

Araquistáin's 1929 version of *Volpone*¹

Purificación RIBES TRAVER
University of Valencia

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with Araquistáin's 1929 free adaptation into Spanish of Ben Jonson's *Volpone*. It centers on the author's claim to originality as a means of stressing its relevance in a theatrical context of fierce competition, with three Spanish versions of the play simultaneously on stage.

Araquistáin's claim to originality is paid attention to by analysing the relationship that his text bears to the two sources he acknowledges as his own: Ben Jonson's original play, on the one hand, and Zweig's German adaptation, on the other. A third possible source of inspiration that he does not mention is also taken into consideration: Ludwig Tieck's (1793) *Herr von Fuchs*, since certain traits in the characters of Bonario, Celia, and, to a lesser extent, *Volpone*, bear resemblance to Karl Krähfeld, Louise and Herr von Fuchs in the German version.

As regards the general assessment of Araquistáin's adaptation, this analysis stresses its uneven quality, since, whereas its first part is dramatically effective, its second part is careless and confusing, in spite of which certain innovations would later prove influential, such as the changes he introduced into the character of Urraca, that can be traced in Tasis's (1956) depiction of Canina.

Volpone had never been as present on the Spanish stage as in 1929, nor would so many different productions of the play be simultaneously performed in our country again. The reason for such an unprecedented outburst of productions is as crematistic as the behaviour of the characters in the comedy, what did not go unnoticed at the time, as echoed, for example, in the heading of some reviews where the interest of the producers is related to that

¹ I gratefully acknowledge financial assistance for the research here reported, as granted by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology (BFF 2003-06096).

of the birds of prey in the comedy.² The enormous success enjoyed by Romain's adaptation of Zweig's German version of the play in Paris arose the interest of a host of translators and theater managers that rushed to have their versions both staged and published in as short a period of time as possible. This success had also been echoed in Spain, where Ceria, from *ABC* (24/11/1928: 37) for example, had reviewed the première. The importance of the theatrical event in Paris was stressed by having the news of its success share title with a piece of relevant political information. The title read: "Mayoría del Gobierno en la Cámara. Estreno de *Volpone*." One year later the play still held the stage in Paris, as recalled by Sánchez Guerra (*ABC*, 5/12/1929: 11) a couple of weeks before the première of his own version in Madrid: "El invierno pasado ... el éxito fue grande ... El público sigue llenando todavía el teatro donde *Volpone* se representa."³ At the same time, he regretted the unfair opportunism of his competitors, who had suddenly felt an urgent need to translate *Volpone*, and who had made claim to originality as a way of calling attention to their merits: "Y cuando nos disponemos a estrenar el arreglo hecho por nosotros resulta que hay *¡dos o tres adaptaciones más tomadas directamente del inglés!*"⁴ This was, in fact, the characteristic that advertisements of Jarnés's version stressed: "Se ensaya *Volpone*, traducción directa del original por Benjamín Jarnés."⁵ (*ABC*, 13/12/29: 36). The same quality was underlined both in Araquistáin's published edition: "*única adaptación directa del original inglés en lengua española ... Editorial España, Madrid*"⁶ (*ABC*, 7/12/29) and in his staged version: "publicada en volumen y estrenada en Buenos Aires, *hecha directamente del original*, y que me parece, según he expresado en

² Cfr., for example, the *Heraldo de Aragón* (29/12/1929) where Roberto Castrovido in "Charla de la semana. El magnífico zorro, el pícaro Mosca y el pobre Gazapo" establishes the links between the subject matter of the play, the theatrical battle unleashed by it and a financial scandal of the day, which came to be known as the "Gazapo affair."

³ Trans. "The play proved tremendously successful last winter ... And audiences still fill the playhouse where *Volpone* is on stage."

⁴ Trans. "And when we are about to stage our own version of the play, it so happens that *two or three additional adaptations claim to be faithful translations of the English original text!*" [my italics].

⁵ Trans. "Rehearsals of Benjamín Jarnés's *faithful translation* of *Volpone* into Spanish are now taking place" [my italics].

⁶ Trans. "This is the *only faithful adaptation* of the English text into Spanish ... España Press, Madrid" [my italics].

otro lugar, excelente”⁷ (E. Díez Canedo: *El Sol*, 20/12/29: 3). But the outcome of such a ferocious competition was usually more accomplished on the page than on stage, though this was not always the case.

The clearest example of this apparent contradiction is to be found in the Spanish version of Romain’s adaptation made by Artemio Precioso and Rafael Sánchez Guerra, that is an almost literal rendering of Romain’s most theatrically effective version of the play.⁸ Their translation reveals an excellent knowledge of French as well as their ability to recreate the essential strategies of the source text into their target language. The adaptation of the text for a new audience also involves, in this case, a careful suppression of any word or expression that might offend the ears of a sensitive audience (and, no less, those of official censors).⁹

This most correct of versions, however, does not seem to have proved as successful on stage as its authors probably anticipated when they secured the prescriptive copyright from

⁷ Trans. “(that has been) both published and staged in Buenos Aires. It is a *close rendering of the English text*, and, as I have already pointed out elsewhere, it is an excellent version” [my italics].

⁸ Romain had taken good care to improve the dramatic quality of Zweig’s version, as has been extensively argued by P. Ribes Traver in “Spanish Adaptations of Ben Jonson’s *Volpone*.” *Spanish Studies in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*. Ed. J.M. González de Sevilla. Newark: Delaware University Press (volume to be issued in 2005).

