras is a key element in the configuration of the Galician adaptation. The Galician writer adopts the perspective of a soldier in the army of Fortinbras who, after reaching the final act, finds the concluding tragedy in the throne room of Elsinore:

I imagine myself as one of those soldiers who arrived with Fortinbras in Elsinore announced by solemn military gunpowder, when the corpses are still lying in the hall of the castle: the King, the Queen, and Hamlet oh well.

Or perhaps I am a halberdier, or mounted archer, who lays down his arms to help carry the corpses of those crowned and their heir to the hallowed ground.

And I ask one and all, relatives and friends, the cause of that tragic carnage, and listen to many tell the story and its details. And much thereafter, now that I am old and tired, and am only for going out to buy a quart of wine or a pint of beer for the soldiers on watch at Butre's tower, on a winters eve, warming by the fire in this sheltered courtyard, I begin to tell you the tragic tale that took place within the ivy-choked high walls of the castle. Can you blame me for carving this story year by year, growing it in my mind, connecting one fact to another, recalling and dreaming that tragedy, recollecting dreams, sentiments, suspicions, placing in that uncertain and aching Hamlet, my friend who passes by, love and trust, and on everything else harsh disdain and revulsion? I say.<sup>4</sup> (*Don Hamlet* 18-9)

In other words, the story which is told takes the perspective of the offstage soldiers who accompany Fortinbras' expedition. This perspective, which could not be otherwise explained, allows Cunqueiro to live firsthand the final events of the tragedy. Undoubtedly, the twist in the narrator's perspective of events is the direct result of Cunqueiro's version, a version of the story that may be closer to an Oedipus Hamlet. This substantial fact will be pivotal in the Galician adaptation. As Cunqueiro points out in an interview to a Galician newspaper:

I lived during the Civil War and subsequent years, and I had an intellectual and moral concern about the futility of revenge. This is what *A man who*

<sup>3</sup> Non refago, non modernizo, nin dilucido o mito Hamlet. Conto, por dentro, unha historia que quizais aconteceuu.

<sup>4</sup> Todo o máis, digo, eu son agora mesmo un daqueles soldados que chegan a Elsinor con Fortimbrás, anunciados por solemnes pólvoras militares, cando aínda están na sala do castelo os cadáveres. El Rei, a Raíña, Hamlet, en fin. Un alabardeiro eu son quizais, ou un arqueiro montado, que pousa nun rincón as súas armas para axudar a leva-los cadáveres dos coroados e do herdeiro ó camposanto.

E pregunto a uns e a outros, a parentes e amigos, o gallo daquela mortandade, e escoito a diversos a historia e os seus lances, e moito tempo despois, que xa vou vello e canso, e non sirvo máis que para irles mercar un neto de viño ou un xerro de cervexa ós cadetes da garda da Torre da Butre, unha noite de inverno, quentándome ó lume no adro cuberto, pónome a contar a traxedia que alí, onde son as altas paredes que afalaga a hedra vizosa, aconteceuu. ¿E pódese estorbar que a fora eu adubiano ano a ano, madurécendoa, no meu pensamento, tendendo fíos deste alfinete ó outro, rememorándoa e resoñándoa a traxedia aquela, rememorándoa a resoños, a pálpitos, a sospeitas, e pondo naquel dubidante e dolorido que alí pasa, Hamlet amigo, amor e confianza, e no todo áspera xenreira e noxo? Digo eu.

*looked like Orestes* is about. I have been reading Shakespeare since I was a child, and almost every topic is there. One day I was surprised that Hamlet did not fit within his work. There was a missing piece. I started to realise that this great drama of human maturity was based on the Oedipus complex. In other words, the murderer of his father, who married his mother, was his true father. [...] After I wrote my *Hamlet*, other writers would come to this conclusion. Clearly, eternal human passions are still the same since the creation of classic myths. Humanity, since then, had no new passions. Everything is in the Greeks, in the Greek classics. (Outeiriño 12)

However, the figure of Fortinbras in Cunqueiro's version as well as allusions to warfare will be devoid of meaning, of any intention. Fortinbras is a referential pretext in *Don Hamlet* rather than a sub-plot or oppositional scheme. Avoiding Fortinbras as a sub-plot is not the only change in Cunqueiro's adaptation. In fact, Galician scholars believe that the version written by Cunqueiro is devoid of any plot, but rather favours an aesthetic nonsense in the purest style of the Theatre of the Absurd. The fact that Cunqueiro does not also take on Shakespeare's meeting with the ghost or the suicide of Ophelia proves his final intention: the textual empowerment of the Shakespearean version is only the basis for Cunqueiro's ultimate tribute to Shakespeare.

