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Ang Trahedya ni Hamlet, translated by Tinio

Review Author: Nonie De La Fuente, S.J.

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Book Reviews and Notes



Ang Trahedyang ni Hamlet, Prinsipe ng Dinamarka. By William Shakespeare. Translated by Rolando S. Tinio. Quezon City, Philippines: University of the Philippines Press, 1991. 148 pages.

Many literary critics have written how William Shakespeare's brilliance and genius has carried his literary masterpieces far beyond his own time and locality, and beyond his own historical conditions. These writers have marveled at how Shakespeare's works speak to all times, address themselves to all places, and belong to all people. Indeed Shakespeare is an invaluable contribution to the noble human, creative endeavor of mirroring the human condition—of capturing the human spirit with all its merits and flaws.

Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* is Shakespeare's jewel. Much has already been written about it, outlining and declaring its beauty. It is a powerful and sublime account of human frailty and the will to become whole. The play makes no judgment, passes no moral indictment. Rather, it holds up a mirror to all of us so that we see for ourselves our own flawed condition, our own brokenness. But in the tragic character of Hamlet, we also see ourselves striving to be whole, to become human. It is precisely for this that the play is a precious heirloom among the treasures Shakespeare has left behind. It is an heirloom that has been passed from one generation to another and from one culture to another.

Rolando S. Tinio—poet, playwright and director—translated this masterpiece of Shakespearean drama into Pilipino. His preface explains his intentions in translating Hamlet. This is followed by an introduction about Shakespeare, his other works, the structure of his theater, his dramatics, his costumes, and his audience. The last part of the introduction gives the source of the translation: the Second Quarto and the First Folio. The Text Notes occupy the last section of the translation, and are also based on the Second Quarto and the First Folio.

Shakespeare wrote for the theater. His plays possess intrinsic literary value in as much as their influence on English language and literature has been extensive and indelible. But his plays are more properly regarded as just that—drama, theater—something best appreciated and understood if seen rather than read, precisely because Shakespeare, in the words of John Gassner in his *Treasury of the Theater*:

. . . was a practiced showman, he turned it [life] into theater. And since he was a superb poet, he succeeded in transfiguring life. To view Shakespeare's plays as a fusion of poetry and drama . . . is the beginning of wisdom in Shakespearean appreciation and study.

Tinio draws from this. Avoiding, on the one hand, a literal translation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which would have been an impossible task—to say the least—and an excessively personal version, on the other hand, which might render the play unrecognizable, Tinio aligns himself with Shakespeare's intent to write for the theater. This, Tinio says, as he writes in the preface, is the rationale behind the way he made his translation: "isinalin ito [*Hamlet*] upang maitanghal sa dulaan kaya't kailangang malinawan agad ng artista at manonood ang lahat ng pangungusap."

Shakespeare was a commoner. He intended his plays to speak to the common people, and so, he wrote for them. He wrote so that those who went to the Globe Theater straight from their shops, stalls, stables, and stores, straight from the streets, would be able to grasp and enjoy his stories. This is shown by Shakespeare's characteristic vulgarity and the worldliness of his language. But because the beauty of his poetry and the stylishness of the English language dilute Shakespeare's vulgarity, a lot of his worldliness gets lost, especially to non-English speakers who are not so familiar with the nuances of the language.

Only a faithful translation into our own language, such as the one Tinio has produced, can help return Shakespearean dramas to their rightful owners: not the intellectuals, but the common people.

Tinio comes from the ranks of the common *tao*. In translating *Hamlet*, he, too, has the common man pretty much in mind: those who view the play and those who act in it. Like Shakespeare, he wishes to reach the man or woman on the street. This is why his translation is not as stylized nor as poetic as the original English text. Tinio admits in his preface that critics and scholars are right in pointing out the limitations of his translation, and that he is the first to accept their criticisms. Translations of works in a foreign tongue and from a different time are meant, as Tinio strongly believes, not to imitate a foreign way of thinking or way of doing things, but are meant to capture whatever light these foreign works can shed on our own experiences within our own unique culture.

Rolando Tinio's *Ang Trahedya ni Hamlet* proves what Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe has to say about Shakespeare's universality:

If we call Shakespeare one of the greatest poets, we mean that few have perceived the world as accurately as he did, that few who have expressed their inner contemplation of it have given the reader deeper insight into its meaning and consciousness. . . .

Pearl culturists introduce a foreign matter into the innards of an oyster to produce a cultured, yet expensive, pearl. Perhaps, in like manner, Tinio, in this translation of *Hamlet*, has metaphorically transplanted foreign matter into the very heart of our culture, our language. In the process of translating, in the process of "breaking down" this foreign matter so that it can "fit in" our culture today, a valuable piece of literature has been created. Such is the nature of Shakespeare's works. They may be transplanted into another culture, into another time, and be transformed into something even more valuable, because they shed light on the collective experiences of another people.

The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark has been translated into our own language. It is something foreign that has been rendered our own through *Ang Trahedya ni Hamlet, Prinsipe ng Dinamarka*: something definitely from Shakespeare's literary gift and yet something uniquely from one of our literary talents, Rolando S. Tinio.

Nonie de la Fuente, S.J.
Loyola House of Studies
Ateneo de Manila University

Twice Blessed. By Ninotchka Rosca. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992. 269 pages.

In an author's note to *The Monsoon Collection* (1983), Ninotchka Rosca writes that while individual stories were composed at various places and times, "the collection itself, as a whole, was conceptualized in the Camp Crame Detention Centre in 1973." Much the same thing could be said of Rosca's work, "as a whole": while *The Monsoon Collection*, an earlier volume of stories, *Bitter Country* (1970), the nonfictional *Endgame* (1987), and her first novel, *State of War* (1988), differ from one another in various ways, all are centrally concerned with the experience of the Marcos era and the Martial Law period within it. Now in a recently published second novel, *Twice Blessed*, she takes up the same basic subject, but treats it in a significantly new manner.

The protagonists of this novel, the Basbas twins Hector and Katerina, are, in spite of their blood kinship, instantly recognizable as Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos. Not only does the suggestion of incest imply a conjugal relationship between them; individually they possess many of the signature characteristics of the real-life figures, from a passion for shoes, in Katerina's case, to having placed first in the bar exams, in Hector's. Thinly disguised events and personalities from the history of the regime complete the identification in this *roman* of many *cléfs*. The time setting is somewhat unusual: