

The Shakespearean Translator – Ariel or Caliban?

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The present paper starts from a metaphor used by Leon Levițchi, when prefacing the Romanian 'Univers' edition of Shakespeare's Complete Works, published in the 1980s. There, the professor mused that the job of someone attempting to translate Shakespeare (into Romanian) was like embodying the ultimate duplicity, of the god Ariel, on the one hand, a spirit of nature who thrives on unlimited freedom, and of Caliban, the enslaved mutant, rebellious and unpredictable, on the other. The paper will analyse a selection of prefaces to several Romanian Shakespeare editions, from the early 20th century to the present day, looking at the details occurring in the process of translation and the reasons lying behind some complex and difficult translation choices. From word-for-word equivalence, through the mechanisms of juxta, to the attempt to recreate the iambic pentametre, from archaic parables to modern slang, Romanian versions provided by poets, literary critics, professional translators, or professors of English are validated and authorized in these prefaces. The focus here will fall mainly on the explanatory function of these paratexts, but we will bring adjacent functions into discussion as well.

Keywords: editor's preface, literary translation, paratext, translator's preface, translation of Shakespeare into Romanian

1. Translations of Shakespeare into Romanian

The history of Shakespeare's translation is, to a large extent, the history of Shakespeare's reception in the academic environment, by literary critics and the general public. The translation of Shakespeare into Romanian began in the 19th century, coinciding with the first theatrical performances of the Bard's plays on stages in the Romanian Principalities or in Transylvania, as well as with the first critical notes on *Viliam Șacspear* or *Șacspir*. While scarce and far between in the 19th century in comparison with the large amount of translated material in many other European countries at that time (Matei-Chesnoiu 2007), in the first decades of the 20th century, the Bard already enjoyed, among Romanian writers, critics and translators, a formidable reputation. This impression can be accounted for by the unequivocally deferential tone in which translators choose to write their prefaces, as if making indirect excuses for their courage to have approached such a genius and creator of flawless language.

The isolated translations of single plays and of selected sonnets in the first decades of the 20th century and the interwar period are followed by the two large-scale projects of translating Shakespeare's *Complete Works* into Romanian: one under the supervision of Mihnea Gheorghiu, between 1955 and 1961 at *Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă*, and the other unfolding between 1982 and 1991, coordinated by Leon Levițchi at *Univers* publishing house. In 2010, a third project was initiated, which has been supervised by George Volceanov, with the Romanian publishers *Paralela 45* and *Tracus Arte*.

2. Prefaces to Shakespeare in Romanian. Translation in focus

A particular category of paratexts accompanying Shakespeare's translations into Romanian has been of interest to us: prefaces, forewords and notes (sometimes having the size of genuine critical studies), either written entirely by the translators or written by the editors and containing references to the translation process.

The four translation moments mentioned in the previous section reflect major mutations not only in aesthetic awareness and critical discourse, but also in the social and cultural realities of the receiving context. The 1920s were still heavily indebted to the 19th century tradition, showing a high degree of academic conservatism and excessive concern with the poetic qualities of the Shakespearean text. This approach coincided with the overall direction in the early 20th century Shakespeare scholarship, when the Bard of Avon was still mainly presented as a poet and a creator possessing the attributes of a Romantic genius. Post WW2 Romania witnessed the first years of communism, which brought about censorship, a phenomenon which not only had obvious political and ideological implications, but also affected the way literary language was used. Archaic structures were preferred to modern terms, as they appeared more harmless in their implications, less anchored in anything that could relate to the ideologically heavily loaded contexts of the epoch. At the same time, communism also imposed certain prudishness in language and behaviour and, thus, any obscene reference was banned from the printed texts. The result was a closed discourse, frozen in an atemporal universe.

The complete edition of the 1980s was published under the communist regime as well, but, by then, writers and translators had gained experience in avoiding the vigilance of official censorship, so that highly technical language or obscure jargons, vagueness and hermeticism were employed in all domains, including literary criticism and translation (Percec 2008: 207). The Shakespearean text and the prefaces that accompany it seem highly sophisticated, the paratext of the *Complete Works* being academic, cryptic, and metaphorical.

The latest Romanian edition attempts to compensate even more for many of the past deficiencies, seemingly replacing Shakespeare the poet and the genius with Shakespeare the showbiz entrepreneur and giving up the reverential language for a provocative one, in which "bawdiness" is not avoided but rather capitalized on, as a distinctive feature of the original (Volceanov 2012: 217).

