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# Shakespeare Translators' Voices: The 21st Century Perspective

Edited by
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***Jesús Tronch*****

This collection of translators' voices originates with the seminar ***Shakespeare (re)translations: a field of innovation and transgression*** held at the 2023 ESRA Conference in Budapest and convened by Anna Cetera-Włodarczyk (University of Warsaw) and Jesús Tronch (University of Valencia). The seminar invited papers reflecting on Shakespeare translations both as a vehicle and a mirror of change in interpretative trends or staging practices in the late 20th or 21st century. In particular we explored the relation between translation and performance, the changes in translation norms, strategies and concepts, the evolving cultural status of Shakespeare translators, the (non)canonicity of translations, the political vs. aesthetic context of retranslations, the power of patronage in Shakespeare (re)translations, editorial practices in Shakespeare (re)translations, hybridity in translation (adaptation, tradaptation, appropriation), and, finally, the impact of new media on the emergence and dissemination of new translations.

The underlying aim of the seminar was to trace the ways Shakespeare translators respond to the challenges of the time and position themselves in and against the body of earlier rewritings. This referred in particular to the shifts in translation strategies as well as to the broadly understood translation discourse as manifest in critical pronouncements, scholarly analyses and translators' polemics. Thus we were eager to explore the relation of new translations to

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national cultures, and the way they affirm or contest earlier practices with regard to, for instance, literary conventions, generic features or language use.

As we eventually discovered, the majority of the participants of our seminar proved to be active translators of Shakespeare, contributing new translations to academic series, revising old scripts or collaborating with the theater on new rewritings. Impressed by the richness and variety of their experiences, we have gratefully accepted the opportunity offered by *Multicultural Shakespeare* to give voice to our Translators and let them share their insights on (re)translation of Shakespeare. Additionally we have taken advantage of the opportunity to invite a few excellent colleagues who were not with us in Budapest, and yet kindly agreed to join the exchange of thoughts on contemporary Shakespeare translation practice.

In the following individual contributions, the translators mainly discuss their motivation to retranslate Shakespeare (most of them arguing that the evolving nature of language makes prior translations age in time), their stage-oriented or page-oriented translation purpose (in one case aiming at combining both, and with translators "for the page" acknowledging that their versions would require revision if staged), their relationship with previous translations of the same work; and their decision of verse equivalents.

***Paula Baldwin Lind****

Translated and published: *The Tempest* (2010), *Twelfth Night* (2014), *King Lear* (2017)
Translated and staged: *The Tempest* (2010) adaptation for a musical version

# Translation and Retranslation in the Southern Cone of the World

Translations, adaptations, and other forms of reinterpretation of William Shakespeare's dramatic corpus play a key role in the formation of national literary canons within Europe and further afield. Retranslations are fundamental in this process of making works of literature available in different languages; they somehow **guarantee a constant renewal of the ageing previous translations**, as long as translators consider the cultural context and, above all, the target group of readers/spectators to whom the new versions will be addressed, so that they make a real contribution.

In the past years I have developed **a collaborative translation** methodology with my colleague, Dr. Braulio Fernández Biggs. We have already translated three plays by Shakespeare into Spanish for academic purposes; that is to say, texts that can be used for teaching at undergraduate and postgraduate level, as well as for performance. In 2010 we translated Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and the following year we could adapt it for the stage. The play was performed by the Academy of Performing Arts at Universidad de los Andes, Chile. It was a fascinating experience in which **we worked very closely with the theatre director and music composer**.

Our translation methodology does not constitute a complex or sophisticated model; on the contrary, it has turned out to be an effective system to achieve our ultimate educational objective. In general terms, it consists of six stages or steps: 1) choosing the source text, that is, the English edition we will translate. Until now we have always opted for the Arden Shakespeare editions which usually follow the First Folio; 2) in-depth analysis of the play and discussion sessions on the main critical works about it, so as to establish our own interpretation (character relationships, dramatic conflicts, etc.); 3) transcribing the English text and in that same document start translating line by line into Spanish. **If we don't find a solution to translate a specific line or speech, we collate our proposal with other Spanish editions of the play or we watch a filmed performance of that moment to analyse the action, movement, and gestures of the actors which give us a clue to interpret its meaning.** At this

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stage we also decide **the notes** that we are going to include in that specific section, although we write them at the end of the whole process; 4) dozens of readings and revisions of each translated scene once it is finished; 5) **reading aloud** of the final complete version with a group of students, actors, and other invited people to test the fluency, musicality and dramatic rhythm of the translation. This final oral revision is crucial for the success of our work; 6) writing of **a critical introduction** intended both for beginners and experienced readers of Shakespeare, as well as historical and philological notes that explain certain obscure passages or point out the meaning of debated expressions, obsolete words, certain puns or wordplay, among other issues.

We follow some editorial standards in our publications. First, we keep the original act, scene, and line numbers indicated on each page, following the Arden, Oxford, and Cambridge English editions. We also **respect the prose and verse division of speeches**—we even keep capital letters at the beginning of each verse to distinguish it visually from prose—, although we do not translate the latter into any specific Spanish metrical system, since there is no metre equivalent to iambic pentameter in our language. Following Umberto Eco's ideas on translation, we do not try to translate word by word, but rather **sense for sense**, a task that implies linguistic and cultural negotiations; therefore, we keep as much as possible word syntax (a particularly complex aspect) and adapt the pauses and rhythm resulting from the original punctuation to the possibilities offered by Spanish punctuation. This has allowed us, together with a certain lyricism that we endeavour to give to the verse speeches, to reasonably maintain the differences and inflections that Shakespeare wanted to give to his characters' speeches, for it must be remembered that the playwright did not only consider dramatic decorum in this respect, but that the differences in the language of the characters were designed to be easily perceived by the members of the early modern audience who were able to distinguish the speech of a nobleman from that of an ordinary person.

