TRANSLATING SHAKESPEARE INTO ROMANIAN: ON THE EVE AND IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE 1848 REVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT
The present paper sets out to emphasise the important ideological function of translations in the nineteenth-century Romanian principalities by illustrating the way in which socio-cultural factors, ideology, the dominant poetics and politics shaped and influenced the first Romanian translations of *Julius Caesar* (1844) and *Macbeth* (1850). The two translations share important characteristics such as the option for a verbatim translation and the Frenchifying of the text. I aim to demonstrate that these processes were meant to shore up not only the dominant poetics but also the revolutionary ideology of the time, which aimed to assert the Romanians' national identity by emphasising their Latin origins. Moreover, I will consider the two plays' topicality, in both Wallachia and Moldavia, on the eve and in the aftermath of the 1848 Romanian revolution.

KEYWORDS: Shakespeare, translation, Romanian principalities, 1848 revolution

The present paper sets out to explore the ways in which Shakespeare's plays were adapted, translated and re-contextualised in the nineteenth-century Romanian principalities. Taking as a starting point the definition of translation as rewriting, as a proper site for the play of intertexual exchanges I intend to emphasise the ways in which socio-cultural factors, ideology, the dominant poetics and politics shaped and influenced the first Romanian translations of *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*. I will examine the plays' topicality in the nineteenth-century Romanian principalities and reflect upon the ways in which they were re-contextualised in order respond to the most significant cultural and political event of the time: the 1848 revolution.

Introducing Shakespeare

Translations from West European literature and particularly from Shakespeare were strongly encouraged by all nineteenth-century Romanian scholars and artists who considered them utterly important not only in forging a national identity but also in

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introducing and disseminating Western culture in the Romanian principalities, in synchronizing the Romanian culture with the Western consciousness (Lovinescu 15). In addition, these translations were meant to make a significant contribution to the gradual syntactic and lexicographic standardization of the Romanian literary language. Monica Matei-Chesnoiu noticed that

> the individuality of the nineteenth-century Romanian adoption of Shakespeare, however, lies in its arrival at a time of the fashioning of the country's national identity, when Romania was just emerging from the century-old Ottoman domination and was completing its political and cultural unification (15).

The French and German literary critics and historians were instrumental in helping nineteenth-century Romanian writers acquire and develop the critical concepts and aesthetic theories promoted by the various Western schools of thought. Thus, at the end of the eighteenth century and in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the ideas of the Enlightenment were introduced through German and Austrian channels to Transylvania where they led to the foundation of the Transylvanian School (Şcoala Ardeleană), the cultural movement that conveyed the main ideas of the Age of Reason to Romanians. In Walachia and Moldavia, the principles of the Enlightenment were spread to the young intelligentsia through Voltaire's philosophical works and plays, which were heavily translated in the period. Voltaire's plays—several of them, such as *Brutus* or *La Mort de César*, were adaptations of Shakespeare's works—had been translated into Romanian since 1819 and were among the first plays to be performed at *Cişmeaua Roşie*, the first theatre built in Bucharest (Oprescu 146). The Romantic concepts and ideas, as well as the Realist ones, became popular due to the same German and French influences.

It was also under the strong impact of these two foreign channels of cultural communication that Shakespeare's own plays were initially performed and translated into Romanian. The Shakespearean works were introduced to the Romanian audience at the end of the eighteenth century, when several German troupes of strolling players toured Transylvania and performed some of Shakespeare's most popular plays (Duțu 7). A few years later, Shakespeare's drama was introduced to the other two Romanian provinces through the performances of the Italian opera companies, which performed the adaptations of three Shakespearean plays—*Cordelia, Montecchi and Capuletti*, and *Othello*—in Bucharest (1834) and Jassy (1837) (Duțu 8).

The first representations of the Italian troupe were hardly mentioned in the press of the time; it was only in 1845 that Cezar Bolliac published a comprehensive analysis of an Italian performance of *Othello*, which can be considered the first Romanian drama review of a Shakespearean performance (*Curierul românesc* 79–80). Starting with a comment upon the large number of people that had come to see the performance, Bolliac gave a very short summary of the play and mentioned the Italian writer Cinthio, whose short story was transformed into a tragedy by the "great Shakespeare" (78–80). It is worth noting that Bolliac was probably acquainted with the work of Mrs. Jameson, translated into French in 1842, who had identified the

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Italian's short story as main source of inspiration for Shakespeare's play (Grigorescu 48). One of the first attempts to make Shakespeare's plays popular belonged to the same author, who, in 1836, published Shakespeare's concise biography, a succinct presentation of his works and some details about the echoes they had in France and Germany (*Curiosul* 25–31).

