

# #07

# THE THEORIES AND PRACTICES OF LOPE AND MORATÍN: THE NEW THEATRE AND, *THE NEW PLAY*

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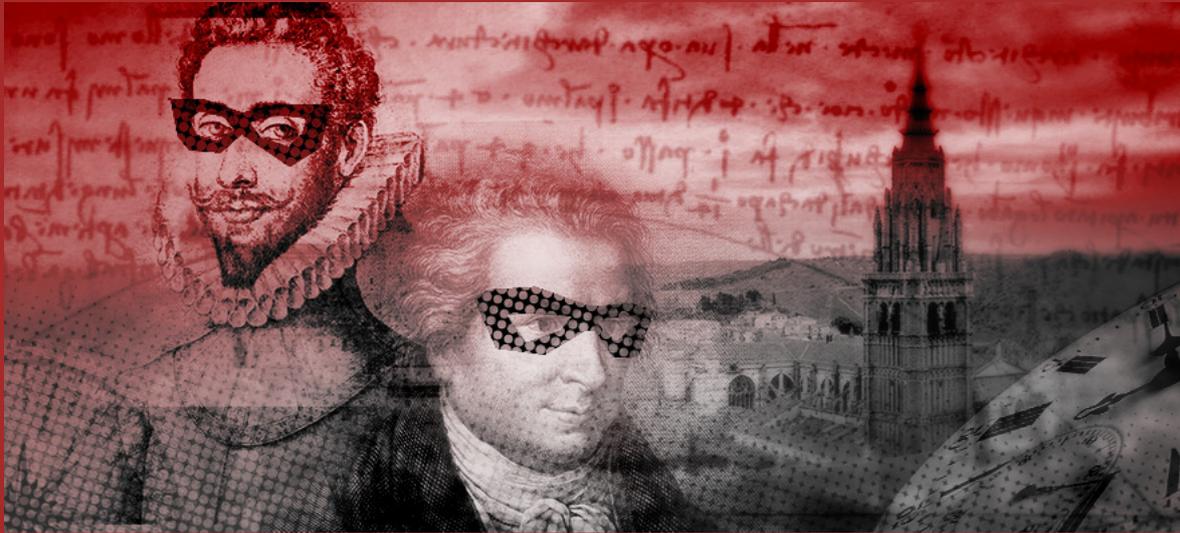
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**Abstract** || In this article, for the first time, the dramatic theories of two influential Spanish playwrights, Lope de Vega and Leandro Fernández de Moratín, will be compared. Two centuries separate them, but both tried to update the theatre through their dramatic works, and both sought to establish a “New Theatre”, which would break with the traditions that came immediately before. The output of these two authors, however, is dramatically different: Lope wrote more than four hundred works while Moratín produced fewer than half a dozen. Nonetheless, the two of them – one of them, the most prolific and internationally renowned dramatic Spanish poets, and the other, perhaps the least productive among the well-known Spanish playwrights – shared a common aspiration: that their works might reflect reality. Paraphrasing Lope himself, *comoedia speculum humanae vitae* could be the motto of both of them. We will use *The New Art of Writing Plays* (19609) and *The New Play, or The Café* (1792) as a starting point, and will analyse the dramatic realism of the works of both authors, within the context of important moments in the lives of each of them.

**Keywords** || New theatre | New art | Reflecting customs | Verisimilitude | Dramatic rules | Didacticism.

Leandro Fernández de Moratín, one of the most representatives of the Spanish neoclassical playwrights, dedicated all his literary works to the Enlightened ideal of providing social education through the theatre. He is well known for attempting, both in his theoretical writings and in his plays – first performed between 1790 and 1806 – to achieve this goal. He established a set of rules which would govern the writing and performance of dramatic texts, and throughout his life he justified, defended, and put these rules into practise. In this context, *The New Play, or The Café* (1792) is paradigmatic, not simply because it conforms strictly to these rules, which could be said of all his works, but also because it encapsulates a meta-theatrical discourse which exposes, on one hand, the foolishness of Neo-Baroque plays – which were enjoying a great popularity at the time, but to which he Moratín was strongly opposed – and on the other, the advantages and virtues or Enlightened poetics.

