

Preface

Papers collected in this volume are the fruit of two energetic and productive sessions which took place in Gdańsk during the European Shakespeare Research Association conference in July 2017. The conference title “Shakespeare and European Theatrical Cultures: AnAtomizing Text and Stage” brought together scholars from many countries across the world and opened many different aspects of Shakespeare studies for discussions. The seminar which was targeted at translation debated on the problems of translating Shakespeare’s plays for theatres and cultures which follow traditions often very different from the Elizabethan ones and yet for which the appropriation of Shakespeare’s plays in the last 200 hundred years or more became of utmost importance.

The discussions during the two sessions were context based, inscribing the translated texts in the histories of Shakespeare’s theatrical reception in various cultural and geographical spaces. At stake was often the cultural self-awareness of being European and at the same time of being distinctly national. To make Shakespeare speak in one’s own language was to demonstrate its suppleness, its mettle, its virtuosity. In this way the historical dimension of translations, tracing the early efforts, their circumstances and effects, became one important theme which the reader will have the opportunity to follow perusing the present papers. Critical scrutiny of practices and strategies of recrafting Shakespeare in translation within particular circumstances of time and place lead us to Romania, Hungary, Ukraine, Poland, and Italy. It is interesting to see similarities in the way Shakespeare became the central cultural fact and a political weapon in those countries where political oppression tried to eradicate the national traditions. Here belongs the problem of translating with an eye on censorship and on the political aspects of translation. But equally interesting are the differences in the kind of difficulties and in the measures taken in bringing Shakespeare to the native tradition, more, in placing his plays in the very centre of particular polysystems.

The other very important problem debated during the sessions and present in all the papers is translating Shakespeare for the stage (or ignoring the stage in translation). Varying theatrical traditions, acting styles and prominence of actors and/or directors are valid contexts for any discussion of drama translation. Translating Shakespeare’s language which was crafted for the Elizabethan theatre, Elizabethan style of acting and Elizabethan taste in poetry means much more than choosing equivalent nouns and verbs of the target language. The theatre of the time of translation, fashions and tastes of the target culture at the time of reception must also be taken into account if criticism of Shakespeare translations should be valid. The discussions of the institutional “habitus” impacting Shakespeare translations

across various periods in the development of national theatres were particularly lively in Gdańsk and the reader will find their traces in the papers here presented: in comparative analyses of translations produced at different times and/or circumscribed by different theatrical traditions and cultural expectations.

Last but not least is the figure of the translator: who s/he is, what s/he represents in terms of creative talents, education, social position, etc. In all the papers much attention is paid to translators and their role in bringing forth successfully Shakespeare's presence in native theatres as well as in native literatures.

The first and the last paper add profiles to the discussion on Shakespeare translation and form a specific frame to the whole collection. Aleksandra Kamińska's paper asks a crucial question about language and translation and reminds the reader of the paradox of Shakespeare translation: it is translation (the shifts, the changes, the otherness of it) that makes Shakespeare the citizen of (post)modernity, while Shakespeare's own language makes him increasingly foreign to native speakers of English. The last paper by Paula Baldwin brings to the scholarly and critical debates on translation the much needed first-hand experience of translating Shakespeare and the focus on 'An Atomising' linguistic and cultural problems in taking decisions with the eye both on the page and the stage.

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