In all our translations, we have kept **the Elizabethan distinction of personal pronouns: the formal "you" and the informal "thou", even in those speeches where Shakespeare switches back and forth between both.** We have translated them in the current usage across Spanish-speaking America today: "usted" and "tú", respectively. Wherever possible, we have **reproduced the intentional repetition of words and even some cacophonies from the original text, as well as the liveliness of elisions and certain contractions that were possible to build in Spanish**. This was certainly not the case with the omission of articles and compound words. We followed similar criteria with regards to prepositions, the use of hyphens and parentheses, which we have maintained for the most part.

As far as the stage directions are concerned, we faithfully follow the Arden source texts set by their different editors yet considering the editorial

history of each play. For the translation of character names, we adhere to the Chilean cultural tradition of translating those names that have a Spanish alternative and leave the others in their original language.

Although we know that there is still much work to be done, **our translations of Shakespeare are part of a long tradition of scholars, translators, poets** of the stature of Pablo Neruda, Nicanor Parra, and Raúl Zurita, as well as theatre professionals, who have kept the work of the great English playwright alive in Chile since the beginning of the 19th century.

***Nikos Hatzopoulos****

Translated and staged: *Winter's Tale* (2004), *King John* (2005), *The Tempest* (2008), *Twelfth Night* (2010), *Richard III* (2016), *Timon of Athens* (2018), *Macbeth* (2020), *Troilus and Cressida* (2022)
Translated: *As You Like It* (2019)

## Translating Shakespeare for the Greek Stage Today

Let me make it clear, right from the start: **I always translate plays for specific productions**, either under commission by theatres or directors, or for productions I myself direct. This means **I always care more for the spoken word than for the written one**.

Translating directly for the stage is quite different than translating for a book. The reader has always the freedom to read twice when the meaning is difficult, to stop and resume reading, to ponder over some thoughts, to meditate or to read very quickly, or even to go straight to the last pages. But the theatre spectator has none of this freedom. What is said on stage is said only once, and in a certain rhythm; there is no way back, or forward. When the audience loses something in the clarity of the meaning, they go on with a handicap; and **when handicaps are accumulated, you have lost the audience**.

Having this in mind helps me take some critical decisions. As we all know, translating is a constant bargaining between what you lose and what you gain. And the outcome depends on what your priorities are. Do you choose to be faithful to the outer form (e.g., the verse technique, or the exact wordplay)?

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Or do you prefer to bring forward the spirit, the inner meaning, the unravelling of thought? Of course, the very best—the blessing—would be to achieve both. But, as we also know, this is not always possible when you translate to a different language (which is, sometimes, like translating to a completely different culture). So, my answer to the above dilemma is this:

Yes, I always try to achieve the necessary balance; I am always faithful to the poetic form, using an iambic metre and keeping the rhyming parts; I always try to render the exact words and the actual phrasing. But **when the desired form jeopardizes the meaning or the clarity of action for the audience, I always opt for the clear meaning**. Having this attitude, I would say I am more faithful to the spirit than to the strict letter.

Another dilemma is added when I am confronted with the obscurity of some Shakespeare passages, or with some inconsistencies that the editors find in the original text. I am not referring here to the passages where the ambivalence of meaning is deliberate by the author, but rather to those where there is not a consensus regarding their exact meaning. Here again, bearing in mind that the audience should follow an unhindered flow of thoughts, arguments and dramatic action, I have to choose one among the possible two or three different meanings proposed.

Greek language is continually evolving during the past two centuries, due to extended social changes, a fact that makes the retranslating of the classical texts mandatory. **The sense of humour, the sense of formal or informal, the expressions characterizing social status, the difference between nobleness and vulgarity, are not understood today the way they were some forty years ago**. Greek language has inherent peculiarities, some of which are considerable obstacles for the translators in their effort to be faithful to the original. For example, the most common nouns in Greek are 3 or 4-syllables long, and verbs may even be 6 or 7-syllables long, whereas most English words are one-syllable long. Trying to arrange these long words into an iambic pentameter may result in a severely distorted syntax, which demands on the audience a very hard effort in order to understand. We already had examples of distorted syntax in some older translations of ancient Greek drama, and there was a time that this kind of writing was highly appraised as "purely poetic," but to the modern ears it is almost unintelligible.

On the other hand, modern Greek language gives you by itself some weapons to overcome these obstacles. First, the fact that almost all Greek words are inflected gives you a considerable amount of freedom in syntax. You are not obliged to keep the "subject-verb-object" sequence, you don't even have to mention a subject, since this is inherent in the verb form. On the contrary, you have a lot of alternatives in the formulation of a sentence. And selecting different options lets you have different overtones and connotations, different

hues of the meaning. Secondly, **the mixture of the two recent forms of Greek language**—***katharevousa*** **and** ***dimotiki*****, the purist and demotic registers** respectively—which is usually spoken in everyday modern Greek, is by itself a very powerful tool. In every step, it virtually gives you possibility of choosing between two almost different languages. And the balance you achieve between the two enables you to express poetry, comedy, irony, social status, age, profession, majesty, arrogance, ignorance, buffoonery, etc.

Now, what is the factor that makes me choose this meaning to that one, this expression to the other one? **It is the inner life of the speaking character, their motives and the consistency of their reasoning. Actually, being an actor myself helps me to get into each character, and find out why they speak and what is the line of their thought and their reactions**.

Most important, the decisive factor that guides me is the specific production for which the translation is prepared. When I am almost done with my first drafts and have some passages with different possible renderings, **I always discuss with the director**, to find out their point of view for the play. I even encourage them to choose by themselves between 2 or 3 possible phrasings. All these alternatives are not really deviations from the original meaning; they are just variations within the limits of freedom that the Greek language allows, but they give different overtones to the text.

And lastly, I believe that **a good translation is completed during the rehearsals**. The ultimate trial for the text is to be spoken by the actors. There you can see what does work and what doesn't. And, of course, you can make changes till the last moment. In many cases I have changed things while rehearsing. Once I was even tempted to change a whole speech, because the kind of language I had chosen sounded quite unfamiliar in the mouth of the specific actor. But the director did not let me do it, because it was too late for the actor to memorize a new text!...