In short, we are dealing with an attempt to break away from the prior literary traditions – traditions which, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was thought would never be surpassed. As such, Leandro – in contrast to his father, who considered Lope and Calderón to be responsible for the corruption of Spanish theatre (Fernández de Moratín 1996: 155) – does not criticise Baroque theatre in itself, whose poetics he manages to tolerate<sup>1</sup>, although he does not partake in them himself. However, he pours criticism upon the *barroquistas* – those writers that ceaselessly repeat the same formulas which, in their day were innovative, but which now, aside from adding nothing to a work, provided an outlet for some of the least acceptable poetic atrocities. His criticism focuses on “la malversación de este mismo teatro por parte de los dramaturgos del XVIII” [the misappropriation of this theatrical tradition by playwrights of the 18th century] (Alda 1953: 10) or, in the passionate words of Menéndez Pelayo “una turba de vándalos, un enjambre de escritores famélicos y proletarios, que ninguna escuela podía reclamar por suyos y que juntaban en torpe mezcolanza los vicios de todas” (1943: 424).

This determination to establish a new set of ideas that would break away from those of the past is exactly what drove Lope de Vega to write *The New Art of Writing Plays* (*El arte nuevo de hacer comedias*) (1609), a poetic discourse whose relationship with Moratín’s ideas will be discussed in this article. From the title onwards, references to this work<sup>2</sup> and to the type of theatre of which Lope was a proponent – new theatre – can be found in Moratín’s work, *The New Play*<sup>3</sup>. In the words of García Santo-Tomás, from the outset this theatrical tradition enjoyed the “privilegio del escándalo” (2006: 31). The ambiguity of this work’s title is clear; it is at once a reference to the “new play” that is staged within the work, and to the “new theatre” – the new theatrical traditions of which Moratín is a proponent. However, in the light of Lope’s work, this ambiguity becomes deeply ironic. The

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## NOTES

1 | As Moratín said, through the mouth of don Pedro – the educated gentleman in *The new Play*: “menos me enfada cualquiera de nuestras comedias antiguas, por malas que sean. Están desarregladas, tienen disparates; pero aquellos son hijos del ingenio y no de la estupidez. [...] Ahora, compare usted nuestros autores adocenados del día con los antiguos, y dígame si no valen más Calderón, Solís, Rojas, Moreto, cuando deliran, que estotros cuando quieren hablar en razón” (Pérez Magallón 1994: 146).

2 | According to Gérard Genette (1982), the peripheral text – or paratext – of the two works establishes links with other texts.

3 | Since the Romantic period, the meaning of the term “new theatre” has increased in scope, and has come to express: “una noción genérica para describir una formulación de síntesis de las prácticas escénicas que se desarrollan en la península desde el siglo XV al XVII” (Rodríguez Cuadros, 2002: 75).

play that don Eleutorio – a character in *The New Play* – writes is both new and outdated at the same time, since, despite having just been written, it conforms to formulae that were current two centuries earlier. Moreover, it is an excellent example of the banal and non-didactic nature of the “new theatre” of the golden age.

The main differences between *The New Art* and *The New Play* arise when we consider the opinions of each author on the theatrical traditions of their respective eras; the former – *The New Art*, by Lope – justifies them, claiming they provide aesthetic identity to the period, while the latter, *The New Play* by Moratín, is opposed to them, classing them as elements of a previous age. In addition, it is clear that Moratín’s aim is to return to the classics – hence his neo-classicist label – while Lope is aiming to break away from them. As such, he begins his *New Art* with a summary of the classic dramatic landscape and compares it to that of contemporary Spanish plays, exclaiming: “¡Mirad si hay en las nuestras pocas faltas!”(v. 61)<sup>4</sup>, and concludes with the idea that although they don’t strictly obey the rules of the art – that is to say, the three unities – they please the audience and are popular:

me pedís que escriba  
Arte de hacer comedias en España,  
donde cuanto se escribe es contra el arte;  
y que decir cómo serán agora  
contra el antiguo, y que en razón se funda,  
es pedir parecer a mi experiencia (vv. 134-138).

