PROJECT MUSE®

Voicing the Distant: Shakespeare and Russian Modernist Poetry, and: Four Hundred Years of Shakespeare in Europe, and: Shakespeare and the Language of Translation, and: Shakespeare and the French Poet, and: Translating Shakespeare for the Twenty-First Century (review)

Peter Davidhazi

Translation and Literature, Volume 15, Part 1, Spring 2006, pp. 122-129
(Review)

Published by Edinburgh University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tal.2006.0003>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/198509>

be said, and the writer's scope is therefore narrowed.

There is little indication of editorial concern with such problems in this book, where too much seems to be the result of whimsy rather than a considered and settled policy. As an instance, there is a strange obsession with the title of Dante's great work. The 'Editors' Note' says 'We refer throughout to Dante's last poem as the *Commedia* without the "*Divina*" which crept into its title in the sixteenth century.' Then the question is referred to again, at more length, in the Introduction. What is said about the origins of the title is accurate; but it seems wrong-headed to insist upon changing it now after hundreds of years of general acceptance. After all, it is not like the title of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, where the corruption to *Astrophel and Stella* destroys the wit and meaning. The absurdity, and indeed futility, of harping on this point is underlined by the fact that on the very first page of this volume itself the work is referred to as the *Divine Comedy*.

In this volume much of the work of selection and discrimination that the editors themselves should have performed is left to the reader. However, if that reader is prepared to forage, sift, and sort out, there is much of value here.

J. G. NICHOLS
Wallasey

Voicing the Distant: Shakespeare and Russian Modernist Poetry. By Ekaterina Sukhanova. Pp. 149. Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004. Hb. £27.50.

Four Hundred Years of Shakespeare in Europe. Edited by Angel-Luis Pujante and Ton Hoenselaars. Pp. 274. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003. Hb. £34.95.

Shakespeare and the Language of Translation. Edited by Ton Hoenselaars. Pp. xiv+346. London: Thomson Learning, 2004. Hb. £45.

Shakespeare and the French Poet. By Yves Bonnefoy, edited John Naughton. Pp. xix+283. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. Pb. £16.

Translating Shakespeare for the Twenty-First Century. Edited by Rui Carvalho Homem and Ton Hoenselaars. Pp. 269. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004. Hb. €60.

Observers agree that the study of translations has been neglected both in the discipline of English Literature at large and in the specialized field of Shakespeare scholarship. Thirty years ago an international group of scholars directed attention to the problems of literary

translation. They organized a series of symposia in the wake of their first conference at the University of Louvain in 1976 (published in 1978 as *Literature and Translation: New Perspectives in Literary Studies*, edited by James S. Holmes *et al.*), and staked out their position in texts such as André Lefevere's *Literary Knowledge* (1977), Itamar Even-Zohar's essay on 'Polysystem Theory' in *Poetics Today* (1979), and Gideon Toury's *In Search of a Theory of Translation* (1980). Theo Hermans in his 'Translation Studies and a New Paradigm', introducing an important collection of the group's essays titled *The Manipulation of Literature* in 1985, found himself still complaining about the low prestige of Translation Studies in academia. The causes of this neglect have always been complex, the factors theoretical, sociological, ideological, and institutional, the mix varying from country to country and from period to period. As Hermans pointed out, exponents of Translation Studies were often their own worst enemies, repeating essentialist questions (such as how to define translation or whether it was even possible, or what were the criteria of a good translation) instead of listening to the dialogue between theory and research.

In some places the demotion of the subject may have been motivated by a reluctance to acknowledge foreign influence. In *Voicing the Distant*, Ekaterina Sukhanova analyses the psychology of suspicion attending any discussion of literary interrelations in the Soviet Union. She points out the ideological concerns which marginalized or isolated the study of translations: 'Under Stalin the very possibility of admitting a foreign influence on any recognized Russian author was simply unacceptable.' She describes how, for a long time, 'an overly strong insistence on the existence of parallels between Russian classical works and works of foreign authors risked coming under attack for lack of respect for national self-consciousness and originality'. But, for different reasons, the subject suffered from malnutrition in Western democracies too. Diagnosing a residue of the malady, Dirk Delabastita's contribution to the collection edited by Pujante and Hoenselaars identifies its two main symptoms as Shakespeareans' ignorance of even the basics of Translation Studies, and their neglect of translations of Shakespeare. He traces this syndrome to the conflicting interests of native and foreign Shakespeare scholars, the one group unwilling to accept a focus that would require it to develop skills in several languages, and so jealously guarding the hegemony of English-based research, the other ambitious for acceptance, validation, and assimilation by mainstream Anglo-American scholarship, hence ready to conform at all costs and suppress their difference. However true for some, such motives could not explain the willingness, indeed the enthusiasm of Dennis Kennedy