***Iolanda Plescia****

Translated and published: *Troilus and Cressida* (2015) *The Taming of the Shrew* (2019), *Sir Thomas More*, (2022), *Henry VIII* (forthcoming in 2025)
Translated and staged: fragments of *Sir Thomas More* and *Troilus and Cressida* (2016), fragments of *Sir Thomas More* (2021), *Sir Thomas More* (2023, stage version)

# Translating Shakespeare into Italian

I started translating Shakespeare into Italian as **a form of "deep reading:"** a privileged gateway into the source text. **Growing up bilingually**, I was used to feeling words slip and slide away as I reached for the right one, and translating seemed like a way to finally fix some kind of meaning on a page. My responsibility towards the target language and its users became clearer with the passage of time on my first assignment. Naturally, the more I translate, the more I realize that translations too are slippery and subject to constant change—but the satisfaction of getting things right every once in a while is too great to give up the challenge.

A classic is always new, and for all time, like Shakespeare in Ben Jonson's words. Not so with translation. Translation is transient, language change never stops, and **each new version is good for a generation or two, perhaps a few more if it's excellent**. But even in that case, the patina of time will leave a sediment on the translated play-text and it will be necessary to refashion it for new audiences of readers and theatregoers: this, it seems to me, is one of the main reasons for retranslation.

My first translation was of *Troilus and Cressida*, for the Feltrinelli series founded by Agostino Lombardo, a prominent Italian professor who had hoped to be able to translate all of Shakespeare's plays during his lifetime. Of course, I discovered on this first attempt that I could render meanings but not always the beauty or effect of a word choice. For example, a word that was exotic, already obsolete in early modern English, and therefore tantalizingly obscure, such as *orgulous* in the Prologue of that play, would become an everyday term that had lost all of its allure in Italian: orgoglioso. I pondered over different solutions, wondering if I should sacrifice sound and the contiguity of the Romance roots in favour of something that would produce a similar shock in the Italian reader. That was the first problem that drove home the point. **The individual choice that the translator finally commits to will never allow for adequate rendition of all of the factors at play simultaneously: sound, rhythm, history of the word, semantic and pragmatic values. It is not an accident that**

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**Shakespeare wrote in early modern English: that was the only language that could generate him**.

One of the biggest challenges in translating towards Italian, I find, is indeed **the closeness of the language to the Latinate words that often carry special meaning in Shakespeare precisely for their being set apart from the Germanic roots**. Not to mention what might happen in situations in which Shakespeare used a smattering of authentic (or at least authentic sounding!) Italian words, as he does in *The Taming of the Shrew*, the second play I tackled. The foreignizing device, conveyed by means of italics in the Folio text, and by breath and accent by actors, is completely lost on Italian eyes and ears; the strategies that can be put in place (such as keeping the tone of Shakespeare's slightly awkward Italian, or retaining italics on the page to visually set the words apart from the contemporary Italian of the translation) are a meagre consolation.

This experience of failure is probably, in fact, a prevailing sentiment in my work. That does not mean the practice is not rewarding, especially as for me it is tied up with my teaching and research into Shakespeare's language. This is perhaps another reason for retranslation in an academic setting: for teachers, translation can help harness our textual work to the "real" world for students wishing to grapple with concrete problem solving. In this sense, **I acknowledge my translations to be mainly aimed at readers and prepared with editorial and philological concerns in the forefront**. I have had the good fortune to work with theatre practitioners, actors and directors, and have developed a strong conviction that "middle ground" translations are never wholly adequate: **translation for the stage and for the page are two entirely different things**, and I readily admit that my "scholarly" translations—lively and readable as I nevertheless hope them to be—will need to be thoroughly revised if they are to be staged. While I claim a position for the translator which need not be hierarchically inferior, in matters of language, to the role of the practitioners, **I also accept change and adaptation to suit the specific vision of a staging**. What is important to me is that the two ensuing texts—for readers and theatregoers—are both allowed to live and thrive on their own terms. After all, most modern-day first encounters with Shakespeare occur on the page, in the classroom, and the act of reading need not diminish but may complement the gratification of seeing the text on stage with a special pleasure of its own, which it is our duty as instructors to convey. I am now in the unique position of editing and translating a play at the same time—*Henry VIII*, or *All Is True*—and I find my enjoyment of the textual work involved is heightened.

While I welcome collaboration—one of the most rewarding experiences I've had was a four-handed translation of *Sir Thomas More* with Nadia Fusini, now series editor of the Feltrinelli Shakespeare—when I am working alone **I tend to translate without watching stagings or looking at other translations**; I consider the draft as a sort of word puzzle I want to solve on my own, and my

strategies invariably rest on the kind of philological work I feel I'm doing, which is working through language diachronically, producing a modern text which however retains some of the specificity of its own time. **Negotiations with my publisher have been crucial in shaping the text**, as space allotted for footnotes and *mise en page* as well as marketing choices all have an impact on the final product: one particularly interesting case was my attempt to change the established Italian title for the *Shrew*, *La Bisbetica Domata*, whose passive form "domata" does not properly render the progressive (and inherently ambiguous) form "taming." After many deliberations, the publisher asserted the need to use the canonized, recognizable title, a decision I accepted since the grammatical structure of Italian only allowed for slight tweaking and afforded no entirely satisfying solution. Loss and gain: you win some, you lose some, as every translator knows only too well.

***Elena Ciobanu***[*]

Forthcoming: *Winter's Tale* (2024), *The Taming of the Shrew* (2024)

## Taming a Shakespearean Shrew in Romanian Iambic Pentameters

In 2021, when the Romanian Shakespeare scholar George Volceanov included me as a new member of the team working on his current translation project dedicated to William Shakespeare's contemporaries, **I was not at all a novice to literary translation**. A number of years before I had published volumes of Romanian translations of poems by Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes and of theoretical essays on poetry written throughout centuries by famous figures like Philip Sidney, J. S. Mill or W. B. Yeats.

