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The editor as translator

In a world, in which scholarly communication is increasingly monolingual, and where scholars no longer need feel embarrassed if they only consult studies in one language, it may be strange to raise the issue of translation in editing Shakespeare. But there are at least two reasons to do so: It is much more common than one may think, and it offers opportunities that may lead to useful contributions to Shakespeare studies. Provocatively, an edition might be called a translation *manqué*.

Even editors of 'monolingual' editions, of course, keep translating, from Early Modern English into the language of their twenty-first-century audience. They may not see their work as such, because of their sense that Shakespeare and their audience are part of the same culture; indeed, one of the motives for editing and re-editing his works is certainly to keep this sense alive. But just because editors are aware that this commonality of culture has its limits they will add glosses, where necessary; in N.F. Blake's words, 'the impression is given that provided the odd difficult word is translated, there should be no difficulty in understanding what Shakespeare wrote'.¹

Translation also plays a subtle, but consequential role in the modernization of spelling. The issues involved are particularly difficult where modern spelling forces the editor to narrow down early modern meanings, e.g. when having to choose between the modern spellings *travel* and *travail*, or *metal* and *mettle*. According to Stanley Wells

a modernizing editor should select what he regards as the primary meaning, irrespective of the original spelling, print this, and annotate the secondary meaning.²

This makes good sense, but there are two problems: editions do not usually have enough space to annotate all the instances;³ and, more importantly, making the very distinction between a primary and a secondary meaning is a modern one; in Shakespeare there may be a single meaning that includes everything modern English forces us to keep

¹ N.F. Blake, *The Language of Shakespeare* (Basingstoke, 1989), p. 2.

² Stanley Wells, *Re-Editing Shakespeare for the Modern Reader* (Oxford, 1984), p 10.

³ The one-volume *Oxford Shakespeare* Stanley Wells was preparing when he formulated the rule has no notes at all.

apart. The decision whether a note is necessary, and, if so, which of the meanings distinguished should be the primary one, will be based on the editors' interpretation of the context in which the word occurs, which in turn, reflects their search for coherence.⁴ The losses incurred in the process are the same as in translation.

The search for coherence will also guide the writing of glosses and explanatory notes. When Ernst Leisi, the Swiss scholar in semantics, published his pioneering *Measure for Measure: An Old-Spelling and Old-Meaning edition*,⁵ he listed several criticisms of existing editions in his introduction, some of which continue to be pertinent.

(1) *Gaps*: Existing editions leave unexplained a good many words that have changed their meanings and consequently need an explanation.

(2) *'Lump translations'*: It often occurs that an editor translates an entire passage into a phrase of his own without discussing the individual words of which it is made up.

(3) *Lack of evidence*: As a rule, editions ... present no evidence in support of their definitions; they simply state that the meaning of the word is such and such ...

(4) *Evidence from dictionaries*: Some editors [...] gather their evidence mainly from dictionaries, especially from the Oxford Dictionary. Dictionaries ... have a tendency to split up words into a number of (seemingly unrelated) 'meanings', thus missing their individual and unique essence. They usually tell us nothing about the frequency or importance of one meaning as against another, nor, in the case of general dictionaries, about the specifically Shakespearean use of words ...

(5) *No full meanings*: Very often, the editor's explanation is merely a 'situational equivalent', i.e. a definition which fits the particular passage but does not catch the full meaning, or essence, of the word.⁶

The last point, of course takes up the issue of coherence mentioned earlier. But the most serious criticism is probably the first, concerning gaps. It is also the one most difficult to deal with in an edition. In many passages, every single word would need an explanatory note, every sentence one for the

⁴ Shoshana Blum-Kulka, 'Shifts of Cohesion and Coherence in Translation', in *The Translation Studies Reader* (London, 2000), ed. Lawrence Venuti, pp. 298-313, p. 298.

⁵ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure: An Old-Spelling and Old-Meaning Edition*, ed. Ernst Leisi (Heidelberg, 1964).

⁶ Leisi, *Measure for Measure*, p. 15.

syntax and the cultural context. We would actually need a *translation* of the whole text in all its details. Then again, a translation into modern English would often be difficult because the often subtle shifts in meaning may not be reflected by adequate changes of the vocabulary.

This is where the translation between languages becomes an opportunity: the vocabulary and the structure of the target-language may make it easier to catch the early modern meanings. Such a translation, which of course may need its own explanatory notes, can then serve as a commentary on Shakespeare's text.

Bilingual editions of Shakespeare's works, like those of other classics, have been quite popular; in many European languages readers may even choose between several.⁷ They are familiar to an English-speaking audience from the *Loeb Classical Library*, which began to appear in 1912, and they usually follow the programme formulated by James Loeb:

To make the beauty and learning, the philosophy and wit of the great writers of ancient Greece and Rome once more accessible by means of translations that are in themselves real pieces of literature, a thing to be read for the pure joy of it, and not dull transcripts of ideas that suggest in every line the existence of a finer original from which the average reader is shut out.⁸

Two contradictory aims are pursued: The translated text is supposed both to stand on its own (offering 'pure joy') and to serve as a commentary on the source-language text (making it 'once more accessible').⁹ The programme does not say anything about the complex issues created by the fact that the texts appear on facing pages, usually with the source-text on the left, the translation on the right.

