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Canons and Heroes: The Reception of the Complete Works Translation Project in Finland, 2002-13¹

Abstract: This essay examines the reception of the ten-year Complete Works translation project undertaken by the Finnish publishing company Werner Söderström Oy (WSOY) in 2004-13. Focusing on reviews published in the first and last years of the project, the essay details ongoing processes of Shakespeare (re-)canonization in Finland, as each new generation explains to itself what Shakespeare means to them, and why it continues to read, translate and perform Shakespeare. These processes are visible in comments from the series editors and translators extolling the importance of Shakespeare's work and the necessity of creating new, modern translations so Finns can read Shakespeare in their mother tongue; in discussions of the literary qualities of a good Shakespeare translation, e.g. whether it is advisable to use iambic pentameter in Finnish, a trochaic language; and in the creation of publisher and translator "heroes," who at significant cost to themselves, whether in money in terms of the publisher, or time and effort in terms of the translators, labour to provide the public with their Shakespeare in modern Finnish. While on the whole reviewers celebrated the new translations, there was some resistance to changes in familiar lines from older translations, such as Macbeth's "tomorrow" speech, suggesting that there are nevertheless some limits on modernizing "classic" translations.

Keywords: Shakespeare, complete works, reception, Finland, translation.

In the years leading up to the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, many European publishers embarked on complete works (re-)translation projects, including the Finnish publishing company Werner Söderström Oy (WSOY).²

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¹ I would like to thank Alice Martin, for making available the WSOY archive of newspaper clippings on the series; Kimmo Absetz, for checking my Finnish translations; and the two anonymous reviewers, whose comments were extremely valuable in helping me re-think how to present the material.

² According to an informal survey conducted on the ESRA mailing list (November 2013), there are or have recently been complete works or large-scale translation projects in Norway, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Romania, Poland, Portugal, and Spain. See also McMullan.

In his introduction to the 2007 special issue of *Shakespeare Quarterly* devoted to “the complete Shakespeare”, William H. Sherman asks pertinent questions which might also help us examine the European complete works phenomena. Most interesting is the question of why:

Why might we want a complete Shakespeare in the first place? Are we looking for a Hegelian *truth* delivered by a Shakespearean *whole*? Do we want to be able to trace the entire arc of Shakespeare’s career as a writer and to place the individual parts within it? Is it a matter of wanting as much as possible of a good thing, or a simple case of expecting (as with all purchases) that, when we take it out of the box, our Shakespeare won’t be missing any of its pieces? (286)

Further questions include “*when* did we start wanting our Shakespeare to be complete?” and of course *which texts* need to be included for Shakespeare to be considered complete.³ A trickier question is *co-authorship*, and how co-authors need to be acknowledged in a “complete works of Shakespeare” (286, my emphasis).

Finland’s first complete works translation project was rooted in larger national and cultural awakenings which eventually led to Finnish independence in 1917. From 1879-1912, the Finnish Literature Society funded the translation of 36 Shakespeare plays, all translated by Paavo Cajander.⁴ In 2002, Touko Siltala, then the literary director of one of Finland’s largest publishing houses, WSOY, had the idea that the firm could embark upon a project to provide new translations of Shakespeare’s plays. Approximately one hundred years had gone by since the previous complete works project. WSOY was also approaching its own 125th anniversary, adding to the impetus to embark upon the “cultural project” to translate Shakespeare.

In this essay, I examine the reception of the WSOY complete works project, focusing especially on the first and last years, where journalists attempted to assess its significance. I became interested in the reception of Shakespeare translations into Finnish when writing about the reception of the first complete works translation project into Finnish (see Keinänen). In early reviews, Cajander’s translations, and the proposed complete works translation project itself, were seen as a *kulttuurivoitto*, a “cultural triumph”, and Cajander’s efforts were applauded. Special attention was paid in the reviews to the difficulty of the project, due to Shakespeare’s challenging language, compounded by the large differences between English and Finnish. In the century or more between the two projects, much changed in Finnish culture. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Shakespeare translation fulfilled an important cultural need, bringing

³ For a good introduction to the issue of what constitutes a “complete” Shakespeare, see Orgel.

⁴ See Keinänen for a description of the project (in Finnish).