What we attempt to find out now is whether the translation-related issues tackled in the paratexts considered reflect these general tendencies and whether their functions are adapted accordingly, in keeping with the overarching role of texts of their type. If, as Genette (1997: 197) puts it, the original preface of a literary work written by its author "has as its chief function to ensure that the text is read properly" (more exactly, firstly that it is read, and then that the reading is done along the appropriate coordinates), a preface to a translated literary text or a similar paratext that concentrates on the translation process should, ideally, fulfil an equivalent function, i.e. incite the readers to approach it and offer the key to understanding why the target text ended up looking as it does.

2.1. Early 20th century prefaces

The two prefaces to the Shakespearean translations we selected for analysis from among the early 20th century paratexts are written by Adolphe Stern (*Julius Caesar*, 1922) and Henry Marcus (*Sonnets*, 1922). We have chosen the preface to a play and the preface to

the sonnets starting from the hypothesis that traditional criticism and translation of the Bard focused on the poetic quality of his language and, therefore, we wanted to establish whether “poet” and “poetic” are key words and desiderata, irrespective of the genre of the translated texts. Indeed, Stern’s very opening sentence in the preface reads: “Shakespeare is the poet who, according to Al. Dumas, created after God’s model.” (Stern 1922: III, our transl.) He goes on to praise Shakespeare’s language as “a perfect tool”, an illustration of the artistic fusion between “form and substance” (idem: V).

The explanatory function (Dimitriu 2009) of this part of the preface becomes clear as long as one may interpret Stern’s remarks, quoted above, as an “elective affinity” (Steiner 1975, qtd. in Dimitriu 2009), i.e. as clear indication of his admiration for the Bard and, consequently, as a plausible reason for having chosen this author. The same function is further fulfilled by Stern’s comments on previous translations and his own, as efforts mainly in the area of versification. He acknowledges P. P. Carp as Shakespeare’s first important translator, in the 19th century, but considers his use of “alexandrine, arhythmical verse” as being designed on Schlegel’s German model (Stern 1922: VII, our transl.) and therefore – we read between the lines – a choice that prompts him to try his hand at offering a more appropriate translation version. Stern explains his preference for the blank verse and iambic pentametre as being faithful to both the English and the Romanian language; the latter among the Romance languages, he thinks, “is the most suitable to this verse, with its sonorous and suggestive folk elements” (Stern 1922: VII, our transl.). The translator sees this as a great advantage, because he can reproduce all ideas and imagery in the original English lines without making his Romanian verse much longer and more tedious. However, he admits that the metric patterns are the main reason why translating Shakespeare is an unbearably hard task. Giving an account of his translation strategies and of his response to the challenges posed by the source-text positions Stern’s confessions still in the category of explanations, the level of discussion being now intratextual (Dimitriu 2009), as opposed to his praise of Shakespeare’s craftsmanship in general, placed on the extratextual level, and to his reference to previous translations, which lies in-between the two levels (it indicates external factors as having played a role in the translation process, but the focus is on the text in question itself).

As opposed to Stern, Henry Marcus is indebted to the French literary tradition and translation practice, when he writes, in his 1922 preface to the *Sonnets*, about his technical choices that they were dictated by Boileau’s literary theory. He confesses to giving up the original rhymes, “so gentle and harmonious” (Marcus 1922: 7, our transl.), in order to save the content, that is, to give, in his words, more *allure* to the concise Shakespearean *pointe*. We recognize here the French critical approach, where the *pointe*, a literary or translation unit, in which the author’s intention is concentrated – often the equivalent of a pun, an ironic twist or a witty remark –, is intensified by the *allure*, a sign of distinction conveyed by semantic complexity or rhythm. Even if Marcus assesses such translation choices as being deviations, he concludes that they are both quantitatively and qualitatively insignificant, being justified by the pressure of versification.

Just like in Stern’s case, there is an external factor indicated by Marcus as having influenced his rendering of the English text into Romanian. The situation is, however, not fully identical, in the sense that it is not dissatisfaction with another translator’s work that encourages his new translation attempt, but rather admiration for a writing style that may be taken as a model – Boileau’s in this case. When reference is made to something outside the text considered for translation, the justification of the translator’s choices is extratextual.

When, on the other hand, he describes how exactly he proceeded with his actual translation, the explanatory function of his prefatorial discourse lies at the intratextual level.

