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# The translator – a particular stance among men of literature

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*This paper aims at presenting a short history of the first Romanian translations and at analyzing the role of the translator in defining the art of translation. The paper focuses on the first Shakespearean interpretations that appeared in Romania, translations accomplished by Dragoş Protopopescu, one of the greatest Romanian Anglicists of the inter-war period.*

Key-words: *translator, Anglicist, art of interpretation, Shakespeare*

## 1. Introduction

Petre Grimm's study *Traduceri şi imitaţiuni româneşti după literatura engleză (Romanian Translations and Interpretations from the English Literature,* 1923*)* was at the lead of specialists' studies. The author considered that we could not have had high-quality Romanian translations "before the language was enriched and molded by the Romanian poets' generations, by Alexandrescu, Alecsandri and especially Eminescu and his great contemporaries. That is why we do not have satisfactory translations before the end of the last century and the beginning of ours and that is why we cannot judge the texts only aesthetically" [our trans.]. Furthermore, the translator needs to have two more basic, however essential features: complete mastery of his mother tongue and assimilation of the language he translates from "so as to dive as deeply as possible into the writer's spirit, a spirit able to be moved and touched by the same feelings and thoughts and not to spare any effort as to render these in the most refined form as similar as possible to the author's." [our trans.]

## 2. Short history of Romanian translations of Shakespeare

In the article *Shakespeare în tălmăcirea Domnului Dragoş Protopopescu (Shakespeare in Mr. Dragoş Protopopescu's translation,* 1941*),* Perpessicius outlines a brief history of translations into Romanian: "The first mention of

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Shakespeare seems to be that of Shakespeare and Byron" in Heliade's *Curier de ambele sexe (Courier for both sexes)* in 1839, a publication which featured the translations of a fragment from *Conversaţiile lui Goethe si Eckerman despre Shakespeare şi Byron (Goethe and Eckerman's conversations about Shakespeare and Byron)* and the rewriting of that translation in *Foaia pentru minte, inimă şi literatură (The paper for mind, soul and literature),* from Braşov. Bariţiu annexed it to this gloss: "I am wondering if we have reached the age when we need to read Shakespeare, this teacher of emperors and beggars, of nations and individuals" [our trans.].

The writer's dilemma is whether *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* in Ioan Barac's translation comes before or after *Julius Caesar* translated by Captain G. Stoica and published in 1844, in Heliade's typography. This is also the opinion of the historiographer Bogdan Duică, who stated in Barac's monograph: "The other translations cannot be dated, which is a regrettable thing for *Hamlet*". After mentioning them, among which the poetic translation of *"A Midsummer Night's Dream"* by Şt. O. Iosif, Perpessicius advises us to read Dragoş Protopopescu's translation, where "not even a paraphrase could substitute him, even if he had the right to do it, in both substance and brilliance of his axioms, in all the canons of the poetic art of the translator" [our trans.]. The intention expressed with that emotion specific to important confessions had materialized until that very moment in twelve translations and represents an act of culture "which honours both the author, the time and his nation" [our trans.] (Perpessicius 1941, 181).

## 3. The art of translation

For Dragoş Protopopescu, the art of translation was a very special one, founded more on technique than on creation; an art which "demanded some types of creators to be sacrificed on God's altar" [our trans.] as the Romanian Anglicist stated in his course *English Pages* (1925, 12).

The translation of Shakespeare's plays into Romanian could not be achieved by anybody; this was Protopopescu's belief, upon contemplating the ideal translators' fabric: "Any of Shakespeare's translators has to be the greatest of his time. And he may be that, only in agreement with the latest outcomes of Shakespearean science. No other field asked for more sacrifice, as that of translating, more self-abandoning and more of a controlled ego" [our trans.] (Protopopescu 1946, 8). The poet is "the god and the translator of the prophet", so translation is not a re-creation and the translator is the outcome of "circumstances not of gift" [our trans.] (Protopopescu 1946, 8).

Dragoş Protopopescu succeeded in translating the complete work of Shakespeare. Twenty five plays were listed as ready for print on the back cover of *Gramatica vie a limbii engleze 1947 (The live grammar of English language)*:

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*Măsură pentru măsură (Measure for Measure), Comedia amăgirilor (The Comedy of Errors), Mult zgomot pentru nimic (Much Ado About Nothing), Dragoste zadarnică (Love's Labour's Lost), Negustorul din Veneția (The Merchant of Venice), Cum vă place (As You Like It), Totul e bine cand se termină cu bine (All's Well that Ends Well), Regele Lear (King Lear), Richard al II-lea (Richard II), Henric al IV-lea, (partea I), (Henry IV – Part I), Henric al VI-lea (partea I), (Henry VI – Part I), Henric al IV-lea (partea II), (Henry IV – Part II), Henric al VI-lea (partea I), (Henry VI – Part I), Henric al VI-lea (partea II), (Henry VI – Part II), Henric al VI lea (partea III), (Henry VI – Part III), Richard al III-lea (Richard III), Henric al VIII-lea (Henry VIII), Troilus şi Cressida (Troilus and Cressida), Titus Andronicus (Titus Andronicus), Romeo şi Julieta (Romeo and Juliet), Timon din Atena (Timon of Athens), Iulius Cezar (Julius Caesar), Macbeth, Antoniu şi Cleopatra (Antony and Cleopatra), Cymbeline, Pericle (Pericles, Prince of Tyre)*.

Analysing the external difficulties related to the translation of Shakespeare into the Romanian language, from the point of view of its shape and execution, the Romanian Anglicist considers that the translator has to know both "English and Romanian from home" and "any of Shakespeare's translators has to be the greatest of his time" [our trans.] (Protopopescu 1946, 11).