It is precisely because of his experience and skill in these works that scholars turn to Lope for an explanation of this “new art”. He is quick to say that it is not art, despite the fact that he practices it himself, and as such, rather than describing the “la vil quimera de este monstruo cómico” (v. 150) as he is asked, he decides, “en estos dos extremos da[r] un medio” (v. 156). However, as several critics of *The New Art* have shown, however much he tries to remove the shackles of the former traditions, he just ends up relying yet more heavily on the work of classic theorists – Aristotle, for example, who took Plato’s theory of imitation and added the idea of verisimilitude, which is one of the dramatic ideas that Lope held in the highest regard. (José Prades 1971: 180).

This relationship with the classical approach is made yet more obvious when we look at the penultimate stanza of *The New Art*; written in Latin, it establishes clear links with Cicero and Livy Andronicas. As Margaret Newels notes:

Die Komödie hatte das ganze alltägliche Leben darzustellen, auch mit seinen Gefahren, den nach Cicero ist sie eine «imitatio vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritates» oder kurz ein «speculum vitae», wie

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## NOTES

4 | From *The New Art* by Lope, from the edition of García Santo-Tomás (2006), and indicating – for greater precision, and since nearly every edition includes them –verse numbers rather than page numbers.

Livius Andronicus sagt (1959: 32).

Not for nothing does Lope pose the question, in the first stanza of this text: “Humanae cur sit speculum comoedia vitae?” (v. 377). This phrase is an excellent summary of the poetics that Moratín will later promote – although, unlike Lope, he accepts the idea unquestioning. Moratín’s aim of making theatre a mirror of morals - an idea upon which he expounds in various theoretical texts, and in particular in the preface of many editions of *The New Play* - is also considered by Lope, in various stanzas of *The New Art*. Moratín said in 1792 that he was attempting to “imitar la naturaleza en lo universal, formando de muchos un solo individuo” (Fernández de Moratín 1994: 101)<sup>5</sup>, and he insists upon this in the 1796 edition, and makes it clear through examples that he applies an inductive method: through the observation of various traits in many and diverse individuals, he forms one single image.

Faced with the primacy of theatrical verse, Moratín defends prose, since it is closer to everyday language and better reflects the real situations which should be presented on stage. Lope de Vega, breaking with tradition, also defends the idea, although he does not provide justification (v. 211), and later even contracts himself (vv. 305-312). Despite all this, Moratín did use verse in some of his works, for example in his debut work *The Old Man and the Young Girl*. He was not, however, the only playwright of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to work with prose, since Diderot, one of the great theorists of Enlightenment theatre also recommended the practice as a means of making drama more natural (Diderot, 1830). Nonetheless we must concede Moratín an extremely high level of skill in his use of language, and, as Dowling points out, the creation of “un nivel de prosa dramática que había de servir de modelo para los dramaturgos españoles del siglo XIX y aun del XX” (1989: 52).

Moratín was also concerned with the work of the actors, which led him to intervene in rehearsals, and to pen numerous reflections on various performances<sup>6</sup>. These texts demonstrate his knowledge of European acting theories, such as that of Denis Diderot, whose essay, *Paradoxe sur le comédien* – published posthumously in 1830, but written before 1777 and distributed in manuscript form – discusses the true secrets of successfully communicating a character’s feelings to the audience. The purpose of the French Enlightenment was, just as it was for Moratín, to achieve the most realistic effect – the greatest verisimilitude – in order that the audience might accept as true that which is performed before them. As such, in his 1825 prologue to *The New Theatre*, when commenting upon the performance, he notes of the character that portrayed don Eleuterio that “«la voz, el gesto, los ademanes, el traje, todo fue tan acomodado al carácter que representó que parecía en él naturaleza lo que era estudio”

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## NOTES

5 | From the edition already referred to, of Jesús Pérez Magallón (1994). From henceforth only page numbers will be referenced.

6 | See the warnings that preface the different editions of his works.

(1994: 103).

