

## On translating Shakespeare into Russian, German and Croatian

*Mladen Engelsfeld*  
*Faculty of Philosophy, Zagreb*

In Shakespeare translation there are mainly three important factors which a serious translator must take into consideration: 1) semantics, concerned with meaning and sense of words and phrases, 2) metaphor, concerned with imagery (metaphors, similes), and 3) rhythm, also concerned with meter and rhyme. In forming the translator's correlative, music or rhythm of Shakespeare sounds is as important as meaning, expressed and suggested by words, or imagery, consisting of metaphors or similes. If music of Shakespeare's words is not adequately rendered in translation, the translation as a whole would be deficient and incomplete, unsatisfactory.

How many ages hence  
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over,  
In states unborn, and accents yet unknown!  
(*JC*, 3.1.111 – 113)

### Introduction

If it is possible to produce a potentially ideal translation of Shakespeare in one of many foreign languages, then one could safely come to the conclusion that the ideal, satisfactory translation of Shakespeare is in some cases possible. But what is the ideal, satisfactory translation of Shakespeare? The ideal translation is a translation which is satisfactory from the point of view of semantics, imagery, verse, rhythm, tone and music.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This article is an amalgamated version of two papers; one, delivered at the Twenty-Sixth International Shakespeare Conference at Stratford – upon – Avon (21 – 26 August 1994), and the other, at the Sixth World Shakespeare Congress in Los Angeles (7 – 14 April 1996).

However, if only one of these characteristics of the ideal translation is missing – as, for example, verse (line, metre and rhyme) – then one could not speak about the ideal, satisfactory translation. True, such an incomplete translation without verse would still be a translation of Shakespeare; it would have many characteristics of plays written by Shakespeare but, in comparison to the imaginary ideal translation, it would be somewhat deficient and not complete, not quite satisfactory. And another sad truth is that most people outside England and America became acquainted with Shakespeare through such incomplete, deficient and unsatisfactory translations. This has led many scholars to the conclusion that a satisfactory translation of Shakespeare's plays into foreign languages is impossible. Now, is this true or not?

Peter Milward, an Englishman who has lived in Japan for a very long time, has become convinced "that translation of Shakespeare's plays into Japanese is altogether impossible" because "it is only meaning that is susceptible to translation, not sound" ("On Translating Shakespeare into Japanese" in *Shakespeare in Translation*, 1982, pp. 19, 20). In other words, then, the "sound" that should accompany the "meaning" of Shakespeare's words cannot be reproduced in Japanese translations. Now, if Peter Milward's assessment of Japanese translations of Shakespeare is correct, what could we say about translating Shakespeare into other languages? Is it equally impossible?

In many nations Shakespeare's verse has been translated into prose. Even in England, for example, A. L. Rowse has paraphrased Shakespeare's sonnets into prose. (A. L. Rowse: *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, Macmillan & Co Ltd, London 1964). On top of that, there are many English school editions which paraphrase certain passages from Shakespeare, turning poetry into prose. Such editions certainly help many children and students to get better acquainted with the original text, but a question arises as to whether Shakespeare in prose – in English or in translation – is genuine, original, authentic Shakespeare or not. Could one in such cases, as in Shakespeare in prose, speak about translation or adaptation or, to use a recent term, appropriation?

The first question that the participants of the Translation seminar at the Sixth World Shakespeare Congress in Los Angeles in 1996 had to answer was this: "How does your target language respond to Shakespeare's verse (iambic pentameter and/or rhyme)?" And that is indeed the crucial question in the field of translating Shakespeare, for, if this requirement for a successful translation is not met, any translation of Shakespeare into foreign languages would be somewhat incomplete and not quite satisfactory.

Taking into consideration linguistic, metrical and rhythmical characteristics of various target languages, i.e. of everything that makes up the music of Shakespeare's verse, I have divided various languages into three groups:

1) The first group consists of languages in which it is possible to reproduce Shakespeare's iambic pentameter: German, Danish, Norwegian, Croatian, Slovene and, perhaps, Russian.

2) The second group consists of languages in which it is not possible to reproduce Shakespeare's iambic pentameter but, as a way out, in which it is possible to find some

kind of metrical substitute for Shakespeare's verse: French, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Serbian, Czech.