Finland closer to intellectual Europe. In the early 2000s, by contrast, the translation project became a *kulttuuriteko*, a “cultural feat”, but it did not generate the kind of proud adulation which greeted the first complete works project. With a few noteworthy exceptions, the WSOY translation series was mainly received perfunctorily, with a nodding glance to Shakespeare’s greatness, and admiration expressed for the “cultural significance” of the project itself. These reviews, however, provide fascinating insight into ongoing processes of Shakespeare (re-)canonization in Finland, as each new generation explains to itself what Shakespeare means to them, and why it continues to read, translate and perform Shakespeare. We can see this process in quotations from the series editors and translators extolling the importance of Shakespeare’s work and the necessity of creating new, modern translations; in discussions of the literary qualities of a good Shakespeare translation; and in the creation of publisher and translator “heroes”, who at significant cost to themselves, whether in money in terms of the publisher, or time and effort in terms of the translators, labour to provide the public with their Shakespeare in modern Finnish. In these discussions we can see tensions between Shakespeare as high and low culture, and the tactics used in the press to encourage the book-buying public to read these books. In also briefly comparing the reception of the present series to the first one, I am hoping to shed light on transformations in translation poetics, information which might be useful to those embarking on translation projects of their own.

I. Canon Formation: Justifications for the WSOY Project Offered in the Press

Several practical reasons were offered for the project, emphasizing that Shakespeare ought to be in print in Finnish in Finland. One was that the Shakespeare canon in Finnish was incomplete, given that *Pericles* had not been translated by Cajander, as at the time its authorship was disputed. WSOY would also be expanding the Shakespeare canon to include one co-authored play, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. *Pericles* in particular was mentioned repeatedly, despite the fact that the play is hardly known, and has never been performed in Finland. The completeness of the “complete works” was clearly an issue for many. Another justification was accessibility: many of Cajander’s older translations were out of print and only available in libraries, and a new series would make the plays more easily accessible to the book-buying public.

In terms of more ideological reasons, most of the early notices and reviews either assume or take pains to establish that Shakespeare was a great writer worthy of our attention today. In a short piece announcing the start of the project, Touko Siltala, the literary director at WSOY who conceived the project,

is quoted as saying: “*on yhtä itsestään selvää, että tarvitsemme uudet, ajanmukaiset suomennokset klassikosta, jota voi pitää kaikkien aikojen suurimpana kirjailijana* [it is obvious that we need new, modern Finnish translations of these classic texts from one of the greatest writers of all time]” (*Helsingin Sanomat* 24.4.2004). A review of *Macbeth* and *Henry IV, Part I* (the first two plays completed in the project) insists on the contemporary relevance of Shakespeare: “*Shakespearen näytelmiä ei voi todellakaan pitää pölyttyneinä muinaisjäänteinä, vaan edeltävinä kulttuuriteksteinä, jotka voivat samanaikaisesti problematisoida ja valaista kulttuurin myöhempiä moderneja ja jopa postmoderneja muotoja*. [Shakespeare’s plays should not be considered dusty old artifacts, but rather as groundbreaking cultural texts, which can at the same time problematize and illuminate modern and even postmodern cultural forms]” (Kekki).

Aside from assumed greatness, however, there is also an underlying fear that Shakespeare is difficult, or even boring. Päivi Koivisto-Alanko, the initial editor-in-chief of the series, is quoted as implicitly arguing *against* this idea, saying that modern audiences might be pleasantly surprised if they took the time to read him:

Mutta tärkein syy hankkeeseen on se, että toivomme mahdollisimman monen huomaavan, ettei Shakespeare ole vaikeaselkoista korkeakulttuuria, vaan oman aikansa viihdettä ja kaikkina aikoina loistavaa kirjallisuutta. Shakespeare on nerokas, kiehtova ja hauska.

[But the most important reason to do the project is that we hope that as many as possible will notice that Shakespeare is not high culture which is dense and hard-to-understand, but in his own time was highly entertaining. Shakespeare produced remarkable literature, which is at once genius, fascinating and fun] (Koivisto-Alanko).

This quotation must have been included in materials put out by STT, the source of many of the initial notices about the series, for it is repeated in many of the reviews.⁵ In reviewing the first two books, Tapio Lahtinen appeals to a reading audience more used to buying thrillers than a Shakespeare play: his headline reads “*Verta ja velikultia kesäpäivän ratoksi: Uudet Shakespeare-suomennokset sopivat vaikka rantakassiin* [Blood and Brothers-at-Arms Provide Summertime Pleasure: Tuck these New Finnish Translations into your Beach Bag]”. This insistence that Shakespeare is both interesting and worth the effort continues in the first lines:

⁵ The STT is a Finnish news agency which provides clients with “ready-made content for Weekly Newsbites, TV Listings, Events, and much more” (from their website).