The translation of poetry helped me gain experience as a translator but the transposition of Elizabethan dramatic texts into Romanian brought with it some very different challenges. The sonorities we now recognize as distinctly Shakespearean are largely based on the use of iambic pentameters which are not characteristic of Romanian literature. I first tried my hand at **rendering such**

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**metrical patterns into appropriate forms in my own language** by retranslating George Peele's *The Old Wives' Tale* has been published recently (Tracus Arte, 2024). This preceded my retranslation of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, **commissioned** by Volceanov **for the second revised 2021-2026 Shakespeare Tracus Arte edition** (the first edition was the result of the *Shakespeare for the Third Millennium* project, conducted in the 2010-2016 period). During the 20th century, Shakespeare's work became known to the Romanian public through two systematic translation projects resulting in two "canonical" editions: the E.S.P.L.A. (1955-1963) and the Univers (1982-1995) ones. Their strong philological bent, favoured by prominent scholars like Leon Levițchi, prevented them from being used for theatre performances to a great extent. By contrast, the Tracus Arte edition (2010-2016) has enjoyed considerable attention from this point of view, 18 of its retranslations having been already used in 27 performances on Romanian stages. This is certainly due to the very different principles adopted by the Tracus Arte translators (myself included) in their attempt at reviving the Shakespearean canon **primarily for the stage and for contemporary audiences** (after all, Shakespeare was striving not only to attain aesthetic excellence, but also, and very significantly, to cater for, and elevate, the tastes of his spectators). Such principles, as they were formulated by Volceanov (2021: 56-57), basically focus on the idea of performability, which entails important injunctions linked with depoliticization, debowdlerization, accessibility and modernization of language. The use of the latest British and American Shakespeare editions has given translators access to the most recent research in the field and has helped them in their attempt to observe the no less important stringency principle (as it was settled by Levițchi) which limits the number of lines that may be added in translation to no more than 7 per 100 original lines.

Previous translations of *The Taming of the Shrew* belong to Dan Amadeo Lăzărescu (1957), as part of the E.S.P.L.A. edition, and Violeta Popa (2016), as part of the first Tracus Arte edition. The necessity of a retranslation was undeniable at the beginning of the 21st century, after more than half a century from the initial Romanian version, fraught as it was with obsolete or archaic forms of words, odd turns of phrase, cacophonies or inversions that would be difficult to approach by actors on the stage. Popa's retranslation is an obvious improvement in terms of vocabulary, which is no longer characterized by obsolescence and is thus much more accessible to today's audiences. However, her retranslation does not adequately observe some of the guidelines (particularly linked with stringency and performability) in the translation poetics adopted by the members of the Tracus Arte project. Popa's frequent preference for a more explanatory style unnecessarily burdens the text with a number of lines that may even become obstacles on the phonic or semantic levels. Thus, for instance, she adds 12 lines to the original 80 that make up scene 5 from Act IV,

just like Lăzărescu before her. In my translation, I manage to arrive at a Romanian version of the same scene counting 81 lines, without any sacrifice in terms of meaning or euphony. **In working very closely with Popa's version on the table, I was also able to identify in it a series of semantic inaccuracies resulting from an erroneous or incomplete understanding of the Shakespearean discourse which constitute a serious argument in favour a new revised translation**. To give one example, in Act II, scene 1, in the dialogue between Katherina and Petruchio, both Lăzărescu and Popa translate "crest" by "coif" [helmet], which renders the logic of the dialogue somewhat loose as it ignores the fact that "crest," in this particular context, must be understood as referring to a figure/device on a coat of arms[1] (Petruchio calls Kate a "herald" a line before). My translation therefore uses the word "stemă" [coat of arms] in this case, and this allows for greater semantic clarity in the ensuing part of the conversation.

My work as a Shakespeare translator will continue with the retranslation of another comedy, *The Winter's Tale*, recently commissioned by Mihai Eminescu National Theatre from Chișinău, in the Republic of Moldova, whose future programme will include this play. Bringing Shakespearean cadences and meanings into Romanian constitutes one of the most rewarding professional experiences for me, as it offers me not only the intimate experience of such rare textual richness, but also a passionate and fruitful conversation with revered predecessors.

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[1] The Yale edition confirms this in the notes on the respective page (see William Shakespeare. *The Taming of the Shrew*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, p. 67).

***Piotr Kamiński*** *

Translated and published: *Richard II* (2009), *Macbeth* (2011), *The Twelfth Night* (2011), *The Tempest* (2012), *The Winter's Tale* (2014), *The Merchant of Venice* (2015)
Translated and staged: *Richard II* (2004), *The Twelfth Night* (2011), *The Tempest* (2012), *The Winter's Tale* (2017), *The Merchant of Venice* (2014), *Measure for measure* (2016, 2022, 2023), *Hamlet* (2019), *King Lear* (2021)

# Shakespeare Set the Tune, it's my Turn to Play it

I undertook the work on the new Polish translations for one subjective and two objective reasons. The subjective one is simple: I felt like it. Every text in a foreign language is a challenge, and **there is no challenge more powerful**, a higher mountain than Shakespeare. One push (from Andrzej Seweryn, before his production of *Richard II* in the National Theatre, Warsaw, in 2003) proved enough. But there are also objective reasons: translations are getting old, unfortunately, and the new ones I know do not meet a certain criterion that seems extremely important to me. **I try to translate these dramas not as pure, literary texts, but as "theatrical scores," where the pace, the rhythm of the arguments and events, the timing of each monologue and each scene, is a parameter that, while obviously hidden, remains absolutely fundamental.** This is why I translate obstinately "**verse for verse**." This, of course, requires persistent "thickening" of the text, which is not always easy; but no one promised me it would be easy.

It remains, however, a "joyful creation:" I have the right to write Shakespeare's dramas—in my own words. Shakespeare has already done all the hard work, leaving me only the free choice of words, hopefully worthy of his genius.

However, I never feel like I'm doing "the same thing all over again." After all, every young pianist takes up Chopin's mazurkas knowing full well that his predecessors number in the thousands, and there are some real giants among them. He listens to them, to be sure, but above all he stares at the score. I, too, try to listen to Shakespeare, not to the other translators. And I have three supervisors: one, of course, is the poet himself (whose earthly deputy is Professor Anna Cetera-Włodarczyk, a merciless advocate of his interests); the second is the actor supposed to learn by heart the words I have chosen, and speak them from the stage, so I'd rather make sure he won't break his teeth on them; and the third is the spectator, who must understand these intricate phrases and arguments at first hearing.