and other native British scholars, as Kennedy puts it in the introduction to another recent volume, 'to open a discourse for a subject much ignored by Anglo-centered Shakespearean commentators'. That is, to organize conferences, write papers, and edit volumes to explore the history of what they call 'foreign Shakespeare' or 'Shakespeare without his language' – meaning the translations, stagings, and overall reception of Shakespeare outside Britain. In the foreword to the Pujante-Hoenselaars volume, Stanley Wells responds on behalf of the mainstream scholarly establishment to Delabastita's 'trenchant, challenging, and somewhat chastening essay' by noting that since non-anglophone Shakespeare scholars have become more willing and able to publish in English than they once were, English speakers have less excuse for ignoring their contributions.

The rhetoric of these kinds of exchanges may help us to understand what happened. Ten years ago, in *Shakespeare Survey* 48, Inga-Stina Ewbank called the study of translations a 'stepchild' of Shakespeare Studies. In his essay for *Four Hundred Years of Shakespeare in Europe*, Delabastita calls it the 'Cinderella' of Shakespeare scholarship. 'Stepchild' and 'Cinderella' (she was also a stepchild, after all) describe a lowly status which opens the way to neglect, exploitation, and humiliation. But both these figures passed from a deprived or submissive childhood to liberated adulthood. Derrida, quoted by Delabastita, compares translation to a child able to speak independently, and so different from a mere reproduction; Translation Studies, when once emancipated from neglect, makes its own way. The figure of Cinderella, deprived not only by virtue of being a stepchild but by being female, is appealing as a metaphor because she eventually marries a prince. It recommends itself to those who employ the rhetoric of liberation and are anxious to recuperate female virtue.

'Both the traditional rhetoric of translation (most offensively in a phrase like *les belles infidèles*) and the historical reality of literary production suggest that the relation between original and translation is very much a gendered one.' So Delabastita, in the very paper in which he calls translation the 'Cinderella' of Shakespeare studies. He spells out very clearly what he sees as the political implications of this gendering, arguing that the 'suppression of translation' in Shakespeare criticism bespeaks a hidden masculinist agenda which jars with the sophistication of its gender criticism. The Shakespeareans' neglect of translation shows vestiges of essentialist, patriarchal, and imperialist thinking about language. Such expressions as *belles infidèles* represent women as faithless, however lovely. To call translated Shakespeare a 'Cinderella', to speak on behalf of a female victim, is to put oneself in

the role of the liberator. Reading these new books on Shakespeare translations feels like listening to a debate on the emancipation of women. So, in *Shakespeare and the Language of Translation* (which appears in one of the several new Arden series of ancillary Shakespeare studies), Ton Hoenselaars proposes that Translation Studies deserves 'the status of an equal partner in the academic debate', or else he maintains that we would profit from engaging translations of Shakespeare 'as equal partners in a dialogue with the original', or he talks of 'the various emancipating vernaculars of Europe', or 'the gradual emancipation of Shakespeare in translation' and the residual 'Cinderella complex'. In her *Translation Studies* (1991) Susan Bassnett urged a reversal of the conventional relationship between Comparative Literature and Translation Studies, promoting the latter as the principal discipline. In her contribution to Hoenselaar's volume, she effectively speaks from the same corner, registering her distaste or bewilderment in the face of Kate's arguments for female subservience in the final speech in *The Taming of the Shrew*. These are, as she puts it, 'highly problematic in the twenty-first century'. Inga-Stina Ewbank, quoted in the foreword, celebrates the rise of Translation Studies, once dismissed as a harmless, if interesting, activity irrelevant to mainstream Shakespeare scholarship but now at 'the very cutting edge of Shakespeare studies', and translation itself, formerly a 'stepchild' of literary activities, but now a 'cultural ambassador'. Ton Hoenselaars concludes that 'with its status as an equal partner in the academic debate, the subdiscipline of Shakespearean translation would also have its distinct responsibilities'. We hear in that the sober (male) voice of the judge reminding Cinderella, now emancipated, of her moral duties.

