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# *Romeo and Juliet,* from Page to Stage and Back: A Hands-On Perspective on Functionalism in Drama Translation[i]

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**Abstract**
A decade ago I translated *Romeo and Juliet* into Romanian for a student performance, which premiered on February 14, 2013 and has since participated in four international theatre festivals. Three years later, having joined the team of the *Shakespeare for the New Millennium* project – devoted to the retranslation of Shakespeare's complete works – I embarked on what I thought would be merely a revision of my previous translation for the stage, but soon turned into a very different *translatorial* experience, which resulted in an entirely new Romanian version, mainly due to the twofold, yet more clearly defined purpose of the translation project. This new version, published in vol. 13 (2018) of the latest scholarly edition of Shakespeare's complete works (2010-2019), has recently passed the performability test as well, in a compelling stage production which premiered, to great acclaim, on December 17, 2022 at the "Mihai Eminescu" National Theatre in Chișinău (Moldova). Thus, my article sets out to explore – self-reflectively, retrospectively and through the lens of *Skopos* theory – how in each case my approach to the task in hand, my decisions and my solutions to various translation problems were guided by what I knew or assumed about the aims, requirements and prospective audience of each translation. Thus, a translator's practical experience is brought to bear on what has been both hailed and criticised as "a new paradigm" in translation studies, in an attempt to test its hypotheses against the actual practice (as well as the outcomes) of translating the same text for different purposes.

**Keywords**: *Romeo and Juliet*, stage translation, retranslation, performability, equivalence, *Skopos*, translation brief/commission, target audience

## Recent Theoretical Approaches to Drama Translation

In the four decades since Susan Bassnett's early theoretical work on drama translation and her memorable descriptions of it as "the most neglected area of translation studies research" ("Still Trapped" 90) or as "the poor relation" of "Translation Studies" (107), a number of scholarly articles, books, essay collections, as well as special issues of journals have been devoted to defining, describing, and exploring the problematic aspects as well as the processes involved in what translation theorists variously term "drama translation," "theatre translation," "performance translation," "stage translation" or "translation for the theatre." The past two decades, in particular, have seen a flowering of both theoretical and practice-oriented research work on the subject, so diverse and compelling that some scholars are already responding to a perceived need for summary and systematisation: "the first book-length account of the history, theory and methodology of theatre translation" (Elam) by Italian academic Massimiliano Morini, *Theatre Translation: Theory and Practice* was published last year (Bloomsbury 2022), with the threefold aim of providing a diachronic survey of (capitalised) Theatrical Translation Studies as "a burgeoning academic field" (Cover copy), of exploring the current state of the art in this area of research and of proposing an "all-encompassing view of theatre translation" (Morini 65), as well as a working methodology for studying it.

Also, if in the last two decades of the 20th century – which Morini describes as the " 'problem phase' of Theatrical Translation Studies" (5) – a transition from the text-centric bias of previous approaches to drama translation towards increasingly performance-oriented views can be traced in the pioneering work of Bassnett, Andre Lefevere, Patrice Pavis, Anne Ubersfeld, Ortrun Zuber, whose descriptive explorations and theorisations drew heavily on semiotics, 21st-century research in this already interdisciplinary area has taken a markedly performance-centric turn and has opened up to incorporate socio-cultural, practice-oriented, integrative and, lately, holistic perspectives, which redefine theatre translation as a collaborative endeavour. Thus, the descriptive studies of the 1980s and 90s were mainly devoted to drawing distinctions between drama

translation and other kinds of literary translation by emphasising those features of the dramatic text that render it more problematic, more challenging, more difficult to translate and therefore require special training and the acquisition of certain skills on the translator's part. Although still largely source-oriented, focusing on translation problems deriving from the very nature of the dramatic text as "inherently dual" (Anderman 92) – i.e. both literature and part of a theatrical production, – or provisional, "incomplete in itself until realised in performance," "*troué*, i.e. full of gaps that can only be realised physically" (Bassnett, "Still Trapped" 91) – they already begin to acknowledge the existence of an "extra dimension to the written text that the translator must somehow be able to grasp":

> a theatre text, written with a view to its performance, contains distinguishable structural features that make it performable, beyond the stage directions themselves. Consequently, the task of the translator must be to determine what those structures are and to translate them into the TL, even though this may lead to major shifts on the linguistic and stylistic planes. (Bassnett, *Translation Studies* 126)

Since it is usually meant to be spoken and acted on a stage, heard and seen by an audience, there has to be an aural, visual, sensorial and gestic subtext to drama, which would have to be decoded by the translator and re-encoded in the target language in a such a way as to make it readily transposable into performance. While Susan Bassnett has famously dismissed the notion that such decoding should fall within the province of the translator, who would then "not only have to know both languages and theatrical systems intimately, but would also have to have experience of gestic readings and training as a performer or director in those two systems" ("Still Trapped" 92), most theorists in both translation and theatre studies (Zuber, Pavis, Egil Törnqvist, Robert W. Corrigan), including a few translators (Rich Hite, Phyllis Zatlin) have stressed the importance of "performability," "speakability," "breathability," "stageability" and other such criteria that a translated playtext has to meet, sometimes even at the expense of the once-sovereign principle of fidelity. Thus, some special qualifications have been added to the list of "minimal requirements for theatrical translators" issued by the Ariane Literary

Translation Network[ii] in 1998, which already consisted of "linguistic competency, theatrical experience, and writing talent" (qtd. in Zatlin 2): "a thorough grounding in both cultures" (Zatlin 9), familiarity with their respective theatre conventions, training "in the practice of theatre," as well as sensitivity "to the vocal idiosyncrasies of both languages, of their inherent rhythms, patterns and stress" (2).