Both prefaces mentioned in this section bring to the fore “text-specific translation issues that are part of what James Holmes (1988) calls ‘problem-oriented’ studies” (Dimitriu 2009: 197): the effort of rendering the rhythm and, respectively, the rhyme of the Shakespearean verse into Romanian, so the explanatory function of the prefaces is fulfilled in connection to specific prosodic elements.

When highlighting the difficulties of dealing with these elements, both translators actually perform a translation-oriented text analysis, thus assigning their prefaces an informative/ descriptive function (Dimitriu 2009) as well.

The concern for the preservation of the poetical dimension of Shakespeare’s language, in other words, the care for keeping the poetic beauty of literature generally intact, a desideratum at the beginning of the 20th century, as previously pointed out, did not result into a uniform application of translation methods and techniques. So, the two translators meet in their plea for fidelity to the principle dictating that it should be the poetic quality of the translation product that should take precedence over fidelity either to the source or to the target text, but they part in their choice of the translation means used in order to obey this principle. While Stern declares himself in favour of fidelity to the source text (easy to observe, he says, as long as Romanian as the target language allows for that), Marcus chooses to diverge from the original and gives more importance to the target text, in the (subjective) hope that this is how he would be able to produce a translation marked by poeticity. This being the case, the two prefaces may be said to fulfil a similar general normative/ prescriptive (Dimitriu 2009) function, when it comes to the adherence to the poeticity principle, but a disparate one, when the choice of actual translation techniques gets down to the loyalty to the form of the original.

One final note is worth making concerning Stern’s preface: what leaped to the eye in the case of this particular paratext is the translator’s use of two words borrowed from French to refer to some peculiar aspects he considered in the translation process – the above mentioned *allure* and *pointe*. The fact that he found no Romanian equivalents and chose not to paraphrase the French terms may be indicative of the incipient stage at which Romanian terminology in literary and translation studies (the latter improperly called so for what was going on in the field at the time Marcus was writing) found itself in the early years of the 20th century. This would count, we think, as a preface fulfilling what we may call a “documentary” function, in the sense that it documents the state of the Romanian translation/ literary studies terminology at the time.

2.2. Prefaces in the 50s and the 60s

Mihnea Gheorghiu, the editor of the 1950s-1960s *Complete Works*, regards the earlier attempts of translating Shakespeare into Romanian as “enthusiastic” (an obvious euphemism), commenting on the necessity of the new collection as an act of cultural and historical reparation (1955: 53). He shifts his attention from form to content, saluting Shakespeare as a writer for the ordinary people, speaking on behalf of “emperors and beggars, nations and individuals.” (idem: 52, our transl.) Apart from this remarkably democratic manifesto in an author fully identified otherwise with the (academic) elites, Gheorghiu also encourages Romanians, when reading Shakespeare, to focus on his characters, as rich and diverse as any modern writer could provide. He suggests that the most

important contribution to making Shakespeare known in Romania is not that of professional translators or teachers, but that of the best known Romanian writers. Again, poets are considered the best connoisseurs of the Bard (he quotes Mihai Eminescu, Șt. O. Iosif, Al. Macedonski or George Topîrceanu to illustrate his point of view).

The explanatory function of Gheorghiu's preface is obvious – the type of translation he advocates is what Nida (1964, 1969 with Taber) called, not much later after this preface was written, “dynamic equivalence”, a sense-for-sense (content-for-content) approach, counting on intelligibility, as opposed to “formal equivalence”, heavily relying on word-for-word equivalence. Without drawing attention to specific areas of difficulty in translation, he declares himself in favour of an editorial policy supporting the primacy of meaning over form in translation, this ruling, at an intratextual level, that, in Nida and Taber's words (1969: 24), “translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language *message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style*” (our emphasis).

The extratextual dimension of the explanatory function of Gheorghiu's preface resides in its author's claim that the new translation of Shakespeare's works is meant to compensate for what previous translations, too “enthusiastic” as he considers them, failed to offer the Romanian public.