⁹ It must be remembered that censorship was in full action at the time, as the Dictator Primo de Rivera himself proudly acknowledged, firmly persuaded that it was a necessary measure against excess: “La censura y otras restricciones han hecho posible vivir con eficiencia diez veces más de lo que hubiera podido vivir en el absurdo régimen de crítica y propaganda libre, desenfadado, opresor e irresponsable, incompatible con las dictaduras y yo creo que con todo modo de gobernar que algunos llaman libertad” (*ABC*, 24/12/1929: 17) (Trans. “Censorship and other restrictive measures have provided our way of life with ten times as much efficiency as it would have ever been imaginable, had we been governed according to an absurd system of unrestrained criticism and propaganda, that would have proved both oppressive and irresponsible, and that is incompatible not only with any kind of dictatorship but also with what some people label as ‘freedom’”). One example of this zeal was the unprecedented measure of imprisoning the authors of saucy compliments addressed at the fair sex: “Las autoridades se vieron precisadas a velar por la seguridad del pudor del bello sexo y establecieron como buen precedente el encarcelamiento de los profesionales del piropo insolente y agresivo” (*ABC*, 29/12/29: 57) (Trans. “The authorities felt compelled to guard the modesty of the fair sex and thus regarded the imprisoning of professionals of insolent and aggressive compliments as a fitting measure to prevent instances of similar behaviour in the future”).

Romains. The reason – it is not difficult to guess – does not lie in the unresponsiveness of their audience, but, rather, in the short time of rehearsal that the play enjoyed and that resulted in a careless production where actors performed very poorly. If reviews are to be trusted, neither were the leading characters in a proper command of their roles, nor had the sprightly rhythm of Romains’s version been taken advantage of. According to “Floridor”, “Los artistas del Infanta Beatriz ... no ‘entraron’ en sus respectivas figuraciones”¹⁰ (*ABC*, 20/12/1929: 33) and, in E. Díez Canedo’s view, “unos actores que aún no se habían aprendido sus papeles fueron arrastrando hasta el final de los cinco actos”¹¹ (*El Sol*, 21/12/1929: 3).

As regards the second version that was staged in Madrid the following day,¹² it is not easy to decide how successful it was since reviews of the performances somewhat differ from each other. Whereas E. Díez Canedo, from *El Sol* (21/12/1929: 3), for example, praises both the individual performance and the overall effect of the play, F., from *ABC* (21/12/29), presents us with a less enthusiastic view. According to Díez Canedo,

Conviene anotar en el crédito de los artistas del Alkazar el esfuerzo interpretativo con que han animado estas escenas, dando un rendimiento que muchos no esperaban ... Pero yo alabo, sobre todo ... el tono del conjunto, que responde certeramente al movimiento de la acción.¹³

what is not wholly shared by F., who makes a different reading of the individual performances: “Margarita Robles en un papel tan fuera de su temperamento como el de Mosca bastante hizo con salvarlo decorosamente ... El Sr. Delgrás (Volpone) no responde tampoco al que nosotros imaginamos. Es un papel para una

¹⁰ Trans. “The artists from the Infanta Beatriz ... did not quite succeed in their figurative parts.”

¹¹ Trans. “Certain players that, so far, had not achieved a proper command of their parts kept dragging them to the end of the fifth act.”

¹² The version by Artemio Precioso was first performed at the *Infanta Beatriz* on the 19th of December, 1929, and Jamés’s adaptation was premièred the following day at the *Alkazar*.

¹³ Trans. “The effort made by the Alkazar’s artists in order to enliven these scenes is worth stressing. They have performed far better than expected. I wish to underline not only individual outstanding performance but also the successful tone achieved by the company as a whole, in line with the movement of the action.”

primera figura."¹⁴ The critic, however, does not dismiss the play as a whole: "El conjunto nos pareció aceptable."¹⁵

A detailed analysis of the printed version by Jarnés (1929) reveals that he followed Jonson's original closely except for a number of omissions, transpositions, and, above all, the double ending of the play, which was probably never staged, as can be gathered from the descriptions found in different reviews (*ABC*, 21/12/29: 47 or *El Sol*, 21/12/1929: 3). Even though both endings involved the punishment of Volpone in one way or another, Jarnés chose to underline the Fox's skill by having him cunningly bribe the judges in the last minute, and thus beat everybody else's wit. In Canedo's view, (*El Sol*, 21/12/1929: 3) his ending was in line with the time's reluctance to punish the hero: "¿Qué hechizo ejercerá este personaje sobre los autores modernos, que ninguno se decide a castigarle con toda la severidad de su primer padre?"¹⁶ I have the feeling that Jarnés was not merely bewitched by Volpone, but by Araquistáin's final solution as well. Like him, he chose to resort to a last minute trick that consisted of a will in favour of the Judges. The difference with his version lay in the fact that, whereas in Araquistáin, Mosca had surprisingly forgotten about a document that he himself had handed to the magistrates, in Jarnés, Volpone was wide aware of what he wished to achieve, and thus his final victory proved a just reward to his cunning. Even this third ending, that was probably devised as a way of providing the play with a more amiable tone than his printed version could achieve, proves more consistent than Araquistáin's, and, like his, it subtly hints at the corruptibility of the judges.

Jarnés's was a dramatically coherent adaptation with a clear outline and sketchy characters that required a quick delivery of lines. This version, though only slightly influenced by Zweig, was, however, more suited than any other to the type of performance that he suggested at the beginning of his *lieblose Komödie* (1926)¹⁷, that is to say, "als *Commedia dell'Arte* zu spielen,

¹⁴ Trans. "Margarita Robles, whose part as Mosca only slightly suited her character, merely saved the situation with decorum ... As regards Mr. Delgrás (Volpone), he doesn't meet our expectations either. His is a role for a first rate figure."