Despite the elusiveness of the term – which remains, like many others in this area of translation studies, ill-defined and controversial (Bassnett has rejected it as "a term that has no credibility" and that merely "allows the translator to take greater liberties with the text than many might deem acceptable" – "Still Trapped" 95) – performability, alongside cultural acceptability, seems central to most current discussions of theatre translation, which are now decidedly performance-, as well as target-oriented, and much more concerned with issues pertaining to the "cultural relocation" (Hale and Upton) of the playtext through both interlingual and intersemiotic translation than with source-related aspects. They also tend to be more systematic and integrative, proposing all-encompassing methodologies that attempt to subsume "all significant historical views on translation and theatre" into "a single approach" (Morini 73), which is then put to the test through analyses of selected stage translations. Two relevant examples of the current trend are Morini's recent monograph, *Theatre Translation: Theory and Practice* (2022) and Brazilian translator José Roberto O'Shea's contribution to the collective volume *Translating Shakespeare for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Rui Carvalho Homem and Ton Hoenselaars (2004), "From Printed Text to Performance Text: Brazilian Translations of Shakespearean Drama."

Morini defines theatre translation as "the recreation (*any* recreation) of a theatrical event in a different language," which happens "on all textual and performative planes" (69) and involves collaboration among all participants in the production of the "target theatre act" (70). His model focuses on the end product and appropriates Roman Jakobson's well-known triadic division of translation ("interlingual," "intralingual" and "intersemiotic"), to which he adds a fourth level ("intra-/ intersemiotic"), to describe the successive steps in the "complex, collaborative process of transformation" (72) from source text to target

performance. By this, he is actually doing little more than replacing theatre terminology – which he blames for the "terminological confusion" and the "sense of despairing complexity felt by the early theorists" (72) – with the more familiar jargon of translation theory, rethinking the transformative processes commonly known as "adaptation," "mise-en-scène," "production" as different kinds of translation, all of which contribute in equal measure to the target theatre act.

The model proposed by O'Shea is more convincing – perhaps because his approach is based on years of practical experience as a translator of Shakespeare into Brazilian Portuguese – and even more comprehensive than Morini's, which it predates by almost twenty years. Drawing both on his direct observation as a practitioner and on various "working definitions of drama, theatre, translation, and theatre translation" (145), particularly on the typological model put forth by Pavis in *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* (1992/ trans. 1995), O'Shea defines "translation, in general, as a creative hermeneutic process: an interpretative intellectual activity characterised by reading, rereading, researching, testing, adapting, writing, rewriting" (147) and theatre as "spoken language signifying side by side visual, aural, and sensorial language, by means of actors, space, movement, props, light, music, and the complex interrelations among these, all coming to fruition in reception" (146-147). Using Pavis's "series of concretisations" (a concept borrowed from Roman Ingarden), O'Shea's account of the "transformations of a dramatic text, from original (T0), to literary translation (T1), to dramaturgy (T2), to performance text (T3), and finally to reception (T4)" (149) emphasizes the role of the audience and the (re)creative, as well as collaborative, nature of the whole enterprise.

Both theoretical and methodological models, for all their totalizing, integrative ambitions, fail to provide a full account of what a target-oriented theatre translation entails on the translator's part in terms of required competencies, experience, knowledge, familiarity with the production concept, the cast, the director's artistic vision and the envisaged audience response, as well as the extent to which the translator is actually involved in the "intersemiotic" and "intrasemiotic" (in Morini's borrowed terminology) stages of the process or, in O'Shea's (also

borrowed) terms, in the third "concretisation" of the text. What is missing from Morini's model is obviously the reception of the end product by a target audience, not only as the necessary validation of a translation's efficacy, but also as a decisive factor at every stage of the process, from interlingual to inter- and intrasemiotic translation, since textual, dramaturgical and theatrical strategies are ultimately guided by what is known or assumed about the prospective audience's expectations, cultural (and other kinds of) competence and ever-changing tastes. Conversely, the model proposed by O'Shea, which aptly includes the "text's 'receptive' or 'recipient' concretisation" (151) as the last stage in the "creative hermeneutic process" (147) the original text undergoes before it arrives "at its end point, at the spectator, who . . . in the final analysis, establishes [its] use and meaning" (151-152), seems too inclusive, in that it fails to discriminate between very different kinds of "interpretative activity" (147) taking place in each stage of the process. Also, viewing theatre translation as a collaborative enterprise and focusing on the end product (i.e. the theatrical performance), which therefore "belongs as much to the textual translator as it does to the directors, the actors and all the other participants in the transaction" (Morini 72), both end up blurring the boundaries between the different types of "transformative processes" (72) involved in the "recreation of a theatrical event in a different language" (69) – by subsuming all within a redefined and broadened concept of translation – and thus leave the proper province of the translator (regarded as only part of the picture) only partly explored.

## Towards a Functionalist Approach to Drama Translation

The theoretical perspective that seems to have the potential to remedy such failures by completing the performance-oriented models with a pragmatic account of what a theatre translator is called upon to do and how one goes about accomplishing the task she's been assigned according to the purpose(s) of the translation in the context of its reception is provided by the functionalist paradigm, which has been gaining wider currency in Translation Studies ever since the publication of Christiane Nord's English translation of Vermeer and Reiss's study *Towards a General*

