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Translator's Correlative
or
the Pitfalls of "Poetical" Rendering

There is a fallacy spread among the general public, and unfortunately among experts too, that poets are by virtue of their vocation the best translators of Shakespeare. Poets have, the argument runs, congenial souls and are therefore bound to understand each other better than is the case with normal, ordinary people. Besides, they know and can feel their mother tongue so well that they are capable of finding a translator's correlative; in other words, an equivalent or similar expression that shall be the formula of the corresponding expression from the original; so that when a reader or listener reads or listens to such a "translator's correlative" the meaning and the emotion of the original is consequently evoked. This way of translating might be helpful in translations of separate poems or perhaps of the works of other writers, but freely applied to the translation of Shakespeare's dramas this principle does not work. It does not work because the "poetical", "identical", "equivalent", and "similar" expressions, as they are called, too often run counter to the corresponding expressions of the original: in a word, they distort the original.

To illustrate my argument I have chosen the translation of *Macbeth* by a Croatian poet, Vladimir Nazor, published in Zagreb in 1917. On the title page of the translation it is stated that the drama has been translated from English by Vladimir Nazor. In a note on Nazor's version of *Macbeth* Professor J. Torbarina remarks that Nazor, next to the original, used excellent Italian and German translations.¹ Professor Torbarina has

¹ J. Torbarina, "Shakespeareov i Nazorov *Macbeth*". *Obzor*, LXXIV, 1933, No. 73, p. 2.

also discovered that Nazor has made full use of S. Stefanović's translation of *Macbeth*.¹ The comparison of Nazor's translation with the original shows that Nazor tried to improve upon Shakespeare's text, to alter it, and to fill what he thought to be the failings of Shakespeare's imagination. The aim of the article, however, is not to mark how much Nazor has drawn from other translations but to show how much and how faithfully he has followed Shakespeare's text.

Macbeth begins with a very short and effective scene of 12 lines (in the "Arden Shakespeare"). "Each theme", says Professor L. C. Knights, "is stated in the first act".² The scene opens with a question of the first Witch immediately answered by the second Witch:

When the hurlyburly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.³
(I, i, 3—4)

Vladimir Nazor translates these lines as follows:

Kad svrši buka rata ovoga,
Te jedan svlada, drugi propaše.

This means:

When the noise of this war is done,
And one wins, the other loses.⁴

"Buka" (noise) is not an adequate translation of "hurlyburly", for "hurlyburly", remarks Professor Knights, "implies more than 'the tumult of sedition or insurrection'. Both it and 'when the Battaile's lost, and wonne' suggest the kind of metaphysical pitch-and-toss that is about to be played with good and evil".⁵ "When the battle's lost and won" has a double meaning: it is intentionally ambiguous; equivocal; uncertain; doubtful; vague; open; paradoxical. The statement does not say that "one wins, the other loses": it says that "the battle's lost *and* won".⁶

The scene ends with a choric statement of all three Witches the first line of which gives the main theme of the reversal of values:⁷

Fair is foul, and foul is fair.
(I, i, 11)

¹ J. Torbarina, "U obranu Shakespearea". *Telegram*, V, 1964, No. 211, p. 2.

² L. C. Knights, *Explorations*. London, Third Impression, 1958, p. 18.

³ The references are from the "Arden Shakespeare" edited by K. Muir, Ninth edition, 1962.

⁴ I am fully aware that re-translating Shakespeare into English cannot do justice to the translator. I only want to point to errors that mostly occur as a result of mistranslation.

⁵ L. C. Knights, *Explorations*. London, Third Impression, 1958, p. 18.

⁶ My italics, M. E.

⁷ See *Some Shakespearean Themes* by L. C. Knights, Reprinted June 1960, p. 122.

Nazor's translation of the line is:

Ljepota ružna je, grdoba l'jepa je.

What Nazor says is:

The fairness is ugly, the ugliness is fair.

