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**THE FUNCTION OF BIBLICAL DISCOURSE IN *HAMLET*
AND ITS HANDLING IN JOSÉ MARÍA VALVERDE'S
TRANSLATION**

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Abstract

This study focuses on the use Shakespeare makes of the numerous quotations from, and references to, the Holy Scripture in *Hamlet*, paying special attention to the function of the intertextuality produced by the biblical discourse in this particular tragedy. A contrastive analysis of the Elizabethan text and the Spanish translations of José María Valverde, Luis Astrana Marín and Miguel Ángel Conejero Dionís-Bayer demonstrates that a corresponding biblical intertext is recreated to a great extent in the target language by these three authors, and especially by Valverde. The analysis also contributes to reaffirm the thesis that in no case was the objective of Shakespeare's scriptural intertextuality of an ethic or religious nature but purely an aesthetic or decorative one.

Key words

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, biblical discourse, intertextuality, contrastive analysis and translation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The effect or impact that a word, a phrase, a sentence or a text from the Holy Scripture, or a mere reference to the Bible, may have on literary discourse is not, in principle, any different to the bearing that any of those segments may have upon a manifestation of ordinary written or oral language. Likewise, the role of biblical intertextuality is not different, in essence, to that of a quotation or a simple scriptural reference in the speech of a preacher, a common believer or simply of any individual who quotes the Old or the New Testament for cultural, historical or any other kind of reasons. The function of the use of such quotation or reference may range from poles as distant from one another as in fact are the sectarian indoctrination or proselytism, on the one hand, and the mere decoration of the language, on the other. This function is not dissimilar to that of references of or allusions to classical literature. In other words, the biblical or scriptural intertextuality may have profound religious and theological or merely aesthetic and stylistic implications, or perhaps both, as has often been the case in mystical literature.

It is probably unnecessary to state that the Bible has been one of the main sources of all manifestations of art and particularly of literature. As far as the case of English literature is concerned, it is a generally acknowledged fact that the King James Version of the Bible was probably the most influential book on the literature written in English after 1611; and most critics and readers coincide in that this particular influence was in general more of an aesthetic nature than of a doctrinal or even ethical one. Any which way, there is little doubt that the strength of the religious component gradually decreased as the heyday of the religious debate of the Reformation weakened. This point is quite important because Shakespeare wrote the biggest part of his works

between 1590 and 1611, that is, before the publication date of the Authorised King James Version of the Bible.

It is also worth noting that there is not a single proof attesting to his personal involvement in the debate or controversy of the Reformation that was still alive during the last thirty years of his life. He was only a witness. In other words, neither could Shakespeare benefit from the high aesthetic quality of the Authorised Version nor was it easy for him to escape from the theological feuds in which his fellow writers and humanists were involved.

What is certain though is that in his numerous works there is not a single proof of, nor even a hint at, his participation in the mentioned religious controversy of the epoch. It is equally true, and quite relevant for the kind of analysis carried out in this study, that the main source of his abundant use of and frequent resource to biblical discourse was the so-called Geneva Bible¹. Although some critics and historians of culture suggest or maintain that he was also part of the team of translators of King James. In this respect, some of the evidence provided is highly interesting. For instance, Bambata Dolo writes:

According to Anthony Browder, *From The Browder File*, William Shakespeare was involved in the translation of the King James Bible of 1611 A.D. pointing to Psalm 46:3 and 9, as proof of his involvement in the translation projects. If we count 46 words from the beginning of *Psalm 46*, one will come upon the word, “Shake”, and counting 46 words backwards, from the end, one comes upon the word “Spear”, which equals to Shakespeare, indicating to us his secret signature in his approval of the finished product of the King James Bible of 1611 A.D. (...) William Shakespeare was 46 years old when the translation projects of the King James Version of the English Bible were completed.²

¹ Steven Marx, in his book *Shakespeare and the Bible*, states that “[the] first edition of the King James translation of the Bible was published in London in 1611 [so it] is unlikely that Shakespeare had a hand in this project, but not impossible” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 2013), p. 1. In the “General Note” of his book, he also agrees with the fact that “the [Geneva Bible] is one that most authorities agree Shakespeare read”. (*Ibid.*, p. iv).

² Bambata Dolo, *The Genesis of the Bible* (Bloomington: Author House, 2012), p. 703.

George Koppelman and Daniel Vechler provide a less interesting but probably more serious proof of the alleged participation of Shakespeare in the translation team and of his relation with both the Geneva Bible and the Authorised Version:

After the composition of *Henry V*, Shakespeare's biblical allusions turn sharply to the Geneva Bible, but before 1600 the echoes are notably not from the Geneva translation. According to Jonathan Bate, an allusion to the officially sanctioned Bishops' Bible over the Geneva "would have come from the memory of listening in church".³

From these statements and from the existing bibliography on this topic, it is difficult to conclude whether Shakespeare collaborated on the new version, but it is undeniable that he had an in-depth knowledge of the Holy Scripture and made excellent use of it.

The language of the Bible is indeed an inexhaustible source of literary inspiration⁴ and rhetorical devices; and this is true of all of its versions and renderings into the languages of all of the countries of Christendom. This is true because all of them count on translations, which rightly deserve the 'ancient', 'venerable' and 'memorable' qualifiers. This memorable and, to a certain extent, venerable character of the language of those translations accounts for the fact that not many authors have drawn on it for purely aesthetic reasons, yet rather for religious ones. This is quite logical especially if one bears in mind that the Bible has not only affected the mentality and beliefs of the peoples of those countries but also their languages. The enormous wealth of rhetorical figures, literary devices, literary forms and even phraseological

³ George Koppelman and Daniel Vechler. *Shakespeare's Beehive: An Annotated Elizabethan Dictionary Comes to Light* (New York: Axletree Press, 2014), p. 124.

⁴ See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), *The Pleasures of Reading* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), and *The World of Biblical Literature* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Harold Bloom, *Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), and *The Book of J* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990); Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), and *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of 'The Bible and Literature'* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990); Frank Vermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), and *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

units, phrases or single words of biblical origin that have entered the vernacular languages into which the Holy Writ has been translated is telling evidence of this fact.

The existence of this strictly linguistic influence or interlanguage in the ordinary language of the different peoples of Europe has its logical parallel in the strictly stylistic –formal, not ideological or doctrinal– influence or intertext in what might be called the “extraordinary” use of language, namely, in literature. It is therefore surprising that the analysts of the biblical language of Shakespeare fall so often into the trap of believing that Shakespeare shares many of the teaching principles, maxims or ideas expressed in the quotations or references from the Bible that he puts into the mouth of his characters⁵. It surprises, in short, that they misunderstand to such a degree and so frequently the text and the characters with the playwright. Probably their faith and their apostolic zeal often drown the objectivity exacted by literary criticism, deviating their attention from its real object, that is, the aesthetic and stylistic value of the work.

On other occasions, it is an excessive emphasis upon moralism that imbalances the critics’ judgement. This replacement of the aesthetic by the ethic is equally dangerous in literary criticism. It was Edmond Malone⁶, the pioneering critic to whom Shakespearean studies are otherwise heavily indebted, who inaugurated and started

⁵ The opposite case, so to speak, would be Bernard Shaw’s, for this dramatist uses and even subverts biblical language in order to emphasise his Christian disbelief, as Gustavo A. Rodríguez Martín has proven in his article “Shaw’s Subversion of Biblical Language” (in *Godly Heretics: Essays in Alternative Christianity in Literature and Popular Culture*, ed. Marc DiPaolo [Jefferson: McFarland & co., 2013], pp. 114-34).

⁶ Edmond Malone’s own edition of Shakespeare’s works –including essays on the dramatist’s biography or the plays in performance– remain invaluable. Among his works, both as an editor and as a critic, the following ones are very relevant: “An Attempt to Ascertain the Order in Which the Plays Attributed to Shakspeare Were Written”, in *The Plays of Williams Shakspeare in Ten Volumes* (1778); *A Dissertation of the Three Parts of “King Henry VI”* (1787); *An account of the incidents from which the title and part of the story of Shakspeare’s “Tempest” were derived, and its true date ascertained* (1809); and, especially, *Life of Shakspeare* (1821).

injecting this moralizing into his critical views, a line of interpretation later followed by Joseph Ritson⁷, Charles Wordsworth⁸ and William James Rolfe⁹.

As for the critics whose religious zeal overshadows the aesthetic value of Shakespeare's works, R. Chris Hassel, Jr., is worth mentioning. The author of "Hamlet's 'Too, Too Solid Flesh'", R. Chris Hassel, Jr., is an expert on the controversy over the role of faith and works maintained between Catholic and Protestant theologians in the time of the Reformation. Indeed, this author obstinately imposes upon the plot and the point of view of Shakespeare's play, and particularly upon Hamlet's motivations and intentions, his Lutheran if not Calvinistic doctrine. He tries to impress the reader with an equally impressive list of biblical quotations and references to prove the unprovable, namely, that Hamlet is not ultimately impelled by his wish to restore human decency in rotten Denmark but by his faith in providence¹⁰. For Hamlet's temporary reflection on what had to be done and on the course his action had to take had much more to do with "works" than with pure or blind faith –*sola fides sufficit*–, the doctrine of the Calvinists¹¹.

Another example of this criticism, which uses religious or biblical references to enter into theological controversy, is given to us by Omar Abdulaziz Alsaif in his "The

⁷ Ritson expresses his unfavourable opinion of Malone's edition of Shakespeare's plays in his *Cursory criticisms on the edition of Shakspeare published by Edmond Malone* (1792). Later on, he published his own edition: *Fairy Tales, Legends & Romances Illustrating Shakspeare & Other Early English Writers* (1875).

⁸ The first edition of his book *On Shakspeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible* was published in 1864, in London.

⁹ Rolfe is probably one of the key American figures on early Shakespearean criticism. His works are: *Shakespeare the Boy* (1896); *Life of Shakespeare* (1901); *Life of William Shakespeare* (1904); and *Shakespearean Proverbs* (1908).

¹⁰ Hassel, Jr., R. Chris, "Hamlet's 'Too, Too Solid Flesh'" in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 25. 3 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 609-22.

¹¹ Other approaches are also studied by R. Chris Hassel Jr. in his "Painted Women: Annunciation Motifs in Hamlet" (*Comparative Drama* 32, 1998: 47-84.), where he goes one step further in his comments about the possible similes that exist between artistic and literary images of the annunciation by the late sixteenth century, and Shakespeare's representation of Hamlet's mother and Ophelia on some significant occasions. As a matter of fact, the blasphemous intentions that he guesses in the purely aesthetic uses of this kind of iconography by Shakespeare is absolute nonsense.

Significance of Religion in Hamlet”. This author puts too much emphasis on the doctrinal value of the Judeo-Christian language which is interwoven by Shakespeare in the fabric of his characters, without mentioning its main function –which, as has been stated, is rhetorical and stylistic rather than religious. To mention just one example, he is unable to realize that when Shakespeare puts into Claudius’s mouth the most pious words of repentance and makes him ask for forgiveness in the humblest way possible, he does so in order to emphasise the wickedness of his unrepentant heart¹². In other words, Shakespeare is simply presenting a chiaroscuro painting in which the dark side is made to stand out; and not the image of a transformed soul.

Other critics are far more direct and claim to see in his works textual evidence of his Catholic or Protestant adscription. This is what Joseph Pearce, for instance, deduces and must have concluded from his readings of the dramatist’s plays and poems because apart from his works, very little is known about his personal life:

And so we come to the conclusion of our quest, discovering that Shakespeare had died as he had lived, as a resolute Catholic [and this] is sufficient to convict him of his Catholic convictions in the eyes of any right-minded jury in the venerable court of common sense.¹³

Pearce is not the only critic to claim Shakespeare’s Catholic adscription. Helen Hackett, in probably one of the best studies on the issue, refers to the alleged Roman Catholicism of Shakespeare:

... rumours that Shakespeare “died a papist” were in circulation since the late seventeenth century, and his putative Catholicism has been periodically investigated ever since.¹⁴

Then, she briefly reviews the state of the art and the recent literature on the matter¹⁵.

¹² Alsaif says that “... Claudius is devout at time; he blames himself and asks for forgiveness in church”. (“The significance of religion in Hamlet” in *Journal of English and Literature*. 3. 6. [October 2012], pp. 132-135), p. 133.

¹³ Joseph Pearce, *The Quest for Shakespeare* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), p. 172.

¹⁴ Helen Hackett, *Shakespeare and Elizabeth: The Meeting of Two Myths* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 229.

It is probably unnecessary to add that the topic is very attractive not only for Catholic¹⁶ but also for Protestant¹⁷ scholars, for Protestant scholarship soon reacted against such an “appropriation”. Thus, Sidney Lee, from the beginning to the end of his famous biography of the dramatist leaves no room for doubt about Shakespeare’s Anglican and Protestant conviction¹⁸. From Malone¹⁹ to our own day²⁰, the attractiveness of the supposed Catholicism of Shakespeare has inspired scholars of different persuasions and fields of knowledge, as well as writers. Yet probably none has contended in favour of Shakespeare’s Catholicism as passionately as Chesterton. His words are as follows:

¹⁵ “Scholars have always been baffled and intrigued by the lack of biographical evidence for Shakespeare between the birth of his twins Hamnet and Judith in Stratford in February 1585 and Robert Greene’s attack on him as a young rival playwright, an “upstart crow”, in London in 1592. Both Olver Baker in 1937 and E.K. Chambers in 1944 suggested that Shakespeare might have spent part of the 1580s in Lancashire, still a largely Catholic county, serving in various Catholic households, including Hoghton Tower, where a player named William Shakeshafte was mentioned in a family will of 1581. Honigmann found support for identification of Shakespeare with Shakeshafte in the fact that John Cottam, the schoolmaster in Stratford-upon-Avon from 1579 to 1581, came from a Lancashire recusant family who were connected with the Hoghtons. (...) Meanwhile, for the past few decades historians such as Christopher Haigh, J. J. Scarisbrick, and Eamon Duffy have reshaped our understanding of the English Reformation by compiling convincing evidence that Catholicism was deeply rooted in many parts of the English populace and was an enduring cultural presence long after the establishment of the Protestant Church of England in 1559. This has gradually filtered through to Shakespearean studies to encourage the idea of a Catholic Shakespeare, or at least a Shakespeare who came from a strongly Catholic family and community and whose worldview was shaped by the religious persecutions and tensions of the Elizabethan age. Versions of this account of Shakespeare were taken up by Stephen Greenblatt in *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2001) and *Will in the World* (2004) and by the popular historian Michael Wood in his 2003 BBC television series and book *In Search of Shakespeare*.” *Ibid.*, pp. 229-30.

¹⁶ “Claims for Shakespeare’s Catholicism date back to the seventeenth century, when John Speed referred to Robert Parsons and Shakespeare as “this papist and his poet” (1611) and Richard Davies claimed Shakespeare died a papist.” (Hannibal Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare*. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004]), p. 58.

¹⁷ One of the most relevant studies about ancient culture and Shakespeare is *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity: Greek and Latin Antiquity Presented in Shakespeare’s Play*, where after analysing Juliet’s words in act IV, scene i (“Shall I come to you at evening mass?”), Paul Stapfer confirms that “No Roman Catholic would ever made use of such an expression; consequently Shakespeare was a Protestant”. (Princeton: C. Kegan Paul and Company, 1880), p. 271.

¹⁸ Sidney Lee, *A Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Macmillan & co., 1901).

¹⁹ “Much was (...) made of a Catholic document supposedly discovered in the rafters of the Shakespeare house in Stratford, signed by John Shakespeare, Shakespeare’s father. Edmund Malone published this in his 1790 edition of Shakespeare, persuaded that it was genuine and that it indicated that John Shakespeare was a Catholic recusant, but he changed his mind and omitted it from the 1796 edition. The document itself subsequently disappeared, but arguments for a Catholic Shakespeare persisted.” Hamlin, *op. cit.* p. 58-9.

²⁰ See E.A.J. Honigmann, *Shakespeare: The ‘Lost Years’*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

That Shakespeare was a Catholic is a thing that every Catholic feels by every sort of convergent common sense to be true (...). Nearly all Englishmen are either Shakesperians or Miltonians. I do not mean that they admire one more than the other; because everyone in his senses must admire both of them infinitely. I mean that each represents something in the make-up of England; and that the two things are so antagonistic that it is really impossible not to be secretly on one side or the other (...). Shakespeare represents the Catholic, Milton the Protestant (...). Whenever Shakespeare speaks of religion (which is only seldom), it is of a religion that has made him.²¹

The clearest forerunner of this militant Christian criticism is to be found in bishop Charles Wordsworth. For the large quantity, and even the undeniable quality, of Shakespeare's biblical intertextuality analysed and commented upon by bishop Charles Wordsworth in his classic study *On Shakspeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible*, special attention will be given to the kind of analysis he carries out in this study. For bishop Wordsworth's pioneering work –which is an inevitable reference for all critics and scholars specialised in this dimension of Shakespearean studies– stands out amongst the critical literature which confuses the aesthetic with the doctrinal function of biblical discourse in Shakespeare's literary text and, as a result, the beliefs of the author and those with which he imbues his characters. In this sense, it is not difficult to disagree more with the statement he makes in the "Introduction" of his book:

[Shakespeare was] a diligent and a devout reader of the Word of God; and that he has turned this reading to far more and far better account than any of his critics would seem to have suspected, or at all events has yet attempted to point out. His marvellous knowledge of the Book of Nature is admitted on all hands: his knowledge of the Book of Grace though far less noticed, will be found, I believe, to have been scarcely less remarkable.²²

A rigorous and clarifying analysis and a clear-cut idea of the purpose and function of the abundance of quotations from and references to the Scripture in Shakespeare's works is of the utmost relevance for a valid interpretation of his works and, consequently, indispensable for a valid evaluation of the translations' faithfulness. This

²¹ G.K. Chesterton, *Illustrated London News* (May 18, 1907).