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I say that I listen to Shakespeare and not to other translators, but, of course, I also look into their work. Not only into the Polish translations, but also into other languages I understand. More than once I find comfort in them, discovering that I'm not the only one this and that idea of Shakespeare's put to the torments of hell.

Above all, however, **I listen to Shakespeare, close my eyes and wait for the echo**. The right sentence may come immediately, or after a few months. When I sacrifice something, to squeeze meanings and images into the tight straitjacket of form I have imposed on myself, giving them, of course, a harmonious, poetic shape, I try to repay that debt at the earliest opportunity. Quite often, it presents itself in the very next verse. And frequently I discover that **not every word of Shakespeare's poetry deserves to have a whole verse added to it, in order to save at all costs the lump of meaning it contains**.

***Elisabeth Plessen****

Translated, published, and staged: *As You Like It* (1986), *Julius Caesar* (1986), *The Merchant of Venice* (1988), *Antony and Cleopatra* (1994), *Richard III* (1997), *Hamlet* (1999), *Twelfth Night* (2010)

## Translating Shakespeare into German

**I have Shakespeare's stage in mind, each time I translate one of his plays.** The triangle of the scenic space, a neutral space, and the gallery. Concerning the scenery the Quartos and the 1623 Folio note a change of act or scene only through *Enter* or *Exit/Exeunt* of the players. At the beginning, there is merely an *ACTUS PRIMUS. SCAENA PRIMA* and at the end *FINIS*, nothing else. With rapid transitions or contrast the flow of the action takes its course unhindered. The scope is wide. The early editions give us parsimonious indications about props or decor. This opens the imagination of the public (as well as the actors) up to the text—to concentrate on the blank verses or lines the actors speak. It emphases the importance for outer/topological orientation, to see in one's own mind the unseen. The German term therefore—*Wortkulisse*—I would not know it in English. A few hints depict the imaginary—a whole world or cosmos. The

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poles of/for the Roman Empire around the Mediterranean in *Antony and Cleopatra* f. e. are names, two cities: Rome and Alexandria, a deck, the mentioning of a Cape and Parthia, some bays of the Ionian Sea, a river Cydnus. In many cases it is clear from the text where a scene takes place. In some it is unclear (line 1727-1750). In this case Shakespeare allows himself the same freedom as a novelist. He does not need to give more attention to where the drama takes place than is dramatically useful. He does not need to focus more clearly on the circumstances. He makes full use of the freedom his stage provided. The rest is sheer presence of the actors and immediacy through dialog.

I do not follow the detailed notations of Samuel Rowe's edition of Shakespeare's collected works nor other arrangements or fixations of later editors and their categories, as I think **this kind of editing restricts the Bards endlessly sailing-on-mind and his allegorical, non-conceptual poetical style**. However, I admit: I love to read the notations and footnotes, these arguing parts in different editions and sometimes I almost get happily lost in them, especially in Horace Howard Furness' A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare.

## Translations Echo the History of Language

Only one time I broke my concept. All translations were commissioned by various theatres for various stages. The first director was namely Peter Zadek. The director of *Julius Caesar*, commissioned by Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg, was Michael Bogdanov. He planned a modern, experimental version of the play, wanted to explore its political aspects of terror or civil war, which still concern us today—with monitors on the stage, when Brutus addresses the public in the sense of a press conference, and a tank in the battle of Philippi in the last act. This concept Bogdanov thought required as contrast and element of suspense and inner action an old Shakespearian German, in short a modernized August Wilhelm Schlegel translation, as this version is still *the* known or standard one if you mention the Bard to Germans. So I transcribed and retranslated Schlegel in big parts but **without changing Schlegel's versification form** or formal atmosphere of dialogue as I kept his—in modern German completely out of date way to speak to a person (Shakespeare: you—Schlegel Ihr/Euch—Sie/Ihnen today). Underneath this "cover" or "pretending" I changed quite a lot. My problem here: I had to get into two different minds or creep under the skin of two writers i.e. Shakespeare's original I saw with my own eyes or tools of language as a writer/translator. At the same time I tried to free Schlegel's German from the codes of taste of his time (around 1800) and give the remaining version a liveliness and freshness which resulted from my eyes on the Bard and my comprehension of (the) language(s). I corrected Schlegel's omissions of context sometimes as well, i. e. Shakespeare's vulgar puns, mainly sexual allusions, and when Shakespeare repeats a word four times, like in

Portia's speech (2.1, scene between her and Brutus) I went back to the original and repeated in German the emphasis of "sick" four times. Slagging took place, the replacement of old fashioned or obsolete terms. I kept Schlegel's precise places of locations like at the beginning of the third act: *Rom, vor dem Kapitol. Trompetenstoß. Caesar, Brutus* etc. ... *treten auf.* (Rome. At the Capitol) Whereas Shakespeare only notes: *3.1 Florish. Enter Caesar, Brutus* etc. Or in 2.3 *Eine Straße nahe dem Kapitol.* (A street near the Capitol.) *Artemidorus tritt auf und liest einen Zettel.* Where the original only has: 2.3 *Enter Artemidorus, reading a paper*. This could be anywhere. Even on the moon! In Schlegel's translation reigns a kind of prescriptive order—of course, no director must follow it—but it confines or restricts the imagination if you read the play for the first time and do not get into the openness of Shakespeare's sailing-on-mind, where freedom reigns: actors enter/entered and get/got off the stage.

**Translations age in a different way as originals, i. e. much quicker.** It is their inner nature to put on patina, this slightly greyish, slightly dusty layer on some words, how thin or thick ever after a while—it depends on the translator's creative or artistic grip, as language is like a river in a permanent flow of its partly renewal.