3) The third group consists of languages in which it is not possible to reproduce or recreate Shakespeare's iambic pentameter with its metrical and structural characteristics. This group includes languages such as Hungarian, Japanese, Arabic, Chinese, and Indian languages (Bengali, Hindi, Tamil).

Translators in some languages which belong to the third group have made great efforts to render Shakespeare's verse as faithfully as possible. In India, for example, N. J. Tagore used blank verse of 16 syllables in an attempt to translate Shakespeare line by line. In China, Sun Day, in his translation of *King Lear* (1935), tried to adhere to the original iambic pentameter by using phoneme groups which he called *Yinzu*. As I am unable to judge whether Indian and Chinese translators could retain something of what Peter Milward would put in the category of sound, I will leave the field to other, more competent scholars.

Civilization and its symbols, cultural customs and habits, conscious and unconscious values and attitudes of many countries – Japan, China, Arabic countries, and some others – are so different from those in Western Europe and America that translators from those countries, apart from linguistic difficulties, have to face many others. Witness the two excellent films by the Japanese director Akira Kurosawa, *The Throne of Blood* (1957) and *Ran* (1985), based respectively on Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. However, the discussion of such problems as are the differences in thinking and behaviour between various civilizations would mean leaving the category of translation and entering the category of adaptation or appropriation. My article deals mostly with translations of Shakespeare which belong to the first group of languages.

The division of languages into three groups according to their response to Shakespeare's verse should be considered as conditional and provisional, and it is not always clear cut; some languages, or translations, could potentially belong to two of my groups. Since I have a command of about 12 languages only, in my division I have not only relied on my own assessments and existing literature on translations and translating, but have also consulted scholars of various nationalities who have helped me with their opinions.

I am open to any sort of argumentative criticism and would be very grateful to all those who could help me with their opinions and advice. Scholars and translators who are not inclined to agree with my division of languages into 3 groups, are at liberty to make their own divisions or approach the problem of Shakespeare translation in their own way.

### Three Important Factors in Translating Shakespeare

As I have translated 6,288 lines of poetry and prose of the *First and the Second Part of King Henry IV* (according to the New Shakespeare edition), I hope I can speak here – in Justice Shallow's words – "in some authority".

I had been in the process of translating both plays into Croatian in the line of 6 iambic feet which I have inherited from previous translators but, when after hard labour I reached the end of *Part II*, I realized that I could make some changes in the inherited line which would enable me to render the rhythmic movements of Shakespeare's lines, not only the words and phrases, and that I have in fact discovered a new line and metre for translating the two parts of *Henry IV* into Croatian.

In the process of translating I was becoming more and more aware that, in forming the translator's correlative, rhythm or music of Shakespeare's sounds is as important as meaning, expressed and suggested by words, or imagery, consisting of metaphors or similes.

I broke the contract with the publisher and started working on the 6,288 lines again, bearing in mind T.S. Eliot's words that in the life of a nation there are not many things more important than the discovery of a new form of line.

In this paper I am going to discuss the importance of music in Shakespeare's verse to the art of translating Shakespeare and to the understanding of Shakespeare's art as well. But before passing on to this elusive, though existent and alive, category of Shakespeare's verse, I must say a word or two about two other important factors in translating Shakespeare – semantics and metaphor.

In Shakespeare translation there are mainly three important factors which a serious translator must take into consideration: 1) semantics, concerned with meaning and sense of words and phrases, 2) metaphor, concerned with imagery (metaphors, similes), and 3) rhythm, also concerned with metre and rhyme.

An ideal translation which I have in mind must be easily spoken and pronounced – as in Shakespeare – for I do not believe in translations intended for the theatre (scenic translations) on the one hand, and in translations for reading (literal translations) on the other. Such separation did not exist in Shakespeare. An ideal successful translation is a work of art which Shakespeare would have written if he had lived in a foreign country and if he had had at his disposal the same theatrical and linguistic tradition as in England.

## Semantics

When Hamlet's dictum "Frailty, thy name is woman" (*Ham.*, 1.2.146) the Russian poet Boris Pasternak translates "O ženščiny, vam imja – verolomstvo"<sup>2</sup>, meaning "O, women, your name (is) – treachery", one wonders why has the word "frailty", meaning "weakness, in a physical as well as moral sense",<sup>3</sup> become "treachery" or "perfidy", in spite of the fact that there are enough words in Russian which correspond to the English word "frailty"? Was it because Pasternak thought that "treachery" rather than "frailty"

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<sup>2</sup> Vil'jam Šekspir, *Izabrannye proizvedenija*, Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo hudožestvennoj literatury, Moskva 1953, p. 241.