Discussion of these issues is surprisingly rare, and we have to go to an Italian translator of Hölderlin for some insights; Luigi Reitani observes:

⁷ Editions that come to mind are those by Agostino Lombardo and by Giorgio Melchiori in Italian, the series edited by Michel Grivelet and the translations by Jean-Michel Déprats in French, by Ángel-Luis Pujante in Spanish—the list is by no means complete. The first bilingual English-German edition of Shakespeare appeared in 1912, edited by L.L. Schücking, and has remained in print ever since. Interestingly, it has continued to use the Schlegel/Tieck translation (with some corrections). A list of Shakespeare translations into European languages can be found on the Shakespeare in Europe website <http://pages.unibas.ch/shine/>.

⁸ Quoted by John St. John, *William Heinemann, A Century of Publishing, 1890-1990* (London, 1990), p. 152.

⁹ One exception to this is Sinclair's edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. He states in his preface: "I have tried to serve readers who have little or no knowledge of Italian and who wish to know the matter of Dante's poem." Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by John D. Sinclair (New York, 1939), p. 9.

When the translated text and translation are printed together ... the reader can easily move from one language to the other, opening up the possibility of reverberative effects. Not only does the translation become functional to the reading of the 'original', but the 'original' may help give a better understanding of the choices made in the translation. The starting text therefore also loses its autonomy: in bilingual editions it 'lives' by the translation.¹⁰

This means that in a bilingual edition of the type described the juxtaposition of texts, by inviting comparison, affects both; in some cases, the function of the juxtaposition may even be to bring out the art of the translator. As such it is something quite different from a translation that is meant to stand on its own—the kind of translation that a gloss should offer.

The relatively high status of the translation is supported by its position on the right hand side of the book, where important information is traditionally placed, like the title or the beginning of a chapter. This may be due to the mechanics of reading: as we read from left to right, and economize on our eye movements, we tend to get caught on the right hand page.

Bilingual editions of the type described then cannot really offer the kind of complete commentary that an edition might offer. There is a bilingual edition, however, that tries to solve the problems mentioned, the series *Englisch-deutsche Studienausgabe der Dramen Shakespeares*, an edition that has been progressing slowly but steadily since the 1970s, and in which twenty-five volumes have been published so far.

In the late 1960s the founders of the series, Werner Habicht, Ernst Leisi, and Rudolf Stamm, all board members of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft West, saw themselves confronted with a specific situation in the West German theatre: after a period of celebrating the classics as a mainstay of humanist culture, directors, whose influence was growing, began to rebel against the limitations this imposed on them and increasingly insisted on their own freedom in shaping productions. In the eyes of the bard's devotees, as they would meet in the Gesellschaft, these were only nominally Shakespearian. Directors freely adapted the classical Schlegel/Tieck translation or used versions like those by Hans Rothe, which claimed to bring across Shakespeare's spirit rather than the meaning of his supposedly disfigured

¹⁰ Luigi Reitani, 'Face to Face. Hölderlin in a New Italian Bilingual Edition', *Modern Language Notes* 117 (2002), pp. 590-98, p. 591. On the manner in which readers may move between the texts see Lance Hewson, 'The Bilingual Edition in Translation Studies', *Visible Language* 27, no. 1-2 (1993), pp. 139-60.

texts. One of the lazy arguments used by directors was that one did not really know anyway what Shakespeare had written, in the absence of manuscripts and single authorized editions. At the meetings of the Gesellschaft there were heated debates on the issues, in typical German fashion pitching scholars, who dominated the Gesellschaft, and 'practitioners' against each other. But what was the proper scholarly response to be? It was felt to be an edition, which made available the considerable amount of sound knowledge we have about Shakespeare and his plays to an audience with some command of English, as it had become common in Germany after the Second World War. This led to the project of an edition of a special kind. It was to offer a critical introduction, a scene-by-scene commentary modelled on Wolfgang Clemen's *Commentary on Shakespeare's 'Richard III'*, a good English text with variants, a prose translation and explanatory notes. Not surprisingly, the specific scholarly interests of the founders became part of the edition's programme: Ernst Leisi's interest in historical semantics, and Rudolf Stamm's interest in the way performance is inscribed in the text, what he called their *theatrical physiognomy*.¹¹

A key feature of the edition is the translation, which aspires neither to stand on its own, nor to be performed, nor to invite comparison with the source text as in other bilingual editions. It solely serves, together with the explanatory footnotes, as a guide to understanding Shakespeare's English text. To mark the contrast to common bilingual editions the English text is printed on the right, the German translation on the left; and the footnotes, which claim the same status as the translation, are only referenced in the German text. Readers are expected to use their knowledge of English to read off common stylistic features, like verse, alliteration and rhyme, from the English text; less familiar ones are explained.