²² Charles Wordsworth, *On Shakspeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible*. 3rd ed. (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1880), p. 2.

kind of analysis is even more necessary in a work like *Hamlet*, and not only due to the intertextual wealth that this play entails, but also because of the depth of Hamlet's thoughts and the contradictions he undergoes and endures. On occasions, his inner conflict between hesitation and resolution takes the form of biblical sententious formulas or exempla that in his mouth appear as paradoxical.

The translation chosen for the contrastive analysis of the original text and its reception in Spanish is José María Valverde's²³. However, in order to better measure and evaluate the scope of its degree of faithfulness or deviation from the original, the answers given in Valverde's text are compared with those of two other translators: Luis Astrana Marín²⁴ and Miguel Ángel Conejero Dionís-Bayer²⁵.

²³ José María Valverde, trad., *Hamlet / Macbeth*. (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1994).

²⁴ Luis Astrana Marín, trad., *Obras completas de William Shakespeare*. (Madrid: Aguilar, 1966).

²⁵ Miguel Ángel Conejero Dionís Bayer *et al.*, trad., *Hamlet*. 14th ed. (Madrid: Anaya, 1992, 2009).

2. CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF SHAKESPEARE'S ORIGINAL TEXT AND VALVERDE'S TRANSLATION

2.1 Prince Hamlet's biblical discourse

One of the first episodes that is presented to us, which is not only surrounded by a religious halo but also wrapped in a rich discourse of biblical references and connotations, is the appearance of the Ghost. Let us take a look at the Ghost's first words, his dialogue with Hamlet, and the conversation that Hamlet maintains with Horatio:

But virtue, as it never will be mov'd
Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,
So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd,
Will sate itself in a celestial bed
And prey on garbage.

(...)

Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand
Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatch'd;
Cut off ev'n in the blossoms of my sin,
Unhous'led, disappointed, unanel'd,
No reckoning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head.

(...)

HORATIO: There's no offence, my lord.

HAMLET: Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is, Horatio,
And much offence too. Touching his vision here,
It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you.

(...)

HAMLET: Never to speak of this that you have seen,
Swear by my sword.

GHOST: (*beneath*) Swear

HAMLET: *Hic et ubique?* Then we'll shift our ground.
Come hither, gentlemen,
And lay your hands again upon my sword.
Never to speak of this that you have heard:
Swear by my sword.

GHOST: (*beneath*) Swear by his sword.

(I, v, 53-7; 74-9; 135-8 and 154-161).²⁶

It is not difficult to understand that, precisely for the halo of mystery and for the high doses of religious concepts and scriptural references of the language contained in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the criticism of the most spiritual sign has attempted to give a transcendental feeling to this scene or even to use it with a pastoral or theological intention²⁷.

As stated before, a case in point of this quasi-pastoral approach is that of Wordsworth in his otherwise well-informed and very useful book. Thus, referring to Hamlet's invocations to the "Angels and ministers of grace" (I, iv, 18) or "heavenly Guards!" (III, iv, 96-7), Wordsworth states:

A devout invocation for the ministering help of the Holy Angels is not to be confounded with the impiety of addressing them in prayer. The one is encouraged, the other is forbidden in Holy Scripture. Such invocations abound in *Hamlet*, and though the story of that play refers to a period long before the Reformation, and though, on that account, Shakespeare would seem to have intended to represent the characters as tinged, to some extent, with the errors of Romanism, yet I am not sure that upon the point now before us he has transgressed the limits which a sound theology would impose.²⁸

Furthermore, as can be seen in these very words, this criticism hastens towards Catholic heresy ("errors of Romanism"), especially the reference that the Ghost makes to the Purgatory in which he finds himself, for having been denied extreme unction (for having died "unhousel'd" and "unaneal'd" [I, v, 77])²⁹.

²⁶ Citations to the text of *Hamlet* are to *The Complete Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and Stanley Wells. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

²⁷ All the citations to the Bible are from *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*, ed. Lloyd Berry (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Bibles, 2007; repr. from University of Wisconsin Press, facs. Edn., 1969).

²⁸ Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 117-118.

²⁹ The biblical support traditionally used by the Catholic Church to prove the existence of Purgatory is to be found in *Luke* 12:58-9 ("While thou goest with thine adversary to the ruler, as thou art in the way, give diligence in the way, that thou mayest be delivered from him, lest he draw thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the jailer, and the jailer cast thee into prison. I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the utmost mite.") and in *2 Mac.* 12:46 ("And also in that he perceived that there was great favour laid up for those that died godly, it was an holy and good thought. Whereupon he made a reconciliation for the dead, that they might be delivered from sin."). One should bear in mind though that

The other trend of criticism, that is, that of the ideologically or doctrinally neutral scholars usually takes two opposite directions. Indeed, while some of these critics limit themselves to simply giving the textual reference of the biblical quotation, echo or allusion; others succumb to the temptation of excessive erudition.

Among the former are included most editors of this play for, though their scriptural notes very seldom contain explanations about the textual function of biblical language, they provide the basis for further study. Thus, Edwards, while referring to “unhousel’d” and “unaneal’d”, limits himself to gloss these terms as “without the sacrament, not annointed? Or prepared for death, without extreme unction”³⁰; and as far as saint Patrick’s mention is concerned, he says: “it is not clear why Hamlet should pick on this saint. Some say it is because he was the patron saint of Purgatory”³¹. To give another example, Raffel, in the only footnote that is included about the Ghost in his edition, also limits himself to saying that “the radiant angel” is Satan³², an explanation that appears on all levels to be erroneous, both for the context itself and for the destruction of parallelism that exists in the original between this utterance and the previous one.

A telling example of those who lapse into excessive erudition is to be found in Nayeem’s and Uddin’s “Hamlet’s Procrastination is Contrived from Puritan Obedience”. Speaking about the Ghost of King Hamlet, they amply elaborate upon the belief in spirits and the Christians’ acceptance of their appearance, above all those from

the two books of Maccabees are considered to be apocryphal by the Protestant Churches and the Church of England. Manuel Sánchez García has elaborated on the echo of *Matthew* 5:26 and *Luke* 12:59 in *The Taming of the Shrew*. See *Estudio Textual y Traductológico de ‘The Taming of the Shrew’* (Cáceres: Servicio Publicaciones Universidad de Extremadura, 1999), especially pp. 46-56.

³⁰ Philip Edwards, ed, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. 2nd ed. The New Cambridge Shakespeare. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 108.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

³² Burton Raffel, ed, *Hamlet. The Annotated Shakespeare* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 44.

the Catholic Church, which was the only one in existence in Denmark in the thirteenth century. Their conclusion is that souls, and often those which are in Purgatory, appear to us and that Hamlet “is a believer, strong one, without compunction”³³. Upon this work it would be possible to pronounce a sentence as Shakespearian as ‘much ado about nothing’. In order to conclude that the Danish society of the thirteenth century, and the European for that matter, were Christian and consequently Hamlet as well, it is not necessary to write an article: an article in which, of course, not a single word is mentioned about the function or the aesthetic and stylistic value of the Ghost in the play.

In short, the attitude of authors such as those mentioned above, let alone bishop Wordsworth, deviates the reader’s attention from what should have been the very purpose of their research and writings, namely, the function of biblical discourse in Shakespeare’s magnificent intertext. Rather than offering an in-depth analysis of the shaping of Shakespeare’s characters, they give a religious or theological sermon, choosing to take advantage of the occasion, as bishop Wordsworth does, to criticise the Roman Catholic doctrine that, as has been seen, he despatches as “Romanism”³⁴. Yet, it is worth insisting on the fact that it would be unfair not to acknowledge their textual contribution to the study of this play and to Shakespeare, in general. Their help in identifying the scriptural passages that Shakespeare used or had in mind is invaluable.

In Valverde’s translation, as in Astrana’s and Conejero’s, the references to the angels and to saint Patrick, the terms “unhousel’d” and “unaneal’d”, and the phrase

³³ Abu Nayeem and Kawsar Uddin, “Hamlet’s Procrastination is Contrived from Puritan Obedience” in *ASA University Review*, 7. 1 (January-June, 2013), p. 205.

³⁴ A good example of how misleading this doctrinal criticism may be is mentioned by José Luis Oncins Martínez in a monograph on the Spanish translations of *Timon of Athens*. In reference to Apemantus’s words “Feasts are too proud to give thanks to the gods” (*Timon of Athens* I.ii.60), Oncins Martínez says: “En opinión de C. Wordsworth (...), esta bendición a la mesa a cargo de Apemantus resultaría en cierto modo un anacronismo”. (*Estudio Textual y Traductológico de ‘Timon of Athens’* [Cáceres: Servicio de Publicaciones Universidad de Extremadura, 1996], p. 92).

“swear on the sword” are faithfully rendered. And any critic sharing the same doctrinal or even sectarian impetus of bishop Wordsworth might have written similar things after having read the Spanish texts. This probably testifies to both the similarity of the methods and strategies of proselytism everywhere and to the loyalty of these translations. This is Valverde’s text:

Pero igual que la virtud no se dejará mover nunca aunque la lascivia la corteje bajo la forma celestial, así la lujuria, aunque esté unida a un ángel radiante, se depravará hasta en un lecho celestial y se hartará de basura. (...) [A]sí, mientras dormía, fui despojado por una mano de hermano, de la vida, la corona y la Reina, todo a la vez: podado en plena floración de mi pecado, sin comulgar, sin preparar, sin ungir: sin contar con nada, sino enviado por mi cuenta con todas mis imperfecciones sobre mi cabeza (...) HORACIO: No hay ofensa, señor. / HAMLET: Sí que la hay, por San Patricio, Horacio, y mucha ofensa, por cierto, respecto a esta vision de aquí (...) HAMLET: No hablar nunca de lo que habéis visto. Jurad por mi espada. / ESPECTRO: ¡Jurad! / HAMLET: *Hic et ubique?* Entonces cambiaremos de sitio. Venid acá, caballeros, y volved a poner las manos en mi espada. Jurad por mi espada no hablar jamás de lo que habéis oído. / ESPECTRO: ¡Jurad!³⁵.

Astrana’s translation reads as follows:

Pero así como la virtud sera siempre incorruptible, aunque la tiene la lujuria bajo una forma celestial, así también la incontinenencia, aunque está enlazada a un radiante serafín, se hastiará en un tálamo divino e irá a cebarse en la basura (...) Así fue como, estando durmiendo, perdí a la vez, a manos de mi hermano, mi vida, mi esposa y mi corona; segado en plena flor de mis pecados, sin viático, óleos ni preparación, mis cuentas por hacer y enviado a juicio con todas mis imperfecciones sobre mi cabeza. (...) HORACIO: No hay ofensa alguna, señor. / HAMLET: ¡Sí, y por San Patricio; la hay, Horacio, y demasiado grande! ... Respecto de esa aparición, es un espíritu venerable, permitid que lo diga. (...) HAMLET: ¡No hablar nunca de lo que habéis visto! ¡Juradlo por mi espada! / SOMBRA: (*Bajo tierra.*) ¡Jurad! / HAMLET: *Hic et ubique?* Pues mudemos de sitio ... ¡Acercaos aquí, caballeros, y poned nuevamente las manos sobre mi espada! ... ¡No hablar nunca de lo que habéis oído! ¡Juradlo por mi espada! / SOMBRA: (*Bajo tierra.*) ¡Jurad!³⁶.

Let us now see Conejero’s text:

Pero del mismo modo que la virtud será siempre inamovible,
aunque la lujuria la corteje en forma angelical,
así también el vicio, aunque al cielo se encadenara,
habrá de saciarse en tálamo divino
y cebarse en la inmundicia.

³⁵ Valverde, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-8.

³⁶ Astrana, *op. cit.*, pp. 1344-6.

(...)

De este modo, mientras dormía, y por la acción
de un hermano, fui desposeído de reina, vida y corona,
todo de una vez. Y en la flor de todos mis pecados,
sin viático, sin sacramentos, sin unción,
sin la cuenta de mis deudas, enviado a responder
de todas mis culpas e imperfecciones.

(...)

HORACIO: No hay ofensa, señor.

HAMLET: ¡Sí, por San Patricio! Sí que la hay, Horacio.

¡Y ofensa grande! En cuanto a la aparición ...

Es un espectro honrado, permitídmelo.

(...)

HAMLET: Que nunca hablaréis de lo que habéis visto,
Jurad sobre mi espada.

ESPECTRO: ¡Jurad!

HAMLET: ¿*Hic et ubique*? Probemos a cambiar de sitio.

Venid aquí, señores,

Y poned vuestras manos sobre mi espada.

¡Jurad sobre mi espada

que no hablaréis de lo que habéis visto!

ESPECTRO: ¡Jurad!³⁷.

In act I, scene ii, right after Claudius makes it public that he has just married the widow of his brother –using the syntactically characteristic complex and convoluted discourse, employed so often by Shakespeare to characterise his most wicked characters– Hamlet utters some greatly meaningful words. It is a moment of deep frustration, from remembering not only the death and the type of death of his father, but also what he considers to be the loss of his mother. The words that spring to his mind, which are clearly noted by Wordsworth³⁸, Dover Wilson³⁹, Markus and Jordan⁴⁰,

³⁷ Conejero, *op.cit.*, pp. 195-215.

³⁸ Wordsworth says: "... [There] is nothing in which he is more emphatic than in representing the act of suicide as a direct violation of the Divine law" (*op. cit.*, p. 149).

³⁹ Dover Wilson says: "132. *His canon 'gainst self-slaughter* Apparently the sixth commandment is meant." (Dover Wilson, John (ed.). *Hamlet*. 2nd edition. The New Shakespeare. 1936. Reprint. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969], p. 152).

⁴⁰ Markus and Jordan say: "134 *canon* divine law./self-slaughter suicide. The Sixth Commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill', was thought to prohibit suicide as well as murder." (Markus, Julia and Paul Jordan, eds., *Hamlet*. [London: Longman, 1993], p. 34).

Hibbard⁴¹ and Wells⁴², among others, entail a complete reflection upon the sixth commandment from the Law of God, which, as it was understood at the time, also extended itself to imply suicide:

O that this too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!
(I, ii, 129-32).

As is apparent throughout the plot of the complete work, the context of such suicidal temptation or of the *tedium vitae* of the young Prince corresponds more to a temporary, transitional situation than to a permanent state of mind. This mood, as well as the doubts which taunted Hamlet at this critical moment, cannot define a person who, as Arnold Kettle proves, cannot be considered the embodiment of doubt and frustration but, on the contrary, the personification of action⁴³. As a matter of fact, the Prince has little to do with the image of doubt, indecision and inactivity generated by a popular, and even academic, widespread cliché. In any case, this is the prevailing significance of those words, which are so similar to those that Hamlet also utters in his famous soliloquy in act III, scene i, lines 56-89, where he even considers the possibility of making “his quietus ... with a bare bodkin”.

In the translation of Valverde, the key words in the scriptural intertextuality are even more recognisable than in the Elizabethan original, since the term ‘ley’ is a perfect

⁴¹ Hibbard says: “132 **His canon ‘gainst self-slaughter** It was taken for granted that suicide was prohibited by the sixth commandment, ‘Thou shalt not kill’ (Exodus 20:13).” (Hibbard, G.R., ed., *Hamlet*, [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998], p.68)

⁴² Wells says: “132: *His canon ‘gainst self-slaughter*: The sixth commandment, ‘Thou shalt not kill’ (Exodus 20:13), was generally regarded as a sufficient condemnation of suicide./*canon*: Religious law.” (Wells, Stanley, ed., *William Shakespeare: Hamlet*. 1980. Reprint. [London: Penguin Books, 2005], p. 190).

⁴³ See Arnold Kettle, “From *Hamlet* to *Lear*.” *Shakespeare in a Changing World*. Ed. by Arnold Kettle. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1964), especially pp. 160-171.

equivalent for ‘law’, and appears on several occasions in *Exodus*⁴⁴, while ‘canon’ does not appear even once. Valverde’s translation is as follows:

¡Ah, si esta carne, demasiado, demasiado sólida, se fundiese, se derritiese y se disolviese en un rocío! ¡O si el Eterno no hubiera fijado su ley contra el suicidio! ¡Oh Dios, oh Dios! ¡Qué fatigosas, rancias e inútiles me parecen todas las costumbres de este mundo! ¡Qué asco me da! ¡Ah, qué asco, qué asco! Es un jardín sin escardar, que crece para dar semilla: sólo lo poseen cosas podridas y de naturaleza torpe.⁴⁵

Consequently, Valverde’s rendering of ‘His canon’ (‘su ley’) in this particular passage, which coincides with Astrana’s⁴⁶ and Conejero’s⁴⁷ translations, is truly adequate and telling for the Spanish reception.

In this sense, the reflections that Hamlet makes in the same brief monologue which follows shortly after, highlight Hamlet’s belief in the things of this world being of little relevance. Hamlet, to be precise, says:

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on’t! ah, fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature

⁴⁴ “And it shall be a sign unto thee upon thy hand, and for a remembrance between thine eyes, that the Law of the Lord may be in thy mouth; for by a strong hand the Lord brought thee out of Egypt.” (*Exodus* 13:9); “Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will cause bread to rain from heaven to you, and the people shall go out, and gather which is sufficient for every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my Law or not.” (*Exodus* 16:4); “And the Lord said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep my commandments, and my laws?” (*Exodus* 16:28); “When they have a matter, they come unto me, and I judge between one and another, and declare the ordinances of God, and his laws.” (*Exodus* 18:16); “Now these are the laws, which thou shalt set before them.” (*Exodus* 21:1); “Afterward Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the Laws; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the things which the Lord hath said, will we do.” (*Exodus* 24:3); “And the Lord said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mountain, and be there, and I will give thee tablets of stone, and the Law, and the Commandment, which I have written, for to teach them.” (*Exodus* 24:12) and “And they shall be for Aaron and his sons, when they come into the Tabernacle of the Congregation, or when they come unto the altar to minister in the holy place, that they commit not iniquity, and so die. *This shall be a law forever unto him and to his seed after him.*” (*Exodus* 28:43).