Nazor has replaced adjectives (fair, foul) by nouns (the fairness, the ugliness). By introducing "grdoba" instead of the possible "rugoba", or "ružnoća" (the ugliness) he has weakened the expressed antithesis so characteristic of the general style of the play.

The line "When the battle's lost and won" (I, i, 4) is later echoed in Duncan's words

What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won.
(I, ii, 69)

Nazor's rendering of the line is:

Izdajnik
Sto onaj gubi, neka Macbeth dobije!

This means:

Let Macbeth win what that traitor loses!

The unnecessary imperative "neka" (let) robs the brief pronouncement of its force; the omission of "noble" is yet another impoverishment of the line; and the addition of "izdajnik" (traitor) is a typical example of how some translators "improve" upon Shakespeare.

"When Duncan says, 'What he hath lost, Noble *Macbeth* hath wonne', we hear the echo,"¹

So from that spring, whence comfort seem'd to come,
Discomfort swells. (I, ii, 27—28)

Also, Macbeth's words "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (I, iii, 38) are "a dramatically ironical echo"² of the Witches' "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (I, i, 11).

All these expressions work backwards and forwards; and if each time they are translated by a different "identical" equivalent, then it is obvious that they will considerably lessen the imaginative impact of the drama.

Now I would like to point out an unsuccessful rendering of a well known line in *Macbeth*. "There is a line in the play of *Macbeth*", says E. Dowden, "uttered as the evening shadows begin to gather on the day of Banquo's murder, which we may repeat to ourselves as a motto of the entire tragedy, 'Good things of day begin to droop and drowse'. It is the tragedy

¹ L. C. Knights, *Explorations*. London, Third Impression, 1958, p. 19.

² J. D. Wilson, *Macbeth*. The New Shakespeare, Cambridge, 1951, p. 102.

of the twilight and the setting-in of thick darkness upon a human soul."¹ In Nazor's translation this line

Good things of Day begin to droop and drowse,
(III, ii, 52)

runs as follows:

Stvorove danje svladao je san.

This means:

The day has subdued daily creatures.

First of all, we notice the omission of the significant word "good". But most important, the translator has not caught the transitory movement of the line; the moment when the powers of evil begin to overwhelm the powers of good. The line is not only characteristic of a particular situation but also of "the movement of the play".² The translation of the line needs no further comment.

Now I would like to draw attention to Nazor's mistranslation of some specific words that embody meanings essential to the proper understanding of a particular drama and of the whole of Shakespeare.

In a characteristic description of the "unruly" night Lennox speaks

Of dire combustion, and confus'd events.
(II, iii, 59)

Nazor's rendering of the line is as follows:

Što javljahu nam požar, djela okrutna.

Nazor says that screams of death and "wild voices" (divlji glasovi)

Were announcing fire, cruel deeds.

"Combustion" here means "civil uproar"³, "tumult, confusion, especially of a political kind"⁴; "confus'd events" stand for "disorders, revolutions"⁵. In Nazor's translation "dire combustion" is turned into "fire"⁶, "confus'd events" into "cruel deeds", and "unruly" (II, iii, 55) becomes "tempestuous" (oluj-

¹ E. Dowden, *Shakspeare: his Mind and Art*. London, 1875, p. 244.

² C. Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery*. Cambridge 1935, p. 333.

³ J. D. Wilson, op. cit., p. 175.

⁴ K. Muir, op. cit., p. 65.

⁵ A. Schmidt, *Shakespeare Lexicon*. Berlin and Leipzig, Forth Edition, 1923, p. 235.

⁶ "Fire" might have come, directly or indirectly, from Schmidt's "conflagration" (op. cit., p. 215) and Nazor should not therefore be blamed for translating "combustion" with "fire". However, the aim of the article is to point out the inadequacies of translation and not the sources from which the errors might have originated.

na). It is not necessary to point out how the words "unruly", "combustion", "confus'd", and the passage in which they appear, are related to the rest of the drama.