¹⁵ Trans. "We took the play to be acceptable as a whole."

¹⁶ Trans. "I wonder what kind of spell this character casts over modern authors that no one seems to be ready to punish him as sternly as his first father did."

¹⁷ Trans. *Loveless Comedy*.

rasch, eher karikaturistisch als naturalistisch."¹⁸ Jarnés's drastic reduction of characters to their essence had made them fitting for a detached kind of performance, and his collaboration with the innovatory stage designer Mignoni, helped this approach become true.¹⁹ His was, above all, a text for the scene, rather than a text for the reading public.

A different kind of audience was probably in Araquistáin's mind when he attempted his own version of the play, which he proudly termed a *personal rewriting* ("obra personal de re-creación"; *ABC*, 7/12/1929: 43) while acknowledging his double debt both to Zweig and to Jonson. There is a third source, I dare suggest, that he does not mention: the translation made into German by Ludwig Tieck in 1793. Even though the parallels here are not as close as in the other two texts, there are still some traits in the characterization of Bonario and Celia that seem reminiscent of Tieck's Karl von Krähfeld and Louise. It is to be regretted, however, that, as is often the case with Araquistáin, he has not taken advantage of the possibilities open to him by this source, since he arises certain expectations that he does not fulfill later in the play. This flaw seems to be quite a persistent one, what leads me to entertain the hypothesis that Araquistáin made a conscious start, taking good care of most dramatic devices. But then, suddenly, maybe due to an unexpected shortage of time, this exquisite care collapsed and gave way to a most indigest mixture of styles and influences that were not properly handled and that resulted in a dramatic failure. This version couldn't possibly succeed on stage, in spite of the eulogistic commentaries made on the successful reception encountered by Enrique de Rosas in Buenos Aires: "Se amplían las conquistas de *Volpone*, o *el Zorro*, de Ben Jonson, concienzudo y sugestido arreglo de Luis Araquistáin ... como ya hemos dicho, llevado por el buen

¹⁸ Trans. "To be played as *Commedia dell'Arte*, quickly, as a caricature rather than realistically."

¹⁹ It must be born in mind that Mignoni had been acclaimed as a promising stage designer, who was starting to bring about a change in Spanish theatrical productions. Another famous designer of the day was Bartolozzi, who had collaborated with Araquistáin in his Zaragoza staging of *Volpone*. But, although Trivelín had made an enthusiastic assessment of their worthy contribution in "El teatro en 1929" (*Blanco y Negro*, 30/12/1928: 28): "gracias a ellos el realismo depauperado empieza a gozar de una bien ganada jubilación" (Trans. "With their help, exhausted realism has benefited from well deserved retirement"), the outcome of their collaboration with both adapters of *Volpone* was bound to be different, as the result of the contrasting nature of their playscripts.

arte de Enrique de Rosas, pasea por los escenarios argentinos"²⁰ (*El Sol*, 28/11/1929: 6).

Araquistáin's competitive nature led him to give this uneven text to the press, so that no other version could be issued before his, no matter how much revision was still advisable.²¹ It looks as though he were not ready to accept any other kind of defeat. Artemio Precioso and Rafael Sánchez Guerra had been quicker than him to obtain the copyright of a successful piece for the stage, and he was not ready to allow any other translation – either on the page or on stage – precede his own. Not yet satisfied with having ranged first in the date of publication and performance – though but abroad – he drew constant attention to his remarkable work as adapter, so as to arise the curiosity of potential readers. It is no mere coincidence that the publishing house repeatedly advertised his volume just while rehearsals of other versions were taking place and being equally advertised. Shyness and discretion were obviously unknown to Araquistáin, as can be once more stated when recalling the precise time when he felt compelled to lecture on *Volpone*. It was no less than on the 22nd of December, that is to say, just when the widely expected versions of Precioso and Sánchez Guerra on the one hand, and Jarnés, on the other, had just premièred. He thus made sure he obtained a coveted space in the papers, sharing page with the reviews of the other versions. In fact, a note placed by the review on the version staged at the Infanta Beatriz (*El Sol*, 20/12/1929: 3) announced his forthcoming lecture on the origins and symbolism of *Volpone*: "El día 22, a las seis y media de la tarde, D. Luis Araquistáin disertará acerca del tema 'Orígenes, peripecias y simbolismo de *Volpone* o el Zorro'."²² Another note on the same page reminded the readers that the second performance of *Volpone* would take place at the Infanta

²⁰ Trans. "Luis Araquistáin's accurate and suggestive version of Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, led by the skilful hand of Enrique de Rosas, is winning over the hearts of Argentinian audiences."

²¹ On the seventh of December he was already boasting that his printed version had been issued over four months earlier: "mi adaptación fue publicada hace ya cuatro meses y estrenada hace uno – el 6 de noviembre – en Buenos Aires" (*ABC*: 43) (Trans. "My version was already published four months ago, and it was staged last month – on the 6th of November – in Buenos Aires") whereas Jarnés would still have to wait until the 28th of December to see his version published (in *La Farsa*, year III, number 120), that is to say, eight days after its first performance in Madrid.

²² Trans. "Mr. Luis Araquistáin will deliver a lecture on the origins, symbolism and peripecies of *Volpone* or *the Fox* on December the 22nd, at half past six."