⁴⁵ Valverde, *op.cit.* p. 14.

⁴⁶ “¡Oh! ¡Que esta sólida, excesivamente sólida, carne pudiera derretirse, deshacerse y disolverse en rocío! ... ¡O que no hubiese fijado el Eterno su ley contra el suicidio! ... ¡Oh Dios! ¡Dios! ... ¡Qué fastidiosas, rancias, vanas e inútiles me parecen las prácticas de este mundo! ... ¡Vergüenza de ello! ¡Ah! ¡Vergüenza! ¡Es un jardín de malas hierbas sin escardar, que crece para semilla; productos de naturaleza grosera y amarga lo ocupan únicamente!”. (Astrana, *op.cit.*, p. 1338).

⁴⁷ “Oh, si la carne mía sólida se disolviera,/fundiera su hielo y se tornara rocío./Oh, si el Dios eterno no hubiera dictado/su ley contra el suicidio. ¡Dios! ¡Oh, Dios!/¡Qué estériles, vanas, inútiles, insípidas/se presentan ante mí las cosas de este mundo!/¡Qué absurdo! ¡Oh, huerto sin cultivo/que engendra semillas! Es fétido y repugnante/todo lo que lo habita”. (Conejero, *op.cit.*, pp. 127-9).

Possess it merely. (...)
(I, ii, 133-7).

These words, which, as Wordsworth states, are interwoven with those that appear in *I John* (2:15)⁴⁸ and *James* (4:4)⁴⁹, are meant to reflect the transitory moment that Hamlet has to face and endure. These words are very much in keeping with King Solomon's apothegm in *Ecclesiastes*, for though they are less literal, they probably reflect the status of Hamlet's psyche on that occasion better than the extracts chosen by Wordsworth. That is *Ecclesiastes* 1:2: "vanitas vanitatis et omnia vanitas"⁵⁰. It should be made clear, however, that Hamlet's previous penchant is not the abandonment of the things of this world or the religious conversion that could be inferred from the words of bishop Wordsworth⁵¹, but rather a commitment to the things of this world and against corruption, an allegiance to the *res publica* of Denmark.

In relation to the translation that Valverde offers for these words of Hamlet, there is no doubt that they contain somewhat of a biblical reflection:

¡Qué fatigosas, rancias e inútiles me parecen todas las costumbres de este mundo!
¡Qué asco me da! ¡Ah, qué asco, qué asco! Es un jardín sin escardar, que crece para
dar semilla: sólo lo poseen cosas podridas y de naturaleza torpe.⁵²

Having said that, it is important to add on this occasion that Conejero, in translating "uses of this world" for "cosas de este mundo"⁵³, facilitates even further the essence of the scriptural echo for the Spanish receptor of the text. In the phrase "las cosas de este

⁴⁸ "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (*John* 2:15).

⁴⁹ "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the amity of the world is the enmity of God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, maketh himself the enemy of God." (*James* 4:4).

⁵⁰ "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher: vanity of vanities, all is vanity." (*Ecclesiastes* 1:2)

⁵¹ "Shakspeare divides the world into which is familiar to us, and which is unknown. (...) And of which is familiar to us he, more than once, draws a picture, the colouring of which, however unattractive, must be allowed to be faithfully and severely scriptural" (*op.cit.*, p. 144).

⁵² Valverde, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁵³ Conejero, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

mundo”, translated by Bóver-Cantera⁵⁴ and Schökel⁵⁵, among others, it is easier for the Spanish audience to identify the “vanitas vanitatis” spirit than in formulas such as the ones suggested by Valverde (“cosas podridas y de naturaleza torpe”⁵⁶) or Astrana’s (“las prácticas todas de este mundo”⁵⁷).

The purpose of all these biblical allusions here is merely rhetorical or stylistic. In other words, the reference to *Exodus* is not meant to illustrate a theological or religious disquisition. On the contrary, it serves simply to add a touch of Christian flavour to Hamlet’s psychic profile, and to highlight what he considers to be the necessity to take actions against the rottenness of Denmark.

The identification of this function is what is relevant for the translator, simply because he has to recreate the same situation –the psychological mood of the character– in the target language. This is why, as has been pointed out, neither the unnecessary doctrinal disquisitions nor the simple reference to the biblical *locus* that most critics offer add much to the understanding of the literary value of the play.

Having witnessed the promptness with which Gertrude, whose husband is barely in the grave, marries and shares her bed with Claudius, a fact that Hamlet considers to

⁵⁴ “¡Vanidad de vanidades, dice Qohélet; vanidad de vanidades, todo es vanidad! ¿Qué proverbio obtiene el hombre de todo el esfuerzo que realiza bajo el sol? Una generación se va y otra generación viene, mas la tierra siempre permanece. Levántese el sol y el sol se traspone y tiende hacia el sitio por donde sale. Dirígesse hacia el mediodía y se vuelve luego al norte, torna y retorna, marcha el viento y a sus giros el viento vuelve. Todos los ríos van al mar y el mar se llena; al lugar donde los ríos caminan, allá ellos tornan a ir. Todas las cosas de este mundo se obtienen con esfuerzo cuanto nadie podría decir: no se sacia el ojo de ver ni se harta el oído de oír” (*Eclesiastés* 1:2-8). Bóver-Cantera, trad., *Sagrada Biblia*. (Madrid: Editorial Católica, 1961).

⁵⁵ “¡Vanidad de vanidades –dice Qohélet–; vanidad de vanidades, todo es vanidad! ¿Qué saca el hombre de todas las fatigas que lo fatigan bajo el sol? Un generación se va, otra generación viene, mientras la tierra siempre está quieta. Sale el sol, se pone el sol, jadea por llegar a su puesto y de allí vuelve a salir. Camina al sur, gira al norte, gira y gira y camina al viento. Todos los ríos caminan al mar y el mar no se llena, llegados al sitio adonde caminan, dede allí vuelven a caminar. Todas las cosas de este mundo cansan y nadie es capaz de explicarlas. No se sacian los ojos de ver ni se hartan los oídos de oír”, (*Eclesiastés* 1:2-8). Schökel (trad.), *Biblia del Peregrino*. (Bilbao: Ediciones Mensajero y Ediciones Ega, 1995).

⁵⁶ Valverde, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁵⁷ Astrana, *op. cit.*, p. 1338.

be incestuous and which therefore breaks his heart, the young Prince utters the following words:

A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father's body
Like Niobe, all tears- why she, even she
(O God! a beast that wants discourse of reason
Would have mourn'd longer) married with my uncle;
My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules. Within a month,
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not, nor it cannot come to good.
But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue!
(I, ii, 147-60).

The biblical key⁵⁸, in this case, resides within the words “break, my heart”, in which not only do the verses of the psalmist resonate⁵⁹; yet so too does the voice of the prophet Isaiah⁶⁰ and even that of the evangelist Luke⁶¹. It is evident that Hamlet does not invoke, neither in this case nor probably throughout the whole work, the divine compassion that is reminded to us by the psalmist, the prophet and the evangelist. Contrarily, he only employs the image of the “broken heart” in order to show his sorrow, and even the magnitude of both his pain, and the hatred and resentment that will

⁵⁸ Wells says: “*break, my heart*: A powerful phrase which derived its currency from its use in the Bible: ‘He healeth those that are broken in heart’ (*Psalms* 147:3; also 51:17 (Geneva Bible, 1587) and 69:20; *Isaiah* 61:1 (Geneva Bible); *Luke* 4:16-18) . Cf. *Now cracks a noble heart* (V.2.353). The modern use of the phrase as referring sentimentally to amorous disappointment came much later.” (*op. cit.*, p. 191-2).

⁵⁹ “He healeth those that are broken in heart, and bindeth up their sores” (*Psalms* 147:3); “The sacrifices of God are a contrite spirit: a contrite and a broken heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (*Psalms* 51:17); and “Rebuke hath broken mine heart, and I am full of heaviness, and I looked for some to have pity on me, but there was none: and for comforters, but I found none” (*Psalms* 69:20).

⁶⁰ “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, therefore hath the Lord anointed me: he hath sent me to preach good tidings unto the poor, to bind up the broken hearted, to preach liberty to the captives, and to them that are bound, the opening of the prison” (*Isaiah* 61:1).

⁶¹ “The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me, that I should preach the Gospel to the poor, he hath sent me, that I should heal the broken hearted, that I should preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, that I should set at liberty them that are bruised” (*Luke* 4:18)

lead him to carry out his revenge or to administrate justice, according to what is understood by the work⁶². Its function, therefore, is more rhetorical than religious.

The image of the “broken heart” that is seen in *Isaiah*, the *Psalms* and the *Gospel of saint Luke*, and which Hamlet reproduces literally in his monologue, is maintained in the translation of Valverde and that of Astrana Marín. Indeed, though the phrase “corazón quebrantado”⁶³ possesses a stronger biblical echo than “corazón roto”⁶⁴, both forms are frequent in the Spanish translations of the Holy Scripture. Consequently both in Valverde’s and Astrana’s translations, the scriptural resonance is retained. Valverde’s translations reads as follows: “Pero que se rompa mi corazón, porque tengo que contener mi lengua”⁶⁵. And this is Astrana’s target text: “Pero ¡rómpete, corazón, pues debo refrenar la lengua!”⁶⁶. In Conejero’s translation, by opting for the formula “¡Corazón, estalla ahora!”⁶⁷, the connotative value that “quebarantar” and “romper” keep, as well as their association with the scriptural text, is lost. Thus, neither the audience nor the reader are able to perceive the biblical echo.

Shortly after the Ghost has informed Hamlet of the incestuous relationship that had caused his poisoning and even his passing through Purgatory, Hamlet lets out the known cry of protest against what he considers to be “time out of joint”. This comes

⁶² As well the traditional interpretation of this play as a ‘classic revenge tragedy’, there is another one which is far more inkeeping with Shakespeare’s humanistic view of life. This alternative interpretation sees Hamlet as the inevitable victim of an honest humanist trying to shun from the feudal thirst for revenge in favour of the modern search of justice. Only in the light of this perspective, Hamlet’s interest in persuading people of the righteousness of his cause and even his procrastination can be understood acquires meaning. Cf. Arnold Kettle, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-171.

⁶³ “El ultraje quebró mi corazón, estoy perdido/esperé compasión, pero fue en vano” (*Salmo* 69:20, Martín Nieto (trad.), *La Santa Biblia*, Madrid: Editorial San Pablo, 1988).

⁶⁴ “[É] cura los corazones rotos y venda sus heridas” (Martín Nieto, *op. cit.*, *Salmo* 147:3).

⁶⁵ Valverde, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

⁶⁶ Astrana, *op.cit.*, p. 1338.

⁶⁷ Conejero, *op.cit.*, p. 131.

with a curse that Wells equates to that of Job, as he states that “Hamlet seems to be following *Job* (3:1-3) in cursing the day of his nativity”⁶⁸. Hamlet says:

The time is out of joint. O cursed spite
That ever I was born to set it right!
Nay, come, let's go together.
(I, v, 189-191)

Meanwhile, the curse of Job reads:

And Job cried out, and said, Let the day perish, wherein I was born, and the night when it was said, There is a man child conceived. Let that day be darkness, let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it.⁶⁹

As can be seen, Wells limits himself to focusing only on the parallels between the two texts. He fails to capture, however, that this symmetry is only formal because there is a semantic bifurcation that differentiates the nature of the two curses. Moreover, it is that differentiating feature where the aesthetic value of the trace of Job's words resides. Thus, while Job curses his luck to then right away passively accept it as a design of God's will⁷⁰; Hamlet's curse has taken a new turn. He curses the fact that “time is out of joint” and that he had to be born in order to set it right; but he finally accepts the challenge and decides to “take arms against a sea of troubles” (III, i, 59). In other words, though they share the same linguistic pattern, the attitudes of each of these characters are diametrically opposed. Shakespeare does not use Job's words and attitude to teach Hamlet a lesson of endurance but to convey the magnitude of Hamlet's pain, as this suffering will become the measure of his rebellion.

The parallel between the words of Hamlet and the discourse of Job is maintained in Valverde's text, as it is both in Astrana's and Conejero's. Nevertheless, Valverde and Astrana conserve the same metaphor in Spanish for “the world is out of

⁶⁸ Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

⁶⁹ (*Job* 3: 2-4).

⁷⁰ Job's phrase (“the Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken it” [*Job* 1:21]) has almost become proverbial in English as it has in Spanish: “The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away”/ “Dios me lo dio y Dios me lo quitó”.

joint”, since “desquiciado”⁷¹ and “fuera de quicio”⁷² are equivalent forms as they share the same image.

The term ‘dust’ that Hamlet uses at the end of his illustrious eulogy of man has also been recognised for its biblical criticism as an echo of the words of *Genesis* 3:19. Behold the context in which Hamlet delivers those famous words:

(...) I have of late -but wherefore I know not- lost all my mirth, forgone
all custom of exercises; and indeed, it goes so
heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame,
the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most
excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave
o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted
with golden fire- why, it appeareth no other thing
to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of
vapours. What a piece of work is a man! how
noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form
and moving how express and admirable! in action
how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!
the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals!
And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?
(II, ii, 300-313)

Wells draws our attention to the biblical resonance of the word ‘dust’, but without making any further comment⁷³. They appear in *Genesis* 3:19:

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the earth, for out of
it wast thou taken, because thou art dust, and to dust shalt thou return.

However since these words of *Genesis* have become part and parcel of the liturgy of the Church, and quite popular due to the traditional practice of the imposition of ashes for Ash Wednesday, it is worth making clear that, contrary to what may appear at times, the medieval insistence on the brevity of life can by no means define Hamlet’s personality.

Far from that, the concept ‘dust’ is the key to a question about the mystery of the origin of man. Indeed, what Hamlet highlights through these beautiful words is the

⁷¹ Valverde, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

⁷² Astrana, *op.cit.*, p. 1346.

⁷³ Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

greatness of man. In fact, this eulogy is among one of the best literary homages to mankind.

By rendering ‘dust’ as ‘polvo’, Valverde⁷⁴, or Astrana⁷⁵ for that matter, find themselves much closer to the original than translators such as Conejero⁷⁶, for instance, who opts for ‘barro’. Given that, as is widely known, ‘barro’ is identified with the creation and the beginning of life, while ‘polvo’ connotes the end of it: death. Once again, a biblical verse proves to be a very efficient stylistic device in the deliniation of Hamlet’s psychic profile⁷⁷.

In the conversation that Hamlet maintains with Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, in which the Prince compares Denmark to a prison, he utters the sentence: “Then is doomsday near!” (II, ii, 238). It is surprising to see that bishop Wordsworth does not make any reference to these words of Hamlet.

Markus and Jordan explain the use of ‘doomsday’ here saying that “the Day of Judgement must be near, because only that would cause the world to ‘grow honest’”⁷⁸. Hibbard’s explanation is similar: “‘Then is doomsday near’ (because nothing but the threat of doomsday could convert this world to honesty)”⁷⁹.

There is no doubt that Hamlet is referring to the lack of honesty of Denmark, which transforms this reference to the Last Judgement, and its concomitant destruction of the world, into an anticipatory metaphor of Fortinbras’s invasion of Denmark at the

⁷⁴ Valverde’s translation runs as “... y sin embargo, para mí, ¿qué es esa quintaesencia del polvo?” (*op. cit.*, p. 41).

⁷⁵ Astrana’s texts is: “Y, sin embargo, ¿qué es para mí esa quinta esencia del polvo?” (*op. cit.*, p. 1353).

⁷⁶ Conejero’s translation of “And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?” is “Y sin embargo, para mí, ¿por qué es sólo la quintaesencia del barro?” (*op. cit.*, p. 287).

⁷⁷ The emphasis here is on the beauty of life, not on the ugliness of death. This is why it is difficult to agree with what John Russell maintains in his *Hamlet and Narcissus*, especially in the chapter “Dust and Divinity” (Newark: University of Delaware, pp. 40-7).

⁷⁸ Markus and Jordan, *op.cit.*, p. 128.

⁷⁹ Hibbard, *op.cit.*, p. 216.

end of its corrupt monarchy. In my opinion, in this context, this aesthetic function of doomsday is more important than the Apocalyptic catechesis of the biblical texts upon which it is inspired⁸⁰.

Both the image of and the metaphor for doomsday can be easily rendered into Spanish and probably into any language spoken in the geography of Christendom. In Valverde's translation, Hamlet's words become "Entonces está cerca el día del Juicio,"⁸¹; Astrana also uses "el día del Juicio"⁸² and Conejero "Juicio Final"⁸³. As can be seen the three formulas are valid.

In the same scene, reflecting upon the appearance of his diseased father shortly before the representation of *The Mousetrap* before the new King and the court, Hamlet makes it very clear that he needs proof of the assassination of his father and, therefore, that he does not completely trust the origin of the Ghost that wanders during the night. Shakespeare sees no better way to contextualise this doubt than by putting a few words into Hamlet's mouth in which, once again, the doctrine of Paul resonates⁸⁴:

... The spirit that I have seen
May be a devil; and the devil hath power
T' assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds
More relative than this. The play's the thing

⁸⁰ 1 *Corinthians* 6:9-10; 1 *John* 2:18; 1 *Kings* 1:1-53; 1 *Timothy* 4:1; 2 *Peter* 3:3; 2 *Peter* 3:3-4; 2 *Thessalonians* 2:3-4; 2 *Timothy* 3:1-17; 2 *Timothy* 3:1-4; 2 *Timothy* 3:1-5; *Daniel* 12:4; *Daniel* 9:24-27; *Daniel* 9:27; *Genesis* 12:3; *Isaiah* 40:1-31; *Isaiah* 52:1-15; *Joel* 2:28-32; *Luke* 21:1-38; *Luke* 21:11; *Luke* 21:24; *Luke* 21:25; *Luke* 21; *Mark* 13:32; *Matthew* 16:2-3; *Matthew* 24:1-51; *Matthew* 24:13; *Matthew* 24:14; *Matthew* 24:15; *Matthew* 24:21-22; *Matthew* 24:22; *Matthew* 24:3; *Matthew* 24:36; *Matthew* 24:42-44; *Matthew* 24:6; *Matthew* 24:7; *Matthew* 24:8; *Philippians* 2:9-11; *Psalms* 22:1-31; *Revelation* 1:3; *Revelation* 1:7; *Revelation* 13:1; *Revelation* 13:1-18; *Revelation* 13:16-17; *Revelation* 16:13; *Revelation* 3:3; *Revelation* 7:14; *Romans* 13:11; *Romans* 5:6; and *Zechariah* 12:10.