This verisimilitude of theatrical behaviour is premised in the every element of the decorum of each character; just as Diderot desired, each character should be presented according to his or her own condition. This encapsulated another of Moratín's maxims, that language should be respectable, as defined by Enlightenment scholars; that the linguistic production of each should be altered – as occurs in reality – by his or her social extraction. In *The New Play*, Pipí, the waiter at the café, is astonished by those that work in theatre and, representing the ignorant popular masses, he shows pride in not understanding the rules; Don Serapio speaks in a manner that is appropriate for his character – a defender of his friends, who wishes fervently for the downfall of all those who are against them; Mariquita uses expressions that are apt for a young marriageable woman; don Hermógenes speaks like a Latinate pedant; don Pedro like a learned, enlightened man. In the same way, in *The New Art*, Lope advises that characters should act in a manner proper to their position - the king with “gravidad real” [royal gravitas]; the old man with “modestia sentenciosa” (vv. 269-279); “el lacayo no trate cosas altas” (v. 286) – but also according to their situation, since, as he notes, “no es la misma la dicción y el estilo del lenguaje cómico que la del político, ni se dice igual una sentencia que un consejo”.

If the language of each character had to be adapted to his or her condition, is it obvious that actors had to take great care over their declamations to ensure that this was so; to avoid, for example, a well-constructed literary text sounding like a recited poem. Hence, these considerations can be extended to the dressing room. These days we are used to period dress being an integral part of a performance, but this has not always been the case. Indeed, often it was the actors themselves that were responsible for finding and purchasing their own costumes. To this was added the problem that actresses, concerned with fashion, were loath to appear onstage in unflattering clothes. This question was one of the objections of the Enlightenment reform of the theatre, since a single inappropriate garment could destroy the verisimilitude of an entire play. Nonetheless, this considerations weren't considered ground breaking, since even early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Lope had warned against the foolishness of “sacar un turco un cuello de cristiano / y calzas atacadas un romano” (vv. 360-361).

As for the structural unities, Moratín strictly followed the unity of action that Lope prescribed (vv. 181 – 187) and takes his recommendations on the unity of time to the extreme; Lope takes some licence with respect to Aristotle's maxim<sup>7</sup>, “que pase en el período / de un sol” (vv. 188-189) and, recognising that “ya le perdimos el respeto”, he eventually recommends that “pase en el menos tiempo que pueda” [it occurs in the shortest time possible] (v. 193), and does not rule

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## NOTES

7 | For greater discussion of these principles and *The New Art*, see the excellent study by Rozas (1976: 87-93).

out the passing of years or long voyages “si fuere fuerza” (v.197). He concludes that “no vaya a verlas quien se ofende” (v. 200). Faced with such a lax approach to the temporal unity, in *The New Play*, Moratín even manages to ensure that the performance time coincides with the time represented onstage: a couple of hours. The opening stage direction makes this clear – everything should occur just as if the audience were party, in person, to the events of the play. Hence the classic principle of the three unities reemerges, but always with the objective of assuring the highest degree of dramatic illusion. These unities are highlighted in the paratext, and two of them – those of action and of place – are given elevated to the position of title in *The New Play or The Café*<sup>8</sup>: the action takes place entirely in a café in Madrid and it concerns a single subject – the performance of a new play in the theatre next door to the café – outside, hence, the represented setting. In contrast to the theatrical principles of Lope, those of Moratín – and those of neo-classicism in general – conform, in the words of Guillermo Carnero “una estética blindada” (1997: 7).

Given the classical separation of the genres of tragedy and comedy the mix of “sentencia tragica” and the “humildad de la bajeza cómica” (vv. 191-192) that Lope puts forward – tragicomedy – might appear to be a contradiction (Oehrlein, 1993: 181), but in fact it is rather a reflection of real life. “Theatrical performances are art; that is to say, despite not taking place in the everyday sphere, it still follows the rules of nature” (vv. 174 -180). Hence, in this respect, Moratín prefers Lope’s jumble of principles over classical purity. Artists of the Enlightenment were searching for verisimilitude to touch their audiences, and as such, by bringing together elements from separate genres they created what is known as sentimental theatre<sup>9</sup>, of which Gaspal Melchor de Jovellanos’s play, “The Honourable Delinquent” is a fine example. This desire to show “el alma sensible de los personajes” (Caso 1964: 123) was also developed by Moratín in his first work, *The Old Man and the Young Girl*. This play was first performed in 1790, four years after it was written, because, amongst other reasons, he was reticent to give in on a question of vital importance for the verisimilitude of the play: that a mature and acclaimed actress should play the role of the young girl<sup>10</sup>. In the rehearsals for *The New Play* the situation was different, since Moratín took an active part in the staging of the play, and hence was able to lay down certain conditions, something that was very much the norm at the time<sup>11</sup>.