<sup>3</sup> A. Schmidt, *Shakespeare-Lexicon*, Vol. I, Walter de Gruyter & Co., Berlin 1962, p. 450.

better agrees with what some Russians usually think of their women and could therefore be better accepted in another social milieu, or was it something else?

The problem of Russian translators of Shakespeare is not simple. In a theatre version of Pasternak's translation of *Hamlet*, the line about the frailties of women runs as follows: "Ty, pravo, teška ženščine, prevratnost!" This means: "Thou, the namesake of a woman, art really falseness (deception, deceit)!" And even this version of Shakespeare's line from *Hamlet*, after Pasternak's final instruction to the prompter, was changed into a new one: "O ženščiny! Izmennicy vam imja." (Literally: "O women! Traitors is your name").<sup>4</sup>

Now, all of Pasternak's versions of Shakespeare's line about the frailty of women are variations of a well-known phrase from Verdi's *Rigoletto*: la donna è mobile (the woman is deceitful). According to Pasternak, then, women are treacherous, false, and deceitful.

But what could one say when in Pasternak's translation, or rather paraphrase, of Hotspur's famous speech on honour "By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap" (*IH4*, 1. 3.199 – 206), one does not even find the two key words of this speech – the word "honour", used twice in that speech, and the word "redeem" – both of which are equally important for that speech and for the play as a whole.<sup>5</sup> Instead of "honour" Pasternak once uses "slava" (glory), though his translation of Falstaff's speech on honour (*IH4*, 5.1.127 – 141) shows that he was acquainted with the meaning of the word "honour" (čest).<sup>6</sup>

It should be duly noted that Pasternak's mistranslations of "frailty", "honour" and "redeem" were not made out of metrical considerations but, as his and many other translations of Shakespeare into major East and Central European languages show, out of misunderstanding and ignorance of Shakespeare's way of thinking and writing, and Shakespeare criticism as well.

Pasternak has evidently not heard of key-words or pivotal-words in Shakespeare such as "honour" in *Henry IV*, "honest" in *Othello* or "nature" in *Macbeth* and *Lear*. There is no *licentia poetica* in the translation of key-words in Shakespeare though such licenses are the usual practice of numerous translators. Shakespeare is the international victim of his fellow-poets and other charlatans who, in their innocent ignorance, drag him down to their own level.

## Imagery

In a series of 7 clothing images Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a hypocrite who hides his true nature under a disguise. One of them, spoken by Macbeth himself:

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<sup>4</sup> I am very grateful to A.V. Bartoshevich of Moscow's State Institute of Arts Research, who has allowed me to see and photocopy the relevant passages from the Prompter's copy of Pasternak's translation of *Hamlet*.

<sup>5</sup> Vil'jam Šekspir, op. cit., p. 88.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

and I have bought  
Golden opinion from all sorts of people,  
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,  
Not cast aside so soon. (*Mac.*, 1.7.32 – 35)

is immediately followed by another one, uttered by Lady Macbeth:

was the hope drunk,  
wherein you dress'd yourself? (*Mac.*, 1.7.35 – 36)

and both of them are paraphrased in Pasternak's translation. The first image is rendered as:

Ja v narodnom mnen'e  
Stoju tak vysoko, što ja b hotel  
Požit' nemnogo etoj dobroj slavoj.

and the second one as follows:

A što ž tvoja mečta? Byla p'jana,  
Ne vyspalas' i vidit v černom cvete,  
Čto do pohmel'ja radovalo vzor?<sup>7</sup>

In Pasternak's translation of Lady Macbeth's metaphor there is not a single trace of Shakespeare's clothing image.

Friedrich Bodenstedt, the German translator of *Macbeth*, shows the same disregard for Shakespeare's way of thinking and unnecessarily replaces Lady Macbeth's clothing image with another metaphor:

War denn die Hoffnung trunken  
In der Du gingst?<sup>8</sup>

The Croatian poet Vladimir Nazor, who studied English in order to be able to translate *Macbeth*, has also paraphrased Lady Macbeth's image:

Macbethe,  
Što reče! Nada, što ti svu razveseli  
Ponosnu dušu, zar je bila varava  
Utvara noćna pa je iščeznula  
Kad i san minu.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 433.