After seeing Duncan murdered, Macduff rushes in with the fearful tidings:

Confusion now hath made his masterpiece!
(II, iii, 67)

Nazor's translation of the line is:

Pakô remek-djelo izvrši.

This means:

Hell has made its masterpiece.

"Confusion" here means "ruin, destruction"¹, "ruin, overthrow"². Nazor probably thought that "confusion" was inadequate to the situation and has replaced it with what to him seemed a stronger word: "hell". Later in the drama (III, v, 29) he translates the same word meaning "overthrow, ruin, destruction"³ with "ludilo, propast grdna" (madness, vast ruin).

During the banquet scene Lady Macbeth reproaches Macbeth for displacing the mirth and braking the good meeting

With most admir'd disorder.
(III, iv, 109)

Nazor's rendering of the line is as follows:

vi ste društvo rastjerali
Hirima čudnim.

This means:

you have dispersed the meeting
With strange whims.

"Disorder" signifies "discomposure, derangement of the mental functions"⁴; "either i) agitation of mind (cf. *K. John*, 3. 4. 102) or (ii) commotion, confusion"⁵; K. Muir finds here "an implied reference to the overthrowing of *order* — one of the main themes of the play"⁶.

In his speech in Act I, scene iii, 127—142 Macbeth says his seated heart knocks at his ribs

Against the use nature.
(I, iii, 137)

Nazor translates this as follows:

¹ J. D. Wilson, op. cit., p. 175.

² A. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 235.

³ C. T. Onions, *A Shakespeare Glossary*. Oxford, 1958, p. 44.

⁴ A. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 315.

⁵ J. D. Wilson, op. cit., p. 176.

⁶ Op. cit., p. 99.

I moje jako srce lupa mahnito
O rebra bijuć.

This means:

And my strong heart knocks frantically,
Beating against the ribs.

The disappearance of the word "nature" strips the utterance of its significance; "against the use of nature" expresses the unnaturalness of evil — one of the major themes of the play mirrored in Macbeth's speech (I, iii, 127—142).¹

Throughout the whole play there occur explicit references to "nature" which evoke "the sense of the unnaturalness of evil"²: "villainies of nature" (I, ii, 11) — the word "nature" is left out in the translation; "Nature's mischief" (I, v, 50) translated as "čas ljudskog jada" (a moment of human grief); "'Tis unnatural" (II, iv, 10) translated as "ovo je / Protivu reda božjega" (this is against God's order); "The least a death to nature" (III, iv, 27) translated as "najmanja / Smrt don'jela bi" (the least would bring death); "Boundless intemperance / In nature is a tyranny" (IV, iii, 66—67) translated as "Neumjerenost, / Što svladati se ne da, već je tiranstvo" (Intemperance, that cannot be subdued, already is tyranny); "strangers to my nature" (IV, iii, 125) translated as "Meni su tuđa" (Are strange to me), and so on. I have given only some instances of mistranslation or omission of this "elusive, indispensable and pregnant word"³, so important in Shakespeare.

In his greatest plays Shakespeare replaces the direct statement by a metaphorical phrase, or an image. One of the main images or ideas in *Macbeth* is the picture of Macbeth himself. "The idea constantly recurs that Macbeth's new honours sit ill upon him, like a loose and badly fitting garment, belonging to someone else"⁴; "Macbeth is uncomfortable in them because he is continually conscious of the fact that they do not belong to him. There is a further point, and it is one of the utmost importance; the oldest symbol for the hypocrite is that of the man who cloaks his true nature under a disguise. Macbeth loathes playing the part of the hypocrite — and actually does not play it too well"⁵. This "series of garment metaphors which run through the play is paralleled by a series of masking or cloaking images which", says C. Brooks, "show themselves to be merely variants of the garments which hide none too well his disgraceful self. He is consciously hiding that

¹ See *Some Shakespearean Themes* by L. C. Knights, p. 121.

² *Ibid.*, p. 122.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁴ C. Spurgeon, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

⁵ C. Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn*. New York, 1947, p. 32.

self throughout the play"¹. For our purposes, however, we are going to see how Nazor's translation reveals the picture of Macbeth in the "old clothes" imagery as collected for us by Caroline Spurgeon.

Early in the play Macbeth himself first expresses the idea:

The Thane of Cawdor lives: why do you dress me
In borrow'd robes? (I, iii, 108—109)

In Nazor's translation this runs as follows:

Ne ćete
Sad meni, je li, dati čast i naslove,
Što drugog rese?

This means:

You aren't going
To give me now the honour and the titles
The adorn another, are you?

Here the clothing image is replaced by a paraphrase.

Somewhat later Banquo notices how his partner is rapt and says:

New honours come upon him,
Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mould,
But with the aid of use. (I, iii, 145—147)

In Nazor's rendering the lines run as follows:

Čast i ta dika velika,
U kojima je najedamput sinuo,
Ko kakvo novo odijelo bune ga:
S vremenom samo snaći će se u njima.

This means:

The honour and this great glory,
In which he all of a sudden shines,
Puzzle him like some new suit:
Only with time will he get used to them.

The expressions "ta dika velika" (this great glory), "U kojima je najedamput sinuo" (in which he all of a sudden shines), and "bune ga" (puzzle him) are Nazor's additions to the original; "new" put in the place of "strange" is another alteration. The last line of the passage in the translation is a gross misinterpretation of the original: Banquo never says that only with time will Macbeth get used to "the honour and this great glory" — and the drama reveals why this never happens. Banquo's statement is indirect; he only says that "our strange garments, cleave not to their mould, / But with the aid of use". This is, of course, also true of "new honours"; only, in the original,

¹ Op. cit., p. 33.

Banquo's words "cleave not to their mould, / But with the aid of use" refer to "new honours" indirectly, through "our strange garments", whereas in the translation Nazor makes explicit what in the original is only implicit.

Macbeth uses the same metaphor of clothes when he informs Lady Macbeth that they will proceed no further in this business:

and I have bought

Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon. (I, vii, 32—35)

Nazor renders this in the following way:

Ja sam time stekao

Kod mnogih ljudi zlatan glas. Nov, novcat
Dok taj je sjaj na meni, njim ću kitit se,
I ne ću da ga odmah bacim.

This means:

By this I have acquired

Golden fame from many people. While this gloss
Is on me new, brand-new, I will bedeck myself with it,
And I do not want to cast it aside at once.

Nazor wanted to nationalize metaphor "and I have bought / Golden opinions" and has replaced it with what he thought to be the nearest equivalent for it — "steći zlatan glas" (to acquire golden fame, reputation); in this way he has not only replaced the forceful metaphor by a worn phrase but has also changed its meaning: for "bought" conveys a different meaning from "acquired". And, finally, Macbeth says that golden opinions should be worn now in their newest gloss, not cast aside so soon; he does not say "I do not want to cast it aside at once".

Macbeth "has already been wearing Duncan's garments in anticipation, as his wife implies in the metaphor with which she answers him"¹:

Was the hope drunk,
Wherein you dress'd yourself? Hath it slept since?
(I, vii, 35—36)

Nazor's rendering of these metaphorical questions is as follows:

Macbethe,

Što reče! Nada, što ti svu razveseli
Ponosnu dušu, zar je bila varava
Utvara noćna pa je iščeznula
Kad i san minu?

¹ C. Brooks, op. cit., p. 33.

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?

The original two lines are expanded into five lines; "Macbethe / Što reče!" (Macbeth, what do you say!) is Nazor's "poetical" reinforcement of Shakespeare; "drunk" becomes "varava / Utvara noćna" (deceptive nightly illusion); "Wherein you dress'd yourself" is transformed into "što ti svu razveseli / Ponosnu dušu" (that has cheered your whole proud soul); the brief question of Lady Macbeth "Hath it slept since?" is interpreted as "pa je iščeznula / Kad i san minu" (and did it vanish when the dream passed away). There is no trace of a single metaphor.