*Theory of Translational Action* (1984, trans. 1997). "Functionalism" mainly refers to a group of theories, hypotheses and approaches to translation that share an underlying set of principles and a common starting point: the idea advanced by Hans Vermeer in 1978 that "translation, because it is an action, always presupposes a *Skopos* and is directed by a *Skopos*" (228) – a Greek word for "purpose" which he introduced as a technical neologism and has become (despite many alternative terms being used) the "company logo" (Pym 45). This revolutionary insight triggered nothing less than a change of paradigm in translation theory, for it shifted the focus from the source text and principles of equivalence to the purpose of the target text in the context of its reception and principles of functionality. According to the "*Skopos* rule" formulated by Vermeer, "the dominant factor of each translation is its purpose" (Reiss and Vermeer qtd. in Pym 44), and the purpose or intended function of the target text need not be identical with the purpose or intended function of the source text – in fact, Vermeer argues that such identity (which he calls "functional constancy") is "the exception rather than the rule" (Vermeer 228). Thus, each change of *Skopos* will determine a different translation of the same source text because the way one translates does not depend on the type of text one is translating (and not even on its original function), but on the purpose the target text is designed to achieve. There seems to be little agreement, however, among the proponents of functionalism on the question of who decides what that purpose is – if the decision lies with the translator, the client or the end-user – but most of them (especially in the more recent, pragmatic contributions by Nord or Daniel Gouadec) have emphasized the importance of the client's instructions, which they variously term "commission" (Vermeer), "translation brief" (Nord) or "job specifications" (Gouadec). These should be as complete as possible – providing, apart from "function information" (intended function, readership profile, required quality, etc.), any relevant material that should help the translator carry out the task according to the given commission (glossaries, parallel texts, previous translations, contacts with experts in the field) – and negotiated with the translator in an "elaborate 'pre-translation' phase" (Pym 59).

Applied to drama translation – whether intended for the page (a new edition of Shakespeare's complete works, for example) or for the stage (a projected performance of a Shakespeare play, for instance) – the functionalist paradigm integrated with the performance-centred, target-oriented, collaborative models discussed in the first part of this article, should yield a working methodology not only for new academic research in the field, but also for the practice of theatre translation itself, by offering a set of guidelines for both translators and theatre professionals or editors (as clients taking on the responsibility of defining the *Skopos* of a translation and of providing the translator with a detailed "translation brief") to follow as they collaborate on a theatrical or editorial project. In what follows I will attempt to test out the proposed methodology by looking back on my own work as a translator of Shakespeare into Romanian and comparing my two different versions of *Romeo and Juliet* (for a theatrical performance and for the latest edition of Shakespeare's complete works) as translation projects undertaken and carried out with distinct purposes in view.

## Translating *Romeo and Juliet* for the Stage (2013)

The translation of *Romeo and Juliet* for a student performance in 2013 – which I now look upon as my "apprenticeship" in the craft of translation – was commissioned by the Drama Department at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu at the request of the appointed director of the prospective stage production, which was to premiere on February 14 and to participate, later that year, in the International Shakespeare Festival in Essen, Germany, but turned out so successful that it was included in the FITS programme that same year and, after winning two international student awards, in Minsk (2014) and Moscow (2015), made it into the repertoire of the "Radu Stanca" National Theatre of Sibiu, with regular runs from 2015 to 2018. At the outset, my brief was quite simply to produce a performable, linguistically updated and culturally acceptable Romanian version of the play that should, at the same time, observe the overriding principle of semantic and dynamic equivalence with the source text. While both updating the language and making the necessary adjustments to facilitate

comprehension or to prevent wrong cultural associations seemed rather straightforward, since (being a teacher) I was familiar with the audience profile (young and fairly educated, broad-minded but not sophisticated, clever but not well-read), I struggled with the notion of a "performable" target text, which seemed to me (at the time) a very fuzzy concept indeed. Working to a tight deadline, director, cast and translator formed a close-knit team, pulling together in a common effort to harmonize our different readings of the text and to reach a consensus as to what made a translated text performable: since there was no time for a "pre-translation phase" of discussion and negotiation or for a step-by-step progression from source text to target performance (from textual to stage "concretisation" / from "interlingual" to "intrasemiotic" translation), we tested passages of translated text for fluency and easiness of utterance (i.e. "speakability"/ "breathability") in cold readings, for memorability of lines and translatability of words into gestures (i.e. "actability"/"playability") in rehearsals, making adjustments as we moved forward on all levels of interpretation and transformation at once. Also, the intralingual phase (or "dramaturgical concretisation") preceded the interlingual translation, the director having already made the textual cuts and necessary adjustments for a cast of eleven and less than "two hours' traffic of [their] stage" before handing the text over to me.

At the level of "textual concretisation (T1)," performability can be achieved by focusing on the aural features of the text: rhythm, rhyme schemes, the sound of words in utterance, meaningful or merely euphonious repetitions of sounds (alliteration, assonance). At the same time, to facilitate memorisation, a simplification of convoluted syntax might also be necessary, especially in verse translation, where a long sentence may sprawl over three or four lines, in successive enjambments which notoriously impede memorisation. For example, my solutions for Mercutio's Queen Mab monologue – an extremely difficult speech to memorise and to deliver convincingly – were a straightforward syntax, a familiar vocabulary, and the rhymed iambic pentameter. My decision to add rhyme to one of the most impressive speeches in the play was dictated by two of the main requirements of the "translation brief": performability, which was considerably enhanced by a mnemonic trick (rhymed poetry is

much easier to remember than unrhymed verse) that also imparted musicality to the lines, and dynamic equivalence (the speech had to be perceived as highly poetic by a target audience that traditionally associates poetry with rhyme):

> MERCUTIO: Atunci, stimate domn,
> Te-a vizitat Regina Mab în somn.
> E moașa zânelor și se arată
> Așa de mică precum o agată
> Purtată pe un deget de-un vătaf.
> Trasă de niște fire mici de praf,
> Caleașca ei pe nasuri adormite
> Se-așază: are spițe făurite
> Din gambe de păianjeni; coviltir
> Din aripi de cosaș; frâie din fir
> Din cea mai fină pânză. . . . (I.4.53-63)