Nämä kirjat voi viedä riippumattoon ja uimarannalle. Ei snobbailun vuoksi vaan siksi, että Matti Rossin uudet Shakespeare-käännökset ovat sujuvuudessaan lukijalle varsinaisia avaimet käteen-klassikoita.

[These are books you can enjoy on your hammock or at the beach. Not for their snob appeal, but because Matti Rossi's fluent new Shakespeare translations provide easy access to these classic works] (Lahtinen).

Although Lahtinen's main point is to suggest the plays are exciting, in stating that one should *not* read these texts for their snob appeal, he nevertheless underscores the idea that reading Shakespeare is somehow a "cultural feat" of a different kind, that a reader of Shakespeare possesses unusual and desirable cultural capital, that "understanding these classic works" is socially valuable, worth the effort.

Reviewers are conscious that Shakespeare is perceived as difficult, and by far the most common justification offered for the WSOY translation project was the need to re-translate Shakespeare into *modern* Finnish, since for many reviewers, the older translations by Cajander had aged and become hard to understand. The reviewer Timo Kallinen comments on Cajander's older translations thus: "*Nykyihminen ei yksinkertaisesti ymmärrä niitä näyttämöltä kuultuna, vaikka ne luettuna voivat tuottaa erikoislaatuista ja nostalgista nautintoa* [A contemporary person simply does not understand them when heard onstage, although read they can provide unique and nostalgic pleasure]" (Tiedonantaja 13.8.2004). Cajander's translations are "*kieleltään vaikeaselkoisia ja vanhentuneita* [hard to understand and old-fashioned]" according to another (Savon Sanomat 25.4.2004). A spate of articles (nine in total) accompanying the publication of the first two books in April 2004 highlighted the significance of the project precisely in these terms, with headlines like "*Shakespearea aikamme kielellä* [Shakespeare in the Language of our Time]", and even "*Shakespearea ymmärrettävästi suomeksi* [Shakespeare in Understandable Finnish]". The implication for all of these writers is that the new translations will be, should be, in modern Finnish, which will allow readers and viewers to get closer to the "*tekstien ydintä* [heart of the text]" than native speakers of English, for whom Shakespeare's original language is more difficult (Lehtonen).

Finally, modern reviewers also emphasized the importance of being able to read classics in one's mother tongue. Suna Vuori, for example, writes:

Sivistysvaltiolla pitää olla klassikot omalla kielellään. Jotta nämä kulttuurin kulmakivet tulevat luetuiksi ja myös ymmärretyiksi, kieltä on aika ajoin tarkistettava ja päivitettävä, mahdolliset virheet on oikaistava ja aukot täydennettävä. Kieli elää, eikä täydellistä käännöstä ole, joten työ ei lopu koskaan.

[A civilized country needs to translate the classics into its own language. So that these cornerstones of culture are both read and understood, every now and then their language must be revised and updated, possible mistakes corrected, and gaps filled in. Language is constantly changing, and there is no such thing as a perfect translation, so the work will never end] (Vuori, "Suomalainen").

This quotation encapsulates the main justifications offered for the complete works translation project: 1) Shakespeare is a "cornerstone of culture" and thus worth translating; 2) classics are best read in *modern* language; and 3) in one's *mother tongue*. Having now examined these justifications, let us turn next to an examination of how reviewers discussed the *kinds* of translations they preferred.

II. Dominant Poetics, Translator Norms

André Lefevere has argued that translations are essentially shaped by two factors: "the translator's ideology (whether he/she willingly embraces it, or whether it is imposed on him/her as a constraint by some form of patronage) and the poetics dominant in the receiving literature at the time the translation is made" (*Translation, Rewriting* 40). Importantly, WSOY did not try to impose a rigorous set of norms. The translators were asked to be loyal to the original text, which in most cases was the Oxford and Arden Shakespeares. Nothing was to be added or omitted, and prose/verse distinctions were to be observed. In other words, the publisher gave the translators a relatively free hand. The reviews, by contrast, reveal a rather strong sense of the dominant poetics regarding Shakespeare translation in Finland at the time, focusing on such issues as the translation of iambic pentameter, and the need to respect older translations even while modifying them.

