Coello's Spanish "Hamlet" (1872)

Adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet by Carlos Coello, premiered in Madrid on November 22, 1872.

The play reflects Spain's late introduction to Shakespeare's work, in comparison to other European countries. In the Prologue, Coello, who calls Shakespeare "the English Calderón," insists that his play is a completely new play, "subject to the needs of the Spanish scene and the special conditions of our audience." Built from the original text, the play includes dialogues and soliloquies of the original and much of its plot. One of the play's most interesting features is that of the development of the characters and of the subtexts—such topics as lost honor and the unequal relationship between men and women.

In this way, El príncipe Hamlet becomes a rewrite of Shakespeare's Hamlet, emblematic of the Spanish theatrical tradition of the Golden Age, which was revitalized in the first half of the 19th century in Spain.

The Spanish theatre of the 19th century, with its romantic and nationalistic bent, looked to its own 16th and 17th century plays as models, rather than importing foreign works. Nevertheless, Coello's El príncipe Hamlet exposed the Spanish public to Shakespeare's work at a time when performances of his plays in Spain were scarce and translations of his works were still based on previous versions done by the French.

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This portrait depicts Prince Carlos (1545-1568), heir to the Spanish throne and son of Felipe II (1556-1598), by his first wife and cousin, Manuela de Portugal (1528-1545). This work idealizes the prince’s face and body when, in fact, he was born with grave physical and psychological malformations that may have been due to his parents’ inbreeding. Both his clothing—a cape lined with lynx fur and a yellow jerkin—and his frontal pose help to disguise these characteristics. The figure of Jupiter and an eagle carrying the column of Hercules are visible through a window in the background.