<sup>8</sup> Shakespeare's *Sämtliche Werke*, Zweiter Band, Vierte Auflage, Stuttgart, p. 233.

<sup>9</sup> This means: Macbeth, / What do you say! The hope that has cheered / Your whole proud soul, was it a deceptive / Nightly illusion, and did it vanish / When the dream passed away?

Of all the examples of clothing images in *Macbeth* as collected by Caroline Spurgeon in her book *Shakespeare's Imagery* Nazor has only once retained the original metaphor. The image of Macbeth himself, indirectly presented in a chain of images, has disappeared.<sup>10</sup>

Pasternak's, Bodenstedt's and Nazor's translations of one clothing image in *Macbeth* is especially typical of poet-translators who either paraphrase Shakespeare's metaphors or supplant them with others which they think superior to Shakespeare's. It is in translations of Shakespeare's images that *traduttore* easily becomes *traditore*.

### The Music of Shakespeare's Sounds (Metre, Rhyme, Tone)

Now I come to the main point of my paper – the role played by the music of the sounds in Shakespeare's verse. The music of Shakespeare's sounds, as I have already said, is an elusive category and does not easily lend itself to critical analysis. However, some of its constituent parts like metre and rhythm could be separated from the whole musical effect of a particular work and analysed away.

J. Torbarina has made a metrical analysis of 33 lines of Shakespeare's soliloquy "To be, or not to be" (*Ham.*, 3.1.56 – 88) and has compared it to the Schlegel-Tieck version of the same speech in German. His conclusion is that in this classical German translation of Shakespeare, which was the main source of inspiration for the translators of Shakespeare into most Central and East European languages for more than a century, the versification of Shakespeare has been simplified, stiffened and made uniform.<sup>11</sup>

Schlegel was not so much trying to reproduce Shakespeare's versification as to imitate a native metre successfully used by Goethe in his *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (definitive version in verse, 1787) and by Schiller in *Don Carlos* (1787), some ten years before Schlegel began publishing his Shakespeare (1797), and it was due to this translation that Shakespeare became so popular in Germany.<sup>12</sup>

Many European translators of Shakespeare thought along the same lines as Schlegel, and erroneously as we now know. But today this is no longer so. In Germany after Schlegel, the pendulum has swung in another direction. Richard Flatter, another translator of Shakespeare, tries to reproduce the metrical pattern of every single line. And this, if other requirements for a successful translation are met, is as far as a translator could go.

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<sup>10</sup> See my article "Translator's Correlative or the Pitfalls of 'Poetical' Rendering", SRAZ (Studia romanica et anglica zagradiensia), Num. 17 – 18, Zagreb, 1964, pp. 61 – 71.

<sup>11</sup> J. Torbarina, "On Rendering Shakespeare's Blank Verse Into Other Languages", SRAZ, Num. 8, Zagreb 1959, pp. 3 – 12, and J. Torbarina, "On Translating Shakespeare", in *English Studies Today*, Second Series, Francke Verlag Bern, 1961, pp. 247 – 258.

<sup>12</sup> J. Torbarina, "On Rendering Shakespeare's Blank Verse Into Other Languages", SRAZ, Num. 8, Zagreb, 1959, p. 8.

Every translator of Shakespeare has to find a suitable line and metrical pattern, a general framework, within which he could place his equivalent for Shakespeare's five-foot iambic line with all its variations and which would allow him to express the rhythmical movements of Shakespeare's verse. On a rational level, Hamlet's soliloquy "To be, or not to be" sets forth his thoughts; on an irrational, his subconscious. The rhythm of the soliloquy brings out both the electroencephalogram of Hamlet's brain and the electrocardiogram of Hamlet's heart.

Finding an acceptable metrical pattern, and line, could sometimes take a century or more, as it did in Croatia. The translator of Shakespeare could either inherit one of the lines and metrical patterns from his predecessors or invent a completely new line of his own, which would be very rare. He could also, as I did, select one of the inherited lines and adapt it to suit his requirements for translating Shakespeare.

I had to "go progress through" 6,288 lines of both parts of *Henry IV* to settle upon a metrical pattern and a line which I hoped would allow me to transfer into my mother tongue all the music, rhythmic movements, and tone, which I find in the verse of those plays. And it is about the role of music in *Henry IV* – of rhythm, of tone, of intonation, of incantation of Shakespeare's verse – that I want to make my main point.