Taking leave of Ross, Macduff uses another "old-clothes" image:

Well, may you see things well done there: — adieu! —
Lest our old robes sit easier than our new!

(II, iv, 37—38)

These two lines run in Nazor's translation as follows:

Putovali mi sretno! I sve bilo nam
Baš tako, da se ne bude još kazalo:
"Oh, negda nam je bolje bilo!"

This means:

Have a good journey! And let everything be
Just so, that no one can say:
"Oh, once it was better!"

Again, a paraphrase has been substituted for the "old robes" image.

At the end of the play Cathness sees Macbeth "as a man vainly trying to fasten a large garment on him with too small a belt"¹:

He cannot buckle his distemper'd cause
Within the belt of rule. (V, ii, 15—16)

Nazor translates the lines as follows:

Da pâsom reda on sad više ne može
Pritegnuti svoj rasklimani položaj.

This is the only instance where the metaphor has been left unaltered.

¹ C. Spurgeon, op. cit., p. 326.

Now comes an image which "vividly sums up the essence of what they all have been thinking ever since Macbeth's accession to power"¹:

 now does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief. (V, ii, 20-22)

The lines are rendered as follows:

 Sad osjeća,
E njegova je čast ogrtač veliki
Kakova diva na melenim plećima
Patuljka, koji plašt je onaj ukrao.

This means:

 Noes does he feel,
That his honour is the huge mantle
Of some giant on the small shoulders
Of a dwarf who has stolen that cloak.

As usual, Nazor modifies and alters the text: "title" is turned into "čast" (honour), "hang loose" is left out, "dwarfish thief" becomes "Patuljka, koji plašt je onaj ukrao" (a dwarf who has stolen that cloak), and "malenim plećima" (small shoulders) is an unnecessary addition to "dwarf". The image expressed is blurred by Nazor's additions and alterations.

Of all the examples of clothing images mentioned by Caroline Spurgeon, only in one case has our translator retained the original metaphor. The analysis shows that the clothing images in Nazor's translation are so altered and paraphrased that they are almost non-existent: the picture of Macbeth himself, as given through a chain of images, has disappeared.

I have chosen Nazor's translation because it admirably exemplifies the common practice of many translators. The article deals only with one aspect of the so called "free" or "poetical" rendering: the necessity to retain the accurate meaning of specific words, expressions, or images. (This, of course, does not mean that other aspects of translating are less important.) The examples that I have selected from the first act of the play for the purposes of analysis have been much commented upon; and much has been written on the themes in *Macbeth*, on Shakespeare's doctrine of "nature", on the order — disorder antithesis, on the significance of Shakespeare's imagery. My purpose is to show that there are limitations beyond which the translator is not allowed to go; for if he does he alters or distorts the text, and even — as in the case of the clothing images in *Macbeth* — strips the text of a whole layer of meanings.

¹ C. Spurgeon, op. cit., p. 326

The translator must aim at the best possible rendering: he must try to effect the nearest possible meaning of a particular word, phrase, or image; and also, not less important, he must try to reproduce the formal features, metrical pattern, and the music of the original. In a word, the "translator's correlative" must be faithful to the original in all respects. This cannot be achieved if the reiterative expressions and words are each time translated in another way; if the word "unruly" is replaced by "olujna" (tempestuous), "confus'd events" by "djela okrutna" (cruel deeds), "confusion" by "pakô" (hell), "disorder" by "hirima čudnim" (strange whims); if the word "nature" is either left out or rendered by different "identical" equivalents; or if the same cluster of images, closely related to the drama in which it occurs, is "poetically" paraphrased. For by such indications the translator will never find directions out.