The reminder sounds not only right but also inevitable. The moral of Perrault's story is that *bonne grace* is a treasure beyond price – 'Belles, ce don vaut mieux que d'être bien coiffées, / Pour engager un cœur, pour en venir à bout.' The emancipation of Translation Studies was to be the reward of virtue. Where the metaphor of *les belles infidèles* implicated translation in sexual treason, the Cinderella metaphor associated Translation Studies with a model of female responsibility. To be as useful, the discipline was committed to a no-nonsense positivist rationale. That commitment has never been spelled out in strictly philosophical terms, yet the assumptions of a positivist agenda are omnipresent in the founding documents, especially in dictating an emphasis on the ideal of pure description. In Shakespeare Studies the methodological assumptions were reinforced by a principled hostility to bardolatry. In the introduction to *European Shakespeares: Translating Shakespeare in the Romantic Age* (1993), Delabastita and Lieven D'hulst

argued that one of the major obstacles to a 'satisfactory description of Shakespeare's reception' had been the canonization of Shakespeare in Western culture, something that 'has all too often precluded a detached and purely descriptive attitude', and seduced many scholars into becoming themselves 'part of the object to be investigated', into forgetting that such involvement, even if not objectionable in itself, was hardly 'conducive to the researcher's ideal of a maximally neutral and complete understanding'. Among the various later twentieth-century schools of principled engagement with live political issues (cultural materialism, postcolonialism, feminism) the promotion of ideological neutrality was a unique stance – surprising, maybe somewhat anachronistic, but still challenging.

There is no need for the newly emancipated discipline to combat prescriptive dogmas and assumptions over again. There is time now for it to reflect on its own philosophical leanings and learn from alternative perspectives. Over the last couple of decades the fight for acknowledgement conditioned it into a reflex of zealous self-justification which precluded sympathy with other positions, hostile or not. In more recently published books on 'foreign Shakespeares' there are signs of an increased capacity for tolerating and integrating different types of knowledge, even some hitherto proscribed. Twenty years ago nobody could get away with employing adjectives like 'faithful' in any context, not even when trying to explain, say, that late eighteenth-century translators entertained ideals wholly different from later, fidelity-oriented aims. Now an experienced translator like Martin Hilský, published here in Pujante-Hoenselaars, can safely use that ominous adjective in connection with translations, and can indicate degrees of fidelity without being immediately denounced for heresy. Matured and mellowed, translation students are beyond the stage of protecting key concepts as jealously as nervous New Critics used to protect the Intentional Fallacy and other dogmas. Though scholars today are ready to accept that translations and adaptations constitute modes of rewriting, Ton Hoenselaars can safely add that adaptations can rewrite their source text 'more freely', and that however difficult it is to draw a line between the two, their place is on the same 'sliding generic scale' and a matter of degree. Long gone are the days when the newly established Translation Studies tried to confine research to the old positivist ideal of description and condemned any speculation about unobservable phenomena. 'Speculation' is no longer a pejorative, at least in Shakespeare Studies. Speculation is rehabilitated even when empirical verification is out of the question, as it mostly is whenever we are trying to detect the actual processes of translation, adaptation, or

any kind of rewriting. Knowledge of such matters is hardly more than well-informed guesswork. And if we cannot know for sure, then it is all the more important to listen to others.

Such tolerance for dissenting views and voices is especially rewarding when we have an opportunity to listen to people with manifold expertise, like Yves Bonnefoy, poet, critic, philosopher, and translator. The vintage Bonnefoy essay that gave the title to the volume of his collected papers *Shakespeare and the French Poet* may still resort to dubious old norms like 'truly understanding Shakespeare' or 'a complete translation that is both faithful to the original and great literature in its own right', yet it manages to problematize the issue in a subtle, perceptive, and in-depth analysis, arguing that the failure of the French Shakespeare is inevitable because English is governed by a latent Aristotelian mode of perception entirely different from the Platonic metaphysics of French. In English the 'uninflected adjectives snap qualities photographically, without raising the metaphysical problem of the relation of quality and substance, as the agreement of adjectives and nouns must do in French'. In English 'any given word can open up a world ... to our perception', whereas in French 'the words seem to state what they denote and immediately to exclude from the poem's field of reference whatever is not denoted'. 'In English a word is an opening, it is all surface; in French it is a closing, it is all depth.'

This is not language easily accepted by those who tried to turn Translation Studies into a fully fledged academic discipline based on positivist principles. Yet even Delabastita could accept Bonnefoy's conclusion that all a French poet can hope for, at best, is to translate Shakespeare's plays in such a way as to highlight the differences between the philosophies implied in the two languages, and 'every true translation ... has a kind of moral obligation to be a metaphysical reflection, the contemplation of one way of thinking by another, the attempt to express from one's own angle the specific nature of that thought, and finally a kind of examination of one's own resources'. Not everyone would concede Bonnefoy's final assessment of all the French Shakespeares as 'persistent failures'. Isabelle Schwartz-Gastine's contribution to the Pujante-Hoenselaar volume uses the same old norms of proximity and fidelity – Voltaire can be 'closer to the original', or in François-Victor Hugo 'faithfulness to the original predominates over the observance of the literary fashion' – but she concludes by observing 'Shakespeare has definitely found roots in French culture.' The most important service rendered by any comparative analysis of translations does not lie in any normative judgement they may substantiate. Instead, as Delabastita proposes in Pujante-Hoenselaar's

volume, we may use comparison of translations to explore Shakespeare's ambiguities, using the variant disambiguations of the original not to rank the translations, but to chart the complementary possibilities of the original, and investigate how and why different solutions are preferred by different translators. Balz Engler points out in the same volume that 'if we compare translations into various languages, using Shakespeare's English text as a *tertium comparationis*, as it were, we can learn about how different cultures and languages cope with specific issues'.