One criticism of Paavo Cajander's older translations revolved around the question of meter: in the late 19th century, Cajander decided to be faithful to Shakespeare's iambic pentameter, even though word stress in Finnish is on the first syllable.⁶ Cajander, a poet himself, had an exceptionally good ear for sounds and rhythms, but to modern ears his efforts to begin lines with an unaccented syllable felt contrived. All but one of the WSOY translators chose *not* to translate into iambic pentameter, but preferred variations on trochaic rhythms. Alice Martin (76-77) reports that some of the translators as well as the editors were influenced by the metrical techniques of Matti Rossi, and studied how he achieved his trochaic verse forms.

⁶ Lefevere (*Translation, Rewriting...*) argues that A. W. Schlegel's idea that poems should be translated using the same meter as the original is responsible for all kinds of metrical contortions in many translations produced between 1830 and 1930 (39).

Reviewers, too, were interested in questions of meter. Several early reviewers explain Shakespeare's iambic pentameter to the Finnish audience, while also commenting that it is not always the best solution in Finnish. Leena Tuomela's (2004) subtitle says "*Matti Rossi on hylännyt silosäkeen mutta säilyttänyt runollisuuden* [Matti Rossi has rejected iambic pentameter but preserved Shakespeare's poetry]". In the review itself, she writes that Rossi's translations are "*uudet mutta eivät liian modernit* [new, but not too modern]" and "*vaikka Rossi onkin hylännyt silosäkeen, tekstin runollisuus ei ole siitä kärsinyt* [while Rossi has rejected iambic pentameter, the poetic qualities of his text have not suffered]". Mikko Nortela (2004), in a review of *Henry IV, Part I* comments that "*Rossi taas ei edes tavoittele jambimaista pentametria. Hän on lähempänä aivan turhaan unohdettuja Yrjö Jylhän käännöksiä, joissa on vahva ja luonteva rytmin tuntu* [Rossi doesn't even try to do iambic pentameter. He is closer to the undeservedly forgotten Yrjö Jylhä translations, which have a strong and natural rhythm]". Timo Kallinen (2004) similarly praises Rossi's art, commenting that the first two plays were well chosen, for they amply demonstrate the "*häikäisevä kielellinen rikkaus hohtamaan kahdessa lähes päinvastaisessa tyylilajissa* [dazzling richness of Rossi's language in two nearly opposite genres]". Rossi's language is "*rikasta, mutta selkeää, parasta nykysuomea* [rich, but clear, the very best of modern Finnish]".

Although most agreed with the translators' choices to be faithful to the natural rhythms of Finnish, one in particular challenged the translation norm of *not* reproducing the meter of the original. This point was raised by Jussi Nikkilä, an actor and director, writing for *Parnasso*, a Finnish literary review. When the series started he was a young acting student; he started reading the books as they came out, and then found himself reading them all. Nikkilä speaks admiringly of many books in the series, and contemplates the rigors of translating iambic pentameter verse, focusing specifically on Kersti Juva, the only translator who attempted to reproduce iambic verse in Finnish. Nikkilä, commenting that the effort "*varmasti paljon hikeä ja kyyneleitä vaatinut* [no doubt required a lot of sweat and tears]" (35), nevertheless thinks that iambic verse does work in Finnish:

Jambisessa pentametrissa on käännettynäkin ehdottomasti puolensa. Teksti kulkee pidäkkeettä ja kevyesti eteenpäin, säilyy helpommin mielessä, ja ajatus saa kuin itsestään sille varatun rytmisen tilan. Turha löysyys karsiutuu heti, eikä keinotekoisia sanoja esiinny kuten Paavo Cajanderilla, jonka käännöksissä on kyllä ehdottomasti oma viehätyksensä.

[There is something to be said for the use of iambic verse. The text moves freely and lightly forward, is easier to remember, and the thought receives the rhythmic space it needs. Unnecessary slackness is immediately pared away, and Juva does not resort to contrived words as Cajander did, although to be fair, Cajander's translations nevertheless do possess a charm of their own].