One of the biggest differences, however, between the principles of Lope and those of Moratín is that for the latter verisimilitude did not constitute an aesthetic objective in itself, but rather that contributed to a greater one: the promotion of customs and traditions, and public instruction; two goals that were of great importance to the learned Spanish in the Enlightenment<sup>12</sup>. Indeed, many Enlightenment projects were dedicated to bringing about theatre reform, and, although they

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8 | See Pérez Magallón (1994: 100): “Aunque algunos impresores, críticos y editores antiguos y modernos confirieron o aceptaron *El café* como título alternativo, no hay indicio alguno de que Moratín [...] quisiera darle tal título”.

9 | Regarding one performance of *The Maidens’ Consent*, Larra noted in an article published in the *Revista Española* on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1834 that “Moratín ha sido el primer poeta cómico que ha dado un carácter lacrimoso y sentimental a un género en que sus antecesores sólo habían querido representar la ridiculez” (Larra, 1923: 132).

10 | As Moratín says in the “warning” of the 1825 edition: “La segunda dama de la compañía, que frisaba ya en los cuarenta, no quiso reducirse a hacer el papel de doña Beatriz, a fin de conservar siquiera en el teatro las apariencias de su perdida juventud. La comedia volvió a manos del autor, y desistió por entonces de la idea de hacerla representar” (1970: 52).

11 | Indeed, the demands of the director of the company were yet more important than those of the author. It is not surprising, hence, that the former was often known as *el autor de teatro* [theatre author].

12 | An excellent example can be found in *Memoria para el arreglo de la policía de los espectáculos y diversiones públicas y sobre su origen en España* by Jovellanos, published in 1812, but drafted between 1786 and 1790 (Carnero 2009: 388).

were never brought to completion, their objectives are still relevant to the subject with which we are dealing, given that the theatre was the greatest instrument of promotion and dispersion of ideas – we must remember that at the time the press didn't reach the many illiterate fringes of society. Hence it was considered a grave error that the theatre should have become, as Nicolás Fernández de Moratín described it, “la escuela de la maldad, el espejo de la lascivia, el retrato de la desenvoltura, la academia del desuello, el ejemplar de la desobediencia, insultos, travesuras y picardías” (1996: 156). This constitutes the roots of the effort to alter the course that the theatre was taking, with the aim of avoiding these situations, and using plays as an educational tool to disseminate good habits.

Using these premises as a starting point, *The New Comedy* seemed to embrace the idea of sacrificing theatrical preferences of the uneducated masses – and as such, the success of the play – in the name of utility and good habits. It is true that Moratín was taking a sizeable risk in satirising a type of play that the public loved, but even so, *The New Comedy* was a success and it had a first run of seven nights<sup>13</sup>.

As such, the objective of emotionally moving the audience through the theatre makes sense, and it is for this reason that it was imperative that the approach be taken seriously, and that care be taken to ensure that all aspects of the play be verisimilitudinous; by touching people emotionally, it is much easier to get to the heart of a theme and to encourage people to accept the reasoning of the work. It is for this reason that all Moratín's works, while not belonging fully to the genre of sentimental theatre, have elements that play on the emotions and that show us the psychological makeup of the characters in order that the audience accept them as worthy of compassion, identify with them, learn from their mistakes, and apply what they have learnt in their own lives. In the case of *The New Play*, don Eleutorio, the author of the play that is to be performed in the theatre next door to the café, has taken to writing poems to attempt to earn some money to feed his family: “Viéndose él así, sin oficio ni beneficio, ni pariente, ni habiente, ha cogido y se ha hecho poeta” (1994: 111). The play that is the result of this attempt is truly awful – although not much worse than those that were performed on a daily basis – but a small group of sycophants endlessly praise the author and his work to such a degree that it is a surprise when someone contradicts them: “¡Vaya, que es también demasiado! ¡Disparates! ¡Pues no, no los llaman disparates los hombres inteligentes que han leído la comedia! Cierto que me ha chocado. ¡Disparates! Y no se ve otra cosa en el teatro todos los días, y siempre gusta, y siempre lo aplauden a rabiar” (1994: 121). Moratín offers us a summary of this “nonsense”, which can be found in many of these Neo-Baroque plays, in a few of his satirical verses that won the Spanish Real Academy Prize ten years