***Salvador Oliva****

Translated into Catalan and published: all Shakespeare plays (1980s), *Sonnets* (2003), *Edward III* (2014), *Venus and Adonis* (2016), *Rape of Lucrece* (2017)
Translated into Spanish and published: *Henry V* (2008), *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (2008, with Ángel-Luis Pujante), *Titus Andronicus* (2010), *Timon of Athens* (2010, with Ángel-Luis Pujante), *The Taming of the Shrew* (2012), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (2012), *Pericles* (2012, with Ángel-Luis Pujante), *King John* (2015), *Henry VIII* (2015, with Ángel-Luis Pujante)

## Translating Shakespeare into Catalan

During the 1980s I had the privilege of translating the complete dramatic works of William Shakespeare into the Catalan language. This work was commissioned by the Catalan public television (TV3) to serve as the basis for the dubbed version of the BBC Television Shakespeare series to which they had purchased the

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rights. Subsequently, my translations were then published by the Barcelona Editorial Vicens Vives, and they have been since reissued in the late 2010s.

In the early 2000s, the Spanish publishing house, Destino, offered me the possibility of publishing a few translations with them, and with the permission of Vicens Vices, I agreed to this and at the same time took this opportunity to make some alterations in my previous translations in order to improve the text in the new editions.

Besides the complete thetrical works I have also translated in verse Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and his narrative poems *Venus and Adonis*, and *The Rape of Lucrece*.

**Translating literary works is definitively a literary practice**. It involves moving a work of art from one language into another work of art in another language. There are no specific methods or strategies to translating literature. In fact I agree mostly with Jose María Valverde (poet, professor, and translator of Shakespeare's plays into Spanish in prose in the late 1960s), who said that he translated by ear.

Translations age over time, something which originals do not. That implies that every one or two generations should provide new translations.

**Translating drama for a theatre production is largely the same as translating for literary publication**.

From my experience I believe it is important to consult previous translations of the same original, and henceforth make efforts to improve on them.

I do not think that there are techniques for translating. **The basis is the translator's linguistic talent.** The objective is to retain as much as posible the quality of the original as a work of art.

Theoretical essays about translating Shakespeare can only help, depending on the talent of the author of the essay. More important are studies about the author of the original, especially if they are linguistic studies.

As for the problem of translating the English iambic pentameter into Catalan, I opted for two solutions. With the sonnets, it was obvious that I had to adopt isosyllabism. Since Catalan has lengthier words than English, I believed that the best solution was to translate the ten syllables of the pentameter into the twelve syllables of a Catalan dodecasyllable or alexandrine: the dodecasyllable has no caesura, while the alexandrine does (although the Spanish "alejandrino" has fourteen syllables, it has only twelve metrical syllables).

With respect to drama, isosyllabism was not necessary, and I opted for a complex meter, as described by Benoît de Cornulier. The complex meter I used consisted of octosyllables, decasyllables, dodecasyllables and alexandrines. And then, in the few instances required by verse, I used caesural lines, which might consist of eight plus six metrical syllables, or six plus eight. Exceptionally I used lengthier verse lines, with a caesurea, but with hemistichs of six, eight or ten syllables.

**My solution gives priority to rhythm (be it binary or ternary) rather than to the number of syllables.** That is why, in a few instances, I used nine-syllable lines with a ternary rhythm; that is, three sequences of two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllables, as reflected in this pattern: u u S / u u S / u u S (u) (u), where the slash does not indicate word boundaries.

Personally, as a retired professor of Catalan Philology, I consider that translating Shakespeare has been **the most stimulating and fulfilling work I have had the privelege of enjoying during my lifetime**. In my opinion, Shakespeare is the greatest literary author, which makes translating his work an awe-inspring challenge for a translator.

***Mickaël Savchenko****

Translated and published: *King Richard III* (2023)

## Translating Shakespeare into Russian

Shakespeare has been very fortunate in Russia: excellent Russian translations of his works are numerous, even if most of them are at least a few decades old. I did not contemplate retranslating one of his plays, but… **producing a new version of *King Richard III* for the prestigious** "Literaturnye pamiatniki" ("Monuments of literature") **collection was an offer I could not refuse**. This commission came from Prof. Nataliia Mikeladze, who was responsible for much of the volume's editorial matter, including the commentary. In a way, **I see my version as a counterattack against amateur translations**, which abound on the Internet and even make it into print nowadays.

I had prior experience with Elizabethan drama, having translated Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* for the same collection. Work on *King Richard III* took me two years, from early 2018 to early 2020 (which does not mean I worked every day! I had to combine this work with my job and sometimes would not touch it for months). Then I moved on to two of Shakespeare's sources for the play, Hall's *Chronicle* and *A Mirror for Magistrates*, selections from which were to appear in the appendices. These texts were previously unavailable in Russian.

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Given the specificity of the series, with its focus on literature, I had to approach Shakespeare's play as text, preferring the page over the stage. Obviously I was wary of heavy syntax and tried to not to use archaisms excessively—even if I made use of them systematically, as I see no point in producing yet another "modernizing" version. As a side note, **if I had to stage *Richard* using this translation as a basis, I would definitely alter it, using simpler language**.

My key objective was to recreate Shakespeare's text as closely as possible, even if the result would not always read smoothly. I don't want to pretend Shakespeare is our contemporary and transport him into our age, but rather invite the reader to travel back to his times and to inhabit his brain.

In poetry, the form is as much a part of the semantic content as the words. According to the existing Russian tradition, metrical texts are translated using metrical verse. The Russian metrical system is luckily very similar to the English one, which allowed me to reproduce non-metrical lines whenever Shakespeare had them, the variations in metre (as when Shakespeare used the iambic trimeter) and also all the rhymes. Apart from the purely formal aspect, I paid attention to the metaphors, including frequent use of legal imagery. It would of course be naïve to believe that a very accurate translation is by default a success. So I made sure not to butcher Shakespeare's spirit by being too pedantic.

Despite my attempts at recreating Shakespeare, I would more often feel frustration than satisfaction: the translated version looks inevitably impoverished semantically. **Shakespeare's language is palimpsestic: it is so charged with all the meaning it has accumulated over the centuries (what he actually said and what was read into it) that modern speech seems blank in comparison**. My translation technique consisted in reading the original, getting impregnated with it until I was able to hear (in my mind's ear) Russian equivalents, which fitted the metre. Sometimes I would copy the electronic version of the English text into Word and gradually replace it with Russian text. I would type alternative solutions in the margins and then eliminate everything but the preferred reading.