Who indeed is, Ophelia? Who is Hamlet? It is irrelevant, as what matters in the Galician version is the empowerment of the text. It is essentially an issue built upon the plot's mechanism, fate, and the human condition. *Hamlet* is therefore a tragedy caused by the situations imposed on its characters with Classical reminiscences. This is the key to understand the modern interpretations of the Galician adaptation that theatrical directors such as Ricard Salvat presented on stage (Salvat 93). In the end, it is the active voice of Cunqueiro as a writer, his alter ego and the actors, what brings the play credibility and empowerment. In fact, the empowerment shown in the preface, written as a stylish manifesto, is taken up again at the end of the play in the death scene of Hamlet. In this final scene, the prince issues a royal decree before committing suicide. This decree is centred on the idea of allowing free communication, the free flow of all the elements that threatened Elsinore from the outside, the free movement of the text from the outside to the inside. Yet again, the lack of communication or the unsuccessful dialogues prove a point in the messages codified in the Cunqueirian version produced during Franco's regime, a regime characterised by its lack of freedom, communication and by censorship. This idea will also be central in another adaptation of the Galician writer, "Función de Romeo e Xulieta, Famosos Namorados", a play within a novel, published in *Chronicles of the Subchantor* (1956) (Braxe and Seoane, 1991; Jarazo and Domínguez, 2011).

The role that botanic allusions and atmospheric phenomena play in the action goes indeed further than the construction of mere stylistic elements designed for aesthetic purposes (Jarazo, 2006). As a matter of fact, as Cunqueiro warns the audience at the beginning of the play in an introductory note: "On a winter's eve, warming by the fire in this sheltered courtyard, I begin to tell you the tragic tale that took place within the ivy-choked high walls of the castle"<sup>5</sup> (*Don Hamlet* 11). From the beginning of the Galician version the role of environmental elements will play in opposition to the *topos* will be essential. In the play, the castle constitutes an imprisoned location, essential in the final resolution of the tragedy. The audience easily understands the importance of adjectival signification in Cunqueiro's prose. The vicious ivy threatening the walls of the castle represents, for example, the cruelty of the upcoming events threatening the future of

<sup>5</sup> Unha noite de inverno, quentándome ó lume no adro cuberto, póño-me a contar a traxedia que alí, onde son as altas paredes que afalaga a hedra vizosa, aconteceu.

Denmark. Equally important is the role played by wild environmental elements in contrast with the *topos*, Elsinore, as Cunqueiro also suggests in some stage directions:

SCENE, - a castle in Elsinore, in the kingdom of Denmark, in the middle of a wild field of exotic flowers which faces the ferocious tides of the sea, steered there by the unruly storms of the first quarter, that hath the power to break it in to a multitude of isles, with an audacious castle on each one. There stands Elsinore, the royal tower, perched aloft the darkest rocky cliff. In the isles, the saline breeze permits neither tree or rose, nor a singing bird, but those imprisoned in blue wicker birdcages in the princess' chambers, within the walled castle.<sup>6</sup> (*Don Hamlet* 1.1.15)

But the wind is one of the most relevant metaphors in this Galician version. Cunqueiro empowers the feeling of repression inside the castle with this symbol. We are, in fact, faced with an oppositional scheme between the alienation represented by the tamed environmental elements and the wind, the vicious ivy or the furious landscape outdoors, representing irrational passion and liberty:

Welcome to Elsinore, Good Gentles! Here in Elsinore all is shut against the wind. There is no other place so windy in the world as Elsinore. Everything has to be within the castle walls: people, cattle, and the garden. 'Tis the irate wind that is the cause! Not a soul doth pleasure take in going out of Elsinore with such a wind outside, akin to a colossal howling army that besieges Elsinore a whole night long. Whence the reason why in Elsinore, all are of pale complexion. Who would venture out from Elsinore?<sup>7</sup> (*Don Hamlet* 1.1.20)