Foreign contemporary critical opinions on Shakespeare began to be translated and published in most literary journals. Ion Heliade Rădulescu published an excerpt from Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*, in the literary supplement of his journal, *Curierul de ambe sexe* (59–60). It was the fragment in which Goethe, while commenting upon the greatness of Shakespeare's art, also warned against the danger of becoming a simple imitator of the great playwright (59–60). It is not difficult to understand the connection between Goethe's word of caution and the Romanian cultural context of the time; it was in those years, preceding the 1848 revolution, that all leading Romanian intellectuals advocated the production of a national literature and denounced the proliferation of poor imitations and inferior translations from other foreign literatures. The same fragment was later reproduced in *Foaie pentru minte, inimă și literatură*, the literary review that G. Bariţiu published in Transylvania.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Shakespeare's profile had been outlined especially under the literary influence of French and German Romantic writers; the Romanian scholars' articles and critical opinions on Shakespeare were predominantly inspired by the Romantic definition of the drama developed by Victor Hugo and Goethe. Thus, Shakespeare became a synonym for the literary absolute in the nineteenth century; he was considered a genius whose work would serve as a guide and an incentive to the creation of original national drama. Both Romantic and Realist Romanian writers regarded Shakespeare as a precursor of the same rank as Homer, Sophocles, Corneille and Racine (Marino 23). However, the Romanian appropriation of Shakespeare did not take place mechanically, by mere imitation. As critic Adrian Marino remarks, Shakespeare's work "is permanently interpreted, even adapted to our ideological and cultural necessities" (23). Thus, all nineteenth-century Romanian intellectuals advocated the translation of Shakespeare's plays into Romanian not only for their intrinsic literary value but also for their role in educating and illuminating the people. Moreover, Shakespearean plays, such as *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*, were employed not only as cultural catalysts but also as a means to comment upon topical Romanian issues.

Translating *Julius Caesar* on the Eve of the 1848 Romanian Revolution[1]

The earliest Shakespearean translation into Romanian belongs to George Barițiu, who, in 1840, published his translation of a fragment from *Julius Caesar*, in the literary review *Foaie pentru minte, inimă și literatură.* He chose the second scene

[1] The Romanian nineteenth century was historically characterised by the passage from feudalism to capitalism, by the constant struggle for national independence and the union of the three Romanian provinces—Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania.

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of the first act, the one in which Caesar is warned to beware the Ides of March and Cassius exposes to Brutus the worrying prospect of Caesar's becoming a dictator in Rome. Cassius's speech brings to the fore Rome's republican tradition that, for centuries, had promoted freedom and equality rights for the ones involved in its government. Four years later, in 1844, Captain S. Stoica published a complete version of the same Shakespearean play, using for his translation not the original text but several French intermediary translations.

In what follows, I aim to show that the reasons for which both George Barițiu and S. Stoica chose to translate the same Shakespearean play transgressed literary considerations, advancing into the realm of political signification. Due to its proclamation of republican values and its debate about the right to overthrow tyranny, *Julius Caesar* was appropriated by the anti-authoritarian, revolutionary discourse, being ideologically used to subtly underlay and emphasize the republican ideas upheld by most of the existing revolutionary groups, on the eve of the 1848 revolution.

This subversion-oriented employment of *Julius Caesar* by the 1848 Romanian revolutionaries is not, however, a singular event. The Roman play, being one of Shakespeare's most politicised plays, seems to have established a long tradition of ideological appropriations in many other countries. Thus, *Julius Caesar* was the first translated Shakespearean play in Italy (1739), Germany (1741), Russia (1787), Bulgaria (1875) and Japan (1883). In all these otherwise extremely different countries, Shakespeare's play was published in politically and culturally riotous periods, when the function it served was never purely aesthetic, as it generally fostered political and revolutionary ideas. Even in England, the play disappeared from production in times of political disquiet, such as the English Civil War, and from 1780 to 1812, when there might have been fears that the ideas of the French revolution could spread across the Channel.

S. Stoica's Romanian translation was published at Tipografia lui Heliade, the publishing house of Ion Heliade Rădulescu, one of the most radical and active supporters of the Romanian 1848 revolution. Heliade had previously published plays such as Byron's *Marino Faliero* (1838) and *The Two Foscari* (1839), as well as Schiller's tragedy *Brigands* (1840), which also display a wide range of revolutionary incitements (Grimm 23). The Romanian translator used not the English original but several French translations of Shakespeare's play, namely the works of Horace Meyer, Benjamin Laroche and François Guizot (Rădulescu 254–255). Stoica's translation belongs to the first translational phase of the Romanian nineteenth century when, under the influence of French neoclassical rules, translators manifested a high degree of tolerance towards indirect translations. Rendered in prose and written in Cyrillic letters, Stoica's translation focuses mainly on rendering the plot of the play; at times, it betrays the French intermediary either by modifying the text or by mistakenly interpreting certain words. The *Julius Caesar* available to nineteenth-century Romanians was, therefore, the rewriting of several French rewritings of the English text, becoming thus a kind of palimpsest: while preserving the French interpretation of the English play, Stoica's translation was

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also adapted to the requirements of the Romanian mainstream ideology and dominant poetics.