Working on the translation involved a good deal of research. I used the best scholarly editions (basing myself on Arden 3rd) and provided line numbers (our intention to publish the translation alongside the English original eventually did not materialize). I consulted the *Oxford Dictionary of Original Shakespearean Pronunciation* whenever I thought I saw an occasional rhyme (in the middle of a scene rather than concluding one), to check if the words actually rhymed in Shakespeare's time. At the same time, I had to look up some Russian words I had doubts about, in dictionaries and in the online poetic corpora, checking the prescribed and the actual pronunciation in terms of the stressed syllable. Reading historical literature was also of help.

In producing a new translation, the translator usually endeavours to surpass his predecessors and to correct their errors, if need be. However, **I avoided looking into existing Russian translations of *King Richard III* in order not to be influenced by the translators' choices—which was difficult, as some of Shakespeare's aphorisms have become clichés in Russian as well** ("The winter of our discontent," "A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!"); and some lines from previous translations were deeply engraved in my memory since my childhood. Some time after I finished work, I started looking into the translations again and was surprised to see how good they occasionally were. I have to admit I used to look down on those earlier attempts: working on Shakespeare gives you a feeling of superiority over anyone else. **When I was translating Shakespeare, I *was* him!** When confronted with these earlier renditions, I also saw that sometimes the translators had made the same choice I did.

What is verse translation? I would say **it's the art of a jeweller. It's all about inserting gemstones into a setting, the gemstones being Shakespeare's words, and the setting the metre and rhyme system. You have to cut and polish the stone so it fits, and you have to make sure the setting is solid enough to hold it.**

***Sándor Fazekas****

Translated and published: *Sonnets* (2023)

## The Sound of the Virginal: Retranslating the Sonnets into Hungarian

After five years of extensive work, my retranslation of *The Sonnets* was published in the summer of 2023. My motivation to retranslate *The Sonnets* came from two directions. The first mental impulse came from the academic field: my teacher at the University of Szeged, Annamária Hódosy held a seminar about *The Sonnets*. Although we were in Faculty of Literature, she quoted the poems in English, and when the Hungarian translation of Lőrinc Szabó emerged she noted every time that these versions differed greatly from the original text.

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One or two times it is acceptable, but when she kept mentioning this about every single poem, showing hidden and forgotten meanings of the original, I began to wonder: is it possible to make a new, more precise and less poetic translation? The second impulse was emotional: it came from within—from a dream. I woke up and made my first version of Sonnet 144. You can't make such an endeavor without strong emotional motivation—or maybe you can do it, but the result may not be too convincing. My colleagues helped me all the way to create my new version, and I won a fellowship for this. **I consider my endeavor as a teamwork, although the toughest part of it is certainly lonely: the responsibility for my decisions is entirely mine, but there are a lot of people who helped me**. First of all, my lecturer, Natália Pikli, who made my effort more precise and corrected my errors about the use of the Shakespearean expressions. She knows the context of these words, so she could correct my translation. I am not a professional poet, so I needed to elaborate my metrical concept together with a colleague who is, Viktor Horváth. Actually, I decided to make a **strict metrical translation** of the original, because the Hungarian language makes it possible, and this opportunity was left unused by my ancestors, who made poetic and loose translations.

**When you find a great goal, it will give you new insights and sharpen your skills**. It also redefines your connections with your colleagues. My motivation, besides what I mentioned before, was also to improve myself. Now I can speak and write the language of Shakespeare—the world of the dramas could be accessible to me. I discovered a new world, and at the same time, the skills and methods to make further discoveries in the world of Shakespeare. My career has also been transformed by this effort, and I am lucky to teach actors and need to go regularly to theaters and see the most current performances of Hungarian and also international companies. The next phase will be the constitution of a new vision, which is even more complicated than the previous one, the project of *The Sonnets.*

In my opinion, the retranslation not necessarily needs other methods or tools as the first translation. The main thing is that you need to find a different perspective than your predecessors, and also a different concept of the work. In my case, I needed to become independent from the poetical vision of Lőrinc Szabó, who was a great poet himself. It is inevitable to be different for me as I am not a poet but a literary historian, so **my goal was to make a bilingual edition with extensive notes and commentary**. In the past, the previous attempts at retranslations after Lőrinc Szabó have followed his path: he made such a huge impact that everybody tried exactly the same way that he elaborated. No wonder that their attempts are not accepted by the artistic and academic audience. I decided to create my own English version because I didn't want to rely solely on one single edition. It sounds rough, but I wanted to make my own mistakes entirely: the different readings of the Sonnets have so much diversity

that it seemed to me impossible to choose between them: I made the decisions in every dubious case myself.

In my case, the page came first, but I knew that when I would succeed in finishing the project, the stage would come after it inevitably. In my opinion, the poems are similar to the dramas: they come alive via performances. Luckily, I teach actors, so I know a lot of them: they can add new meanings and great emotional strength to the words. In addition, suddenly, a new opportunity came, which I didn't expect: the composer Péter Huzella made songs from my translations. As he mentioned, the music came quickly because of the iambic versification. It was a wonderful experience to hear those songs: it seemed to flow flawlessly as his own words.

The translation technique is determined by the properties of the material and the purpose of the translation. My key objective was to create a basically faithful and well-annotated version of *The Sonnets*, with my own English version. Maybe this is strange to imagine, but in our country, this kind of effort is still missing. The first version by Károly Szász and Vilmos Győry was born in the 19th century, and at that time, it was not a common policy to make annotated and/or bilingual editions, and besides that, Shakespearean research was also in a relatively early state. Lőrinc Szabó, who created the canonical translation, made a popular and well-known version but transformed the original into his own modern poems. His basic material was quite narrow, the edition of Sidney Lee and the German translation of Stefan George. The first version was born as early as 1929, the last, third one in 1955. By the time of the third version, he wrote a study which showed that he also had the desire to explore the context of the Petrarchan poetry of Shakespeare's age, but he couldn't finish it; it became my duty to show the connection between the contemporary poetry of the Elizabethan age and also the plays of Shakespeare. The vast amount of new dictionaries, editions, and commentaries helped my work to be more precise.