A secondary, normative/ prescriptive function may be said to be fulfilled by the editor's declaration of his orientation towards the content of the source text in translation; such orientation, applied to the whole collection of Shakespearean works translated under Gheorghiu's supervision, may be taken as a model to be followed by other practitioners. To legitimize his preference, the editor suggests that a translation approach displaying fidelity towards the source text content, more specifically, towards the variety of characters that this content brings before the readers' eyes, would be received by a large and heterogeneous public. Reaching the masses was a well-set goal in communist Romania, in all walks of life, so the normative/ prescriptive function of this preface may be grasped in terms of suggesting an editorial and translation policy that would fit the needs of almost every potential member of the audience, with no distinction between the educated elites and the average man. Mention of the opinion that poets seem to be the ideal translators may be interpreted as fulfilling, indirectly, a normative/ prescriptive function, too. The praise of these particular translators may be understood as a prescription: it is poets that should translate texts with a poetic dimension and not other categories of translators.

2.3. Prefaces in the 80s

Three decades later, Leon Levițchi admits that Shakespeare in translation is a “necessary evil”: doubly evil if done poorly, only half evil if “it is close to the original (denotation, emphasis, mode, connotation, coherence, style, versification) while observing the rules of the target language.” (1982: 27, our transl.) On the one hand, we recognize the Anglophile scholar, who always prefers a good English text to anything else; on the other hand, we see that the process of translating Shakespeare is, by now, in theory and practice, connected to the ethics of the international community of professional translators. Levițchi regards the literary translation as an auxiliary material, an impression which grows when the original is something as rich and complex as Shakespeare, where the *juxta* (the juxtalinear translation of classical texts and a traditional translation practice in the academic environment) will never suffice. He admits being an adept of George Călinescu's theory, who advised that literary

translation should work as an analogy, never relying on the word-for-word translation technique, rarely with annoyingly long footnotes or paraphrases. Technically, Levițchi argues, poetic translation can be achieved when the first, literal meaning of a word is intended, but not for secondary or metaphorical meanings. To support his idea, the editor evokes Shakespeare's last romance, *The Tempest*, in which the spirit of the air, free, graceful and ineffable, is opposed by the monster of the underworld, who uses the magician's language to curse. While the original writer is clearly Ariel, the translator risks becoming a Caliban if he doesn't have the imaginative power to reinvent the text. Overall, it seems that the strategy generally encouraged for the 1980s edition is the poetic license, the slight divergence from the original (and from grammar and syntactic rules functioning in everyday Romanian), considered a response to versification or style requirements.

The direction in which the explanatory function of Levițchi's preface points is thus clear: free translation that gives birth to dynamic equivalence, by taking into account the meaning of the original, even if this means to sacrifice its form (so, fidelity to the target text and the target culture is in place). When discussing the intratextual level, in order to indicate the necessity of considering form of secondary importance as compared to meaning, he provides the illustrative example of a problematic issue, that of the words used in their connotative sense. Mentioning them as a challenge for translators makes the part of the preface where this is done informative/ descriptive by Dimitriu's (2009) criteria.

To give more weight to his proclaimed option, the translator resorts, extratextually, to a voice that is recognized as authoritative in Romanian literary studies – George Călinescu's. The implication is that, if a well-known critic like him suggests a path to be taken, this must be the way to go on. Again, the normative/ prescriptive function follows/ becomes evident from the firmness with which the translation choices are made and talked about.

2.4. Prefaces in the 2000s

Last but not least, the Romanian Shakespeare edition closer to the present moment is one in which, if we were to remix Levițchi's metaphor, the translator is neither Ariel nor Caliban, but Falstaff. For George Volceanov (2012: 217), slang and debowdlerizing the Shakespearean text (i.e. freeing it from the pressure to avoid obscenities at all cost) are major priorities, because, he believes, the days of the "philological" translation and reception are gone, and have been replaced by the translation for the stage and the understanding of the Bard as an entertainer. Consequently, Volceanov invites readers to forget the aseptic phrases of previous translations, which were, to a great extent, "acceptable", but not illustrative of the "concessions Shakespeare made to his unrefined public", in an age when the theatre was regarded as a subliterate and subcultural form (idem: 218, our transl.). Censorship and self-censorship were not only political and ideological phenomena, but processes stemming from the translator's "moral fibre" (idem: 219, our transl.) or prudishness. The general editor believes that the metaphorical paraphrasing of the original slang and pornographic language did as much injustice to Shakespeare as the complicated and scholarly glossing in extensive footnotes or endnotes that used to accompany the main text in some of the translations. Both translation choices are unfortunate: the former prevents the Bard from really being our contemporary, while the latter is absurd if the text is employed for the stage, since "a line cannot be uttered on the stage alongside its explanatory footnote." (idem: 224, our transl.).