A translator, as closely as she may collaborate with the production team, mainly works at the level of textual concretisation/inter-linguistic translation, taking the director's suggestions into consideration and acting on the actors' feedback. But even without such input, one already anticipates some elements of the intersemiotic transfer, for the "gestic subtext" of drama is not really as "concealed" and difficult to "extract" as Bassnett would have it – even less so in Shakespearean plays, where stage directions are sparse and Elizabethan actors (who mostly directed themselves), company managers and playwrights were certainly not trained in the art of "gestic reading" or in that of directing – but often clearly there, ready to be turned into action. The more challenging problem it poses, however, stems from the culture-bound nature of gestures, which have to be transferred not just from one semiotic system to another (from linguistic expression into action), but also from one cultural context (that of the source text's production) to another (that of its reception in the target language). Arguably the most significant, impactful gesture in *Romeo and Juliet* – the one that triggers the first street brawl between the "two households" – is the apparently inconsequential "biting of the thumb" in the opening scene: Abraham (servant to Montague) takes offence at Sampson (servant to Capulet)'s gesture, which is implied in the exchange "Do you bite your thumb at us, sir? / No, sir, I do not bite my

thumb at you, sir, but I bite my thumb, sir" (I.1. 44, 47). A literal textual translation of this would be meaningless to the 21st-century Romanian reader and, even in English, the annotated, authoritative editions of the play provide it with a footnote: "to mock by . . . putting the thumbnail into the mouth and with a jerk (from the upper teeth) make it to knack (that is pop)" (Weis 127). The Romanian idiom "*a da cu tifla*" approximates the meaning of the English phrase – being mainly used connotatively, to suggest a dismissive, somewhat insulting attitude to someone or something – but, translated into action (by placing one's thumb on the tip of one's nose, with the other fingers outspread and pointing upwards), the gesture would at best suggest an innocent, childish quarrel between playmates mocking each other or just acting silly, considerably losing the offensive potential, as well as the obscene import of the original. For the purpose of a performance mainly addressed to young, not-so-easily shocked 21st-century audiences, I proposed the phrase "*a arăta degetul*" (i.e. "to give someone the finger") as a culturally adequate, as well as effective (in the literal sense of eliciting the proper audience-response) solution, which was (quite predictably) enthusiastically embraced by both cast and director.

If the requirements for cultural acceptability and performability entailed a reasonable degree of adaptation in the context of the target text's reception through the medium of a theatrical production, such translational adjustments would hardly be acceptable in a target text meant for publication in a philological edition, whose *Skopos* is usually "fidelity" to the source text on all levels of equivalence. The instantly (and internationally) recognizable gesture that proved to be an effective solution for the student performance would constitute a glaring anachronism if inserted in an otherwise faithful rendering of the "sacrosanct source text" (although the middle finger gesture seems to have originated in ancient Greece, it was rarely used in the 16th century, having fallen into disgrace during the Middle Ages, probably due to its sexual suggestiveness) and prosodic changes – such as adding rhyme to a monologue originally in blank verse – would be deemed unacceptable. The translation brief for a 21st-century annotated edition of Shakespeare's complete works includes a very different set of requirements, which entail

significantly distinct translatorial strategies and solutions, as the following section attempts to show.

## Retranslating *Romeo and Juliet* for Both Page and Stage (2018)

The commission for the editorial project known as *Shakespeare for the Third Millennium* came three years later – following my participation in a series of translation workshops within the international conference "A Great Feast of Languages," co-organised by the British Centre for Literary Translation and Globe Education in Cologne (Germany, 2016) – from the leader of the Romanian team of translators and coordinator of the said project, Professor George Volceanov. Intended for both the literature student and the general reader, for both the Shakespeare scholar and the theatre professional, the new edition of complete works had a twofold *Skopos*, as well as an elaborate set of requirements, laid down by the project coordinator, in full agreement with all members of the team:

> 1) Retranslations must be carried out in *a modern, up-to-date, accessible language* – therefore, we should break with the tradition of using archaisms of Turkish, Greek or Slavic origin . . . and favour Latinate terms instead;
> 2) Retranslations must be *depoliticized and "de-bowdlerized"* – i.e. they must bring to the fore the obscene, bawdy aspects of Shakespeare's language, which have been glossed over or concealed by previous generations of translators . . .;
> 3) Retranslations are intended primarily for *theatre professionals, actors and directors* . . . - therefore, they must strive to achieve euphony, avoid cacophony, . . . preserve the natural flow of verse, straightforward syntax, . . . in other words, they must take the *principle of performability* into account;
> 4) Retranslations must observe *the "stringency principle"* formulated in the 19th century by Tieck and Schlegel, namely that prose texts should be translated as prose, rhymed verse as rhymed verse and blank verse as blank verse; they must also observe the principle established by Leon Levițchi . . ... that *a Romanian translation of 100 English lines must not exceed 107 lines* (allowing for no more than 7% leeway, which stems from the polysyllabic nature of our vocabulary);
> 5) Retranslations must be based on the *latest and most authoritative British critical editions* – The Arden Shakespeare, Oxford Shakespeare, New Cambridge or New Penguin Shakespeare.
>
> (Adapted from Volceanov 56-57, my emphasis)

Retranslating a canonical text in the 21st century already implied a different approach to the process, for a *re*-translation is not merely a new translation of a source text that has already been translated into a given target language, but – as it is now widely agreed among both theorists and practitioners – "a way of thinking about translation" (Samoyault qtd. in Amaral 245) and a specific "manner" of translating, which necessarily includes a "critical dimension" (Amaral 245). Not only were there six previous Romanian versions of *Romeo and Juliet* (from 1882, 1922, 1945, 1960, 1984, and 2009), but there was also my own translation for the stage that I had to contend with. Of the earlier published translations of the play, Romanian poets Ștefan Octavian Iosif's (1945) and Virgil Teodorescu's (1984) versions are generally regarded as the most accomplished – both fairly faithful to the source text and often highly poetic – but today both sound outdated (rife with archaisms, obsolete word forms and unnatural syntax), can hardly be staged without considerable adaptation, and the vulgar, obscene overtones of many Shakespearean puns are almost completely lost in translation. The very *raison d'etre* of any retranslation (i.e. the need for linguistic and cultural updating), as well as the specific requirements of the translation brief demanded that our approach to the task and our solutions to various translation problems should look both forward – to the younger generation of readers, actors, and spectators – and, with a critical eye, back to the previous translations, against which our version was to be judged and whose flaws it sought to remedy.