I found that the previous translations hadn't dug deep into the philological and interpretative dilemmas of these poems. The main thing was the vision and the modernity of the texts, not the philological debates, but Shakespeare loves wordplays and ambiguities, but these remain hidden until my edition. As my proofreader, Natália Pikli put it, this translation is a gamechanger in many fields.

The English editions which I used to create my own version were all very informative and enlightening. The most recent edition by Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells was very useful for my translations, but I also admired the first edition's enigmatic nature. Katherine Duncan-Jones also did excellent work in the Arden edition, and made wonderful commentaries, so I had a massive background to build on. Booth's edition and also Burrow's gave me great support: the first one is extensive, and the second is laconical. I am myself curious about how to continue this wonderful journey with the plays, but I am preparing for another adventure.

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***Filip Krajník****
***Anna Hrdinová*****

Translated, published, and staged: *Hamlet*, trans. by Filip Krajník (2022)
To be published: *Much Ado About Nothing,* trans. by Anna Hrdinová (forthcoming 2025)

# Shakespeare and Beyond on the 21st-Century Czech Page and Stage

The tradition of translating Shakespeare into Czech goes back to the late 18th century, when the first Czech renditions of Shakespeare's plays were published as chapbooks for readers in the provinces or staged by the Patriotic Theatre in Prague. Besides the obvious commercial motivation, the aim of these productions was to showcase the ability of the language to reproduce a classic whose works then frequented German-speaking theatres in the Czech capital (Drábek 2012: 87-102). Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Shakespeare became for Czechs an adopted national poet of a kind (as he did for the Germans and other European nations around that time), one who served as an ally in their cultural and political efforts—whether under the Habsburg empire, the German occupation during the Second World War or the communist regime before 1990 (Krajník and Kyselová 56-60). To celebrate the tercentenary of Shakespeare's birth, a new complete translation of Shakespeare's works was commissioned in the mid-19th century, the first such project in any Slavonic language. In his study of Czech translations of Shakespeare, Pavel Drábek identifies eight major waves, or generations, of Shakespearean translations into Czech to date, each having its own ideas of who Shakespeare was and how he should speak to Czech audiences (Drábek 2012).

Since the latest generation of Shakespearean translators into Czech (first appearing in the late 1970s; Drábek 263-302) has produced several strong personalities that still dominate Czech Shakespeare, both in printed volumes and on stages, Czech theatre directors and dramaturges have been hesitant to commission new translations of Shakespeare or other Renaissance playwrights. The result is that **some of the most recent translations of Shakespeare are almost forty years old and already dated or overused**. Perhaps motivated by the vision of prestige for his theatre and himself, in 2019 the director of the

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Prague City Theatres approached Filip Krajník (who had previously translated a selection of Elizabethan sonnets into Czech) for a new version of *Hamlet* for the theatre's planned 2021 production of the play; however, the production's director ultimately refused to work with a new translation and rather opted for a "proven audience-pleaser"—one of the older versions from the 1990s.

Krajník's version, which had been almost completed for the Prague production before it was rejected, was ultimately staged in 2022 at the South Bohemian Theatre in České Budějovice as the first of the theatre's series of productions of classics for younger audiences. As a literary historian with little experience with practical theatre, Krajník decided **to combine his philological skills with the procedural knowledge of theatre practitioners and, during the translation process, closely collaborated with a team of dramaturgical consultants to achieve a theatrically effective and easily stageable text**. One of the decisions that Krajník made was to divert from the almost two-centuries-long tradition to translate the English blank verse into Czech in strict iambic pentameter—a convention about which Czech translators of Shakespeare had complained since the early 20th century (Krajník and Mitrengová 169). Czech is a notoriously uniambic language, with the average length of a word about a syllable greater than in English, which means that translating a verse line into an English metre (while preserving the original number of lines—another Czech tradition that developed throughout the 20th century) is almost always a matter of compromise, whether semantic, poetic or gestic. Krajník's **rhythmised free verse**, which is often metrically close to blank verse—but is not limited by it—better allows what he calls a "verbal gesture" and gives the translator more space to capture dramatic nuances in characters and situations than previous generations of translators had (Krajník 11). It is significant that, while Krajník never attempted to simplify or update the original to make it more accessible (unlike, for instance, one of his predecessors, Jiří Josek, who in his 1999 version of *Hamlet* tended to oblige his audiences, sometimes at the expense of the complexity of Shakespeare's text; Drábek 2000), the South Bohemian production (directed by young director Jakub Čermák, well-known from the Czech independent theatre scene) was praised for its topicality, for its **distinctively modern feel** and for lending "new meaning to many situations of the play, uncovering additional possibilities for their interpretation" (Landa 14; working translation).

Somewhat surprisingly, the collaboration between Krajník and Čermák immediately led to another project: a new translation and production of Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*—a play that had been last staged in Czech in 1922. To a large degree, Krajník's *Edward II* follows the paths established in his *Hamlet*, chiefly in the collaboration with theatre practitioners and in paying attention to the dramaturgical qualities of the text, while also striving to retain its literary and historical value. These two translations ultimately led to an idea of

**a new series of printed editions** (entitled simply *Anglická renesanční dramata ve studentských vydáních*—English Renaissance Drama in Student Editions) of English early-modern plays in Czech for students and general reading audiences. Following the model of English student editions such as New Mermaids, the first two volumes in the series (that is, *Hamlet* and *Edward II*) contain philological and dramaturgical commentary, as well as contextual studies that help non-academic readers understand and appreciate the works and their background, while offering the plays themselves in modern renditions that follow the standards of current theatre. One of the ambitions of the series—led by Anna Hrdinová, whose new version of Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* will be included in the third volume—is not only to re-translate the well-known works by Shakespeare, but also **introduce to Czech readers and theatre practitioners other English playwrights from the period who have been woefully understudied and understaged** in the Czech context. Through collaboration between the academic and theatrical spheres, the series thus seeks to broaden the image of English Renaissance theatre in the minds of Czech reading audiences, as well as contribute new material to the current trend of staging Shakespeare and English early-modern drama in general in Czech theatres.

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