Finally, however, a caveat. Twenty years ago Theo Hermans had good reason to applaud a new approach to translations that resulted in 'a considerable widening of the horizon, since any and all phenomena relating to translation, in the broadest sense, become objects of study'. But the widened scope has now resulted in a loss of focus. Emancipation is fine, but expansion can go too far, and conquest without restraint can be self-destructive. In his introduction to *Shakespeare and the Language of Translation*, Hoenselaars warns that the term 'translation' has been expanded to a virtually meaningless comprehensiveness, and rightly calls for a refocusing on the linguistic experience of translation – while not losing sight of 'the broader processes of cultural exchange'. In his introduction to *Translating Shakespeare for the Twenty-First Century* Hoenselaars's co-editor Homem sounds a similar note: 'when a concern with translation, as hegemonic as it has proved to be, coincides with the study of Shakespeare, traditionally held to be a privileged locus for the representation of the human experience in its complexity ... the temptation may be strong to incur the ultimate hubris of claiming that nothing is alien to translation and to Shakespeare-in/and-translation'. Homem, to be sure, adds that the collection of essays 'is not informed by an ambition of totality', and that the volume is 'acknowledging' but 'not blindly subscribing to the all-embracing designs of Translation Studies vis-à-vis other disciplines'. We can invoke Murray Krieger's allegory (in *New Literary History*, 1986) of the progress of critical movements as the rise and fall of empires. Translation Studies has clearly reached a stage well beyond the radicalism of the youthful, vigorous, incautious phase when 'it gets the job done of putting the new empire in place of its predecessor', and has probably reached the second phase, when the empire relaxes and 'learns to include, though always on its own terms', showing an appearance of catholicity which is but 'a disguised form of hegemony', its newly gained tolerance resting on 'a universal rereading, so that all literature reveals a universal sameness, a sure sign that the movement is about ready to disintegrate', and unwittingly instigating counter-movements which would challenge

the movement's hegemony in the third phase – the decline and fall of the empire. Inasmuch as this applies to the history of Translation Studies, one must simply hope that the last phase is still not imminent. The militant overconfidence of the first is over, yet the newly gained tolerance has not wiped out the long-cherished dream of a hard discipline. With the rise of a subdiscipline focusing on European Shakespeares, the study of translations has more tasks than ever before, and by now its methodology has become sophisticated enough to do them.

PÉTER DÁVIDHÁZI

Institute of Literary Studies, Hungary

Forty Fables, by Jean de la Fontaine. Translated by Hugh Gaston Hall. Pp. 48. Kenilworth: H. G. Hall, 2002. Hb. £10.

Sonnets. By Hugh Gaston Hall. Pp. 64. Kenilworth: H. G. Hall, 2002. Hb. £10.

Quatrains. By Hugh Gaston Hall. Pp. 88. Kenilworth: H. G. Hall, 2004. Hb. £10.

Children and animals are notoriously shunned by actors. Stories for children or about animals are sometimes deprecated by literary academics, especially where there is rhyme; which may explain why this review comes to you from outside Academe. Victor Hugo in *How to be a Grandfather*, his last book of poetry, listed some of the animal fabulists (here in my translation):

Animals talk; and an expert knows
Their songs, cries, rages, joys and woes.
Puss-in-Boots; Homer's wonderful horses;
Phaedrus, scribbling down the beasts' discourses;
La Fontaine in the long grass lying,
Watching from the undergrowth, dreaming, spying.
Aesop, thinker with a back like Pindus,
Heard them in Greece; Bidpai on the Indus.
Twilight jargon of limpid lagoons
Revealed to Florian, officer of dragoons;
Bald-headed prophet Ezekiel
Was a wild man, listened to wild beasts as well.

Aesop belongs to the select band of ancient Greek writers who were famous even before the Renaissance, as his shortened name indicates. He is by far the lightest of these. His own text is lost: he survives in the Latin of Phaedrus, a freedman of Augustus, and the slightly later Greek of Babrius. The fourteenth-century monk Maximus Planudes wrote