Thus, the latest Romanian version of *Romeo and Juliet*, published in volume 13 of *William Shakespeare's Complete Works* in 2018, is based on the most recent Arden Shakespeare edition of the text (2016), edited by René Weis from the original Quarto and Folio editions, provided with an exhaustive introduction, with commentary and textual notes on each page of the play, including not just glossarial explanations, but also discussions of editorial emendations, alternative readings, and other verbal or interpretive difficulties, all of which have been carefully studied and instrumental in tackling translation problems. The stringency principle has been thoroughly observed throughout, both in terms of prosody (which ranges from sonnet to prose, from blank verse to rhyming couplets, in strict adherence to the form of the source text) and with regard to

Levițchi's 7% limit: to exemplify, the ST-TT length (number of lines) ratio for Mercutio's Queen Mab monologue (1.4.53-94) is 43:44, for Act 2, Scene 2 (entirely in heroic couplets) 90:90, for Juliet's farewell soliloquy (4.3.14-58) 46:48, for Friar Laurence's harangue of Romeo in Act 3, Scene 1 (the longest speech in the play) 51:54.

Delayed in its progress from page to stage by the Covid pandemic, which virtually froze theatrical activity for almost two years, our scholarly translation of *Romeo and Juliet* has recently passed the performability test as well, in a compelling stage production which premiered, to great acclaim, on December 17, 2022, at the "Mihai Eminescu" National Theatre in Chișinău (Moldova). The play has already been presented to the Moldavian public nine times since its premiere, to a full house, eliciting positive reactions and glowing reviews, one of which remarks on the "exceptional linguistic and stylistic craftsmanship of the translation" (Pilchin). In June this year, the production was invited to participate in the 30th edition of the Sibiu International Theatre Festival, where it received standing ovations from a competent, but also generous audience.

The first two requirements of the translation brief – for linguistic up-to-dateness and for de-bowdlerization – were perhaps the most difficult to fulfil for two main reasons: 1) there is always the risk of tipping over from modernisation into exaggeration by including widely used, but dissonant anglicisms such as "VIP," "broker" or "tsunami" (Volceanov 59-60), which are both inappropriate and unnecessary (for there is usually a modern Romanian equivalent for the concept); and 2) much of Shakespeare's verbal humour proceeds from witty wordplay – puns, double entendres, malapropisms – and most of these allude to sex or sexual organs. Notoriously difficult to translate (as so much recent scholarship has shown, eager to dismiss all attempts at capturing their double meanings as dismal failures), bawdy puns have often been glossed over in previous Romanian translations or rendered innocuous by ideological censorship and prudish translators. Three different Romanian versions of the opening scene (a glorious sample of Shakespearean wit and punning humour), placed side by side in the following table, will illustrate how our retranslation has improved on the previous, 20th-century translations, whose outdated vocabulary and "demure" renderings

of ribald puns make the jokes almost incomprehensible to the 21st-century Romanian reader, let alone spectator. The archaic words and obsolete inflectional forms are marked by asterisks and back-translations of the solutions provided by each translator for bawdy puns and dialogic wordplay are given in brackets:

| **Shakespeare** | **Ștefan Octavian Iosif (1945)** | **Virgil Teodorescu (1984)** | **A. Ignat and A. M. Călin (2018)** |
|---|---|---|---|
| SAMSON: Gregory, on my word, we'll not **carry coals.** GREGORY: No, for then we should be **colliers.** SAMSON: I mean, an we be in **choler**, we'll draw. GREGORY: Ay, while you live, draw your neck out of **collar**. SAMSON: I strike quickly being moved. | SAMSON: Pe legea mea, Gregorio, să nu le mai permitem să ne ia de sus. [we *won't let them look down on us*]. GREGORIO: Nu, firește, căci am rămânea* jos [*for then, we would stay down*]. SAMSON: Vreau să spun că dacă ne-or mai lua la vale [*if they make fun of us*], să ne ținem la înălțime [*we'll rise to the occasion*]. GREGORIO: Da, numai bagă de seamă să nu ajungi la înălțimea furcilor [*beware lest you rise to the height of a pitchfork*]. SAMSON: Eu, când mă scoate cineva din țâțâni [*if someone* | SAMSON: Nu, Gregory! Pe ce-am mai scump, n-o să le îngăduim să ne ia în râs [*we won't let them mock us*]. Să nu te lași! [*Do not cower!*] GREGORY: Păi cum! Altfel am fi lași. [*for then we would be cowards* (homonymic pun in TL)]. SAMSON: Vom trage spada, nu-i așa? – de-or cuteza să ne scurteze rangul. [*We'll draw our swords . . . if they dare downgrade us*]. GREGORY: Firește, însă ia aminte, prea sus fiind să nu ne-ajungă ștreangul. *[beware, being too high up, lest we reach the noose* (SL pun replaced by | SAMSON: Pe legea mea, nu ne vom lăsa înjosiți. [*we won't let them abase us*] GREGORY: Păi, nu, c-atunci s-ar chema că suntem josnici. [*No, for then we would be base*] SAMSON: Adică, dacă ne înfurie, scoatem sabia. [*if they anger us, we'll draw*] GREGORY: Mai bine-ai face, cât trăiești, să-ți scoți gâtul din funie. [*While you live, you'd better draw your neck out of the rope (paronymic pun:* [în]furie-funie)] SAMSON: Eu sar iute la bătaie de mă stârnește careva. [*I'm quick to strike, if I'm provoked*] |