Beatriz that night at 10.30: "Infanta Beatriz. 10.30. Segunda representación de *Volpone*, la famosísima comedia de Ben Jonson,"²³ and still a third note reminded them that Jarnés's *Volpone* was to be staged at the Alkázár that very same evening: "*Volpone* se estrenará en el Alkázár hoy, viernes, en función de tarde."²⁴

It was no surprise to anybody that the lecture delivered by Araquistáin was as fully reviewed as any of the theatrical performances of his rivals. And, as more than one had anticipated, he did not miss the opportunity of alluding to his own version, that he presented as a homage to the memory of Ben Jonson: "Expone cómo su propia adaptación trata precisamente de restablecer el sentido que las circunstancias impidieron a Ben Jonson darle con directa y peligrosa sinceridad ... dando así la mejor prueba de respeto y fidelidad a su memoria"²⁵ (*El Sol*, 23/12/1929: 4).

Even though no version by him had been rehearsed in Madrid during the previous weeks, he had capitalized the attention of the reading public by engaging in a vivid debate with Rafael Sánchez Guerra that went on for a few days. In it he didn't refrain from attacking his rivals, whose versions he considered clearly inferior to his own. Aware that he had a better command both of German and English than either Artemio Precioso or Rafael Sánchez Guerra, he disparaged their version as merely servile to the French rendering of Romaine. At the same time he stressed the superior quality of his adaptation because, on the one hand, it derived directly from the English original, and, on the other, it had also benefited, not from the French rendering of the German version, but from Zweig's text directly, and he disdainfully challenged anyone to look into his text and discover its sources:

¿Quién comercia con *Volpone*? Comercia, en el peor sentido de la palabra, el que adquiere por dinero una creación que no es suya, para lucrarse con la reventa, sin mayor esfuerzo, no el que realiza una obra personal de recreación como yo he pretendido hacer ... Y ahí

²³ Trans. "10.30 at the Infanta Beatriz, Second performance of *Volpone*, Ben Jonson's most famous comedy."

²⁴ Trans. "*Volpone* will be premièred this evening at the Alkázár."

²⁵ Trans. "He explains how his own version tries to restore the play's full sense, that circumstances prevented Ben Jonson from portraying due to the danger inherent in a direct and sincere rendering of it ... He (Araquistáin) thereby gives its author the clearest proof of esteem and faithfulness to his memory."

está el texto impreso para que lo comparen con el original y con el arreglo de Zweig los que quieran y puedan²⁶. (ABC, 7/12/1929: 43)

Sánchez Guerra had openly admitted that he had not read either Jonson's English text or Zweig's German version, but merely Romain's adaptation. Nevertheless, he stressed Araquistáin's opportunism since his translation had been prompted by the theatrical success, first of Zweig, but, especially, of Romain's French adaptation at the Atelier: "¿Quién nos presentó a todos – *¡a todos!* – el famoso personaje de la antigua farsa? Pues a unos ha sido Stefan Zweig, y a otros – los más, Jules Romain"²⁷ (ABC, 5/12/1929: 11).

It must be reckoned, however, that Araquistáin made a real effort towards originality, for he departed in many ways both from Jonson's original play and from Zweig's adaptation, even though the final product was not as theatrically well informed as the adaptation by Romain. His version is, in fact, somewhat uneven, and, though it has a promising beginning, it is not sustained to its end.

It is worth mentioning in his favour, however, that Araquistáin risks keeping onstage a character that had been unpopular for a long time: Volpone disguised as Scoto de Mantua²⁸. He not only retains the part but develops it in such a way that Volpone even gets to handle his own business with Corvino regarding the favours of his beautiful wife Celia. Scoto makes a general call on Venetian women to help Volpone recover his health. The covetous Corvino immediately rushes to have his own wife examined as a possible candidate. It is the quack himself, that is to say, Volpone in disguise, who performs the task of assessing her charms. Araquistáin's development of this scene helps portray Volpone as a more humane character, since the audience is allowed

²⁶ Trans. "Who should we say does trade with *Volpone*? No one but whoever purchases a work that is not his own with the only aim of selling it again at a substantial profit, with no other effort on his part This is not my case, since *I have attempted a personal rewriting of the play ... There the printed version lies open for comparison both with the English original text and with Zweig's adaptation by whoever happens to be either willing or ready to do so*" [my italics].

²⁷ Trans. "Who was it that made *us all* acquainted with the old farce's character? It was Stefan Zweig in some cases but, far more often, Jules Romain."

²⁸ Starting in England in the third quarter of the eighteenth century with G. Colman's adaptation: *Volpone, or the Fox. A Comedy as altered from Ben Jonson (1778)* and then being removed from most later revivals of the play.

to see onstage how he feels drawn towards Celia, instead of having him merely crave her favours as a way of inflicting pain on Corvino, as Zweig, for example, does. This scene, at the same time, helps develop Corvino's blind avarice, that prevents him from discovering who Scoto really is, while he examines his wife under the pretext of deciding whether she is good enough to look after Volpone. Corvino's greediness is doubly underlined because Araquistáin had already allowed the audience realize to what extent Volpone's interest in Celia could arouse Corvino's jealousy. Volpone, probably under the influence of Tieck, reveals his 'love' for Celia when he is first visited by Corvino. He dreams of her in spite of his ill health, which is taken advantage of by Araquistáin as a way of grounding Corvino's verbal attacks on the 'deal' Volpone. This change is in line with Araquistáin's more amiable tone, that is already visible in the first scenes where he finds ways of justifying the characters's enraged reactions. Not only has Corvino's affronting of Volpone been given a reason that is absent from Jonson, but his jealous reaction against his wife after the mountebank scene is equally portrayed as the logical consequence of Bonario's open interest in her. Corvino is thus created by Araquistáin as a less irrational and violent character, who does not attack a dying man out of mere despitte but out of jealousy, and who does not threaten his wife for no reason.