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13 | An impressive run for the period. It must be noted that during that week, the other two theatres in Madrid had to put on three plays each to attract the public. See the comparative table of audience sizes by Dowling (1989: 50).

previously<sup>14</sup>:

A cada instante hay duelos y quimeras,  
sueños terribles que se ven cumplidos,  
fatídico puñal, fantasma fiera,

desfloradas princesas, aturdidos  
enamorados, ronda, galanteo,  
jardín, escala y celos repetidos;

esclava fiel, astuta en el empleo  
de enredar una trama delincuente,  
y conducir amantes al careo.

Allí se ven salir confusamente  
damas, emperadores, cardenales,  
y algún bufón pesado e insolente.

Y aunque son a su estado desiguales,  
con todos trata, le celebran todos,  
y se mezcla en asuntos principales.  
[...]  
Cinco siglos y más, y una docena  
de acciones junta el numen ignorante  
que a tanto delirar se desenfrena.

Ya veis los muros de Florencia o Gante;  
ya el son del pito los trasforma al punto  
en los desiertos que corona Atlante.

Luego aparece amontonado y junto  
(así lo quiere mágico embolismo)  
Dublín y Atenas, Menfis y Sagunto.

But Moratín's objective in *The New Play* is not so much to exemplify the foolishness of this play – represented by *El gran cerco de Viena* (*The Great Siege of Vienna*), don Eleutorio's debut work - but rather to show the interests of each of the characters involved; with the income from the play don Eleutorio, his wife, and his children would be able to afford to eat decently, the sister of don Eleutorio and don Hermógenes would be able to afford to marry, the newlyweds would be able to purchase a home, the groom would be able to pay off his many debts, and so on. As such, when it becomes known that the play is a flop the audience – of Moratín's play, not of *El gran cerco de Viena*, - feels moved by the characters lot. This is the moment that don Pedro choses to explain the lesson of the play:

es demasiada necedad, después de lo que ha sucedido, que todavía esté creyendo el señor que su obra es buena. ¿Por qué ha de serlo? ¿Qué motivos tiene usted para acertar? ¿Qué ha estudiado usted? ¿Quién le ha enseñado el arte? ¿Qué modelos se ha propuesto usted para la imitación? [...] Pues ¿por dónde usted, que carece de tales requisitos, presume que habrá podido hacer algo bueno? ¿Qué, no hay más sino meterse a escribir, a salga lo que salga, y en ocho días zurcir

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14 | From *Lección poética: sátira contra los vicios introducidos en la poesía castellana* (Moratín: 2000).

un embrollo, ponerlo en malos versos, darle al teatro y ya soy autor? (1994: 155).

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15 | Lázaro Carreter (1994: IX-X).

Finally Don Eleuterio recognizes his own foolishness:

¡Válgame Dios! Yo, señor, seré lo que ustedes quieran; seré mal poeta, seré un zopenco; pero soy un hombre de bien. Este picarón de don Hermógenes me ha estafado cuanto tenía para pagar sus trampas y sus embrollos; me ha metido en nuevos pagos, y me deja imposibilitado de cumplir como es regular con los muchos acreedores que tengo (1994: 156).

This melodramatic conclusion, in which the many problems of a poor family with no livelihood are laid out before us, is resolved through the paternal feelings of don Pedro; he follows his moral imperative – his is both rich and well educated – and resolves the all the economic, as well as providing them with work. This is proof indeed of his social conformity (Andioc 1987: 2214). As if this is not clear enough, he does not neglect to provide a final moral:

Usted, amigo, ha vivido engañado; su amor propio, la necesidad, el ejemplo y la falta de instrucción le han hecho escribir disparates. El público le ha dado a usted una lección muy dura, pero muy útil, puesto que por ella se reconoce y se enmienda. Ojalá los que hoy tiranizan y corrompen el teatro por el maldito furor de ser autores, ya que desatinan como usted, le imitaran en desengañarse (1994: 160).