⁸¹ Valverde, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

⁸² Astrana, *op.cit.*, p. 1352.

⁸³ Conejero, *op.cit.*, p. 277.

⁸⁴ Behind these words, as Wordsworth rightly states (*op.cit.*, p. 124), we hear what Paul tells the Corinthians when he states that Satan is capable of "transforming himself into an angel of light". (2 *Cor.* 11:14).

Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.
(II, ii, 596-603).

The parallelism of Hamlet's reasoning with *Corinthians* 11:14 is patent: "And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an Angel of light." The Holy Writ is employed here with a twofold aim: both to contextualise a Christian thought associated with medieval Denmark and to unveil a very modern, and even humanistic way of thinking that feeds Hamlet's mind: to gather proof before administrating justice.⁸⁵

Thus, as neither Shakespeare nor Hamlet seem to be worried about delving into the mystery of the appearance, but what, on the contrary, really worries them is finding the evidence of the crime, one can only presume that once again the main function of the Pauline echo in the words of Hamlet is to add medieval flavour to the context.

As well as Valverde's text, Astrana's and Conejero's recreate the same parallelism found in the words of a puzzled Hamlet before such an expective vision. This is Valverde's translation:

El espíritu que he visto puede ser el Diablo, y el Diablo tiene poder para tomar una figura agradable, sí, y quizá, por mi credibilidad y mi melancolía, como es tan potente como tales espíritus, me engaña para condenarme. Conseguiré fundamentos más relevantes que eso. El drama es la realidad en que atraparé la conciencia del Rey.⁸⁶

This is Astrana's text:

El espíritu que he visto bien podría ser el diablo, pues que al diablo le es dado presentarse en forma grata. Sí; ¿y quién sabe si, valiéndose de mi debilidad y mi melancolía, ya que él ejerce tanto poder sobre semejante estado de ánimo, me engaña para condenarme? Quiero tener pruebas más seguras. ¡El drama es el lazo en que cogeré la conciencia del rey!⁸⁷

⁸⁵ The possibility that this "spirit" might be a "devil" is considered because of those characteristically Shakespearean word-plays. Thus, the "Devil" can be understood as a "hermaphrodite or bisexual who had intercourse with man, woman and child" (Rubinstein, Frankie. *A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sexual Puns and their Significance*. 1948. 2nd edition. London: Macmillan Press, 1988, p. 74). This is reinforced by the fact that the word 'Devil' is surrounded by other puns such as "power" (*ibid.*, p. 201), "shape" (*ibid.*, p. 236; Webb, J. Barry, *Shakespeare's Erotic Word Usage*. Hastings: The Cornwallis Press, 1989, p. 104) or "abuse" (Rubinstein, *op. cit.*, p. 3).

⁸⁶ Valverde, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50.

⁸⁷ Astrana, *op. cit.*, p. 1358.

Finally Conejero's runs as:

... El espíritu que se me apareció
puede ser el diablo, y el diablo tiene poderes
para asumir formas gratas, o quizás intente,
al hallarme débil y con melancolía,
—él tiene gran predicamento sobre tales estados—
abusar de mí y perderme. Quiero tener
pruebas contundentes. La representación será
la trampa donde caerá la conciencia del rey.⁸⁸

Wordsworth, quoting and relying on Douce⁸⁹, agrees with this author in that “*Job* x.21, was present to our poet's mind”⁹⁰, referring to Hamlet's words in his well-known soliloquy: “... The undiscovered country from whose bourn/No traveller returns” (III, i, 79-80). The similarity with Job's words is beyond all doubt: “Before I go and shall not return, even to the land of darkness and shadow of death”⁹¹. Therefore, the existence of this case of intertextuality between *Hamlet* and the *Book of Job* is unquestionable. There is no doubt either that, given the popularity of Job's story, these words of the text attributed to Moses must have contributed enormously to conveying the high degree of affliction that Hamlet is enduring at that particular moment⁹². This is a telling example that testifies to the fact that Shakespeare is not intending to imbue Hamlet with Job's patience and endurance, but to highlight the degree of that endurance.

⁸⁸ Conejero, *op. cit.* p. 335.

⁸⁹ Douce, Francis. *Illustrations of Shakespeare, and of Ancient Manners: With Dissertations on the Clowns and Fools of Shakespeare; on the Collection of Popular Tales Entitled 'Gesta Romanorum'; and on the English Morris Dance.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1807).

⁹⁰ Wordsworth, *op.cit.*, p. 288.

⁹¹ *Job* 10:21.

⁹² The influence of the *Book of Job* on Shakespeare's works has been analysed in multiple studies, probably one of the most important is Steven Marx's chapter “‘Within a Foot of the Extreme Verge’: The Book of Job and *King Lear*” pp. 59-78. (Marx, *op. cit.*).

Valverde's translation maintains *Job*'s echo intact: "... el país sin descubrir, de cuyos confines no vuelve ningún viajero"⁹³. The same thing can be said of Astrana's text: "... esa ignorada región cuyos confines no vuelve a traspasar viajero alguno"⁹⁴. Finally, Conejero's reads as follows: "... ese país por descubrir, de cuyos confines/ningún viajero retorna"⁹⁵.

Hamlet takes on a character from the New Testament, who has been adopted by the popular imaginary for his cruelty without limit, Herod. And in an interesting piece of advice that he gives to the Players that he has hired, he uses this figure, King Herod, to recommend them not to overact their passions but to express them naturally. To be more precise, he tells them:

... in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the cars of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise. I would such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant. (III, ii, 5-13).

And he goes on to add that "it out-Herods Herod" (III, ii, 16). It is made clear that with this eponymic verb, probably coined by Shakespeare himself and whose first use in the OED comes from this passage⁹⁶, Shakespeare only intends to give additional strength to one of his favourite scenic principles. In regards to this, Wordsworth comments on the scenic sources, although he does so accompanying his words with a great list of quotations which highlight the massacre of the innocents, thus, implying a catechetical lesson.

We pass on now into the New Testament. The character of Herod, as a violent and blood-thirsty Prince, might have been, and no doubt was, well known to our poet from the Ancient Mysteries. And it is probably to his experience of Herod, as acted

⁹³ Valverde, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁹⁴ Astrana, *op. cit.*, p. 1359.

⁹⁵ Conejero, *op. cit.*, p. 349.

⁹⁶ 'Out-herod'. Def. 1. *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

in a mystery, that in the advice given by Hamlet to the players, ‘not to tear a passion to tatters,’ &c., we owe the expression, ‘It out-herods Herod; pray you avoid it,’ Act iii. Sc. 2. But we need not doubt that Shakspeare had in his Facts and Characters of the Bible mind’s eye the Scriptural account of the murder of the Innocents, and of the affliction of their disconsolate mothers, represented by ‘Rachel weeping for her children,’ Matt. ii. 16-18, when the King, speaking before before the gates of Harfleur, to summon it to surrender in these terms : — ‘Therefore, you men of Harfleur,/Take pity of your town, and of your people:/.../If not, why in a moment look to see,/.../Your naked infants spitted upon pikes,/Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confused/Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry/At Herod’s bloody-bunting slaughtermen.’ Act iii. Sc. 2. ‘Herod of Jewry’ is alluded to again more than once ; as the representative of pride and power, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act i. Sc. 2; and of wicked faithless sensuality in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, Act ii. Sc. I.⁹⁷

In this specific case, it would seem that Valverde’s translation is not the greatest at recreating the proverbial cruelty that is attributed to Herod. Perhaps his words do not reach the expressive strength of the translations of Astrana and Conejero, of course, not because Valverde fails to capture the cry of the killing of the innocents in Hamlet’s words, but rather because of the scarce luck of neologism that he proposes: “herodear”. This is Valverde’s translation: “... es herodear más que Herodes”⁹⁸. Astrana’s formula “ser más herodista que Herodes”⁹⁹ is not only more easily understood but also contains a reference to Herod the Great which is quite explicit. As can be seen, Conejero’s solution is quite similar and equally adequate: “Es como ser más Herodes que el propio Herodes”¹⁰⁰.

In the reflection that he makes during the third scene of act III, in the infamous passage in which he doubts between killing his uncle while he prays or delaying his action, Hamlet delivers the following words: “[He] took my father grossly, full of bread” (III, iii, 80). Malone is the first to hear the prophetic voice of Ezekiel through the

⁹⁷ Wordsworth, *op.cit.*, pp. 87-8.

⁹⁸ Valverde, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

⁹⁹ Astrana, *op.cit.*, p. 1361.

¹⁰⁰ Conejero, *op.cit.*, p. 371.

phrase “full of bread” which is used by the Prince¹⁰¹. Later on Johnson, Ritson, and Rolfe¹⁰² also refer to Ezekiel’s echo, quoting his words *à propos* of the infidelity of Jerusalem:

Behold this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, Pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her, and in her daughters: neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.¹⁰³

In this scene, Hamlet makes reference to the unexpected killing of his dear father, King Hamlet, whose death, as was stated earlier, had caught him unrepentant, unconfessed and, worst of all, unhouseled, as the Ghost says in one of his appearances¹⁰⁴. Hamlet’s words are:

A villain kills my father, and for that
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.
Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
'A took my father grossly, full of bread,
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;
And how his audit stands, who knows save heaven?
(III, iii, 76-82).

Though Malone deserves all the credit for being the first to detect this biblical trace, the kind of critical perspective he applies on Shakespeare is perhaps not the most productive one; for he simply identifies the source but adds very little or nothing. Wordsworth, on the contrary, adds too much, as was already stated. He adds too much, and of no relevance. As always, he takes advantage of each single quotation or reference to tell us how good a Christian Shakespeare was or, as is so in this case, that Shakespeare shows an “intimate acquaintance with Holy Scripture”¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰¹ “The uncommon expression, *full of bread*, our poet borrowed from the Holy Writ: ... *Ezekiel* xvi. 49.” (Malone. *The Plays of William Shakespeare in Ten Volumes*. [London: H. Baldwin, 1778], p. 215).

¹⁰² Comments by these critics are compiled in *The Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare, in Ten Volumes: ‘Hamlet’, ‘Othello’, ‘Pericles, Prince of Tyre’*. Volume Ten. (New York: Collins & Hannay, 1923).

¹⁰³ *Ezekiel* 16:49.

¹⁰⁴ I, v, 77.

¹⁰⁵ Wordsworth, *op.cit.*, p. 208.

Between these two extremes a numerous group of critics can be found, whose comments are not more relevant either, since they only emphasise and elaborate on some moral principles which are of interest to them using Hamlet's words as a mere illustration of the moral or ethical preferences. However, in my modest opinion, the words of Ezekiel are not relevant in this context because of these reasons, yet because of the intertextuality with which they manage to contribute to showing us, in a very reduced textual space, just how perverse the queen was and the severity of the crime.

The wickedness of the Queen is expressed by her comparison to disloyal Jerusalem, to Sodom and her daughters; to which Ezekiel in the same text names 'whores'¹⁰⁶. The parallelism with Queen Gertrude, who not only fornicates with her lover but also pays him –paying him with the royal crown– could not be clearer.

¹⁰⁶ "And beside all thy wickedness (woe, woe unto thee, saith the Lord God): Thou hast also built unto thee an high place, and hast made thee an high place in every street. Thou hast built thine high place at every corner of the way, and hast made thy beauty to be abhorred: thou hast opened thy feet to everyone that passed by, and multiplied thy whoredom. Thou hast also committed fornication with the Egyptians thy neighbors, which have great members, and hast increased thy whoredom, to provoke me. Behold, therefore I did stretch out mine hand over thee, and will diminish thine ordinary, and deliver thee unto the will of them that hate thee, even to the daughters of the Philistines, which are ashamed of thy wicked way. Thou hast played the whore also with the Assyrians, because thou wast insatiable: yea, thou hast played the harlot with them, and yet couldest not be satisfied. Thou hast moreover multiplied thy fornication from the land of Canaan unto Chaldea, and yet thou wast not satisfied herewith. How weak is thine heart, saith the Lord God, seeing thou doest all these things, even the work of a presumptuous whorish woman? In that thou buildest thine high place in the corner of every way, and makest thine high place in every street, and hast not been as an harlot that despiseth a reward. But as a wife that playeth the harlot, and taketh others for her husband: They give gifts to all other whores, but thou givest gifts unto all thy lovers, and rewardest them, that they may come unto thee on every side for thy fornication. And the contrary is in thee from other women in thy fornications, neither the like fornication shall be after thee: for in that thou givest a reward, and no reward is given unto thee, therefore thou art contrary. Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God, because thy shame was poured out, and thy filthiness discovered through thy fornications with thy lovers, and with all the idols of thine abominations, and by the blood of thy children, which thou didst offer unto them. Behold, therefore I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated: I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy filthiness unto them, that they may see all thy filthiness. And I will judge thee after ye manner of them that are harlots, and of them that shed blood, and I will give thee the blood of wrath and jealousy. I will also give thee into their hands, and they shall destroy thine high place, and shall break down thine high places. they shall strip thee also out of thy clothes, and shall take thy fair jewels, and leave thee naked and bare. They shall also bring up a company against thee, and they shall stone thee with stones, and thrust thee through with their swords. And they shall burn up thine houses with fire, and execute judgments upon thee in the sight of many women: and I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot, and thou shalt give no reward anymore. So will I make my wrath toward thee to rest, and my jealousy shall depart from thee, and I will cease and be no more angry. Because thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth, but hast provoked me with all these things, behold, therefore I also have brought thy way upon thine head, saith the Lord God: yet hast not thou had consideration of all thine abominations. Behold, all that use proverbs,

As for the severity of the crime, as we have seen and is confirmed by the critics and editors that comment upon the phrase “full of bread”, it also appears more powerful for the fact that King Hamlet dies in sin, that is, without having had the opportunity to purify his soul through extreme unction.

Therefore, all of the prophetic text of *Ezekiel* has a very clear rhetorical and stylistic function, as it serves to complete the profile of the two characters that plot and carry out the crime. What is more, I am convinced by the validity of an original idea that professor López Ortega explained in one of his seminars on Shakespeare, commenting upon the phrase “full of bread”. To be precise, the professor maintains that Shakespeare establishes a brutal contrast between “full of bread” and the term ‘unhous’led’ uttered by the Ghost in the passage, since ‘unhous’led’ means without the sacramental bread¹⁰⁷. It is an equivalent to “the bread of communion”.

Once again, the use of biblical discourse allows Shakespeare to highlight the magnitude of the severity and cruelty of the regicide. In fact, for Hamlet, his admirable father, for being human, was also a sinner. For, though in goodness he believes that nobody bit him, he is like everybody else, a sinner. Therefore, depriving him of extreme unction not only kills his body but also banishes his soul to the suffering of Purgatory. That is the only function of the echo of *Ezekiel*, namely, to add more strength to the crime committed by his uncle and his mother.

shall use this proverb against thee, saying, As is the mother, so is her daughter. Thou art thy mother's daughter, that hath cast off her husband and her children, and thou art the sister of thy sisters, which forsook their husbands and their children: your mother is an Hittite, and your father an Amorite. And thine elder sister is Samaria, and her daughters, that dwell at thy left hand, and thy young sister, that dwelleth at thy right hand, is Sodom, and her daughters. Yet hast thou not walked after their ways, nor done after their abominations: but as it had been a very little thing, thou wast corrupted more than they in all thy ways. As I live, saith the Lord God, Sodom thy sister hath not done, neither she nor her daughters, as thou hast done and thy daughters.” (*Ezekiel* 16:23-48).

¹⁰⁷ I owe this idea to a personal conversation with professor López Ortega, from the Universidad de Extremadura.

Any critical temptation here to see the minimal reference to the controversy on whether revenge is good or bad or the debate on grace and sin, so alive in the Europe of the Reformation, would be, in my opinion, if not missing the whole point, at least missing the main one.

Not only in Valverde's text, but also in the other two translations contrasted with his, are Ezekiel's and Hamlet's words faithfully rendered, and consequently, also the biblical associations and connotations they entail. This is what makes Valverde's text be closer to the original –“harto de pan”¹⁰⁸–; and also Astrana's –“grosera hartura hinchado de pan”¹⁰⁹–; and Conejero's –“groseramente ahíto de pan”¹¹⁰. This is highly important because, though the modern translations of the Holy Scripture tend to avoid the word “pan” in the image “full of bread”¹¹¹, it was maintained in the older versions. This fact is relevant because it was the text of the old versions the ones that entered into popular culture via the liturgy of the Church.

The very striking words that Hamlet directs at his mother in the moment when Polunius is spying on him are not only an example yet a magnificent illustration of the use Shakespeare makes of the Holy Writ. His words read:

Heaven's face doth glow;
Yea, this solidity and compound mass,
With tristful visage, as against the doom,
Is thought-sick at the act.
(III, iv, 49-52).

In this fragment, once again we can see Malone's apocalyptic traces from the New Testament; specifically, from the *Gospel of saint Luke*, although without saying exactly where.

¹⁰⁸ Valverde, *op.cit.*, p. 70.

¹⁰⁹ Astrana, *op.cit.*, p. 1369.

¹¹⁰ Conejero, *op.cit.*, p. 445.

¹¹¹ “Éste fue el crimen de Sodoma, tu hermana, y de sus hijas: soberbia, gula y pereza; no socorrieron al pobre, al indigente,” (Martín Nieto, *op. cit.*, *Ezequiel* 16:49).