That he is intent on writing a less upsetting type of play can be further inferred from Corvino's way of dealing with his wife, for, in spite of having been given grounds for a jealous reaction, he behaves in a more civilized way than both in Jonson and in Zweig. Araquistáin's depiction of Celia as a more articulate character acts as a logical complement to Corvino's behaviour. At the beginning of the play she subtly counters some of her husband's decisions, probably influenced by Louise's comparable attitude in Tieck's version of the play, where she melodramatically defies Rabe's (Corvino's) force when he threatens to force her to Herr von Fuchs's (Volpone's) bed. In Araquistáin, when Corvino urges Scoto to examine her: "Examinadla ... tocadla si gustáis,"²⁹ Celia sharply replies: "¡No estoy enferma!"³⁰ When he later insists that they both lead their way to Volpone's house, she rhetorically asks him: "¿A

²⁹ Trans. "Go ahead, do examine her ... touch her if you wish!"

³⁰ Trans. "I am not ill."

casa de Volpone? ¿No os habrá embaucado ese doctor Escoto?,"³¹ and later tries to evade conjugal obedience by means of a timely headache: "Tengo mucha jaqueca, señor."³²

Celia is not wholly ignorant of the ways of the world, as revealed in her conversation with the matchmaker Serpina regarding Bonario's approaches to her, or in her awareness of Bonario's impudent way of looking at her from the Piazza: "¡Con qué insistencia mira! ¡Es un descarado!"³³ Here, again, the influence of Tieck is discernible, particularly as regards the scene where Karl von Krähfeld Romeo-like gazes at Louise from a lower level. But here the similarity ends, because Araquistáin doesn't follow Tieck's romantic development that ends in a promise of eternal love between Louise and Karl. He arises some expectations of a romantic affair that he seems to forget about later in the play. Even though the obstacle for their happy marriage is removed, because Celia – unlike in Zweig – is freed from her matrimonial ties, no advantage is taken of it. Celia, instead, aligns herself with the guilty, by joining them in an exclamation of desmay at her lot: "¡mi hogar! ¡mi vida!"³⁴

This is the final expression of a loss of shrewdness on her part that starts after Volpone's attempted rape on her. At that moment she adopts Zweig's Colomba's habits of mind, and shares some of her inconsistencies. Even though she is not as extremely naïve as her, she does not hold her accusation against Volpone before the magistrates. And, once the truth comes out and Araquistáin chooses – in a Jonsonian fashion – to punish her husband by having him sent to the pillory and her returned to her own father with her dowry trebled, she proves, as we have seen, deeply concerned at the loss of her past life and home. It looks as

³¹ Trans. "Do you mean we are to lead our way to Volpone's house? Won't that Dr. Scoto have played a trick on you?"

³² Trans. "I have a terrible headache, my lord."

³³ Trans. "Look how he stares at me! What an impudent fellow!"

³⁴ By placing her expression of lament in the middle of those uttered by the guilty, Araquistáin unconsciously turns her into one of them:

Corbaccio ¡mis ducados!

Voltore ¡mi toga!

Corvino ¡la picota! ¡orejas de asno!

Celia ¡mi hogar! ¡mi vida!

Urraca ¡mis ahorros ...! ¡mi quinto marido!

(Trans. *Corbaccio*: O my ducats! / *Voltore*: my gown! / *Corvino*: O the pillory! And ass ears! / *Celia*: O my home! My life! / *Urraca*: Alas, all my savings! My fifth husband!)

though no offence could affect her, for the simple reason that she doesn't acknowledge it. After the rape scene she becomes her husband's shadow, following him everywhere, particularly in his frequent visits to the 'dying' Volpone. She wholly falls into the role of the submissive – and unfeeling – wife who is even ready to be left alone with Volpone for a second time:

Urraca: ¿Y qué haría el señor Volpone entre hombres solos si le sobreviene alguna necesidad urgente?

Corvino: Está Celia.

Urraca: La ... señora no tiene práctica. Y después de lo ocurrido ...

Corvino: Como queráis.

(*A Celia en voz baja.*) *Siéntate*. No conviene que la vieja hiena se quede sola.

(*Se sienta también*)³⁵

This, however, never takes place since, in this moral play, the widow Urraca is not ready to leave her future husband alone for a moment. Araquistáin, well aware of the moral prejudices of his audience,³⁶ transforms Zweig's courtesan Canina (that corresponds to Ben Jonson's Lady Would be) into a Chaucerian kind of widow who is looking for her fifth husband. Like the Wife of Bath, she is full of energy and resolution, to the point that Volpone asks her for help when Bonario accuses him of attempted rape: "Defendedme, señora, no consintáis que me lleven preso."³⁷

As in Jonson's play, she is summoned to declare at Court, though that part could be easily dispensed with because her words are not dramatically relevant but, rather, redundant and ridiculous. She resorts to the unconvincing argument that Bonario's slander regarding Urraca's rough ways had come close to bringing about

³⁵ Trans. "*Urraca*: What could Mr. Volpone do, should some urgent need arise, if left alone amongst men?

Corvino: There Celia lies.

Urraca: But ... she has no practice ... and ... after all that has happened ...

Corvino: It's all right. (*He whispers to Celia*) Sit down. The old hyaena should not be left on her own.

(*She takes a seat*)" [my italics].

³⁶ He calls attention to it in the prologue to the play: "nuestro tiempo no tolera, en España por lo menos, ciertas expresiones demasiado directas y disonantes para el oído del público contemporáneo" (Trans. "Nowadays Spanish audiences do not tolerate impudent or bold expressions" (Araquistáin, 1929: 12).

³⁷ Trans. "Pray protect me! Prevent their sending me to jail!"

the death of his fiancé Volpone, who already was in a bad state of health:

He sido insultada por ese hombre – por Bonario –, les dije; *me ha llamado virago*; me ha ofendido mis sentimientos de mujer y de novia; porque el *señor Volpone*, nobles magistrados, iba a ser hoy mismo mi esposo y *temo que esta indigna calumnia le mate.*³⁸

This weak part – like others – would be later improved by Rafael Tasis in his 1956 version of the play³⁹ where, following Araquistáin, he transformed his Canina into a widow, though more dramatically significant, since her report before the magistrates was essential to prove Volpone innocent beyond doubt. She declared that she had witnessed Celia and Bonaire leave Volpone's house tightly embraced, what, in her view, clearly attested to their guilt and to the falsehood of their accusation against Volpone.

Tasis's Canina, moreover, proved a livelier character who, unlike Araquistáin's Urraca, had received no promise of marriage from Volpone. That is why she took great care of keeping Volpone's interest in her as high as possible by presenting him with valuables: first, a bag of coins to help him recover his senses, so as to make their marriage possible, and later, a silver tray that might ensure Volpone's readiness to marry her on her return with a priest. Araquistáin's Urraca, however, limited her presents to a bag of coins left behind as a proof of love for Volpone, but dissociated from any immediate aim. She did not really need it because Volpone had already promised marriage to her.

Canina's industry met its reward in the end of the play where, in a light mood that is far more consistent than Araquistáin's, she reveals that all widows have been promised a husband: "M'han dit que el meu Volpone és viu, que tothom va a galeres, que la justícia va a dojo, i que donaran un marit a totes les vídues."⁴⁰ This piece of information introduces a note of relief into

³⁸ Trans. "I have been called names by that man – Bonario – *He's called me virago*, he's hurt my feelings – both as woman and as bride – since, most honoured fathers, *Mr. Volpone* was to become my husband today, and *I fear this ignominious slander might bring about his death*" [my italics].

³⁹ It was first staged at the Palacio de la Música, Barcelona, on the 19th of December, 1956.

⁴⁰ Trans. "I've been told that My Volpone is alive, that everyone is bound for the galleys, that Justice is overflowing, and that all widows have been granted a husband."

Volpone's final punishment, which thus seems lighter, an even desirable, to him. He declares that he had rather go to jail than marry a woman like Canina: "ara sí que m'en vaig de gust a la pressó!"⁴¹

Araquistáin's Urraca is, less comically, sent to a nunnery, in line with a spirit of poetic justice which is not wholly motivated in this case. It would have been a proper reward for Zweig's Canina, whose behaviour on stage is openly indecorous, but less so for Araquistáin's more decent Urraca. This idea, moreover, was probably prompted by Zweig's scene – modified by Romaine – where Canina tries to attract Corbaccio's attention by pretending that she is considering the possibility of entering a nunnery and thus needs his help to get rid of all her possessions.

The same spirit of narrow morality leads Araquistáin to make Volpone experience a sudden transformation from a libertine into a reformed rake by the noble and virtuous example of Celia. The problem, however, lies not in the transformation itself, but in the unconvincing way in which it is conducted, which limits itself to the level of oral delivery: "¡Su extraordinaria belleza me embruteció, su infinita bondad me ha purificado! ¡Es mi única derrota! Siempre la recordaré con amor y con vergüenza."⁴²

This device, however, seems to be akin to Araquistáin's spirit, since he makes extended use of it along the play, particularly – and regretfully – in the first trial scene, which is endlessly explained by means of the reported speech instead of simply, and effectively, performing it before the audience.

But this theatrical flaw is slight when compared to what comes next, that is to say, the sudden and unexpected revelation of Volpone's new trick which consists of pretending to be dead, after having left all his estate to Mosca. This revelation comes just after he has let us know how much fear he had experienced during the trial, which is unconvincing because no moment of tension whatsoever has been reported. But what is still more hilarious is Volpone's statement that he had struck on this new trick while mortally bored during the trial, and, later, when he had to refrain himself from laughing at the sight of the birds of prey surrounding his death bed: "(Volpone) Un buen artista no acaba nunca de

⁴¹ Trans. "I can't wait till I find myself in jail."

⁴² Trans. "Her extraordinary beauty drove me to frenzy; her infinite bounty has purified me. In this, alone, have I been vanquished. I will always think of her with love and shame."

concebir obras maestras. Y mientras yo yacía en el Scrutineo y luego aquí delante de mis candidatos, tuve que distraerme con la invención de una nueva treta para contener la risa."⁴³

One wonders how he could have had time to devise a new stratagem after stating the surprising verbosity of this dying fox, who rhetorically acknowledges his debt before every single character that has helped him be declared innocent.

The tone of the play progressively leads to confusion, with a witty Mosca forgetting he has left in the hands of the Chief Magistrate a vital document that had the power to annul Volpone's will in his favour; a Court deciding, before a walking spectre, whether they declare him alive or dead, and an exiled Volpone overjoyed at the idea of leading a penniless life together with his unfaithful Mosca.

The end of Araquistáin's version, though partially inspired in Zweig, is far more contradictory and theatrically unconvincing. It tries to link, with less ability than would Tasis later show, Jonson's and Zweig's denouements, and, in order to do so, he makes the judicial sentence 'secret'. By this means he tries to preserve the reputation of Venice untainted. Araquistáin's Volpone is not punished by Mosca – unlike in Zweig, where he had him disappear in the middle of the night, so that no one could find out that he was still alive – but rather by the Court of Justice, who, nevertheless, choose to keep it secret by solemnly proclaiming that Volpone is dead:

(Presidente) Voy a dictar sentencia. Ante todo, determino que el señor Volpone ha muerto ... Es lo más conveniente para todos. Una revisión del proceso, como sería obligado si tuviera existencia civil el señor Volpone, sería un padrón de ignominia para la ciudad.⁴⁴

As regards other characters, their lot is also supposed to be kept secret, which is difficult to imagine, particularly in the case of Corvino, who has been sentenced to the pillory:

⁴³ Trans. "(Volpone) A good artist never stops conceiving masterpieces. And, as I lay in the *Scrutineo*, and then here, before my candidates, I had to look for some kind of entertainment and thus devised a new trick to hold my laughter."