In a short preface to her translation of *Much Ado About Nothing*, Juva notes that there is a tradition of iambic verse in Finnish, practiced by such greats as Aleksis Kivi, Eino Leino, and P. Mustapää in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but the advent of modernism broke the tradition. She finds it a pity that the two traditions cannot exist side by side: “*Säännöllinen ennustettava mitta kutsuu lausumaan runon ääneen, opettelemaan sen ulkoa, ja nousevien runojalkojen keinuvassa liikkeessä on jotakin rauhoittavaa.* [A predictable rhythm invites one to speak the poem aloud, to learn it by heart, and there is something peaceful in the rising, rocking iambic beat]” (24). In terms of poetic form, then, there was a sea change in translation norms from Cajander’s day to our own: Cajander’s reviewers approved of his efforts to import iambic pentameter into Finnish as they wanted explicitly to learn from Western literary forms in developing Finnish as a literary language, whereas modern reviewers favoured rhythms more natural to the Finnish language.⁷ The reviewer Kari Salminen (2013) frames it like this: “*Hienostelun ja korkean tyylin sijasta on viljelty kansankieltä ja karkeuksia, mutta alkuperäiset merkitykset säilyttäen ja historiaa arvostaen.* [Instead of a snobbish and grand style, the translators have found a rugged style, the language of how people really speak, while at the same time remaining faithful to the original meaning and respecting history]”. Here again we see the linking of Shakespeare and snobbery, while also noticing a possible contradiction in the dominant poetics: how does one “respect history” while writing “how people really speak” in the modern age?

Respecting history turns out to be complicated, not least because there are two levels: Shakespeare’s early modern, and the traditions of Finnish Shakespeare translation. To this end, reviewers compare the new and older translations, placing them side by side so readers can assess the differences for themselves. For example, Soila Lehtonen (2004) begins her review of *Macbeth* with a comparison of lines from Lady Macbeth’s “I have given suck” speech. While she says Cajander’s translations still have moments of “*nasevaa, lyyristä lennokkuutta* [striking, lyrical flight]” they also contain “*tahaton komiikka* [unintended comedy]”. Rossi is praised for *not* attempting to produce some kind of “timeless Finnish” which would echo the effects Shakespeare’s early modern English has on modern audiences, but rather for producing “*elävää puhetta, jonka rytmi näyttelijän on helppo omaksua ja jonka katsoja ymmärtää kertakuulemalla* [living speech, whose rhythms an actor can easily embrace and whose language a reader can easily understand]” (Lehtonen).

⁷ C.f. André Lefevere’s claim that translators fall into two main categories, those “who want their translations to take part in the struggle between canonised and non-canonised systems”, whom he calls “literary translators” and “metaliterary” translators, who are less interested in challenging the dominant poetics, but rather want to “show how a literary polysystem evolves, how it changes, what factors make it behave the way it does” (“Translating” 159-60).

Interestingly, while reviewers are unanimous that the whole point of retranslating texts is to modernize their language, some nevertheless object if familiar lines from Cajander's text have been changed. A good example of this is Tapio Lahtinen's (2004) review of *Macbeth*, which includes a large side-bar containing ten lines of the "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" speech. Shakespeare's text is given in English, with Rossi's translation in bold underneath, and then notes comparing Rossi's solutions to Cajander's along the right side.⁸ While previous translators of *Macbeth* have rendered the "tomorrow" line quite literally (*Huomenna, huomenna ja huomenna*), Rossi's translation is "huomattavasti vapaampi eikä välttämättä kaikkien Shakespearen ihailijoiden mieleen. Makuasia, josta kannattaa kiistellä [much freer, and possibly not to the liking of all Shakespeare lovers. But these matters of taste are worth debating]", writes Lahtinen, who clearly does not like the new rendition of the line (*Tulee huomien, ja sitten toinen, tulee, menee*).⁹ But while Lahtinen objects to individual solutions, he praises the overall text, saying it "istuu nykyaikaan kuin hanska käteen [fits modern Finnish like a glove]". Lahtinen further praises the translation for reproducing rhyme, and approvingly notes that while Rossi's translation has the same number of lines as the original, he moves content freely between lines as needed, so his translation feels less contrived or stilted than earlier ones. These examples nicely illustrate some of the dilemmas facing translators: the need to be rhythmic, but natural; and new, but not too new.

III. The Creation of Translator and Publishing Heroes

Nikkilä's focus above on the sheer difficulties translators must overcome when translating Shakespeare's English into Finnish leads to another theme emerging in the reviews, the creation of heroes, both the translators who embark upon the task of translating a Shakespeare play and the publishers who commission, edit and publish the translations. The early translator Paavo Cajander has been portrayed as a hero in Finnish literary history, as over a 33-year period he translated 36 plays and a handful of sonnets by himself; the Finnish Literature Society (SKS), which published Cajander's efforts, was similarly admired for its work promoting nationalism and cultural revival. So a kind of heroic legacy was there for the shaping in Finland, and the modern press seemed to want to create heroes of their own. This is highly unusual in Finland: reviews of most translated literature scarcely mention the translator, and almost never interview

⁸ By contrast, Cajander's translations were most often compared to Swedish or German ones, as English was not a widely studied language at the time.