Bishop Wordsworth identifies these traces referred to by Malone in *Luke* 21:25-

8:

Then there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars, and upon the earth trouble among the nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waters shall roar. And men's hearts shall fail them for fear and for looking after those things which shall come on the world, for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man come in a cloud, with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth near.

Malone is not without reason, although neither is this the only text from the *Gospel of saint Luke* nor at all from the New Testament from which Shakespeare could have taken inspiration for this diatribe of Hamlet¹¹². In fact, bearing in mind his great knowledge of the Holy Writ, it is indisputable that all the texts in which the Armageddon, the Parousia and the Last Judgement are referred to were present in Shakespeare's mind when writing these words.

Bishop Wordsworth¹¹³ adds to Malone's reference others such as *Peter*¹¹⁴ or *Revelation*¹¹⁵, although without quoting the exact chapters and verses of the *Gospel of*

¹¹² Indeed, in 17:22-30, Luke refers to the Second Coming, the Last Judgement and Doomsday: "And he said unto the disciples, the days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it. Then they shall say to you, Behold here, or behold there; *but* go not thither, neither follow them. For as the lightning that lighteneth out of the one *part* under heaven, shineth unto the other *part* under heaven, so shall the Son of man be in his day. But first must he suffer many things and be reproved of this generation. And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married wives, and gave in marriage unto the day that Noah went into the Ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built. But in the day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. After these *examples* shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed". As Matthew does in 24:4-14. Apart from that, similar references can be found in *Revelation* 11:13: "And the same hour shall there be a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city shall fall; and in the earthquake shall be slain in number seven thousand, and the remnant shall be afraid, and gave glory to the God of heaven."

¹¹³ Wordsworth, *op.cit.*, p. 305-6.

¹¹⁴ "But the heavens and earth, which are now, are kept by the same word in store, and reserved unto fire against the day of judgment, and of the destruction of ungodly men. Dearly beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord, as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning *his* promise (as some men count slackness) but is patient toward us, and would have no man to perish, but would all men to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a noise, and the elements shall melt with heat, and the earth with the works that are therein, shall be burned up. Seeing therefore that all these things must be dissolved, what manner persons ought ye to be in holy conversation and godliness" (2 *Peter* 3:7-11).

*saint Matthew*¹¹⁶. Perhaps it would convene to add that the sources that Wordsworth outlines, above all in the case of *Matthew* if he is really referring to chapter 25, are much more precise than that of Malone; although in the case of *Revelation*, in my opinion, chapter 21 would fit better than the quote that Wordsworth proposes¹¹⁷. Bishop Wordsworth makes amend to the reading that some critics have made of Hamlet's diatribe in the light of the biblical echoes.

Valverde, Astrana and Conejero masterfully depict the stupor and repugnance felt by the sky and the earth in the face of the queen's conduct. They achieve it, as does Shakespeare, by injecting into their texts or enriching them with the signs of apocalyptic speech that are announced by the Armageddon, the Last Judgement and the End of Times. In this way, for example, Valverde expresses his embarrassment of the sky as "[la] cara del Cielo arde"¹¹⁸ ("Heaven's face doth glow") and the fracture of the earth, the earthquakes of apocalypse, as "esta solidez y esa masa compuesta, con rostro tan sofisticado ... está enferma" ("this solidity and compound mass,/With trustful visage, ... /Is thought-sick"). Astrana, on the other hand, transforms that shame into "[inflama] el rostro de los cielos"¹¹⁹ and the reference to the earthquake into "esta sólida y compacta masa del mundo, con doliente aspecto ... se acongoja". Lastly, Conejero

¹¹⁵ "And I saw a great white throne, and one that sat on it, from whose face fled away both the earth and heaven, and their place was no more found." (*Revelation* 20:11).

¹¹⁶ Without any doubt, he is referring to 24:4-14: "And Jesus answered, and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my Name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars, and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and realm against realm, and there shall be famine, and pestilence, and earthquakes in divers places. All these are but the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you, and ye shall be hated of all nations for my Name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall be increased, the love of many shall be cold. But he that endureth to the end, he shall be saved. And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached through the whole world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come".

¹¹⁷ "And I saw a new heaven, and a new earth; for the first heaven, and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea." (*Revelation* 21:1).

¹¹⁸ Valverde, *op.cit.*, p. 72.

¹¹⁹ Astrana, *op.cit.*, p. 1370.

describes the same shame as “incluso el rostro de los cielos se inflame” and the trembling of the earth as “esta tierra firme y compacta de dolorido aspecto ... se avergüenza”¹²⁰.

Any reader or spectator of *Hamlet* will clearly see that these words loaded with full intertextuality anticipate and almost foretell the destruction and end of the state and corrupt court of Denmark.

Hamlet, in one of the soring conversations that he has with his mother, compares his father to Claudius, her new husband, telling her that he is “a mildewed ear/Blasting his wholesome brother” (III, iv, 60). Wordsworth detects¹²¹ in these words the echo of the second dream of the Pharaoh –described in *Genesis*–, stating that he saw “seven thin ears, and blasted with the East wind, sprang up after them”¹²². Of course, there is no doubt that the function of these old words of *Genesis*, repeated afterwards in *Exodus* 7¹²³, *I Kings* 8¹²⁴, *Amos* 4¹²⁵ or *Haggai* 2¹²⁶ is that of making the words of Hamlet more memorable by enhancing them with the vein of the strength of biblical language.

¹²⁰ Conejero, *op.cit.*, p. 457.

¹²¹ Wordsworth, *op.cit.*, p. 69.

¹²² *Genesis* 41:6.

¹²³ “And the Lord had spoken unto Moses and Aaron, saying, If Pharaoh speak unto you, saying, Shew a miracle for you, then thou shalt say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall be turned into a serpent. Then went Moses and Aaron unto Pharaoh, and did even as the Lord had commanded; and Aaron cast forth his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it was turned into a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called for the wise men and sorcerers, and those charmers also of Egypt did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they were turned into serpents. But Aaron’s rod devoured their rods. So Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he hearkened not to them, as the Lord had said.” (*Exodus* 7:8-13).

¹²⁴ “When there shall be famine in the land, when there shall be pestilence, when there shall be blasting, mildew, grasshopper or caterpillar, when their enemy shall besiege them in the cities of their land, or any plague, or any sickness” (*I Kings* 8:37).

¹²⁵ “I have smitten you with blasting, and mildew: your great gardens and your vineyards, and your fig trees, and your olive trees did the palmerworm devour: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.” (*Amos* 4:9).

¹²⁶ “Before these things were, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the winepress for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty. I smote you with blasting, and with mildew, and with hail, in all the labors of your hands: yet you turned not to me, saith the Lord. Consider, I pray you, in your minds, from this day, and afore from the four and

Regarding the translations, if we consider that the image of the bad ear, which infects others, is which survives in the popular culture, Valverde, Astrana and Conejero more than adequately pass the test. In addition, one can even go as far as to saying that Conejero's translation is that of greatest strength. Yet, if we keep in mind that really it is more about the effect that the "blasted ears" have upon the "full and good spears" because of the sun of justice that dominates the Egyptian summer, the opinion upon these translations could be modified¹²⁷. Bearing this in mind, only Astrana's could be considered close to the original, if the reader permits a slight poetic deviation in respect to the semantic weight of "atizonar"; that is, if the reader or spectator allows him to use this verb with the meaning of "chamuscar". In fact, Valverde translates the words of Hamlet as "Aquí está tu marido, que, como una espiga con tizón, enferma a su hermano su aliento sano"¹²⁸. On the contrary, in line with this last perspective, neither Astrana's nor Conejero's translations faithfully keep to the original; considering that in the first there is talk of a disease in the crops and in the second they both talk of the putrefaction of the wheat. Here is Astrana's text: "Ahí está vuestro marido, cual espiga atizonada, que agosta a su gallardo hermano"¹²⁹; and Conejero's text reads: "Ahí tenéis a vuestro marido, espiga podrida que corrompe la gallardía de su hermano"¹³⁰.

twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's Temple was laid: consider it in your minds." (*Haggai* 2:17-19)

¹²⁷ "Volvió a quedarse dormido y tuvo otro sueño: siete espigas granadas y lozanas salían de una sola caña; y otras siete, raquílicas y quemadas por el viento del este, brotaban después de ellas". (Martín Nieto, *op. cit.*, *Génesis* 41:5-6).

¹²⁸ Valverde, *op.cit.*, p. 72.

¹²⁹ Astrana, *op.cit.*, p. 1371.

¹³⁰ Conejero, *op.cit.*, p. 459.

Just before the duel with Laertes and with the intention of appeasing Horatio, Hamlet utters a few words referring to God's providence with the clear-cut echo of *Matthew* 10:29¹³¹. These are Hamlet's words:

...we defy augury; there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all. Since no man know saught of what he leaves, what is 't to leave betimes? Let be. (V, ii, 192-196).

It is quite easy to identify Christ's words¹³² ("... one [sparrow] of them shall not fall on the ground without your father") in the first two lines of Hamlet's ("... there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow"). However, it is extremely difficult to actually understand the role that Hamlet attributes to providence in the following lines: probably the obscurity and even confusion of his reasoning about God's designs are not alien to the debate over the issue of predestination in the days of the Reformation. Shakespeare probably did not want to take sides in the controversy of "the mysterious ways of providence" as Sinfield¹³³ refers to the issue in a commentary on Hamlet's words, and this fact would explain the inconsistency of Hamlet's attitude. This lack of consistency, as Hunter maintains, is the result of the Prince's "detachment from any commitment to a specific Christian orthodoxy"¹³⁴. What Hunter says is quite true, but not the whole truth. Indeed, this lack of consistency is also of the utmost aesthetic importance for it contributes to delineating the psychic profile of Hamlet; and one must not forget that Shakespeare's Hamlet is a blending of the Catholic medieval Prince who lived in

¹³¹ "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father?" (*Matthew* 10:29).

¹³² Bishop Wordsworth is right in identifying traces from *Matthew*. (*op.cit.*, p. 103). This is not, of course, the only source for Hamlet's words, as it is the same idea that is seen, among others, in *Luke* 12:40 and in *Acts* 25:11. With these words, Shakespeare characterises the setting, which is the scene of a medieval duel. For, although the duels and the jousts were not well received by the Church, a part of the Christian ritual was always present in their performance.

¹³³ Alan Sinfield, "Hamlet's Special Providence" in *Shakespeare Survey* 33 (1980, pp. 89-97), p. 97.

¹³⁴ Robert Grams Hunter, *Shakespeare and the mystery of God's judgements*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976), p. 105

medieval Denmark and the humanistic scholar who attended the University of Wittenberg, one of the cradles of the Reformation. From this point of view, the theological debate aroused by this Calvinistic issue *à propos* of this passage from *Hamlet* –which, by the way, has produced an extensive bibliography¹³⁵–, might be quite irrelevant for literary criticism. For Shakespeare, the theological problem did not exist because, as Edwards says, “[t]he recognition of ‘a divinity that shapes our ends’ is Hamlet’s; not necessarily Shakespeare’s”¹³⁶.

Once again, these words that Shakespeare proclaims through his characters are probably more a device to express the contradictions –that a modern humanist living in old feudal Denmark would have to face– than the predestination conflict between Catholics and Calvinists in the Europe of Shakespeare’s epoch. It goes without saying that Hamlet, both as a medieval Prince of Christendom and as a humanistic Christian Prince of the sixteenth-century, had to believe in the Christian God, a circumstance that, incidentally, Shakespeare would not have to necessarily share.

In Valverde’s translation, just as much as in Astrana’s, this fragment maintains great fidelity in respect to the original play. The idea of the Holy Writ, according to which, nothing that moves in the world is unrelated to the divine plan and that even “the fall of a sparrow” is unproduced without the divine knowledge and consent, is held in both translations. The two translations, therefore, are totally valid and reliable for how they represent this passage, which is so meaningful. This is Valverde’s text:

... desafiamos a los augurios. Hasta en la caída de un gorrión hay una especial providencia. Si es ahora, no ha de venir: si no ha de venir, será ahora: si no es ahora, de todas maneras vendrá: estar dispuestos a todo, puesto que nadie tiene nada de lo que deja. ¿Qué es dejar antes de tiempo?¹³⁷

¹³⁵ See Bate, J. *Soul of the Age: The Life, Mind, and World of William Shakespeare*. (New York: Viking, 2008); or Curran, J.E. “*Hamlet*,” *Protestantism, and the Mourning of Contingency: Not to Be*; (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2006), among others.

¹³⁶ Philip Edwards “Tragic Balance in *Hamlet*” in *Shakespeare Survey* 36 (1983, pp. 43-52), p. 105.

¹³⁷ Valverde, *op.cit.*, p. 111.

Astrana's translation is quite similar and equally valid:

... no creo en presagios; hasta en la caída de un gorrión interviene una providencia especial. Si es esta la hora, no está por venir; si no está por venir, esta es la hora; y si esta es la hora, vendrá de todos modos. No hay más que hallarse prevenido. Pues si nadie es dueño de lo que ha de abandonar un día, ¿qué importa abandonarlo tarde o temprano?¹³⁸

In the transfer of this last image into Conejero's text, an apparently slight modification is produced that does however affect its loyalty to the original. Specifically, while in the text of *Matthew* and in Hamlet's words –just as in Valverde's and Astrana's translations– there is talk of a single sparrow (“one of them”¹³⁹ and “a sparrow” [V, ii, 213] or its Spanish equivalent “un gorrión”¹⁴⁰), in Conejero's version he talks of “la caída del gorrión”¹⁴¹. By opting for the indefinite article (“-el gorrión”), Conejero greatly diminishes, so to speak, the magnitude of the power of God, who, in the scriptural text as well as in Shakespeare's original and the two translations we have just seen, is presented as being capable of controlling every single sparrow.

The words that Shakespeare utters through Hamlet at the end of the tragic solution of the work figure between the very few that have a deep religious meaning. Hamlet, both as a medieval Prince of a country of Christendom and as a Christian Prince of the age of humanism, believes in God and his ruling. In fact, as Edwards rightly points out, “‘special providence’ is a theological term for a particular act of divine intervention”¹⁴². It is not without importance that just when Hamlet has done all in his power to regenerate Denmark and realises not only that Denmark has not responded, but that the end of his life is near, he appears to place hope in the hands of God.

¹³⁸ Astrana, *op.cit.*, p. 1392-3.

¹³⁹ *Matthew* 10:29.

¹⁴⁰ Valverde, *op.cit.*, p. 111, and Astrana, *op.cit.*, p. 1392.

¹⁴¹ Conejero, *op.cit.*, p. 685.

¹⁴² Edwards, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, *op.cit.*, p. 48.

It is difficult for someone who has followed the biblical discourse in the work of *Hamlet* to overlook the relationship that two events at the end of the play may have with the Christian kerigma and the very life of Christ itself. The first one is the scene in which a dying Hamlet commands Horatio to pass him the cup of poison and the second, the moment when Hamlet asks his friend “to tell my story” (V, ii, 343). Indeed, it is difficult not to see the parallelism between the way Jesus addresses his Father in the Mount of Olives (“Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me;” in *Luke* 22:42)¹⁴³ and what Hamlet tells Horatio as he approaches death’s door (“As th’art a man,/Give me the cup. Let go! By heaven, I’ll ha’t.” [V, ii, 337]).

It is equally difficult not to see the similarity between the words Hamlet employs when he asks Horatio to execute his last will (“to tell my story”) and Jesus’ mandate to his apostles (“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”¹⁴⁴) However strange it may be, I have not found even a single reference to the scriptural intertextuality present in the said last scene in the play, neither in the bibliography in this work nor in the innumerable listings of titles of monographs and articles checked in bibliographical sources of Shakespeare. Therefore, it would be interesting to know why the obvious symmetry between the words uttered by Hamlet in this scene and the ones pronounced by Jesus have been ignored by most, if not all, analysts of biblical influences on Shakespeare’s works. Probably because such symmetry does not really exist or, if it does, it is only a formal one: a merely rhetorical device. Indeed while Hamlet is asking for a cup of death, Jesus Christ offers a cup of eternal life; and while the Prince is asking Horatio to be the chronicler of acts of revenge against serious offences, the Gospel of Jesus preaches peace, love and forgiveness.

¹⁴³ The same reference can be found in the next verse: “Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee. Take away this cup from Me;” (*Mark* 14:36).

¹⁴⁴ *Mark* 16:15.

These reasons are enough to justify why those Christian critics, who insist on interpreting the fact that the abundance of biblical references attests to his alleged Christian commitment¹⁴⁵, have failed to see these echoes in the last scenes of *Hamlet*. They are with reason, because the purpose of the messianic similarity of these scenes is merely to enhance the “redeeming” value of Hamlet’s death; and this redeeming value has not a transcendental but only political or historical significance. However, this enhancing –and hence merely stylistic– function does not only apply exclusively to these last scenes but to most of those scriptural references that the catechetical spirit of these critics transforms into evidence for what they believe.

Valverde’s text (“Si eres hombre, dame la copa. Vamos, la quiero, por el Cielo”¹⁴⁶) and those of Astrana¹⁴⁷ and Conejero¹⁴⁸, all equally contain this intertextuality.

¹⁴⁵ Tiffany Ann Conroy Moore analyses the idea of “Hamlet as a Christ-like figure in a distinctly political sense” (p. 17) in her book *Kozintsev’s Shakespeare Films: Russian Political Protest in ‘Hamlet’ and ‘King Lear’* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2012); Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Vhelehan question the faithful “Christ-like” representation of Hamlet on screen (p. 36) in their book *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (London: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁴⁶ Valverde, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

¹⁴⁷ “¡Si eres hombre, dame esa copa; suéltala por Dios te lo pido!” (Astrana, *op. cit.*, p. 1395).

¹⁴⁸ “Si de verdad eres hombre,/dame ese cáliz. ¡Suéltalo! ¡Por el cielo santo!” (Conejero, *op. cit.*, p. 709).

