

## Shakespeare into German Prose: a New Bilingual Edition

Balz Engler

The decision to publish yet another edition of Shakespeare's works should be based on good reasons. In the case of the bilingual edition now being prepared in several German and Swiss universities there are mainly three considerations which, in the opinion of those involved, justify the huge undertaking. They concern the producer, the general reader and the scholar.

The history of Shakespeare translation in Germany during the first half of the 20th century might be described, in very few words, as an argument about the merits and defects of the Schlegel-Tieck version. This translation had emerged, in the late 19th century, as the one canonical text; it came to stand beside the other classics of German literature, Goethe and Schiller. Several onslaughts on its strong position were unsuccessful. but criticism, particularly of its weaker parts<sup>1</sup> could never be silenced. Several translators either tried to improve These or to translate the whole of Shakespeare's work anew<sup>2</sup>, on lines which were, more or less, suggested by Schlegel. It was Hans Rothe who, in his new version and his critical writings, attacked Schlegel's translation, on account of its distance from the world of the theatre. The theories of the disintegrators were called upon to justify adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in the name of a mythical 'theatrical sense'.

Rothe's opinions fell on fertile ground in the theatres, which had begun to tire of the Schlegel-Tieck version. Its language belonged to another age, and it represented the bourgeois Bildungstradition, from which they, rightly or wrongly, wanted to break away. The reaction became, and still is, very violent. The theatre seems to be fascinated and repelled at the same time by Shakespeare as it knows him. Not only the language, but the very dramatic substance is under attack<sup>3</sup>. Many producers are unhappy about the situation. They would like to test their work against what is known about the original today. But the language barrier and sheer lack of time make this very

difficult. Therefore, producers have expressed their wish again and again to be helped by the scholars. The new edition may provide this help.

The second reason for preparing the edition is due to changes in the reading public<sup>4</sup>. More and more people have some knowledge of English, however inadequate it may be for reading an Elizabethan text. The reader who wants to approach Shakespeare in the original notices, though, that the poetic translations offer him limited assistance only. What he needs is an edition which helps him to correct and enlarge his understanding of the original.

The new edition will offer him explanations of every single passage in the play — in the shape of a prose-translation. This may be of some interest to scholars as well as translators. Whoever has used the English or American standard editions will remember passages where they failed to answer his questions, perhaps because the passage looked obvious to the editor, or, worse, he tried to conceal that he did not understand it either. Such gaps should not be possible in the new edition. Every passage must at least be translated. In many cases this will not be possible without some research into the meaning, which goes further than the entries of the OED or Schmidt's *Shakespeare-Lexicon*<sup>5</sup>. If the translator cannot give a precise translation, he has to confess his ignorance.

The edition will devote one volume to each play. This will consist of four parts: an introduction, a commentary at the end, discussing problems of interpretation, a modern English text with important variants, the prose-translation and notes. We shall concentrate on the last two of these features.

Traditional translations aim at providing the reader with an equivalent of the original. They try to reproduce those traits of the original which the translator and his audience consider to be significant. Translations may change very much in the pursuit of this aim: In German Shakespeare translation the change from prose to verse at the end of the 18th century and back to prose again in recent years can be explained on these lines.

The German text of the edition planned is different. It does not try to stand on its own; it does not claim to have dramatic quality; it does not try to find an artistic



Nomina actionis, partes pro toto, metaphors, personifications, abstract and concrete notions. These general rules are supplemented by a number of very specific ones, which guide the use of addresses, titles, etc.

In this way the language should remain uniform throughout the edition and still be flexible enough to follow the stylistic changes of the original to some extent. The style of the resulting text might be compared to the voice of somebody reading out a Shakespearean text not for the acting or the poetry, but for relating the contents.

It would be a fallacy, of course, to believe that the problem of translation, the contradiction between explanation and representation, could be solved or even avoided by this procedure.

In many cases notes will have to support the prose-version. They are an integral part of the German text<sup>9</sup>. They help to explain puns, ambiguities, cruxes, etc., and, of course, to complement an inadequate German vocabulary.

It is not possible, for example, to render words like grace, virtue, authority by one German word without limiting their meaning intolerably. From a more exact description of the meaning in the notes the reader may gain a fuller understanding, and he is presented with the material from which the creator of a poetic version has to choose. Possible ambiguities can be pointed out; their influence on the interpretation of the play can be traced, and secondary meanings can be indicated.

Such a text, the editors hope, will help the German speaking student of Shakespeare at university, in the theatre, and at home, to understand Shakespeare more fully and to give him all the assistance modern research can offer.

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The project of the Englisch-deutsche Studienausgabe der Dramen Shakespeares is published under the auspices of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft West. Its general editor is Prof. Dr. W. Habicht (Bonn). He presides over the editorial committee consisting additionally of Prof. Dr.

E. Leisi (Zurich) and Prof. Dr. R. Stamm (Basle). Work on the edition, is being carried out at seven German and Swiss universities (Bochum, Bonn, Freiburg i. Br., Munich, Basle, Berne, Zurich), either by graduate students or members of the staff. The first volumes should be ready for publication in 1974.

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<sup>1</sup> Mainly those plays which had been translated by Tieck's helpers, Dorothea Tieck and Wolf Graf Baudissin.

<sup>2</sup> Gundolf and Schröder may be said to belong to the first group, Flatter and Schaller to the second.

<sup>3</sup> There are more reasons for this development, of course, than those indicated here; among them the more visual staging, due to the competition of TV.

<sup>4</sup> Ulrich Suerbaum gives a useful survey of the present state of German Shakespeare translation in his article "Shakespeare auf deutsch — Eine Zwischenbilanz", *Shakespeare-Jahrbuch West* 1972, p. 42-66.

<sup>5</sup> The method applied is described in the introduction to: Ernst Leisi (ed.), William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure, An Old-Spelling and Old-Meaning Edition*, (Heidelberg 1964).

<sup>6</sup> If a cliché is taken up again later in such a way as to gain metaphorical power, the two levels will be indicated in the notes.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Baudissin, Rothe, Flatter, Schröder, Schaller, Fried.

<sup>8</sup> The following is a summary of the instructions for the editors.

<sup>9</sup> Besides explaining the historical background, allusions, etc.