The idea that the public should be educated by means of moving them emotionally was not understood by some of Moratín's critics, who declared that:

el ridículo que arroja esta comedia no es muy moral: pues recae sobre un hombre honrado; [...] el ridículo y escarmiento debieran caer sobre un poeta necio y vanaglorioso, autor o fomentador de mal gusto en la dramática: antes que sobre un hombre de bien, que [...] es objeto de compasión, y no de escarnio (Blair, 1817: 325).

It is unlikely that don Leandro was in any way hurt by these words - which stemmed from a lack of understanding of the didactic objectives of the work – despite the fact that Ferreres believes he may have been (1963: 41). Nonetheless, even though the play was generally well received, the author himself was not convinced that it would lead to the definitive adoption of the desired theatre reform<sup>15</sup>.

It was generally hoped that the theatre would act – perfectly in line with the stylistic and political ideas of the Illustration – as an entertaining form of social education for the people, so that they might be open to any future legislative proposals put forward by the government. Such an emphasis on the Horatian idea of enjoyment in parallel with education (*docere et delectare*) is one of the elements that presents a schism between the approach of Moratín and that expressed by

Lope in *The New Art*. The latter, despite using the same premises as a starting point, brushes over this point, and is not sparing in his condescension – and justification thereof - for the “barbaric” tastes of the public:

cuando he de escribir una comedia,  
encierro los preceptos con seis llaves;  
saco a Terencio y Plauto de mi estudio,  
para que no me den voces (que suele  
dar gritos la verdad en libros mudos),  
y escribo por el arte que inventaron  
los que el vulgar aplauso pretendieron,  
porque, como las paga el vulgo, es justo  
hablarle en necio para darle gusto (vv. 40-48).

Sustento, en fin, lo que escribí, y conozco  
que, aunque fueran mejor de otra manera,  
no tuvieran el gusto que han tenido,  
porque a veces lo que es contra lo justo  
por la misma razón deleita el gusto (vv. 372-376)<sup>16</sup>.

In these lines Lope advocates caution when employing criticism and satire, not only to avoid censure, but also because the success of the work itself is at stake: “don’t be acerbic in your satire, for if you produce slander, you can expect no applause and hope for no fame” (vv. 345-346). Let’s compare these lines with a Horatian quote that prefaces *The New Play*: “Non ego ventosa e plebis suffragia venor”. Moratín, in contrast to Lope, had no qualms in laughing on stage at social *faux-pas*<sup>17</sup>, even though these had become customs that were fairly widespread and generally accepted. We must not forget that his objective was always an educational one, and as such, making fun of various vices had always to be accompanied by an exaltation of virtues, hence establishing an image of human nature not as it is, but as it should be. As such, doña Mariquita takes efforts to highlight her own virtues, putting herself forward as a model woman, and ridiculing the learned airs of her brother-in-law<sup>18</sup>:

si soy ignorante, buen provecho me haga. Yo sé escribir y ajustar una cuenta, sé guisar, sé planchar, sé coser, sé zurcir, sé bordar, sé cuidar de una casa; yo cuidaré de la mía, y de mi marido, y de mis hijos, y yo me los criaré. Pues, señor, ¿no sé bastante? ¡Que por fuerza he de ser doctora y marisabidilla, y que he de aprender la gramática, y que he de hacer coplas! ¿Para qué? ¿Para perder el juicio? Que permita Dios si no parece casa de locos la nuestra desde que mi hermano ha dado en esas manías. Siempre disputando marido y mujer sobre si la escena es larga o corta, siempre contando las letras por los dedos para saber si los versos están cabales o no, si el lance a oscuras ha de ser antes de la batalla o después del veneno, y manoseando continuamente *Gacetas* y *Mercurios* para buscar nombres bien extravagantes, que casi todos acaban en *of* y en *graf*, para rebutir con ellos sus relaciones... Y entre tanto, ni se barre el cuarto, ni la ropa se lava, ni las medias se cosen, y lo que es peor, ni se come, ni se cena (1994: 136-137).

## NOTES

16 | These final rhyming couplets – “justo” and “gusto” – which Lope uses here once more – have been called the key to *The New Art* by Emilio Orozco (1978: 22-27).