In his opening monologue in the *First Part of King Henry IV* (1.1.1. – 33), the King publicly announces his decision and desire to wage war in the Holy Land. After the bloody civil war in England, peace has been restored; Englishmen will no more have to fight against Englishmen and, as a means to the country's unification, new wars are to begin in far distant lands. The decision has already been made: we are going on a crusade (thesis).

However, if we attend to the King's speech closely, we hear in his voice some kind of inner resistance to the meaning of what he is saying, as if he himself doubts his own words and is trying to convince himself that they are true. Judging by the tone of his words, the King is trying to defy fate. So, what the King says by means of rhythm – the tone, the intonation, the incantation of his speech – runs counter to the logical meaning of his words. In a word: we are not going on a crusade (antithesis).

Later developments in the scene show that – the moment the King is delivering his speech – he already knows of Hotspur's resounding victory and of his refusal to send him his prisoners. The King has a presentiment of a new civil war which could threaten his throne and is aware that a precarious political situation in England demands his presence. His forebodings and feelings are expressed by the tone of his speech which Shakespeare creates in a variety of ways, for example, by a special arrangement of words. One of those arrangements is a hidden metaphor, a triple repetition of the King's wistful sigh "No more", "No more", "No more" (1.1.5, 7, 18), the meaning of which is negated by its tone.

This tone of wistfulness and yearning only faintly heard in the King's opening speech, becomes more pronounced towards the end of the play, as in Hotspur's dying speech at Shrewsbury (*IH4*, 5.4.76 – 86), until, in the *Second Part of King Henry IV*, it becomes dominant and prevailing, permeating and inundating its every line and turning



it into greatest poetry. There, in the *Second Part of King Henry IV*, it goes hand in hand with the main themes of that play: the futility of human efforts to withstand the powerful forces of decay and death, as well as man's constant attempts to outlive his short stay on earth and find happiness.

In one speech then, as I have shown, Shakespeare could express both: thesis, by means of words (we are going on a crusade), and antithesis, by means of tone (we are not going on a crusade). If that tone, that music of Shakespeare's verse, is not adequately rendered in translation, thesis would remain without antithesis, and the translation as a whole would be deficient and incomplete, unsatisfactory.

Here is a part of the King's mutability speech in which the tone – that metaphysical but existing category I have been talking about – is very pronounced:

King. O God, that one might read the book of fate,  
And see the revolution of the times  
Make mountains level, and the continent,  
Weary of solid firmness, melt itself  
Into the sea, and other times to see  
The beachy girdle of the ocean  
Too wide for Neptune'e hips; how chance's mocks  
And changes fill the cup of alteration  
With diverse liquors! O, if this were seen,  
The happiest youth, viewing his progress through,  
What perils past, what crosses to ensue,  
Would shut the book and sit down to die.  
(2H4, 3.1.45 – 56)

and here it is in Croatian:

Kralj. O, listat kad bi mogli knjigu sùdbine,  
I, Bože, vidjeti gdje žrvanj vremena  
Planine sràvnjuje, i gdje se obala  
Tvrdóće krute presita, sva pretapa  
U mora sùd; te vidjet kad bi mogli još  
Gdje pješčani je morski pojas prěširok  
Za bokove Neptúna; gdje Fortune hir  
I poruga sveđ pune pehar promjena  
Svim raznim pilima! O, vidjet da je to,  
Nàjsrètniji bi mladice, gledajuć svoj put,  
Pogrbelji sve prošle, boli što će doć,  
Tad knjigu sklopio te òstavio svijet.

## O PREVOĐENJU SHAKESPEAREA NA RUSKI, NJEMAČKI I HRVATSKI

Tri su važna čimbenika što ih ozbiljan prevoditelj mora uglavnom uzeti u obzir: 1) semantički – značenje i smisao riječi i fraza, 2) metaforički – slikovitost (metafore, usporedbe), i 3) ritmički – metar i rima. Pri tvorbi prevodilačkog korelativa glazba Shakespeareovih glasova jednako je važna kao i izraženo i naslućeno značenje riječi i fraza, ili slikovitost što je tvore metafore ili usporedbe (prispodobe). Ako u prijevodu glazbe Shakespeareovih stihova nije pretočena prikladno, prijevod kao cjelina bit će manjkav i nepotpun – nezadovoljavajući.