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| GREGORY: But thou art not quickly moved to strike.<br>SAMSON: A dog of the house of Montague moves me.<br>GREGORY: To move is to stir, and to be valiant is to stand; therefore, if thou art moved, thou runn'st away.<br>SAMSON: A dog of that house shall move me to stand. I will **take the wall** of any man or maid of Montague's.<br>GREGORY: That shows thee a weak slave, for **the weakest goes to the wall**. | *drives me off my hinge*], nu știu multe [(literally) *I don't know much/* (figurative meaning) *I hit back*].<br>GREGORIO: Și eu nu știu multe care să te scoată din țâțâni. *[I don't know much that drives you off your hinge]*<br>SAMSON: O javră din casa Montague mă scoate din țâțâni.<br>GREGORIO: A scoate din țâțâni înseamnă a urni din loc; dar viteazul stă locului. De aceea, pesemne, când tu ești scos din țâțâni, nimeni nu se mai poate ține de tine.<br>SAMSON: O javră din casa Montague are să mă țină locului! Am să dau de zid pe toți bărbații și pe toate femeile din casa Montague. [*I will push all men and all women of the house of Montague against the wall*]<br>GREGORIO: Atunci ești un om slab, că | rhyming words)].<br>SAMSON: Când mă-ntărât, nu stau pe gânduri, dau! [*When I'm provoked, I don't hesitate, I strike*]<br>GREGORY: Dar stai pe gânduri până te-ntărâți. [*But you hesitate before you are provoked*]<br>SAMSON: Javrele lui Montague mă-ntărâtă peste măsură.<br>GREGORY: Când te-aprinzi îți arde pământul sub picioare; când ești viteaz nu dai îndărăt. Se vede că de-aceea când te-aprinzi, tu o iei la fugă.<br>SAMSON: Când mă întărâtă vreo javră de-a lui Montague nu dau îndărăt. Am să dau de zid cu toți bărbații și cu toate femeile lui Montague. [*I will push all of Montague's men and women against the wall*].<br>GREGORY: Ai da dovadă de neputință. Numai cei neputincioși se dau pe lângă zid. [*Only the | GREGORY: Dar nu ești ușor de stârnit la bătaie. [*But you're not easily provoked*]<br>SAMSON: O javră dintr-ăi de-l servesc pe Montague sigur mă va stârni.<br>GREGORY: Să fii stârnit înseamnă să te urnești, iar vitejia înseamnă să fii de neclintit. Rezultă că tu, când ești sârnit, o iei la fugă.<br>SAMSON: O javră din clanul ălora mă va stârni să stau neclintit. Am curajul să merg în fața oricui din casa Montague, bărbat ori femeie. [*I have the guts to walk ahead of any man or woman of the house of Montague*]<br>GREGORY: Asta te-njosește și mai tare, căci ăi mai slabi se lasă luați pe la spate. [*That would abase you even more, for the weakest let themselves be taken from behind*] |

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| SAMSON: 'Tis true, and therefore women, being the weaker vessels, are ever **thrust to the wall**; therefore I will push Montague's men from the wall and **thrust his maids to the wall.** | numai cei slabi se dau pe lângă ziduri. [*Then you are a weak man, for only the weak walk close to the wall*] SAMSON: Ai dreptate și de aceea femeile, care sunt vase de lut ce se sparg lesne* [*women, who are earthen vessels that break easily*], totdeauna-s date la zid [*are always pushed to the wall*]. De aceea am să arunc peste zid pe bărbați și am să îndes în ziduri pe femei. [*Therefore, I will throw the men over the wall and thrust the women to the wall*]. | *weak keep close to the wall*]. SAMSON: Ai dreptate. De aceea femeile, vase gingașe [*women, being delicate vessels*], sunt împinse mereu spre zid [*are always pushed towards the wall*]. Așadar voi alunga de lângă zid pe toți bărbații lui Montague, iar pe femei le voi înghesui în zid. [*Therefore, I will chase Montague's men away from the wall and push his women to the wall*] | SAMSON: Așa e, de aceea, femeile, fiind făpturi mai slabe [*women, being weaker creatures*], sunt mereu luate pe la spate [*are always taken from behind*]. Așa că eu voi merge în fața bărbaților care-l servesc pe Montague, iar pe fete le voi lua pe la spate. [*Therefore I'll walk ahead of Montague's men and I'll take the maids from behind*] |
| GREGORY: The quarrel is between our masters and us their men. | GREGORIO: Cearta e între domnii noștri și între noi, slugile. | GREGORY: Vrajba s-a iscat între stăpâni și între noi, slujitorii. | GREGORY: Răfuiala-i între stăpânii noștri și între noi, bărbații. |
| SAMSON: 'Tis all one. I will show myself a tyrant: when I have fought with the men, I will be civil with the maids, I will **cut off their heads.** | SAMSON: Ce-mi pasă! Am să fiu neom și, după ce-oi da gata pe bărbați, mă leg de fete [*when I've done away with the men, I'll come on to the maids*]. Are să fie vai și amar de pielea lor! | SAMSON: Mi-e totuna. Cu mine și-au găsit beleaua. După ce-oi sfârși cu bărbații, le viu* de hac fetelor. Am să le retez țeasta. [*When I'm done with the men, I'll go for the women. I'll cut off their skulls/shells* (polysemic pun)]. | SAMSON: E totuna. Am să mă port ca un tiran: după ce mă bat cu bărbații, voi fi galant cu fecioarele și-o să le crăp țestele. [*when I have fought with the men, I will be courteous with the maids and break their skulls/shells* (polysemic pun)] |