17 | We must keep in mind that at the time there were laws that expressly forbid targeted satires, although in reality there was always some element that allowed the identification of a character with a well-known figure of the period. *The New Play* was denounced in this context, because many writers felt it alluded to them.

18 | And at the very end, don Pedro puts her straight, with a distinctly misogynistic air: “Si cuida de su casa, si cría bien a sus hijos, si desempeña como debe los oficios de esposa y madre, conocerá que sabe cuanto hay que saber y cuanto conviene a una mujer de su estado y obligaciones” (1994: 158).

In this respect, Moratín's works are the product of a deliberate didactic intentionality, and if they do not fall unceremoniously into the category of educational works, it is thanks to the technical and artistic mastery of the author. Moratín himself was very clear on the issue: the work is not justified solely by its moral objectives, but also by its beauty and quality as dramatic writing.

In this context, *The Maidens' Consent* (1806) represents the culmination of his enlightened dramatic career. The social error that is criticised in this play is the paternal custom of arranging marriages between his daughters and old men, an abuse of authority that proved entirely counterproductive and dangerous for society as a whole. This issue worried Moratín to such an extent that, with the exception of *The New Play*, all his works addressed this theme to a lesser or greater degree<sup>19</sup>, and with varying outcomes, all of which, of course, in keeping with the morals of the Enlightenment. Making fun of this social convention was used as a way of spreading a message: to persuade mothers and fathers<sup>20</sup> to give their daughter freedom in her choice of husband, since, the fertility, fidelity and durability of the marriage were all dependent upon it; this was, of course, greatly important to the learned of the Enlightenment, since it was this that made possible – and indeed, that guaranteed – social stability and that allowed the baton to pass from one generation to the next.

We say that Moratín's final work represents the high point of his poetics because, after three attempts – relatively speaking, since his other works reached neither the height of perfection nor the success of *The Maidens' Consent*<sup>21</sup> – this clear didactic character is created, and yet neither the text nor the plot are hindered by its presence. What is more, the play obeys the neoclassical norms of verisimilitude and decorum, and respects completely the three unities.

To conclude, we could say that Moratín's contribution to the theatre had a before and after phase; he learnt how to create true art being with the ideas of new Enlightened poetics, in which he truly believed. A parallel could be established with Lope; even though their experiences are different, they are not entirely opposite. Both had a strong following, and, in the case of Moratín's theatre, the result was, in the words of Ruiz Ramón, not only the "plenitud de la comedia neoclásica, sino una fórmula dramática cargada de futuro" (2000: 307), with the added merit of having achieved it with just five works<sup>22</sup>.

## NOTES

19 | According to Ruiz Ramón (2000: 302): "el tema fundamental de Moratín es la inautenticidad como forma de vida". Bajo este criterio podemos englobar todas sus obras: la educación de las muchachas estaba orientada hacia la inautenticidad, los casamientos concertados no son auténticos, como no lo son tampoco los personajes criticados en *La comedia nueva*: "Ni don Eleuterio es auténtico dramaturgo, ni don Hermógenes auténtico erudito y humanista ni doña Agustina auténtica fémica" (Ruiz Ramón 2000: 305).

20 | It is they, as those that hold authority that should reconsider this question: for this reason it is don Diego, one of the representatives of power in the play, who provides the solution, through his refusal to marry the young girl. He also calls on young people not to hide their feelings from their parents or tutors, but the idea of revolution and outright refusal of children to obey their parents' wishes – which is considered possible these days – would never have been proposed by an Enlightened playwright like Moratín.

21 | According to René Andoic: "fue el mayor éxito teatral de la época: duró 26 días seguidos (¡más que las concurridísimas comedias de magia!) y sólo cesaron sus representaciones por sobrevenir la Cuaresma, sus ingresos fueron siempre altos y excepcionalmente regulares desde el principio hasta el fin, tanto en las localidades populares como en las más caras" (1989: 18).

22 | Juan Carlos Rodríguez reflects on this point: "Piénsese en cambio en Lope: sus cientos de obras, su dilatada vida productiva, para lograr fijar definitivamente el molde paradigmático de la *Comedia española del Siglo de Oro*" (1991: 18).

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