⁴⁴ Trans. "(President) I am about to pass sentence. First of all, I declare Volpone dead ... It is most fitting for us all. The proceedings would have to undergo revision, should Mr. Volpone's civil existence be acknowledged, which would bring ignominy upon the town."

(Presidente) Los *castigos*, como esta vista que ahora celebramos, serán *secretos*, pero efectivos ... Vos, señor Corvino, sois castigado a ser paseado por el gran canal con orejas de jumento y a ser conducido luego a la picota, desde donde *deklararéis, urbi et orbe*, que por consideraros indigno de vuestra inocente esposa, pedís su divorcio, obligándoos a devolverla a casa de sus padres con su dote triplicada.⁴⁵

The play ends in a grotesque note, with Volpone wondering before the audience whether he is alive or not. He realizes his own deadly appearance when a dull officer shows his surprise at a speaking corpse in shrouds, which leads him to exclaim: "¡Difunto yo! ¡Es verdad! ¡Viva Volpone!"⁴⁶

It looks as if Araquistáin had been infatuated with the idea of death in his adaptation, which could partly be due to the influence of Zweig's version, where death is repeatedly described and mentioned in all its possible forms, both natural and violent. But here the similarity ends, since, whereas Zweig's obsession with death and torture is appalling and oppressive,⁴⁷ Araquistáin's play with it is sometimes morbose, but, more often, harmless.

There are only a few instances that reveal the influence of Zweig's violent tone, which systematically stresses and develops any hint found in the text by Ben Jonson. An isolated example of that attitude can be found in Voltore's cynical invitation to the judges to torture his dying client: "Aplicadle hierros candentes a la planta de los pies. Metedle astillas por las uñas"⁴⁸

Canina's verbal violence, that shows her ready to torture Leone (Zweig's Bonario) while unjustly tied to the pillory, in spite of having freed Colomba (Celia) from Volpone's lusty embraces, is partly echoed by Araquistáin's Urraca, though her anger is not addressed at Bonario but at Volpone, whose untimely death and

⁴⁵ Trans. "(President) *Punishment* will prove effective, even though it be as *secret* as this trial ... Mr. Corvino, thou shalt be rowed through the Grand Canal, wearing ass's ears, and then be led to the berlino. There thou shalt *declare orbi et orbe* that you ask to be divorced from your wife, since you hold yourself unworthy of her, and wilt therefore return her to her parents with her dowry trebled" [my italics].

⁴⁶ Trans. "Am I dead? 'Tis true! Long live Volpone!"

⁴⁷ The evidence for this conclusion is so extensive in Zweig's version that it is impossible to share Karen Forsyth's view of the play (1981: 622) as "benign", "benevolent" or "tolerant", and that has, notwithstanding, been subscribed by a number of critics who, I fear, have not bothered to look into Zweig's text.

⁴⁸ Trans. "Apply red-hot irons to his feet. Stick chips into his nails ..."

testament in favour of Mosca has deprived her both of husband and fortune. If Zweig's Canina was willing to besmear Leone's lips with honey, so as to attract wasps to his mouth, Araquistáin's Urraca is ready to apply a hot iron to the feet of Volpone's corpse, so as to make sure that he is completely dead. Her disappointment leads her to push him energetically, and this kind of physical violence is shared by her co-inheritors-to-be, who join her in hitting the 'corpse', even with a stick (Corbaccio). Thus, Zweig's verbal violence is supplemented with physical action:

Corbaccio: (Entra en la habitación de Volpone y comienza a golpearle con el báculo)

¡Toma, ladrón, toma! ¡Para esto te di mis dineros! ¡Para esto desheredé a mi hijo! ¡Sanguijuela! ¡Devuélveme mis ducados, forajido!

(Le sigue golpeando)

Urraca: ¿Dónde están mis ahorros, costal de podredumbre?

(Le registra, le zarandea.)

¡No pienses quedarte con ellos, tunante! ¡No te hagas el muerto! ¡No eres digno de serlo!

(Apaga los cirios.)

Yo sé cómo se cura una catalepsia. ¡Mosca, tráeme una plancha caliente para que se la ponga en la planta de los pies, no sea que no esté muerto!

Corvino: (Hace ademán de herirle con su daga en el cuello)⁴⁹

This same character also partakes in Zweig's attraction towards death, although in a different vein, that instead of shudders provokes laughter. Thus, for example, she tries to show her own merits to Volpone by boasting of her wide experience in shrouding previous husbands.