The interior courtyard at Elsinore. On the right, between some arches, can be seen the garden: chrysanthemums, begonias, ivy. Two, three stairs connect the patio to the corridors above. In the background, a sturdy wall, with not one gap. On the left, a spiral staircase, resting on columns. The sun enters on the left, and partially lights the wall in the background, the stairs, and the garden.<sup>8</sup> (*Don Hamlet* 1.3.65)

By letting the wind and the natural forces freely into the castle, King Hamlet is able to release the tensions that threatened the status quo established during the Usurper's

<sup>6</sup> Esta peza ten por escenario o castelo que chaman de Elsinor, no reino de Dinamarca, que é unha floresta salvaxe que se mete mar adiante deica onde o pulo das ondas, rexendo alí a cotío asubiantes temporais do primeiro cadrante, ten poder para quebralo en moitedume de illas, cadaqué ousada dun castelo. No peito penedoso da máis avesía, alí está Elsinor, a torre real. Nas illas, e é polas xistras salobres, non hai árbore nin rosa, nin se escoitan cantar outros paxaros que os que están en gaiolas de vimio pintado de azul nas cámaras das infantas, nos murados castelos.

<sup>7</sup> ¡Benvidos a Elsinor, señores! Aquí en Elsinor todo temos pechado por mor do vento. Non hai no mundo lugar máis venteado que Elsinor. Todo ten que estar dentro: a xente, o gando, o xardín. E é por culpa do vento irado. A ninguén lle praxe saír de Elsinor con tanto vento fóra, semellante a un grande exército ouveador que cercase Elsinor por toda unha longa noite. Por iso os de Elsinor somos xente de pálida pel. ¿Quen sae ó campo en Elsinor?

<sup>8</sup> O patio cuberto de Elsinor. Á dereita, por entre unhas arcadas, vese o xardín: crisantemos, begoñas, hedra. Dúas, tres escaleiras, baixan ó patio dos altos corredores. No fondo, unha parede chea, sen un van. A esquerda, un corredor, de caracol, que descansa sobre columnas. O sol entra pola esquerda, e aluma parte do muro do fondo e as escaleiras da dereita e o xardín.

reign. As a result, actions will finally overflow the universe of Cunqueirian characters with the death of the Queen and King of Denmark and the suicide of Prince Hamlet:

Ne'er did they permit the wind to enter Elsinore. A Royal amendment, Polonius. A supreme decree. It shall be written. From this moment on, wind shall be allowed enter the rooms of Elsinore. King Hamlet doth not fear the wind that howls outside. Tell Ophelia I utter her name upon my death. Ropes are made so rough these days!<sup>9</sup> (*Don Hamlet* 3.9.97)

However, for Cunqueiro, death as a symptom of regeneration is also implicit in monologues such as “to be or not to be”. This revival has to be found through death, as Don Hamlet believes. Critics such as González have stated that: “Reality, thus, is understood and resolved, therefore, as a cyclical concept in perennial return” (74). In contrast with Shakespeare’s, Cunqueiro’s Fortinbras does not appear as a final promise and hope of renewal and rebirth of cyclic historical life. Fortinbras’ place in the play is thus substantially taken by the wind and its symbolism, a technique that the Galician writer deliberately highlights in the preface of the play:

This play was written in the autumn of 1958. The wind was blowing as harshly in my Mondoñedo as the Western winds might blow in Elsinore. I had many times mulled over the tragedy of Shakespeare, and I came to the conclusion that there were much deeper issues within the story which had not been explored by the English playwright. I wish the reader to understand that these lines were written with an unreserved humility.<sup>10</sup> (*Don Hamlet* 63)

Indeed, there is no doubt that in human civilization, wind has inspired mythology, influenced the events of history, expanded the range of transport and warfare, and provided a power source for mechanical work, electricity, and recreation. Wind has been used to steer sailing ships across vast oceans<sup>11</sup> and thus its importance is widely present in Shakespeare’s times as in the Danish sagas which were highly influential by then<sup>12</sup>. However, this kind of “natural” liberation experienced in Elsinore through the action of wind is also a symptom of Cunqueiro’s liberation as a writer of his own fear and doubts represented in the claustrophobic rooms of the castle (Tarrío 122). Like many other playwrights, Cunqueiro leaves aside the subplot of Fortinbras’s invasion of Denmark.