Volceanov's is a completely new approach to the translation of Shakespeare in the peculiar aspect of the Bard's language that he chooses to place emphasis on. If prosody or

words used with an indirect meaning puzzled former translators, now the aspect addressed is different – taboo, harsh, slang words and phrases. The explanatory dimension of the preface to volume one of the collection he has supervised is achieved by the detailed explanations concerning the prevalence of formal equivalence, chosen to render these particular textual elements of the original into Romanian (like before, putting these lexical elements into the limelight has an informative/descriptive dimension). They are supplemented by explanations of an extratextual nature – the translation choices brought to fruition are justified by considering Shakespeare the entertainer not only of the educated, but mostly of the unrefined public and only then an artisan of poetic, pretentious language. Volceanov's Shakespeare is, like Gheorghiu's, a Shakespeare of the masses, only that the way he addresses them in Romanian is different in the free-of-taboo 2000s from the more conservative 1950s.

Since this is the first attempt to consistently translate slang and indelicate words directly, it is harder to anticipate the normative/ prescriptive function of the translation principles enunciated in the preface than it was in the other cases discussed (which all presupposed mainstream ways of translating Shakespeare and not only). The Romanian public's and critics' reactions still need to consolidate until one may be able to evaluate the impact of the direct translation method suggested and used by Volceanov and his team.

Uncertainty as to whether the 2000s Romanian Shakespeare will be long-lived, or future translators will return to more conservative methods of rendering the Bard's texts into Romanian, together with the lengthy explanations Volceanov offers make us speculate on the defensive function of the preface analysed in this section. Norberg (2012: 103), taking a sociological approach to translation, states that the translator's comments in prefaces may be of two kinds: offensive, when they are "comments on translation decisions which appear obvious and undeniable and which show little role distance" (these indicate that the translators perform rather routine tasks and that they have internalized their role as translators dealing with such tasks), and defensive, when they are "statements that anticipate possible objections to certain translation decisions and which, therefore express a greater degree of role distance" (when they perform rather non-routine tasks in which their identification with their role is not that strong).

3. Conclusion

Our analysis of some prefaces to translations of Shakespeare at various moments since the beginning of the 20th century up to the present has revealed that their most obvious function is explanatory. Without exception, the paratexts investigated here contain references to the choice of the translation methods applied, be they illustrative of fidelity either to the source text or to the target text and culture, an account which presents advantages, but which runs risks as well. On the advantage side, one may count the fact that a synchronic approach to a translator's expressed thoughts concerning his/ her strategies highlights what translation tendencies and even norms prevailed at a certain moment; a diachronic approach, on the other hand, offers insight into the evolution of such tendencies and norms – it has become clear during our investigation that, in the span of a century, Shakespeare's texts have benefited from a variety of translation attempts, the translator being now an Ariel, now a Caliban, to return to the question in our title. As Norberg (2012: 104) points out, talking about how s/he performed the translation of a particular text offers the translator "the chance to strengthen his/ her reputation [...] and satisfies the translator's desire to write about the translation task

without being immediately challenged”, while also giving him/ her the opportunity to “anticipate and prevent criticism from reviewers and readers by showing, for example, that s/he has been aware of different translation alternatives and translation problems”.

The risks may reside in exactly the opposite direction, Norberg (2012: 104) says – “exposing translation principles and procedures [...] may invite criticism from reviewers and others”.

Apart from reference to the translation choices made (which contributes to the informative/ descriptive dimension of the translators’ statements), the prefaces that we have explored fulfilled their explanatory function by indicating the connection between these choices and certain extratextual factors, such as other translators’ works, the characteristics of the source and the target language, the prestige of a scholar setting a trend in approaching a literary text, etc.

Finally, the normative/ prescriptive function has been performed rather indirectly, via the explanatory one, with one exception - Volceanov’s translation, in whose case we found it difficult to identify the prescriptive potential of the translation techniques described.

Whether there are risks or advantages attached to a translator’s talking about his/ her endeavour, whether the function of a preface is mainly explanatory, informative or normative, it is clear that paratexts such as those we have analysed provide vital information to the readers, make the translators visible and their voices heard. At the same time, they are always “worthy of further in-depth analysis as they have a lot to offer to translator trainees and researchers in the field of Translation Studies” (Haroon 2017: 112).

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