2.2 Claudius's biblical discourse

The words which Claudius directs at Laertes in act I, scene ii, lines 45-46, right after he has married his brother's widow and thus become a King, are almost a repetition of those which Yahve himself proclaims in *Isaiah* 65:24, as is rightly stated by Wells¹⁴⁹. Claudius tells Laertes:

You cannot speak of reason to the Dane
And lose your voice. What wouldst thou beg, Laertes,
That shall not be my offer, not thy asking?
(I, ii, 44-6).

The similarity of these words with the ones that Jehova pronounces through *Isaiah* is undeniable: "Yea, before they call, I will answer, and whiles they speak, I will hear."¹⁵⁰ It is clear that the new King has needed very little time to make a god out of himself. On this particular occasion, Shakespeare exploits the resource of the scriptural echo in order to express Claudius's self-divinization. He makes the murderous and illegitimate King imitate God's voice as heard in *Isaiah*. This lack of legitimacy is not only of a moral nature since, as Wells points out in reference to the union between Claudius and Gertrude, marriage between a man and his former sister-in-law "was explicitly forbidden"¹⁵¹.

The same can be applied to Valverde's text, where Claudius's words evoke the foreseer God:

No puedes hablar de algo razonable al Rey danés y desperdiciar la voz. ¿Qué quieres, Laertes, que no sea ofrecimiento mío antes que petición tuya?¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

¹⁵⁰ *Isaiah* 65:24.

¹⁵¹ Wells says: "The reprehensible nature of the relation between the King and his Queen (his former sister-in-law) is at once emphasized. Such a marriage was explicitly forbidden by the 'Table of Kindred and Affinity, wherein whosoever are related are forbidden in scripture and our laws to marry together', first produced in 1563 and incorporated into the Book of Common Prayer" (*op. cit.*, p. 184).

¹⁵² Valverde, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

In this way, the contrast between the vileness of his deeds and the god-like sound of his words is maintained in the target language. Likewise, the contrast and its rhetorical echo are clear in Astrana's and Conejero's translations¹⁵³. This is a subtle strategy to exact a diabolical comparison out of Claudius's words of innocent self-defence. Shakespeare is preparing the way from reminiscence; the biblical echo that he uses is preparing his blame. The audience will be unable to stop themselves from uniting or supporting Hamlet's cause. It is a soft reinforcement, but a reinforcement nonetheless. The reference is in the words of Claudius and not Hamlet, as it would be an authoritarian interference. Abel is the first innocent, the first martyr, the first spilt blood for Hamlet having caused the latter.

Through the well-known words in which Claudius confesses, or rather reflects upon, his sins in act III, scene iii, Shakespeare offers us a thorough outline of Claudius's personality. This psychogram, if the term coined by Leta Hollingworth¹⁵⁴ may be allowed in this context, clearly shows the contrast of lights and shadows that defines this character. It is quite important to take note of this passage as it is one of the parts of the play in which biblical intertextuality probably achieves the highest levels.

Shakespeare fills the first part of Claudius's prayer or reflection with scriptural references to Cain¹⁵⁵. In this way, the dramatist draws a parallel between Claudius's murderous behaviour and the "primal eldest curse", which was also "a brother's murder". This is the first part of Claudius's reflection:

O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;

¹⁵³ "Ninguna cosa razonable podrás exponer al rey de Dinamarca y ser desatendido. ¿Qué solicitaríais de mí, Laertes, que no se adelantara a tu demanda mi oferta?" (Astrana, *op. cit.*, p. 1337); and "Nada hay que la razón pueda pedir al rey de Dinamarca y que él no pueda otorgar. ¿Qué puedes pedir sin que a tu ruego no se anticipe mi favor?" (Conejero, *op. cit.*, p. 117-9)

¹⁵⁴ L.S. Hollingworth, "Variability as Related to Sex Differences in Achievement", *American Journal of Sociology*, 1914, pp. 127-216.

¹⁵⁵ Most editors limit themselves to explaining that the "primal eldest curse" refers to Cain's murder of his brother, Abel. See, for instance, Raffel, *op. cit.*, p. 130 and Edwards, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark op. cit.*, p. 171.

It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
 A brother's murder! Pray can I not,
 Though inclination be as sharp as will.
 My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
 And, like a man to double business bound,
 I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
 And both neglect. What if this cursed hand
 Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
 Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
 To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
 But to confront the visage of offence?
 (III, iii, 36-47).

Upon these words, in which “Cain’s murder” is evoked, and those that follow in the King’s confession, bishop Wordsworth comments:

It is needless to observe how accurately and at the same time how reverently, this language represents both the letter and the spirit of the Bible narrative.¹⁵⁶

Bishop Wordsworth is quite right; these words are “accurate” and “reverent”, though ironically not from his pastoral point of view but from a purely aesthetic perspective. For what Shakespeare is emphasising is not the sincerity of a contrite person but the remorselessness of an uncontrite one. In other words, the evocation of Cain’s sin, which is also Claudius’s, provides the contrast between his imploration of divine mercy and his incapacity to repent.

Claudius’s words of imploration for forgiveness are enhanced by the strong scriptural evocation of sentences such as the “cloud of rain that cometh in the time of drought”¹⁵⁷, referred to by Wells¹⁵⁸ in his edition; lines like “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow”¹⁵⁹ mentioned by Wordsworth¹⁶⁰ and Wells¹⁶¹; or Jehova’s words “Wash you, make you clean” and

¹⁵⁶ Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

¹⁵⁷ “How fair a thing is mercy in the time of anguish and trouble? It is like a cloud of rain that cometh in the time of drought” (*Ecclesiasticus* 35:20).

¹⁵⁸ Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

¹⁵⁹ “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (*Psalms* 51:7)

¹⁶⁰ Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

“though your sins were as crimson, they shall be made white as snow: though they were red like scarlet, they shall be as wool”¹⁶² referred to by bishop Wordsworth¹⁶³, Hibbard¹⁶⁴ and Wells¹⁶⁵. In all these sentences the concepts of ‘water’, as a purifying element (“cloud”, “rain”, “wash”, “clean” and even “hyssop”) and ‘whiteness’, as an equivalent of cleanliness (“white” and “snow”) are associated with the idea of absolution and forgiveness. Hence, Claudius’s speech is given more expressive power by the use of words like “rain”, “wash” and phrases such as “white as snow”.

Claudius’s petition of mercy is equally enhanced by an indirect, yet very powerful, reference to the Lord’s Prayer, when he says:

And what's in prayer but this twofold force,
To be forestalled ere we come to fall,
Or pardon'd being down? Then I'll look up;
My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn?
(III, iii, 48-52).

On this reference to *Matthew* 6:13¹⁶⁶, that would later be included in Hibbard’s¹⁶⁷ and Wells’s¹⁶⁸ editions, bishop Wordsworth wrote an early and quite

¹⁶¹ Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

¹⁶² “Hear the word of the Lord, O princes of Sodom: hearken unto the Law of our God, O people of Gomorrah. What have I to do with the multitude of your sacrifices, saith the Lord? I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and of the fat of fed beasts: and I desire not the blood of bullocks, nor of lambs, nor of goats. When ye come to appear before me, who required this of your hands to tread in my courts? Bring no more oblations, in vain: incense is an abomination unto me: I cannot suffer your new moons, nor Sabbaths, nor solemn days (it is iniquity) nor solemn assemblies. My soul hateth your new moons and your appointed feasts: they are a burden unto me: I am weary to bear them. And when you shall stretch out your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: and though ye make many prayers, I will not hear: for your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean: take away the evil of your works from before mine eyes: cease to do evil. Learn to do well: seek judgment, relieve the oppressed: judge the fatherless and defend the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins were as crimson, they shall be made white as snow: though they were red like scarlet, they shall be as wool. If ye consent and obey, ye shall eat the good things of the land. But if ye refuse and be rebellious, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” (*Isaiah* 1:10-20)

¹⁶³ Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, p.140.

¹⁶⁴ Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

¹⁶⁵ Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

¹⁶⁶ “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.” (*Mathew* 6:13)

¹⁶⁷ Hibbard, *op. cit.*, p.241.

interesting statement: "... in *Hamlet*, we learn the twofold force of Prayer, as obtaining either grace to prevent us from sinning, or pardon when we have sinned"¹⁶⁹. This kind of commentary sounds like a homily delivered from the pulpit. Nevertheless, even as a sermon, it would not be valid. Indeed, everybody knows Jesus' famous prayer and it goes without saying that an unrepentant Claudius is not the most adequate person to teach us its "twofold force". In any event, by no means was this the intention of Shakespeare's scriptural intertextuality. He was only interested in making Claudius appear as what he really was, namely, a diabolical figure. Once more, biblical discourse reveals itself as an instrument for characterisation.

As for Claudius's incapacity to repent, his words and later conduct leave no room for doubt. The second part of Claudius's failed attempt to confess is quite eloquent in this respect:

... 'Forgive me my foul murder'?
 That cannot be; since I am still possess'd
 Of those effects for which I did the murder-
 My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
 May one be pardon'd and retain th' offence?
 In the corrupted currents of this world
 Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,
 And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
 Buys out the law; but 'tis not so above.
 There is no shuffling; there the action lies
 In his true nature, and we ourselves compell'd,
 Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
 To give in evidence. What then? What rests?
 Try what repentance can. What can it not?
 Yet what can it when one cannot repent?
 O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
 O limed soul, that, struggling to be free,
 Art more engag'd! Help, angels! Make assay.
 Bow, stubborn knees; and heart with strings of steel,
 Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe!
 All may be well.
 (III, iii, 51-72).

¹⁶⁸ Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

¹⁶⁹ Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 155

As can be observed, he admits that to “forgive” his “foul murder” is not possible (“That cannot be”). And he states quite clearly why: he is still in possession of the spoils of his brother’s murder; that is, his “crown”, his “own ambition” and his “queen”. This is why his language oscillates between the clear resonances from *Ecclesiasticus*, *Psalms*, *Isaiah* and *Matthew* –quoted and referred above–, on the one hand, and his cry of despair, on the other.

It is worth taking pause at this passage, as it is one of the parts of the play in which intertextuality, by means of biblical discourse, is at its richest. Therefore, the quality of the translation will greatly depend on the way this is dealt with. Indeed, the translators have to recreate a Claudius who is going through a moment of tribulation and is confronting the deepest contradiction of his existence. In effect, Claudius is looking for but does not find, the absolution for his sin; and the verbal expression of the core of this contradiction resides in the blending of the biblical voice of the contrite heart and that of the unrepentant victim of selfish arrogance¹⁷⁰.

Hence, there is an unassailable need for the translators to be aware of the existence of the referred segments marked by scriptural connotations and associations, and of the function they play in this literary text. Without any doubt, Valverde passes the test with flying colours. Indeed, throughout his translation the biblical echo can be

¹⁷⁰ Wordsworth (*op. cit.*, pp. 301-2) sees a deep correspondence between the crude statements made by Claudius in this second part of his confession and the following words of saint Paul: “For when the Gentiles which have not the Law, do by nature the things *contained* in the Law, they having not the Law, are a Law unto themselves, which shew the effect of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts accusing one another, or excusing. At the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my Gospel.” (*Romans* 2:14-6). Indeed, his voice sounds very much like Paul’s. There is no doubt that Shakespeare uses the Pauline echo to demonstrate in the end that this evil imposter does not deserve forgiveness because he is an unrepentant sinner. Therefore, the function of these biblical traces is once again a characterising one, that is, that of reinforcing the negative traits of Claudius. However, Wordsworth, merely pays attention to this text, in my opinion, because it allows him to elaborate on the catechesis of the last judgement, a theological excursion he would never permit himself.

neatly perceived; and, what is far more important, Claudius's psychic profile is convincingly portrayed.

Ah, mi culpa está podrida, hiede hasta el Cielo: tiene encima la más antigua maldición prístina, el asesinato de un hermano. Rezar, no puedo, aunque la inclinación sea tan aguda como un deseo; mi culpa, más fuerte, derrota a mi recio intent, y como un hombre obligado a un doble asunto, em quedo detenido pensando por dónde empezaré, descuidadndo los dos. ¿Y qué? Aunque esta mano maldita estuviera más cargada de lo que está de sangre de hermano, ¿no hay bastante lluvia en los dulces cielos para lavarla tan blanca como la nieve? ¿Para qué sirve la misericordia sino para afrontar el rostro de la culpa? ¿Y qué hay en la oración sino esta doble fuerza: ser estorbados antes de caer, o perdonados una vez caídos? Entonces levantaré la mirada: mi culpa ha pasado. Pero, oh, ¿qué forma de oración puede server a mi intento? Perdóname mi torpe asesinato ... Eso no puede ser, puesto que sigo poseyendo los efectos por los que hice el crimen, mi corona, mi ambición, y mi Reina. ¿Puede ser uno perdonado y conservar el delito? En las corrompidas Corrientes de este mundo, la dorada mano de la Culpa puede echar a un lado a la Justicia, y a menudo se ve que el mismo premio de la maldad soborna a la Ley; pero no es así allá arriba; allí no hay trampas, allí la acción queda a su verdadera naturaleza, y nos vemos obligados a prestar declaración ante la cara y la frente de nuestras culpas. Entonces ¿qué? ¿Qué queda? Probar lo que puede el arrepentimiento ¿Qué no podrá? Pero ¿qué podrá si uno no se puede arrepentir? ¡Ah desgraciado estado! ¡Ah pecho negro como la muerte! ¡Ah, alma enfangada, que te hundes más al luchar por librarte! ¡Auxilio, ángeles, acudid! Doblaos tercas rodillas, y tú, corazón con cuerdas de acero, sé tan blando como los tendones del niño recién nacido. Todo puede ir bien.¹⁷¹

The same could be said of Astrana's¹⁷² and Conejero's¹⁷³ translations. Like Valverde, they manage to weave an intertext in which scriptural discourse plays a stylistic function, which faithfully renders the original play.

¹⁷¹ Valverde, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

¹⁷² “¡Oh, atroz es mi delito! ¡Su corrompido hedor llega hasta el cielo! ¡Sobre él pesa la más antigua de las maldiciones: la del fratricidio! No puedo orar, aunque la inclinación sea en mí tan fuerte como la voluntad. La fuerza de mi propósito cede a la mayor fuerza del crimen, y como un hombre ligado a dos tareas, quedome perplejo sin saber por dónde empezar, y a entrambias desatiendo. Pero aunque esta maldita mano se hubiera encallecido con sangre fraternal, ¿no habría bastante lluvia en el clemente cielo para lavarla hasta dejarla limpia como la nieve? ¿Para qué sirve la misericordia si no es para afrontar el rostro del crimen? ¿Y qué hay en la oración si no es la doble virtud de precavernos para no caer y de hacernos perdonar cuando caemos? Alcemos, pues, la vista al cielo: mi crimen se ha consumado ya. Pero ¡hay!, ¿qué forma de oración podrá valerme en este trance? ‘¡Perdóname el horrendo asesinato que cometí!’ No, no puede ser, puesto que sigo aún en posesión de todo aquello por lo cual cometí el crimen: la corona, objeto de mi ambición, y mi esposa, la reina. ¿Puede uno lograr perdón reteniendo los frutos del delito? En las corrompidas corrientes de este mundo, la dorada mano del crimen puede torcer la ley, y a menudo se ha visto al mismo lucro infame sobornar la justicia. Mas no sucede así allá arriba. Allí no valen subterfugios; allí la acción se muestra tal cual es, y nosotros mismos nos vemos obligados a reconocer sin rebozo nuestras culpas, precisamente cara a cara de ellas. ¿Qué hacer, pues? ¿Qué recurso me queda? Probemos lo que puede el arrepentimiento. ¿Qué no podrá? Y, sin embargo, ¿qué podrá

In the words Claudius directs at Laertes in act I, scene ii, lines 45-6, he is subtly trying to divinise his function echoing the very words of Yahve in *Isaiah*. Later on, in the new conversation that both characters maintain in act IV, scene v, 114-54, Claudius overtly invokes the divine origin of kingship and the protection God grants to monarchs. This is his answer to a menacing Laertes:

There's such divinity doth hedge a king
That treason can but peep to what it would,
Acts little of his will.
(IV, v, 120-2).

The thoughts and words that spring to Claudius's mind in the moment in which Laertes, full of rage, seems to threaten his life and his kingdom provoke bishop Wordsworth to make a comment which cannot be missed:

Imbued as the mind of our poet was with Scriptural principles, we shall not be surprised to find that he places upon the very highest ground both the prerogative and the responsibility of kings and governors. If, on the one hand, he would warn us that "Divinity doth hedge a king"; *Hamlet*, Act iv. Sc. 5. (...) that the **person** of a King is 'the Lord's anointed temple' (*1 Sam.* xxiv.10).¹⁷⁴

cuando uno no puede arrepentirse? ¡Oh miserable condición la mía! ¡Oh corazón negro como la muerte! ¡Oh alma mía, cogida como un pájaro en la liga, que cuanto más pugnas por librarte, más te prendes! ¡Oh ángeles del cielo, socorredme! ¡Oh rígidas rodillas, doblegaos! Y tú, corazón duro, ablanda tus fibras de acero de un recién nacido". (Astrana, *op. cit.*, pp. 1368-9)

¹⁷³ "Sucio es mi delito; su hedor llega hasta el cielo./Lleva la marca de la más antigua de las maldiciones:/asesinar al hermano. Quisiera rezar, pero no puedo./Y aunque es mi inclinación tan grande como mi voluntad,/la fuerza de mi delito vence a la de mi deseo./Soy como esos hombres que, sujetos a dos tareas,/quedan paralizados, sin poder comenzarlas,/desatendiéndolas a un tiempo. ¿Será que esta abominable mano/se ha encallado con la sangre fraterna?/¿No queda lluvia en el bendito cielo/para dejarla limpia, blanca como la nieve?/Misericordia, ¿para qué sirves, sino para mirar al delito cara a cara?/¿Y la plegaria? ¿No es doble su virtud?/¿No previene el pecado y perdona/tras la caída? A lo alto he de mirar./Cometí ya mi pecado. ¿Cuál será la oración/que sirva a mi propósito?/¿Diré 'perdón por mi crime'?/No..., no puede ser, puesto que estoy en posesión de todo/lo que me hizo matar: mi corona,/mi ambición, mi reina. ¿Ser perdonado/y retener todo aquello que es fruto del crimen?/En el proceder corrupto de este mundo,/la mano dorada del delito puede aplastar las leyes;/también vemos a menudo cómo el perverso lucro/puede sobornar la justicia. ¡Pero nunca en el cielo!/Allí no cabe el engaño, y la acción muestra allí/su verdadera naturaleza, nos obliga a enfrentarnos,/cara a cara, con nuestras faltas en toda su evidencia/¿Qué hacer entonces? ¿Hay algo que yo pueda hacer?/¿El arrepentimiento? ¿Y si no puedo arrepentirme?/¿Qué hacer cuando el arrepentimiento no es posible?/¡Miserable es mi estado! Oscuro es mi corazón como la muerte,/oh, alma mía, prisionera, que cuanto más luchas por liberarte/más te atenazan tus ligaduras. ¡Vosotros, ángeles cielo, ayudadme!/¡Afanaos!/¡Dobleagaos, obstinadas rodillas! Ablanda/tus fibras de acero, corazón, hasta que sean como las de un recién nacido./Todavía hay remedio." (Conejero, *op. cit.*, pp. 439-43)

¹⁷⁴ Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 284

This comment shows to what extent bishop Wordsworth does not see further than the letter of the biblical text, and to how his way of interpreting it impedes him from recognising the intention of Shakespeare. Bishop Wordsworth's idea of the origin of kingship and authority, in general, is purely medieval. But Shakespeare's is not.