The translation thus helps to offers readers an unrivalled amount of information about Shakespeare's text. But, as we have seen, translation, by forcing editors to choose also makes them give serious thought to the use and meaning of each word. What Stanley Wells observes *apropos* modernizing texts is even more pertinent for the interlingual type of translation: It may be seen 'as a means of exploring Shakespeare's text that can make a real contribution to scholarship'.¹²

Reitani even claims that

only the translation brings to light problems that on first glance are hidden. In order to write a genuine

¹¹ Cf., e.g., Rudolf Stamm, 'The Alphabet of Speechless Complaint' in *The Triple Bond: Plays, Mainly Shakespearean, in Performance*. Ed. Joseph G. Price (University Park, 1975). pp. 255-73.

¹² Wells, *Editing*, p. 34.

commentary, it would perhaps always be necessary to translate a text into another language and then ask what it means.¹³

As every word has to be understood to be translated, the *Studienausgabe* has stimulated a great deal of research; some might say, perhaps less charitably, that it has proved to be a philologists' playground. Many of the editions provide explanations for passages passed over in silence in English language editions, or new explanations where these have relied on the work of earlier editors.

Inconspicuous problems that do not perturb the annotators often catch the eye of the editor-translator and may have far-reaching consequences. To give just one example: The patient student of Shakespearian usage will discover, that *ha* at the end of a sentence may be a question rather than an excited exclamation. This clearly affects, for example, the way in which the development of Othello's reactions to Iago's insinuations is presented:

OTHELLO By heaven, I'll know thy thoughts.

IAGO You cannot, if my heart were in your hand;

 Nor shall not whilst 'tis in my custody.

OTHELLO Ha!¹⁴

IAGO O, beware, my lord, of jealousy, (3.3.166-69)

Unfortunately such findings may be difficult to access for many scholars for linguistic reasons, and because librarians in the English-speaking world would classify the edition as a translation and fail to acquire it. Some of them have also been published in English, in articles and notes, and catalogued in *English and American Studies in German*,¹⁵ and Werner

¹³ Reitani, 'Face to Face', p. 591.

¹⁴ This is the punctuation of the Oxford edition. F has a '?' (which in Early Modern English may stand both for a question and an exclamation mark. Q1 does not have the word. *Othello* in the *Englisch-deutsche Studienausgabe* has a note on *ha* at 3.3.35. Ernst Leisi, *Problemwörter und Problemstellen in Shakespeares Dramen* (Tübingen, 1997), pp. 85-86, discusses *ha* and *ha, ha* in more detail.

¹⁵ *English and American Studies in German: Summaries of Theses and Monographs*. A Supplement to *Anglia*, 1968- (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1969-). The entries may be found as follows: *The Comedy of Errors* 1982, No. 30; *Julius Caesar* 1988, No. 30; *King John* 2003, No. 31; *King Richard II* 1980, No. 31; *Love's Labour's Lost* 1998, No. 36; *Measure for Measure* 1977, No. 41; *Much Ado About Nothing* 1989, No. 32; *The Merchant of Venice* 1982, No. 31; *Othello* 1976, No. 31; *Romeo and Juliet* 1996, No. 37; *Timon of Athens* 1996, No. 38; *Troilus and Cressida* 1986, No. 42; *Twelfth Night* 1992, No. 29. Many of these findings are also dealt with in Leisi, *Problemwörter*, which discusses 972 words and phrases in all.

Brönnimann has offered a selection of examples in an article on the edition.¹⁶

The translation as a part of the edition thus achieves two goals: It contributes to a better understanding of the source text, and it leads to a reconsideration of many passages. But even though it aims at being strictly scholarly, it cannot avoid problems that, at first sight, have little to do with its aims. As Michel Grivelet, the editor of one of the French bilingual editions puts it:

D'une bonne traduction on attend qu'elle soit fidèle, fidèle à la pensée du texte. [...] Mais la pensée dans Shakespeare n'est pas désincarnée, loin de là. Elle a un corps, un corps sonore si l'on veut, qui réclame lui aussi fidélité.¹⁷

There is no meaning without body, and no text without style. Even though translation as commentary does not emulate the style of the source text, it must have one of its own: A word-for-word, 'literal' translation without a consistent style would suggest incompetence, even helplessness, and therefore lose the reader's trust in its accuracy. Because of this, and because of the reverberative effects mentioned by Reitani, which not even book design can avoid, the style will be deliberately different from that of the source text: avoiding archaisms and sound effects, as factual and brisk as possible. This reminds us that even translating as comment is a creative task, one that a scholar can cope with. But then, so is all editing.

¹⁶ Werner Brönnimann, 'Think-Along Edition: The Bilingual Studienausgabe of Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare and the Language of Translation* (London, 2004), ed. A.J. Hoenselaars, pp. 184-98.

¹⁷ William Shakespeare, *Oeuvres Complètes: Tragédies I* (Paris, 1995), ed. Michel Grivelet and Gilles Monsarrat, p. 13.