⁹ In a side-note, Lahtinen wonders whether the Finnish title of Faulkner's *Sound and Fury* needs to be adjusted to use Rossi's better version (*ääni ja vimma*, from Jylhä's translation, versus *huuto ja vimma* from Rossi's).

the translator about his/her work. But at the same time, modern reviewers straddled a fine line between trying *not* to dethrone the old heroes while still celebrating the current translators. There is a strong current of presentism in the reviews, the idea that our own translators are better able to achieve the “true” tone of the original, as those in earlier generations lacked the necessary skills and knowledge (Koskinen and Paloposki 220).

In creating the translator hero, reviews mentioned early pioneers and the difficulties they had faced. A particularly good example of this is Jukka Petäjä’s first long introduction to the entire project, published in Finland’s leading daily. He includes a side-bar with the title “*Kuinka äkäpussi kesytetään suomeksi* [How the Shrew is Tamed in Finnish]” which begins with a quotation from August Ahlqvist, who in 1864 felt that Finnish was still too immature to accommodate Shakespeare translation:

Meidän mielestä on vielä liian aikainen ruveta Shakespearia Suomeksi kääntämään; kielemme sanasto monessakin niistä korkeista asioista, joita tämä runoilija kuvailee, on vielä niin epävakainen ja muodostumaton [ja kielettäremme liikkuu vielä kömpelösti ja hoiperrellen uudemmissa runopuvuissa]. Tuskinpa koskaan saatane Shakespearen teoksia Suomeksi kuulumaan siltä, miltä ne kuuluvat esm. Ruotsin kielellä.

[In our opinion, it is still too early to begin translating Shakespeare into Finnish. Our language lacks the vocabulary to discuss the exalted things the poet describes; it is still too unstable and formless; [it still wobbles clumsily and staggers awkwardly in its new poetic clothes]. And I doubt we’ll ever get Shakespeare’s works to sound in Finnish like they sound for example in Swedish] (cited in Petäjä, “Suomentajan”).

After thus emphasizing these difficulties, Petäjä then says that fortunately Ahlqvist was wrong, and he provides a short history of Shakespeare translation into Finnish, naming twelve translators. The sense here, however, is less that translators build on each other, but that each new translator brings his/her individual genius to the process, and each Shakespeare translation is therefore unique (c.f. the point above that familiar lines should not be changed).¹⁰

In the early reviews, two translators were chosen for special focus, Matti Rossi and Kersti Juva. Since the 1960s, when he teamed with the director Kalle Holmberg to usher in a new age of Shakespeare in performance, Rossi has been known as a complex and exceptionally gifted translator. Juva, by contrast, had not yet translated her first Shakespeare play, but was well-known in Finland for other translations from English, including an award-winning translation of

¹⁰ Only the modern translations were expected to be unique. Many of the translations that appeared in the intervening years were explicitly done and marketed as revisions of Cajander.

Tristram Shandy.¹¹ Translators are deemed heroes due to the difficulty of Shakespeare's language, which in the words of one of the first headlines about the project, offers the translator both "*tähtihetki ja kauhun paikka* [a place to shine [but also] dread]" (Petäjä, "Suomentajan"). In the piece, Juva is quoted as saying good-naturedly that translating Shakespeare is "*mahdotonta* [impossible]", and that she is happy to be starting with one of the lighter comedies, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which contains a lot of prose (rather than the dreaded iambic pentameter). Echoing Juva many years later, Kari Salminen (2013) writes that translating Shakespeare "*ei ole vaikeaa vaan mahdotonta* [is not difficult, but impossible]". Interviewed at the end of the project, Matti Rossi (who had translated sixteen plays) emphasises "*Kyllä se on ollut aikamoinen urakka. Olen työni tehnyt ja tyytyväinen* [Yes it was quite a feat. I've done my work and I'm satisfied]" (Vuori, "Kiemuroiden").