Besides, it is precisely in plays like *Hamlet* and those of the second history tetralogy where Shakespeare shows how far he is from the medieval doctrine about the origin of kingship. The fact that such an illegitimate and perverse monarch as Claudius claims this divine right should have warned bishop Wordsworth against his blind adherence to this medieval doctrine. As a matter of fact, we know very little about Shakespeare's religious beliefs but if he did accept at all that all authority derives from God, as Paul says in *Romans* 13:1-5¹⁷⁵, his belief had little to do with bishop Wordsworth's blind acceptance.

Shakespeare's understanding of an issue which was so controversial in his days was by all means much closer to the new theological theories of the advanced Christian humanism that would appear magisterially formulated in Francisco de Vitoria's *De potestate civili* (1528) and, later on, in Francisco de Suárez's *Tractatus de legibus ac Deo legislatore*, (1612)¹⁷⁶. According to these Spanish scholars, while there is no doubt about the divine origin of authority, people are the vehicle of this divine sovereignty, which is passed to princes under certain conditions. It is this principle of "mediation" what justifies the "illegitimate" Henry IV, who was after all a usurper, and fully

¹⁷⁵ Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; and the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist, shall receive to themselves condemnation. For Magistrates are not to be feared *for* good works, but *for* evil. Wilt thou then be without fear of the power? Do well, so shalt thou have praise of the same. For he is the minister of God for thy wealth, but if thou do evil, fear: for he beareth not the sword for nought: for he is the minister of God to take vengeance on him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must be subject, not because of wrath only, but also for conscience' sake. (*Romans* 13:1-5).

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Suárez, Francisco: *De Legibus I: De Natura Legis*, Vol. XI, Corpus Hispanorum de Pace, Ed. Crítica bilingüe, (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid, 1971); and *Principatus Politicus o la Soberanía Popular*, Defensio Fidei III, Vol. 1, Corpus Hispanorum de Pace (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid, 1965).

legitimises his son Henry V, a King accepted and loved by his people. It is also this principle the one that Hamlet invokes when he tries to persuade the people of Denmark of the existence of rottenness in the court. In other words, it is not a fortuitous fact that only inefficient monarchs like Richard II or corrupt ones like Claudius vehemently claim this right in Shakespeare's plays. This is where the radical difference between the medieval mentality of the bishop Wordsworth and Shakespeare's humanistic thought lies.

Apart from the fact that the bishop's belief in the 'direct' transmission of divine sovereignty would be at odds with the monarchy and the political system of the Britain of his own time, the validity of his interpretation would radically contradict the tragic nature of *Hamlet*. In other words, Hamlet's moral lesson and heroic sacrifice would simply become the irresponsible act of an insane adolescent; and the dramatic dialogue of the play, and its monologues, would only amount to the expression of this insanity. Yet, sane or insane, Hamlet is right, and if he is mad, "there is method in it", as Polonius, one of his strongest enemies, admits.

Bishop Wordsworth's evaluation of Claudius's words is telling proof of how misleading, if not absurd, a strictly religious or theological interpretation of a biblical reference or echo from Shakespeare's works can be. Indeed, with those scriptural words, Claudius is forcing a legitimisation of his murderous usurpation, as though it were part of God's plan. The function of the biblical echo, in so far as it serves to highlight Claudius's inequity is purely stylistic.

In this specific case, the three translators reflect the divine authority of the King in the most medieval way, although each of them employs slightly different terms. Furthermore, the same irony, which oozes out of the Elizabethan text, and which bishop Wordsworth appears incapable of understanding, can be seen in the three Spanish texts:

someone so evil as Claudius cannot count on God's unconditional blessing. Valverde's text is:

Hay tal divinidad ciñendo a un Rey, que la traición no puede más que atisbar lo que quiere, realizando un poco de su deseo.¹⁷⁷

Astrana's passage is:

... hay una divinidad que protege como una valla a los reyes, de tal modo, que la traición no puede sino aislar el objeto de sus designios, haciéndola impotente para ejecutarlos¹⁷⁸;

and Conejero's translation runs as follows:

pues un poder divino protege la majestad
de forma que la traición ni siquiera intuye su objetivo,
no pudiendo consumir la acción.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Valverde, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

¹⁷⁸ Astrana, *op. cit.*, p. 1379.

¹⁷⁹ Conejero, *op. cit.*, p. 545

2.3 Laertes's biblical discourse

In act I, scene iii, lines 11-4, when trying to explain to his sister with every luxury of detail and similes how short-lived Hamlet's feelings towards her could be, Laertes refers to the human body as a 'temple':

For nature crescent does not grow alone
In thews and bulk, but as this temple waxes
The inward service of the mind and soul
Grows wide withal.
(I, iii, 11-4).

Wordsworth hastily recognises in this passage the biblical origin of an image, which is quite residing in the Christian doctrine: the human body is a temple. In fact, after having quoted this passage of Laertes, he refers to *John 2:20-2* as Shakespeare's possible source.

Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this Temple a building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. As soon therefore as he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he thus said unto them; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had said (...).

However, if one takes into account the whole context of Laertes's words, one may conclude that Shakespeare had in mind another text far more adequate for this situation. Indeed, what Laertes is pointing out is the fact that what Hamlet might be looking for is not a lasting relationship but intermittent sexual adventures. These intentions of Hamlet might be reinforced by some terms, in Laertes's intervention, on the bawdy second senses Shakespeare often plays with –for instance, 'nature'¹⁸⁰, 'bulk'¹⁸¹, 'soul'¹⁸², 'own'¹⁸³, 'virtue'¹⁸⁴ and, twice, 'will'¹⁸⁵. Although none of the

¹⁸⁰ "Nature. Generative and excretory organs (*W*; F&H); semen, menses, female pudendum, esp. that of a mare (*OED*). *La natura*: woman's 'quaint' (cunt) and 'privie parts of any man or beast' (F)." (Rubinstein, *op. cit.*, p. 169).

¹⁸¹ "Buttocks. Lit. body, belly; greater part. Bulk up: cause to swell. A bulker (arch.) is a strumpet (who sleeps on bulkheads), as in Duffie, *Madam Fickle*, v.i: 'this damn's bulking quean [whore]'. John Oldman, 'The Streets of London': 'my Foot/Shall march about your Buttocks: whence d'ye come,/From what Bulk-ridden Strumpet reeking home?' (*Penguin Book of Restoration Verse*, p. 247)". (*Ibid.*, p. 39).

sexual senses of these words are documented with Laertes's passage in any of the existent dictionaries or glossaries of Shakespeare's bawdy language and sexual puns, there is no doubt about their ambiguous meaning¹⁸⁶. For these reasons, it is more logical to think, in my opinion, that Shakespeare had probably in mind Paul's exhortation in *I Corinthians* 6:17-20:

But he that is joined unto the Lord, is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth, is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. Know ye not, that your body is the temple of the holy Ghost, which is in you, whom ye have of God? And ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, for they are God's.

The palpable Christian echo of Laertes's words is not necessarily a proof of his profession of Christianity but simply the adoration of a medieval knight that lives and fights in one of the countries of Christendom. For probably Laertes was not necessarily trying to dissuade his sister from continuing her relationship with Hamlet for moral reasons, but because he and his father Polonius realise that the young Prince has lost all

¹⁸² "Buttocks. Sole: the bottom of a thing. Rabelais used *asne* (ass) in one edn of Bk III, ch. 22, and changed it to *âme* (soul) in a 'corrected' edn, in order to save his life (in ch. 23 he made the same pun): 'His soul goeth ... under Prosperine's close-stool ... within which she ... voiced the fecal stuff of her striking clysters' (1693 trs.)." (Rubinstein, *op. cit.*, p. 248).

¹⁸³ "Own. Ass/arse. Sc sp 'ain' (CD) or 'ane', pun on *Frâne*, ass. (See AN for the silent 's' in *asne* – Cot.)." (Rubinstein, *ibid.*, p. 182).

¹⁸⁴ "Virtue. Chastity in women (P); but, not surprisingly, the opposite for men: potency, virility (L *vir*, a man). *Vertue*: manhood, prowess (Cot)." (Rubinstein, *ibid.*, p. 296).

¹⁸⁵ "Will. (...) In word-play (2) the sexual organ, usu. male. The latter is not always easy to distinguish, since consummation necessarily involves both meanings: 'fleshes his will in the spoil of her honour' *All's W. IV.iii.13-4*; *Ant. II.v.8*. (...). The various 'will's' in Sonnets 134, 135, 136 and 143 are often claimed to be allusions not only (1) to Sh's Christian name (2) to that of another man and sexual desire in the ordinary sense, but also (3) on occasion, to the penis and vagina. A characteristic gloss for *Sonn. 135*, *supra*, is that of Colman, 163: 'The lady's 'will' is largely and spacious, perhaps distended through ordinary tumescence, perhaps permanently enlarged by excessive use'. Although no certain example of 'will' = vagina has so far been recorded, Sh's uses are undoubtedly suggestive. 'Will' as penis is clearly intended by Sh., although the application did not become common until a later age". (Webb, *op.cit.*, p. 130).

¹⁸⁶ For existent bibliography of Shakespeare's puns and sexual meanings, see: Colman, E.A.M., *The Dramatic Use of Bawdy in Shakespeare*. London: Longman Group Ltd., 1974; Partridge, Eric, *Shakespeare's Bawdy*. New York: Dutton, 1948; Rubinstein, Frankie, *A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sexual Puns and their Significance*. 1948. 2nd edition. London: Macmillan Press, 1988; Webb, J. Barry, *Shakespeare's Erotic Word Usage*. Hastings: The Cornwallis Press, 1989; Delabastita, Dirk, *There's a Double Tongue*. Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA: Rodopi Press, 1993; Williams, Gordon, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*. London and Atlantic Highlands: The Athlone Press, 1994; and West, Gilian, *A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Semantic Wordplay*. London: The Edwin Meller Press, 1998.

his chances of becoming the King¹⁸⁷. In this sense¹⁸⁸, his resource to Paul's words, is not genuine proof of a Christian recommendation on his part, but of his and his family's indecent ambition and hypocrisy. This is the aesthetic purpose and value of the scriptural intertextuality in this case.

Valverde, as the other two translators do, includes the term "templo" that Jesus Christ identifies no longer with the temple of Solomon but with the human body. Thus, this idea that Laertes has to repeat, however hypocritical his intentions may be, is maintained in the three translations. These are Laertes's words in Valverde's translation:

No lo creas más: pues la naturaleza en crecimiento no crece sólo en nervios y tamaño, sino que, igual que se ensancha ese templo, también se amplía el servicio interior de la mente y el alma. Quizás ahora te quiere, y ahora no hay mancha ni doblez que empañe la virtud de su voluntad, pero tienes que temer, pensando su grandeza, que su voluntad no es suya, pues él mismo es vasallo de su nacimiento.¹⁸⁹;

Astrana's text is:

No pienses de ello más, pues la Naturaleza al hacernos crecer, no solo nos favorece en fuerzas y volumen, sino que a medida que va ensanchando el templo, dilata con él, a la par, el espacio interno de inteligencia y alma. Quizá ahora te ama, y que al presente ninguna mancha ni doblez empañe la pureza de sus intenciones. Pero debes temer, al considerar su alta alcuernia (...)¹⁹⁰.

This is Conejero's translation:

Que la naturaleza, al crecer, no solo nos dota
con músculos y cuerpo, sino que es también templo
que, agradándose, hace que también lo hagan
al alma y la mente. Acaso él te ame ahora

¹⁸⁷ He is heading in the right direction, as this is inkeeping with the rest of the play. Polonius says to Ophelia "Don't make a fool", not well translated either, as it refers to a bastard.

¹⁸⁸ The change of attitude of Ophelia's family when Hamlet ceases to be of interest to them as the ideal partner for his daughter can be seen clearly in the play-on-words underlying the interesting dialogue between Polonius and Ophelia. These hidden senses, as well as the second intentions of Polonius's words in this dialogue, are seen by Margarida Maria Bagina Coelho, "Observações sobre a tradução de *Hamlet* Ersílio Cardoso (com referência especial aos versos 88-136 da terceira cena do primeiro acto)" in *Traducción y Crítica de Traducciones*, eds. Ramón López Ortega and José Luis Oncins Martínez, Cáceres: Universidad de Extremadura, pp. 87-107.

¹⁸⁹ Valverde, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁹⁰ Astrana, *op. cit.*, p. 1340.

y no haya astucia o mácula que ponga sombras
en la virtud de su intención; pero estate alerta
pues, según su rango, no es dueño de sus deseos,
sujeto como está a su alta cuna.¹⁹¹

In act IV, scene 5, Laertes, after verifying the effects of the state of depression and madness in which his sister finds herself, appeals to the Divine Providence, with a clear request for assistance:

OPHELIA: And will he not come again?
And will he not come again?
No, no, he is dead.
Go to thy deathbed;
He never will come again.
His beard was as white as snow,
All flaxen was his poll.
He is gone, he is gone,
And we cast away moan.
God 'a'mercy on his soul!
And of all Christian souls, I pray God. God bye you. *Exit*
LAERTES: Do you see this? O God!
(IV, v, 190-201).

Wordsworth rightly identifies in these very words Laertes's acknowledgement of God's omniscience and omnividence¹⁹²:

... Laertes, seeing and hearing proofs of the madness of his sister Ophelia,
appealed to the divine compassion¹⁹³

It is difficult not to agree with bishop Wordsworth¹⁹⁴ when he says that the works of Shakespeare are full of references to the fact that God knows and sees everything. He provides us with so much evidence of this that it cannot be denied. Yet,

¹⁹¹ Conejero, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

¹⁹² Wordsworth, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.99.

¹⁹⁴ "Among the attributes of God, we have been taught by revelation that He knows all things; that He sees all things, even our most secret thoughts; that He neither slumbers, nor sleeps; and that His Providence is over all His works. Accordingly our poet speaks of Him, as 'the High All Seer,' in King Richard III. Act v. Sc. I; (...)In a note upon this passage, Mr. Henley asks, 'Is there not here some allusion to the sublime description of the Divine Omnipresence in the 139th Psalm?' However this question may be answered, there will be no doubt in other passages that our poet's views of the providence, goodness, and justice of God were drawn directly from Holy Scripture. Thus, where Hamlet says: "There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow". (*Ibid.*, p. 99)

it is equally difficult to agree with the conclusion he draws upon this evidence, that is, the confusion between Shakespeare and his character Laertes: “our poet’s views of the providence, goodness, and justice of God were drawn directly from Holy Scripture.”¹⁹⁵

It is difficult to share bishop Wordsworth’s idea that these were “our poet’s views”. As has been stated on several occasions we know very little about Shakespeare’s life and even less about his religious beliefs. The bishop’s apostolic zeal probably impells him to make assertions like this; but what textual evidence proves is only that those were the views of Laertes, Hamlet, King Richard II and quite a few other characters in his plays. The function and purpose of this Judeo-Christian intertextuality, that is, is once again to complete the portrait of a character.

This echo of divine omnividence is perfectly conveyed in Valverde’s translation that conforms to Laertes’s original words: “Oh Dios, ¿ves esto?”¹⁹⁶. The biblical intertext is also clear in Astrana’s version: “¿Veis esto, oh Dios?”¹⁹⁷. The same cannot be said however for the translation of Conejero, as by disregarding the verb ‘ver’ any form of textual link to God’s omnividence is set aside. Furthermore, the way in which he uses “Testigos sois de esto” seems to suggest that Laertes is considering God rather as a first-hand witness to what he himself is witnessing than towards a divine cry for help coming from any believer’s lips in such a moment: “¡Testigos sois de esto! ¡Dios mío!”¹⁹⁸.

As is common in these cases, the loss in the translation of the marked term or phrase –on this occasion, for biblical-theological reasons– may put an end to a strong

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Valverde, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

¹⁹⁷ Astrana, *op. cit.*, p. 1380.

¹⁹⁸ Conejero, *op. cit.*, p. 559.

rhetorical or stylistic effect in the original text. Hence, in this particular fragment, the quality of Conejero's work is not as high as the translations previously seen.