As Dan Grigorescu noticed, Dragoş Protopopescu's translations were "faithful indeed and indubitably made from the English language and not through a European language intermediary" as the author himself kept mentioning.

In 1928, in *Gândirea,* Emanoil Bucuța applauded the translation of *Hamlet:*

> Dragoş Protopopescu achieved great things for the Romanian literature [...]. His translation represents a new, decisive stage in the assimilation of Shakespeare into the Romanian culture, as opposed to the amateurism of random translations. Shakespeare cannot be divided, but wholly embraced. This fact is known by Dragoş Protopopescu. [our trans.] (Bucuța 1928, 373)

Protopopescu had published the translation of many Shakespearean plays, many staged at The National Theatre, others broadcasted on the radio. His knowledge of the Elizabethan period was extensive, particularly due to the many years of courses and seminars he dedicated to this period. He knew every detail of the history of Renaissance in England, having pursued a very thorough bibliographic research.

## 4. Difficulties of interpretation

In order to translate *Hamlet,* Protopopescu confesses that he "needed to change the language after four or five successive editions" and at the moment he thought it was the final form, he discovered the last and the best English edition which appeared

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before Dover Wilson's. The translator had to face many drawbacks because of the continuous mutations of literary Romanian, as well as because of the English language which has "the capacity to assimilate, the elegance of derivates, the direct verbalization of nouns, the inventiveness of auxiliaries and so many other aspects" [our trans.] (Protopopescu 1947, 128). That was the cause of so many changes and transformations, and also everything that the translation method involved. More or less, the same difficulties were encountered while translating *Poveste de iarnă (The Winter's Tale*).

In the preface to the translation made after the tragic story of Hamlet, published both in the collection *Biblioteca pentru toți (Library for all)* and in the *Library of the National Theatre*, Dragoş Protopopescu wrote:

> My translations from Shakespeare are based on the text of the latest and best edition, the so called *The New Cambridge Shakespeare,* due to the nowadays greatest interpreter of Shakespeare, Prof. John Dover Wilson, from Edinburgh University. (Dragoş Protopopescu in the preface to the translation of *Hamlet* on June 1)

The manuscript of *Hamlet* had disappeared. So, the first printout of the text, an in-four, was published under the title *The Tragically History of Hamlet Prince of Denmarke*.

Ever since 1939, in the preface to Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, Dragoş Protopopescu had been announcing a new revised edition of *Hamlet,* based particularly on the results of the researchers' investigations as well as on his own experience as a translator: "my first *Hamlet* could not take advantage of", which happened to be the Anglicist's first translation, made fifteen years before, and performed sometime around 1929, under the first directorship of Liviu Rebreanu, but, without being seen by the translator, who was not in the country at that time.

The last critical edition of the translation of *Hamlet* made by the Romanian Anglicist, "with a complete text and plenty of commentaries", was going to be published, according to him, by the *Royal Foundations*, by the end of 1942. The translator states that his success was due to Liviu Rebreanu, the initiator of the revival, to Mr. Soare, and to the excellent team of the National Theatre headed by the leading actors Vraca and Calboreanu (as well as V. Valentineanu), who "gave such abundant life to the play".

> I thank all these people gratefully. I dedicate this *Hamlet* to Liviu Rebreanu, the initiator of a Romanian language Shakespeare, homage of admiration for the great novelist and gratitude for the one who understands universal writing. The present edition represents the abridged version of the extended one (3924), of the most complicated, most difficult and at the same time the most

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> fascinating and famous of the works of the greatest playwright in the world. [our trans.] (Protopopescu 1942, 2).

The Romanian Anglicist notices hindrances pertaining to form and execution which add up to the general difficulties of the translation, some of which are manifest in the translations of Shakespeare's plays, and others caused by the differences between Romanian and English. Shakespeare's plays are written in blank verse, thus the text cannot be translated into prose without missing a great deal of the originally intended meaning and form. The blank verse is characteristic of the Elizabethan period. This meant that the translator had to assimilate this type of verse too (Protopopescu 1942, 8).

## 5. Critical reception

Over the long years of thorough study of Shakespeare's work, Dragoş Protopopescu did materialize his vision of Shakespeare in Romanian. Becoming familiar with the text gave him the impression that Shakespeare "stops speaking English; in each English line you can hear spontaneously and by insight, the Romanian verse." [our trans.] (Protopopescu 1942, 12).

The Romanian translator is faithful to the text and, implicitly, to Shakespeare. Although he encountered the difficulty of the text inherent in the original, the author observed faithfully the meaning of the sentence and not the word order as Vladimir Streinu reproached him: "he came up with harmonious rhythms, and translated in a pleasant and uniform style meant to charm our souls" (Streinu 1965, xiii).

Vladimir Streinu's critical remarks are sometimes unsupported, especially when he considers that Dragoş Protopopescu simplifies his work by eliminating lines from the original text. It is obvious that he does not take into consideration the author's motivation in the preface of his book in which he mentions that his intention was that of offering a simplified version that could easily be staged.

## 6. Conclusions

The quality of and mechanisms at play in Dragoş Protopopescu's translations, especially those of Shakespeare, deserve an extended discussion. Even if only a few examples are taken into account, comparing his successive translations with those made by other translators, we might assert that the Romanian Anglicist was the first one to produce a truly personal interpretation of studies on English literature. He always knew how to discern between the significance of the information found in fundamental texts and the subjective nature of interpreting the same information.

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