⁴⁹ Trans.:

Corbaccio: (He enters Volpone's room and goes about beating him with his walking stick) That's for you, thief! Has the money I gave you come down to this? Did I disinherit my own son to be thus rewarded? Give me my ducats back, you leech, you outlaw! (He goes on beating him)

Urraca: Where have you put my savings, you rotten sack? (She pushes his body while searching it thoroughly for money)

Don't you believe you are going to keep it, you rogue! Don't pretend to be dead! You don't deserve it! (She puts the lights out) I know the remedy for a catalepsy. Mosca, fetch me a hot iron! I shall apply it to his feet in case he is not dead! (He (Corvino) pretends to be about to thrust his dagger into his neck) [my italics]

But, as we have already pointed out, death is not taken seriously in this play, in the same way as no concern is shown by Volpone about any change in personal fortune. That is why, when decreed banishment from Venice, he does not seem to regret it in the least but exclaims: "¡Otra vez al ancho mundo, a la vida, a la libertad!"⁵⁰ only to add: "¡Os dejo sin pena, paredes del pasado, que ya me encarcelábais con exceso! ¡Os pierdo sin pesar, tesoros de mi astucia, que ya me oprimíais demasiado con vuestras doradas cadenas!"⁵¹

The lack of tension that is obviously sought by Araquistáin does not seem to spot any contradiction in the depiction of this sudden change of attitude on the part of a character who, so far, had shown no sense of asphyxia at being surrounded by his treasures. It is the same kind of inconsistency that had led Zweig's Mosca to establish a similar kind of contraposition at the end of the play, even though the sense of liberation was not linked in that version to the free circulation of gold, as Mosca suggests, but to the final disappearance of an evil character.

Here that sense of freedom cannot be felt for the simple reason that no tension has been experienced in the whole comedy. And, in order to make sure that the spectator does not feel upset, Araquistáin has his Volpone immediately reconciled to his parasite, willingly ignoring his recent treason: "¡Ya te dije que éramos inseparables! ... Un momento de debilidad, mi amado Mosca, lo tiene cualquiera ..." ⁵²

The two leading characters of the play have been mischievous and have accordingly been punished by the law, but since no character in the play has greatly suffered, they are allowed a spirited departure into their happy exile.

This same kind of departure from the theatre would have been shared by the type of audience that Araquistáin probably had in mind when devising his own re-writing of the play. Benjamín Jarnés's lucid description of their expectations in "El arte y el público hacia 1930" can help us understand why Araquistáin offered them that particular version:

⁵⁰ Trans. "Back to the wide world! Back to life and freedom!"

⁵¹ Trans. "Ancient walls, I now leave you with no feeling of regret, since you had turned into a true prison! Cunningly acquired treasures, I hereby set you free, since your golden chains had proved too oppressive."

⁵² Trans. "Didn't I tell you we couldn't go separate ways? My dear Mosca, nobody is free from blemish."

El espectador de hoy quiere ... cocktails ... deliciosas mixtificaciones ... Una agradable pieza teatral será aquella en que se mezclen momentos trágicos a momentos de agudo humorismo. Algo más que tragicomedia, trágisainete, y mejor que nada, espectáculo ... Y bien agitada la mezcla. No desarrollar nada, sino presentarlo todo.⁵³

What he did not take such good care of doing was meeting the new tastes of some members of the audience who, according to Jarnés: "comienzan a desear verdaderos dramas."⁵⁴

References

- Araquistáin, L. 1929: *Volpone, o el Zorro*. Madrid: Editorial España.
- Araquistáin, L. 1929 (7/12): *ABC*: 43.
- Castrovido, R. 1929 (29/12): "Charla de la semana. El magnífico zorro, el pícaro Mosca y el pobre Gazapo." *Heraldo de Aragón*.
- Ceria. 1928 (24/11): "Estreno de Volpone." *ABC*: 37.
- Colman, G. 1778: *Volpone or the Fox. A Comedy as Altered from Ben Jonson*. London.
- Díez Canedo, E. 1929 (20/12): *El Sol*: 3.
- _____. 1929 (21/12): *El Sol*: 3.
- Floridor. 1929a (20/12): *ABC*: 33.
- _____. 1929b (21/12): *ABC*: 47.
- Forsyth, K. 1981: "Stefan Zweig's Adaptation of Jonson." *Modern Language Review* 76: 619-28.
- Herford, C.H. and P.&E. Simpson. 1925-1952: *Ben Jonson*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Jarnés, B. 1929: *Volpone. Farsa en tres actos y cinco cuadros*. Madrid: La Farsa.
- _____. 1931: "Notas autógrafas." *Textos e Imágenes*. Zaragoza: Cuadernos Jarnesianos 9.
- Precioso, A. and R. Sánchez Guerra. 1930: *Volpone. Comedia en cinco actos, arreglada por Stefan Zweig y Jules Romains*. Madrid: Colón.
- Primo de Rivera, M. 1929 (24/12): *ABC*: 17.
- Ribes Traver, P. (forthcoming) "Spanish Adaptations of Ben Jonson's *Volpone*." Ed. J.M. González de Sevilla. *Spanish Studies in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*. Newark: Delaware University Press.

⁵³ Trans. "Audiences nowadays ask for cocktails ... delicious mixtures ... Any dramatic piece that aims at being pleasant is to blend tragedy and sharp humour together. It is to exceed the limits of tragicomedy and enter those of farce or, still better, lavish spectacle ... The mixture is then to be well shaken. Nothing is to be developed, but merely shown on stage."

⁵⁴ Trans. "(audiences) start to wish for true plays."

- Romains, J. 1928: *Volpone. En collaboration avec Stefan Zweig d'après Ben Jonson*. Paris: Les Oeuvres Libres.
- Sánchez Guerra, R. 1929 (5/12): *ABC*: 11.
- Tasis i Marca. 1957: *Volpone. Adaptació de l'obra de Ben Jonson*. Palma de Mallorca: Moll.
- Tieck, L. 1829 (1793): *Herr von Fuchs. Schriften* 12. Berlin: G. Reimer.
- Trivelín. 1928 (30/12): "El teatro en 1929." *Blanco y Negro*: 28.
- Zweig, S. 1926: *Ben Jonsons Volpone: eine lieblose Komödie in drei Akten*. Postdam: Kiepenheuer Verlag.