The translators themselves mainly downplayed their heroic status, or referred to it jokingly. Juva said that translating Shakespeare is easier now than when Cajander did it, as modern translators have access to much better-edited editions of the English originals, and also because the Finnish language has changed, becoming "*avoimemmaksi, sanoilla pelaaminen ja leikkiminen on yleistynyt* [more open, with more plays on words]," though she did not provide any examples of what she meant (qtd in Petäjä, "Suomentajan"). Another article quotes the translator Kristiina Drews (not involved in the project), who said that with modern technology translators have much better access to background material, allowing them to make translations which are closer to the original work (Petäjä, "Klassikko").¹² At the beginning of the project, Rossi joked about the physical challenges ahead, saying that translating Shakespeare would involve a lot of sitting, and he is not very good at sitting (*Kainuun Sanomat*). I find myself wondering whether the unusual focus on the translators was partly an effort on the part of the reviewers to help market the books, by creating a living, Finnish hero whose work the book-buying public could support. Perhaps they thought that "Rossi" or "Juva" would sell better than "Shakespeare" or "*Macbeth*".

Two ideas challenging the translator-as-hero meme are also evident in the reviews. Cajander's translations were celebrated both on the page and stage (all were performed more or less upon completion at the Finnish Theatre, later the Finnish National Theatre), but there was some effort (in my opinion) to downplay the modern translators' skills by attempting to create a page/stage

¹¹ In 1999, Juva won the prestigious Agricola translation prize for her translation of the novel.

¹² The retranslation hypothesis suggests that first translations tend to be domesticating whereas retranslations tend to be foreignizing, so in some sense "closer" to the original, but as Paloposki and Koskinen point out, there are examples in Finnish which both support and disprove the rule.

distinction. In an interview with Kersti Juva, for example, the journalist Jukka Petäjä suggests that the WSOY translations target more a reading audience than a theatrical one, given the tendency of Finnish theatres and directors to commission or indeed do their own translations for specific performances. Juva, however, challenges this assessment, saying that “[o]n mahdollista, että suomennoksista tulee niin tiheitä, niin täyteen ladattuja, että niitä on aika vaikea laittaa sellaisenaan näyttämölle. Toivoisin tietenkin, että niitä voisi näytellä suoraan. [[i]t’s possible that the Finnish translations will be so dense, so tightly packed, that it would be difficult to play them as is on stage. But I hope they can be played as written]” (Petäjä, “Suomentajan”). Suna Vuori returns to questions of playability in an extended review published on the completion of the series, where she writes: “Käyttökelpoisuus on kuitenkin vain yksi hyvän draamakäännöksen kriteereistä. Muita ovat esimerkiksi oikeellisuus, selkeys—ja kauneus. [Being playable is only one criterion of a good drama translation. Also important are correctness, clarity—and beauty]” (Vuori, “Suomalainen”). Later in the same article she blurs the whole page/stage distinction, saying: “Kun kääntäjä onnistuu, me muut saamme nauttia rikkaasta ja runollisesta kielestä, joka ilahduttaa niin kuultuna ja nähtynä kuin luettunakin [When the translator succeeds, the rest of us get to enjoy rich and poetic language, which is a delight both to hear, see and read].” Considering that both Rossi and Juva have translated extensively for the theatre, I found it rather odd that reviewers questioned the playability of their translations. Perhaps this was inevitable in a book project by a leading literary publisher.

Especially upon the completion of the project, there were also conflicting opinions on how long these translations would last. Saara Pääkkönen, one of the editors, was of the view that the new translations would “rikastuttamaan maamme teatterielämää ja kirjallisuutta seuraavat satakunta vuotta [enrich Finnish theater and literature for the next hundred years or so]” (e.g. Lehtinen; Reku). Matti Rossi, by contrast, indicated that he would be happy if the translations lasted another twenty years (Vuori, “Shakespeare-sarja”). The discrepancy between these two assessments is at least partially due to their differing frames of reference: a publishing company like WSOY cannot for economic reasons hope to embark upon such an expensive, time-consuming and difficult project very often, and must indeed hope that the literary quality of the new translations will hold up for several generations, with sales adding up over decades, not months or years as with most books. Drama translators like Rossi, by contrast, tend to think that translations age quickly and hence must continuously be retranslated.¹³

Whatever their disagreements about the longevity of these translations, there was widespread agreement that the press was performing an important cultural service, and WSOY was celebrated as a kind of publisher-hero.

¹³ See also Aaltonen for a discussion of retranslation in the Finnish theatre.