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| GREGORY: The **heads of the maids?** | [(literally) *Woe betide their skin!*]. GREGORIO: De pielea fetelor? [*The skin of the maids?*] | GREGORY: Țeasta fetelor? [*The skulls of the maids?*] | GREGORY: Țestele fecioarelor? [*The skulls of the maids?*] |
| SAMSON: Ay, the **heads of the maids**, or their **maidenheads**, take it in what sense thou wilt. | SAMSON: De pielea fetelor ori de fetia* lor. Totuna-i! [*the skin of the maids or their maidenhead*] | SAMSON: Da, țeasta fetelor sau a fetiei* lor. Înțelege cum vrei. [*the skulls/shells* (polysemic pun) *of the maids or of their maidenhood*] | SAMSON: Da, țestele fecioarelor sau țeasta fecioriei lor, ia-o cum vrei. [*the skulls of the maids or the shell of their maidenhood*] |
| GREGORY: They must **take it** in the sense that **feel it**. | GREGORIO: Nu-i totuna pentru cine-o s-o pață*. | GREGORY: Cele ce-or pătimi au să-nțeleagă mai bine. | GREGORY: Ba ele o vor lua, fix acolo unde-o vor simți. |
| SAMSON: Me they shall feel while I am able to **stand**, and 'tis known I am a pretty **piece of flesh.** | SAMSON: O, au s-o pață* cu mine, n-ai tu grijă. Știi că sunt un om și jumătate! [(literally) *I'm a man and a half/* (figurative meaning) *I'm one hell of a man*] | SAMSON: Pătimesc ele! N-avea grijă! Mi s-a dus vestea că-s flăcău zdravăn. [*I'm a stout fellow*] | SAMSON: Bărbăția mea o vor simți, cât timp mă țin tare, și știe toată lumea ce bucată bună de carne sunt. [*everyone knows what a fine piece of flesh I am*] |
| GREGORY: 'Tis well thou art not a fish; if thou hadst, thou hadst been poor john. **Draw thy tool**, here comes of the house of Montagues. […] | GREGORIO: Tot e bine că nu ești o jumătate de om! [*It is good you're not half a man*] Scoate spanga*, [*Draw your sword*] uite că vin doi de-ai lui Montague. […] | GREGORY: Ferice de tine că nu te-ai născut pește. Ai fi fost batog afumat. [*Thank God you weren't born a fish. You would have been stockfish*]. Trage spada! [*Draw your sword!*] Vin încoace doi de-ai lui Montague. […] | GREGORY: Bine că nu de pește, c-atunci ai fi fost o scrumbie afumată. [*It is good you're not a piece of fish, for then you would have been a smoked mackerel*] Scoate-ți scula [*Pull out your tool/ dick* (polysemic pun)], că vin câțiva dintr-ai lui |
| SAMSON: **My naked weapon is out**. Quarrel, I will back thee. (1.1.1-32) | SAMSON: Gata! [*I'm ready!*] Începe tu sfada*, eu te apăr din dos. | SAMSON: Am tras spada! [*My sword is out!*] Dă-i drumul! Eu ți-acopăr spatele. | |

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| | | | Montague. […] SAMSON: Mi-e arma despuiată și gata de atac [*My naked weapon is out and ready to fight]*. Provoacă-i la ceartă, că-ți țin eu spatele. |

An apt beginning for "one of the bawdiest of Shakespeare's plays, riddled with sexual puns, double meanings, and bawdy innuendo" (Wells 184), the colloquial exchange between Samson and Gregory bristles with ribald wordplay, from obvious *double entendres* that still sound familiar (like "tool" and "weapon" at the end of the dialogue) to more obscure sexual allusions that would be completely lost on us today without the help of the textual notes provided by authoritative editions and of glossaries of Shakespearean bawdy. Thus, the clownish banter starts with a rather elaborate play on words featuring an idiomatic phrase ("to carry coals"), which might have had "a sexual undertone" – as the footnote in the latest Arden edition suggests, based on "its association with 'privy lodging' and sex in John Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*: 'To see her in the shameful act of sin . . . with some strong-thighed bargeman . . . or else some lovely squire / That *carries coals* up to her privy lodgings' (2.5.41-5)" (124; my emphasis) – but to most Elizabethans meant to do the dirty work "performed by the lowest servants" and, by extension, "to put up with being humiliated" (Keeble 12), followed by a succession of near homophones with different meanings ("colliers," "choler," "collar"), the first being a derivative of "coal" which both reinforces the implication of social inferiority and suggests dishonesty, since "colliers had a bad reputation for cheating in Shakespeare's time" (Weis 124). Iosif's version uses antonymy ("*sus*" – "*jos*") in a failed attempt at meaningful wordplay, for only the first verb phrase ("*să ne ia de sus*") approximates the drift of Samson's line, while Gregory's reply neither completes nor develops the idea. Teodorescu's solution is too creative, for he renders the non-punning wordplay by a homonymic pun ("*să nu te lași*" – "*am fi lași*") whose meanings stray rather liberally from the original. Our translation comes

very close to reproducing the pattern of the SL wordplay, using two derivatives of the same word ("*înjosiți*" – "*josnici*") and manages to preserve the meanings almost intact. For the homophonic pun "choler"/ "collar," the previous translators came up with stylistically ingenious, adaptive solutions (such as using rhyme instead of homophony, in Teodorescu's version), but what gets lost in the process is precisely that which these strategies are designed to rescue, i.e. meaning: the import of "choler" (i.e. anger) is nowhere to be found in their renditions. We opted for the more straightforward solution offered by the paronymic pair "*furie*" – "*funie*," which literally mean anger and rope, respectively, in keeping with the principle of semantic and stylistic equivalence.