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<sup>9</sup> Nunca deixaron entrar en Elsinor o vento. Unha medida real, Poloño. Un decreto supremo. Pono por escrito. Desde hoxe o vento pode entrar nas estancias de Elsinor. El Rei Hamlet non lle ten medo ó vento que oubea fóra. Dille a Ofelia que digo Ofelia ó morrer. ¡Fan agora tan ásperos espartos!

<sup>10</sup> Esta peza foi escrita no outono de 1958. Sopraba tanto vendaval no meu Mondoñedo como sopran ventos do Oeste en Elsinor. Eu tíñalle dado moitas voltas no maxín á traxedia de Shakespeare, e dei na teima de que había algo no máis fondo do conto que non tiña sido usado polo dramaturgo inglés. Rogo que se acepte que estas liñas están escritas cunha humildade sen reservas.

<sup>11</sup> In Shakespeare’s times, the important role of the wind is present in key milestones of English History. Protestant Wind, for example, is a name for the storm that deterred the Spanish Armada from an invasion of England in 1588 where the wind played a pivotal role, (Colin Martin 144-81), or the favourable winds that enabled William of Orange to invade England in 1688. (Lindgrén & Neumann 634).

<sup>12</sup> Even in Danish sagas such as Beowulf, that nature-myths (e.g. wind) lie concealed behind main episodes may be regarded as certain, and a plausible interpretation has been found for at least one, and that the most important, of his heroic deeds. It may be noted in passing that Laistner has, in a very ingenious way, offered another explanation, which would seem to be supported by some descriptive passages of the poem (e.g. *Beowulf* XXI). According to this view, Grendel and his mother are the mists that cause so many deadly diseases along the coasts of Jever and Dithmarschen, and Beowulf “Fegewolf” is the wind hero who chases the mists away.

After the Spanish Civil War and the recent World War II, there was no place for allusions to warfare in a Galician play published in 1958 and performed in the following decades. Let us bear in mind that Franco's succession line was quite a controversial issue (Candela, 1953), especially after the death of a member of the Spanish royal family.

In 1956, Prince Juan Carlos would accidentally fire a gun while playing in the attic with his younger brother, Alfonso, causing his death. Juan's older brother and uncle of Juan Carlos, Jaime de Borbón, who regretted having given up his right to inheritance, later sought a thorough investigation, considering that such an event could affect the line of succession. Following the Law, dynastic succession should have been borne by his father, Juan de Borbon y Battenberg, but the not-so-cordial relationship between Juan and Franco determined the change in the line of succession, and the appointment of Juan Carlos as Prince of Spain. This change was accepted by Prince Juan Carlos, creating an internal conflict in the Royal House of Bourbon. However, Cunqueiro's version was principally tamed due to censorship and political repression (Spitzmesser, 1995):

Curiously, during the German occupation of France, the French began to translate Homer. During Franco's, Segarra, in Catalonia, translated Shakespeare, and Riva, Homer. I know that censorship in Segarra's translation took place, deleting a few paragraphs as Shakespeare's is sometimes opinionated, and very often, political. Thus, the classics are sometimes the way a man has to tell what is not allowed in a situation without freedom of speech. (Outeiriño 12)

All in all, the concurrence of these historical events with Hamlet's story are obvious to the point that the author decided to rewrite the Shakespearean myth from a different perspective, Fortinbras's perspective. In the end, the role of Fortinbras in both versions of *Hamlet* is peripheral but fundamental in the plot and events. In Cunqueiro's modern *Don Hamlet*, Fortinbras is a peripheral but pivotal character in the play. Allusions to warfare are substituted though by the violence inherent in an allegorical wild landscape and by the role of wind. To some extent, it is a consequence of the political repression and censorship in Franco's Spain. However, there is no doubt that in both plays, Fortinbras holds a central position in the configuration of the plays, an active, external powerful alternative to the system that is needed in both cases.

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