References to the complete works project as a “*kulttuurihanke* [cultural feat]” begin with the first notices in January 2004, in a short piece by Arto Tuominen in a small Helsinki journal, *Tiedonantaja*. Other notices and reviews pay similar attention to the scope of the project, calling it a *suurhanke* [major undertaking].¹⁴ There seems to be a sense of pride and anticipation in these early notices, many of them focusing on the magnitude of the undertaking. This theme was amplified in the notices about the completion of the project. In the words of Nina Lehtinen, “*Kun Venetsian kauppias, Othello ja Hamlet saadaan tänä syksynä painokoneista ulos, WSOY:n kunnianhimoinen suururakka kääntää William Shakespearen näytelmät nykysuomeksi on valmis* [When *The Merchant of Venice, Othello* and *Hamlet* are published this fall, WSOY’s ambitious, massive project to translate all of Shakespeare’s plays into modern Finnish will be finished]”. In her long discussion of this “unique” Shakespeare series, Suna Vuori of the *Helsingin Sanomat* quotes Rossi, who admits, “*Kyllä se on ollut aikamoinen urakka* [Yes it was quite an undertaking]” (Vuori, “Kiemuroiden”). Kari Salminen of *Turun Sanomat* uses the term *jättiurakka* [a gigantic undertaking] to describe the project.

The publisher-as-hero meme was further buttressed at both the beginning and end of the project with reference to its financial realities. For the publisher, *kulttuuriteko* becomes a euphemism for “worthy, but not profitable”. Before the first books were even released, the *Helsingin Sanomat* published an article on the economic feasibility of re-translating classics. Under the title “*Klassikko kääntyy harvoin kahdesti* [Classics are Seldom Translated Twice]”, the piece discusses the WSOY Shakespeare project along with several other large translation projects. Jaakko Tapaninen, from the publishing house Tammi, is quoted as giving a rather grim view of their economic prospects:

Tilanne on ikävä kyllä sellainen, että edes klassikoita ei juuri osteta—saati sitten uudelleen suomennettuja klassikoita. Samalla rahalla voi julkaista parhaimmillaan jopa kymmeniä uusia käännöskirjoja, joiden kysyntä on paljon vilkkaampaa.

[The situation is unfortunately that people simply do not buy classics, to say nothing of retranslations of classics. For the same money, you can publish dozens of translations of new books, for which there is much more demand] (Petäjä, “Klassikko”).

Nine years later, Suna Vuori notes that not that many books had been sold, and only *Macbeth* has gone into a second printing (Vuori, “Shakespeare-sarja”).¹⁵ Juhani Reku’s piece in *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus* quotes Pääkkönen saying that

¹⁴ Tuomela; *Helsingin Sanomat* “Shakespearen uudet suomennokset”; *Kaleva*.

¹⁵ Since then a few more individual volumes have gone into a second printing.

the publisher did not expect to make a profit on the translations, but instead was doing the project as an expression of “*kulttuuritahto* [cultural will]”. Given these financial realities, we begin to get a better understanding of the significance of complete works translation projects, not just for Shakespeare but for other classics. Koskinen and Paloposki point out, at least for Finland, that if such works are published in series, their “status (and sales value) increase” (201). As happens more broadly in publishing, better sales figures for the more popular plays might also help to keep the less popular ones in print. Retranslation series can, for example, be marketed to schools (Koskinen and Paloposki 201), and perhaps marketing to the general public is easier as well.

Although the books have perhaps not sold well, the WSOY complete works project has certainly had a positive effect on Finnish culture, albeit on a modest scale. A Shakespeare reading group, led by Alice Martin, is systematically reading through the translations, meeting once a month, scheduled to finish in 2017. The translations are starting to be used in the theatre. And for at least some Finns, it seems important that Shakespeare is readily available in easy-to-read modern translations. The difference from the “cultural victory” of the 19th century to the “cultural feat” or “expression of cultural will” of the early 21st, however, is large, speaking to significant differences in the *uses* of Shakespeare in individual cultures over time. It is nevertheless worth considering why publishers, journalists and academics laud the *idea* of a complete works project, while ordinary people seem rather uninterested in purchasing these volumes. Perhaps part of the reason is a stage/page dichotomy (people would rather *see* than *read* Shakespeare). I would hope that future scholars can compare notes on the status of and justifications for complete works projects in different countries, and perhaps gain insights into the best ways to keep these texts available to the reading public.

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