2.4 Ophelia's biblical discourse

Wells calls our attention to some of Ophelia's words in a conversation with her brother, Laertes, in which she almost paraphrases three verses of the words of Matthew 7:12-15. Ophelia says:

I shall th' effect of this good lesson keep.
As watchman to my heart. But, good my brother,
Do not as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,
Whiles, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads
And recks not his own rede.
(I, iii, 45-51)

The concepts of “ungracious pastors”¹⁹⁹, “steep and thorny way” and “primrose path of dalliance” have an equivalent or close correspondance with Matthew's well-known words:

Therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, even so do ye to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. Enter in at the strait gate; for it is the wide gate, and broad way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because the gate is strait, and the way narrow that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.²⁰⁰

The intertextuality generated here by the language of the Gospel and that of Shakespeare is also enhanced by the echo of another known verse of *John* 10:14, quoted by Wells too: “I am the good shepherd, and know mine, and am known of mine”.

Probably Shakespeare also had *Psalms* 23 in mind, which is dedicated exclusively to the ‘good shepherd’, a well-known Christian figure that people, both in the Middle Ages and the sixteenth century, were familiar with not only through the

¹⁹⁹ Wells highlights the importance of the choice of the word ‘pastor’ by Ophelia because “... [the] ‘good shepherd’, unlike the **ungracious pastors**, will ‘put forth his own sheep; he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him’ (*John* 10:4)”. *Op. cit.*, p. 196.

²⁰⁰ *Matthew* 7:12-15.

liturgy of the Church but also through Norman, Gothic and Renaissance images and paintings.

Valverde maintains this image that presides in the original text and, logically, the exemplification of the wicked shepherd used by Ophelia. He also conserves the metaphors for “caminos” (“way”) and “puertas” (“gate”) of “vida” (“life”) or “destrucción” (“destruction”):

Guardaré el sentido de esta buena lección, como guardianas de mi corazón, pero, mi buen hermano, no hagas como ciertos pastores sin gracia: no me muestres el abrupto y espinoso camino del cielo, mientras ellos, como libertinos jactanciosos y desatados, pisan el sender de rosas de los goces, sin atender a su propia doctrina.²⁰¹

However, Astrana –although the evangelical metaphors for the pathways and the doors to salvation and condemnation are recognisable in his translation–, by expressing “pastors” as “predicadores”, loses the christological image of the shepherd and with it an important part of the vigour of the text:

Conservaré, como salvaguardia de mi corazón, el recuerdo de esas saludables máximas. Pero, mi buen hermano, no hagas como algunos predicadores inexorables, que enseñan el áspero y espinoso camino del cielo, mientras ellos, como jactanciosos y procaces libertinos, pisan la senda florida de los placeres y no se preocupan de su propia doctrina.²⁰²

Something very similar happens with Conejero’s text, in which the “way” and “gate” metaphors are faithfully rendered but the “pastor’s” image is lost. The word “eclesiasticos” has none of the connotations intended with the original word:

Guardaré el sentido de esos Buenos consejos
como custodia de mi corazón. Pero, hermano mío,
no hagas como ciertos eclesiásticos
que muestras el espinoso camino de la Gloria
mientras que libertinos, jactanciosos,
siguen ellos la senda florida del placer
ignorando su propio consejo.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Valverde, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

²⁰² Astrana, *op. cit.*, p. 1341.

²⁰³ Conejero, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

In the words with which an already-deranged Ophelia addresses Claudius in act IV, scene v, bishop Wordsworth detects a rich confluence of New Testament echoes and legendary narrative²⁰⁴. These are the words of the heartbroken Ophelia:

Well, God dild you! They say the owl was a baker's daughter. Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be. God be at your table! (IV, v, 42-4).

Regarding “the owl was a baker’s daughter”, the bishop reminds us that the legend “The Baker’s Daughter” is a Christian legend and that the transformation of the daughter into an owl was a punishment. This fact provides the link between Ophelia’s words of the reference to the legend and the sentence “God be at your table”, in which vestiges from *Luke*²⁰⁵ and *Matthew*²⁰⁶ coalesce.

As for the words “Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be” (IV, v, 43-4), the bishop also detects in them the stamp of *1 John* 3:2: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be”.

As can be seen Ophelia’s words are full of biblical discourse. The apparent chaotic blending of these quotations from the Bible and the reference to the legend in Ophelia’s mind is much more coherent than it may appear at first sight. The resulting intertextuality shaped by Ophelia’s discourse, some verses from the New Testament and allusions to “The Baker’s Daughter” legend contributes to allow Shakespeare to show, firstly, that she is a medieval woman, and therefore, Christian; and secondly, that in the moment that she speaks, the Christian hope acts as the counterpoint to the tribulation that she is going through.

²⁰⁴ Martins summarises in a few words the main ingredients of this legend. “As the legend goes, Christ begged hospitality of a baker’s wife, who would have given it, but was prevented from doing this act of charity towards the seeming beggar by her daughter, who was, in consequence, changed into an owl.” (Taylor, William and Thom, M. A., *Shakespeare Examinations*. [Boston: Ginn and Co., 1888.] p. 57).

²⁰⁵ “Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find waking; verily I say unto you, he will gird himself about, and make them to sit down at table, and will come forth, and serve them.” (*Luke* 12:37); and “Now when one of them that sat at table heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that eateth bread in the kingdom of God.” (*Luke* 14:15).

²⁰⁶ “But I say unto you, that many shall come from the East and West, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.” (*Matthew* 8:11).

In relation to the reception of this passage in Spanish, the translation of “owl” for “lechuza” or “búho” also seems very adequate, not only because the legend conserves strong echoes in English speaking countries, but also because the idea of this bird within the popular imagination of our culture is also very negative. What is more, it is even likely that the distant origin of this transformation of the baker’s daughter into an owl, that is the end of the legend, arises from the myth of Nictimene. According to the myth, Nictimene, the daughter of King of Lesbos Epopeo, consents to sexual relations with her father, who is in love with her. Disgraced by her actions, Nictimene hides in the forest until Atenea, pitying her, converts her into a owl, a symbol of those who run and hide in the shadows. Probably some of the defenders of certain free versions might consider it to be legitimate to transform “The Baker’s Daughter” into “Epopeo’s Daughter, Nictimene”. Though it is not necessary in this case, as with this last solution the connection to the heavenly feast of Luke and Matthew would be lost.

In José María Valverde’s version all of the connotations that this fragment holds in the original work are loyally reproduced.

Dicen que la lechuza era hija de un panadero. Señor, sabemos lo que somos, pero no lo que podemos ser. Dios esté en vuestra mesa.²⁰⁷

Astrana’s²⁰⁸ and Conejero’s²⁰⁹ also faithfully preserve this aspect from the original.

²⁰⁷ Valverde, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

²⁰⁸ “Cuenta[n] que la lechuza era hija de un panadero. ¡Señor! Sabemos lo que podemos, mas no sabemos lo que podemos ser. Dios bendiga vuestra mesa.” (Astrana, *op. cit.*, p. 1378).

²⁰⁹ “Dicen que era hija del panadero la lechuza ... ¡Señor, señor! Lo que somos, lo sabemos; no sabemos, sin embargo, lo que podemos ser ... Dios bendiga vuestra mesa.” (Conejero, *op. cit.*, p. 531).

2.5 First Player's biblical discourse

During a conversation between Hamlet and the First Player in act III, scene ii, the latter states the following:

The great man down, you mark his favourite flies,
The poor advanc'd makes friends of enemies; (III, ii, 214-5)

Bishop Wordsworth²¹⁰, making reference to this passage, hastens to use it as proof that Shakespeare knows the Bible well, a point which he insists upon repeatedly throughout his book. Moreover, he suggests in his commentary that he even knows the apocryphal –apocryphal for the canon of his Church, the Church of England, but not for the Catholic Church. Although the bishop tells us that the piece of wisdom that the First Player reminds us of the words of the son of Sirach in *Ecclesiasticus*, the First Player's words are not only not in agreement with the Holy Writ, but they say exactly the opposite²¹¹. Its content is more or less the same as that of the proverb “del árbol caído todos hacen leña” (or “anyone can kick a man when he's down”; and it may also refer to false or hollow friendship²¹²). Once more, the doctrinal zeal of the bishop has played a trick on him.

Valverde translates that piece of wisdom of the First Player as

Si cae el grande, ved a sus validos
huyendo: cuando el pobre suben, se hacen
amigos los que fueron enemigos²¹³.

For Astrana, they become:

²¹⁰ Wordsworth, op. cit., p. 251.

²¹¹ “When the rich slips, there are many hands to catch him, if he talks nonsense he is congratulated. The poor slips, and is blamed for it, he may talk good sense, but no room is made for him. The rich speaks and everyone stops talking, and then they praise his discourse to the skies. The poor speaks and people say, 'Who is this?' and if he stumbles, they trip him up yet more.” (*The New Jerusalem Bible*. [New York; London: Darton Longman & Todd, Ltd.; Doubleday, 1985] *Ecclesiasticus* 13:22-3).

²¹² Thomas Price includes this quote in the section “Hollow friendship” in his compendium *The Wisdom and Genius of Shakespeare: Comprising Moral Philosophy, Delineations of Character, Paintings of Nature and the Passions, Seven Hundred Aphorisms and Miscellaneous Pieces: with Select and Original Notes, and Scriptural References*, (E.L. Carey and A. Hart, University of Michigan, 1839) (p. 49).

²¹³ Valverde, op. cit., p. 62.

Cae el potentado, y veis a sus favoritos huir de él; encumbándose el miserable, y de sus enemigos hace amigos²¹⁴.

Finally, Conejero translates them as:

Cuando sucumbe el poderoso, todos tienden a huir,
si asciende el miserable, obtiene amigos de enemigos²¹⁵.

In all of the translations we can observe almost complete faithfulness to the Elizabethan original, including its flagrant deviation from the text of *Ecclesiasticus* in which it is paradoxically inspired.

²¹⁴ Astrana, *op. cit.*, p. 1365.

²¹⁵ Conejero, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

2.6 Priest's biblical discourse

In act V, scene i, in Ophelia's burial, the priest, referring to the possibility of Ophelia having committed suicide, tells Laertes that the suspicion of her death prevents him from administering the rite of exequies:

PRIEST: Her obsequies have been as far enlarg'd
As we have warranty. Her death was doubtful;
And, but that great command o'ersways the order,
She should in ground unsanctified have lodg'd
Till the last trumpet. For charitable prayers,
Shards, flints, and pebbles should be thrown on her.
Yet here she is allow'd her virgin crants,
Her maiden strewments, and the bringing home
Of bell and burial.
LAERTES: Must there no more be done?
PRIEST: No more be done.
We should profane the service of the dead
To sing a requiem and such rest to her
As to peace-parted souls.
(V, i, 222-34)

As can be seen, the priest says that on this particular occasion, "To sing a requiem and such rest to her/As to peace-parted souls" would be an act of profaning. It is in these very words, that the priest considers that the "requiem" should not be delivered where a strong echo of the New Testament is heard. They are the core of the medieval ritual and ceremonial that the Catholic Church used on these occasions in the early thirteenth century²¹⁶. Obviously, Latin was the official language of the Church and of its liturgy. But the text of the Gospel selected for the funeral remained unaltered²¹⁷ in the sixteenth century²¹⁸. A medieval priest would not have been allowed to officiate in

²¹⁶ In the Catholic Church, people who committed used to be denied a Christian burial.

²¹⁷ In the Latin Rite of the Roman Catholic Church, the change from Latin to the vernacular languages in the liturgy was not permitted until the Second Vatican Council.

²¹⁸ In the Church of England, the same text was used in English for the funeral services; and as late as in 1662 the *Book of Common Prayer* includes a very similar formula: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace: according to thy word./For mine eyes have seen: thy salvation,/Which thou hast prepared: before the face of all people;/To be a light to lighten the Gentiles: and to be the glory of thy people Israel."

English, as is the case in the play.²¹⁹

This quotation of the funeral rite is just the beginning of *Luke 2:29*: “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word”.²²⁰ As with many other formulas, references or religious echoes of the work, the priest’s words contribute uniquely to the medieval atmosphere of the story that Shakespeare is telling us.

Although they have no other aim than that of emphasising the ordeal that Ophelia had gone through before dying, and placing the scene in the historical moment of Hamlet’s Denmark, that is, the Middle Ages, some authors use this scene in order to prove that Shakespeare was a Roman Catholic²²¹. Others use it to elaborate on moral, doctrinal or historical aspects, which do not add much to our understanding or appreciation of the aesthetic dimension of the play. This is exactly what Rex Gibson does in the chapter he wrote for the *Cambridge Student Guide: Hamlet* (“What was Shakespeare’s England like?”). He manifestly goes a little too far in his explanation of the presence and function of suicide, the Christian burial rites and the Purgatory in *Hamlet*. As a matter of fact, as has just been said, rather than concentrating on the specific purpose in the plot, he elaborates too much on the significance of these concepts in the epoch, as well as their moral and theological dimension. Shakespeare’s intention with his references to suicide, the funeral rites and the Purgatory is purely contextualising, not religious. It would be unfair to say that Gibson’s information about these beliefs in Elizabethan England is out of place. Yet they cannot replace a commentary on the aesthetic function, and such a comment is unfortunately lacking.

²¹⁹ The Latin text, taken from the *Vulgate*, reads as follows: *Nunc Dimittis servum tuum, Domine, secundum verbum tuum in pace: Quia viderunt oculi mei salutare tuum Quod parasti ante faciem omnium populorum: Lumen ad revelationem gentium, et gloriam plebis tuae Israel.*

²²⁰ Wells (*op. cit.*, p. 298) says: “peace-parted souls: Those who die piously in peace (‘Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace’ (*Luke 2:29*)).”

²²¹ See Maurice J. Quinlan, “Shakespeare and the Catholic Burial Services,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 5 (1954): pp. 303-6.

The Spanish translations faithfully reproduce the sad connotations that ooze from the original text. However, Valverde's and Conejero's are closer both to the ritual formula and the verses of Luke than Astrana's, for Astrana renders "peace-parted" as "mueren en el Señor", thus slightly deviating from the text of the Gospel. In Valverde's text we find an adequate rendering of the Gospel terms, that is, "peace-parted souls": "profanarías el servicio de difuntos cantando el grave requiem y dándole tal reposo como a las almas que marcharon en paz"²²². Conejero also renders the key words out from which the echo arises: "Sería profanar el oficio de difuntos si cantáramos/response o solemne requiem como si se tratara de un alma/que ha partido en paz"²²³. As for Astrana's translation, while the evocation of the Holy Scripture is maintained, it does not contain the reference to "peace", a concept on which both Luke and the office of the dead put emphasis: "Profanaríamos los ritos funerales si cantáramos para ella el descanso eterno, como se hace por las almas de los que mueren en el Señor"²²⁴.

In any case, as far as the Spanish reception of these connotations is concerned, the three authors succeed. Indeed, as stated before, these words from the *Gospel of saint Luke* mentioned by the reluctant priest are part and parcel of the Anglican and Roman Catholic tradition, as in both confessions they are the nucleus of the liturgy of the dead. Through the Spanish versions of the Bible and of Catholic liturgy, they are easily identified both by Spanish-speaking Catholics and non-Catholics. The scriptural echo was also identified and understood before the Second Vatican Council, when the rite was administered in Latin, because Luke's words appeared in all kinds of condolence letters, in memoriam cards and on tombstones.

²²² Valverde, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

²²³ Conejero, *op. cit.*, p. 639.

²²⁴ Astrana, *op. cit.*, p. 1388.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The result of the analysis of the samples selected is telling evidence of the fact that not only the indirect but also the direct references to the Holy Scripture used by Shakespeare in this tragedy have a merely aesthetic aim and function. In other words, neither the simple biblical resonances nor the direct quotations from the Bible serve any pastoral or doctrinal purpose –let alone are they meant to illustrate any theological principle.

This aesthetic intention undoubtedly accounts for Shakespeare's use of such a wealth of a corpus of biblical discourse for enriching his dramatic and poetic language in general and particularly that of *Hamlet*. That the motive of this rich biblical intertextuality is merely a stylistic one explains why not only the dramatist's religious beliefs but also his attitude to religion itself still remain unclear.

Indeed, as far as we know from the scarce existing documentation on his life, he kept aloof from the religious debate of his time. Although he does not appear to have left out of his works any of the important things and themes of his epoch, as a matter of fact he actually refused to touch upon what was probably the most burning issue of the time: the religious debate brought about by the Reformation. This exclusively stylistic use of biblical and religious discourse is obviously the corollary of Shakespeare's deliberate distancing from the theological feud aroused by the Reformation. It is certainly shocking irony that one of the writers who delved most deeply into the collective mentality –as well as the historical events– of his time should and did avoid the mentioned religious controversy. *Hamlet* provides telling evidence for this, especially if one bears in mind that, as Arnold Kettle contends Prince Hamlet is the tragic victim of the change from a medieval to a modern world. This is what those

numerous critics and historians that insisted and still insist on finding a religious meaning in his works fail to see.

Only when one realises that the purpose of Shakespeare's use of biblical language is purely aesthetic do these apparent contradictions cease to exist. Hence, it is surprising that those critics and editors that are not caught in the trap of forcing a religious interpretation or sense of the biblical discourse onto the play limit themselves to identify the source. It is strange indeed that neither any of the main critics consulted, nor the main editors of the play add any comment on the aesthetic or stylistic function of the echoes or quotations.

According to what has been proven in José María Valverde's translation along with the other two that have been used in comparison, not a single insinuation that could suppose a religious intention can be found in any of the numerous references that are made to the New or Old Testament in *Hamlet*. Consequently, and as is equally occurrent in the original text, any appreciation that could be made of this kind from literary criticism, from Catholic or Protestant apologetics, or even from history, would be as useless as the ones that have been done and commented already.

In relation to the transfer of biblical terms, segments and paragraphs, or the echoes and indirect references to the Scripture, into the three Spanish versions of the play here analysed, they are maintained and understood quite accurately. However, at some time or another, neither Valverde nor Astrana and Conejero have been able to perceive the scriptural resonance of the source text. As a consequence, they have failed to render those echoes in its translation. Yet, it is not in Valverde's where these shortcomings are most frequent.

In conclusion, as far as their recreation of the biblical intertextuality and its function in their translations are concerned, not only Valverde but also Astrana and Conejero brilliantly pass the test.

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