The wordplay on "wall" – which takes on different meanings in three idiomatic or proverbial expressions – poses a greater challenge to the translator, for idioms and proverbs are often also culturemes. Thus, both Samson's vaunt that he will "take the wall of any man or maid of Montague's" and Gregory's cutting rejoinder that "the weakest goes to the wall" are culture-bound, originating in (and therefore referring to or recalling) particular social customs: taking the wall simply meant walking along the cleanest side of the path, "the one closest to the wall and furthest from the gutter," and was therefore "an assertion of superiority or contempt" (Weis 125), while the proverb cited by Gregory means that "the less powerful are pushed aside by the stronger" (Keeble 12) and may have derived from the arrangement of seating in medieval churches (i.e. around the walls) for the elderly and the infirm, while the rest of the congregation would stand (Pickering 284). In both Teodorescu's and Iosif's renditions, Samson's insulting, but empty (and physically harmless) bravado becomes a threat of violence ("*am să dau de zid cu toți . . .*" – i.e. I will push all . . . against the wall), while the proverb is completely emptied of popular wisdom (i.e. of its figurative meaning), conjuring up, instead, the image of a scabby cat or dog rubbing against walls ("*cei slabi/neputincioși se dau pe lângă ziduri/zid*" – i.e. only the weak/helpless keep close to the wall). Far from discouraged by Gregory's snubbing repartee and picking up on his mention of "the weakest," Samson turns their play on words into something "more sinister than mere social provocation" (Weis 125), in several bawdy quips that allude to sex, rape,

defloration and beheading, interspersed with *double entendres* that conflate "weapons of war . . . with penises" (Belsey 63). In our translation of the scene, this transition from social arrogance to sexual bragging is signalled by Gregory's double-edged remark that "*ăi mai slabi se lasă luați pe la spate*" (i.e. the weakest let themselves be taken from behind), implying both martial (i.e. attacked from behind) and sexual (i.e. penetrated from behind) vulnerability, which prompts Samson's misogynistic joke about women being "ever thrust to the wall" and his resolve to "push Montague's men *from* the wall and thrust his maids *to* the wall" (my emphasis). The antonymic play ("from the wall/to the wall") is preserved in our rendition of Samson's line ("*în fața/pe la spate*" – i.e. ahead of/ from behind), which reiterates his determination to assert social superiority over Montague's men (historically, in our culture, walking ahead of someone rather than closer to the wall would more clearly indicate ascendancy) and advertises his masculinist fantasies.

The rest of their conversation – which, according to Gordon Williams (*Shakespeare's Sexual Language: A Glossary*), "provides the earliest confusing of decapitation with defloration" (200) in Samson's lurid boast that he "will cut off . . . the heads of the maids or their maidenheads" – regales the groundlings with an overdose of ribald puns. While Iosif's version misses the mark with its play on the word "*piele*" (skin) – which is, indeed, used metaphorically in various colloquial phrases to mean one's life or one's wellbeing, but in Romanian slang it usually refers to male, rather than female sexual anatomy (i.e. the foreskin, rather than the hymen) – Teodorescu's solution, with its pun on "țeastă" (which means both skull/head and shell/shield) was adequate, but needed linguistic updating and slight improvements (the verb "*a crăpa*," i.e. to break, collocates more naturally with "*țeastă*" and is a clearer allusion to defloration than "*a reteza*," i.e. to cut off). Both, however, chose to gloss over the sexual innuendoes in "take," "feel," "stand," "piece of flesh," "tool" and "naked weapon," which our translation has adequately restored, using equivalent polysemic puns ("*a o lua*," "*a o simți*," "*a se ține tare*," "*bucată de carne*," "*scula*," "*arma despuiată*").

While the perceived difficulty of translating drama stems from the duality inherent in its very nature – as late 20th-century scholarship has

shown, focusing on those particularities of the dramatic text that make the translator's task more challenging than other genres, further complicated by recent, performance-oriented theoretical work advocating more integrative, collaborative methodologies – the functionalist model might bring some clarity into this ever-expanding, but still nebulous area of research. In drama translation practice, the approach could alleviate the burden placed on the translators' shoulders by unrealistic criteria of equivalence or vaguely defined ideals of "stageworthiness," by focusing instead on the purpose of the target text and circumscribing their responsibility within the boundaries of a clearly defined translation brief. My practical experience as (re)translator of *Romeo and Juliet* for a student performance and, a few years later, for a scholarly edition of complete works intended for both readers and theatre professionals has revealed that drama translation is (and should be) governed by principles of functionality. Guided by the requirements of my commission, always with the prospective audience in mind and collaborating closely with the production team, I was able to produce a target text that worked effectively on the stage. The twofold *Skopos* of our retranslation within the *Shakespeare for the Third Millennium* project, so thoroughly defined and detailed in a fully-fledged "poetics of the new edition" (Volceanov 56), became considerably less intimidating as we internalised its principles and performed our task carefully following its guidelines. The recent staging of our published version, with minimal dramaturgic/"intralingual" adaptation, confirms its adequacy to the *Skopos* set by the project coordinator, while attesting, once more, to the translators' "loyalty" (in its ethical acceptation as "bilateral" moral responsibility – Nord 115) to both Shakespeare and the 21st-century Romanian reader or theatregoer.

**Notes:**

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[ii] A project of the European Union for cooperation between member states in the field of books and reading, supporting the translation of literary works (1997-1999).

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