Stoica's rendering is characterized by the excessive use of Latin-origin words, even in contexts where more local equivalents of the respective word existed and sounded probably more familiar. Stoica, like most Romanian translators of Shakespeare at that time, proves to be highly influenced by the Latinist trends that advocated the replacement of all words of Slavic origin with words derived from Latin or other Romance language. Thus, he chooses to translate the word *friend* as *amic* (Lat. *amicus*) instead of *prieten* (Slav. *prijatelĭ*); *love* as *amor* (Lat. *amor*) instead of *iubire* (Slav. *ljubiti*) or *dragoste* (Slav. *dragostĭ*); *holy* as *sacră* (Lat. *sacer*) instead of *sfântă* (Slav. *sventŭ*); *to think* or *thought* as *a cugeta* or *cugetări* (Lat. *cogitare*), instead of a *gândi* or *gânduri* (Hung. *gond*).

Nonetheless, there are instances when certain words seem to have been chosen not only for their Latin origin but also because they might have carried a veiled ideological message that pointed to the political and cultural issues of the time. Thus, when rendering the opening dialogue between Flavius, Marullus and the two Roman citizens, Stoica chooses to translate the English word *citizen* (in all the French versions rendered as *citoyen*) as *plebeu*, i.e. "plebeian," instead of the exact Romanian equivalent *cetăţean*, the word that he actually uses when translating the dramatis personae. Likewise, a few lines further, in the passage where the cobbler boasts that even the most high-positioned men of Rome had their shoes repaired by him, the words "as proper men as ever"(1.1.22–23) are rendered into Romanian as *patricii*, i.e. "patricians," a term that cannot be found in any of the French translations.[2] The translator's insertion of these two terms, taken over from Roman history, represents more than the mere display of his knowledge of history; it actually aims to radicalize the opposition between the two social classes—the oppressed plebeians and the ruling patricians—which in the Romanian political context of the time could have been easily identified with the opposition between the oppressed Romanian people and the foreign tyrannical rulers.

Another telling example occurs in Cassius's famous speech where he proclaims Rome's republican tradition and the justness of its values, and he urges Brutus not to yield to Caesar's colossal power but to take action against it. The explicit ideological message of these lines is highlighted in Stoica's rendering by the translation of the word *masters* from the Shakespearean line "Men at some time are masters of their fates" (1.2.139) as the Romanian *Domni*, the political term used at the time to designate Romanian rulers. The important meaning of this line, asserting the freedom of each individual, the equality of all men, is further emphasised by the translator's choice to capitalize the respective word as if to raise awareness to the message of the speech.

[2] In Guizot's French version, the line is rendered by "on a vu bien des gens, je dis des meilleurs qui aientjamaismarché sur peau de bête, faire leur chemin sur de l'ouvrage de ma façon."

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Anti-tyrannical *Macbeth* in the aftermath of the 1848 Romanian Revolution

The first Romanian translation of *Macbeth* by St. Bâgescu, written with Cyrillic letters and published in 1850, shares a number of similarities to Stoica's translation of *Julius Caesar*. Like Stoica, Bâgescu uses for his translation not the English source text but the 1835 edition of Pierre Le Tourneur's prose translation of the play.[3] The translation is characterised by the same features we have noticed earlier with regard to the translation of *Julius Caesar*: an astonishing literalness and the excessive use of French and Latin-derived neologisms. Thus, Bâgescu follows closely Le Tourneur's version, translating it word for word; there are no traces of omissions or additions, no single sentence is left out. This strategy of translation makes the text rather difficult to read and, at times, it even precludes proper comprehension. Likewise, the use of French-derived neologisms, many of which were the translator's own coinage, foreignizes the text, making it sound unfamiliar, ostentatious, and awkward. Thus, for the French word *patience* he uses *pacienţa* instead of the more familiar Romanian equivalent *răbdare*; for *malheureux* ("miserable, unhappy") he uses *infortunaţii* instead of the Romanian *nefericiţii*; *roitelet* ("wren") is translated as *roateletă*, a word coined by the translator starting from the French word, instead of *pitulice*, the common Romanian name of the bird; *soupçons* ("doubts") is translated as *suspecţii,* instead of *îndoieli*; *fatigue* ("tiredness") is translated as *fatiga* (another personal coinage); *orageuse* ("stormy") is rendered as *oragioasă* instead of *furtunoasă*, etc.

However, just as it happened with the sixteenth-century English translations (Florio's translation of Montaigne's *Essais* is a relevant example), many of the new words coined and circulated by these first Shakespearean translators have been preserved and have progressively been integrated into the basic Romanian vocabulary. Such words like *afront* ("insult"), *aviditate* ("greed"), *a reprima* ("to repress"), *abis* ("abysm"), *lamentabil* ("lamentable"), *calamitate* ("calamity") were first introduced in Romanian by means of these early translations, which reflect the dominant poetics of the time.

As I have previously mentioned, the first half of the nineteenth century was a period when Romanians struggled to assert their national identity by emphasising their Latinity against the monopolising Slavic influences. Romania's Latinity represented an issue of utmost importance in the construction of our national identity, as it connected us more tightly to the other Latin countries in Europe by means of a common origin.

These issues were even more ardently emphasised in the 1850s, when the Romanian principalities, after the suppression of the French-inspired 1848 revolution, found themselves under Russian and Ottoman military occupation. Thus, as in Stoica's case, Bâgescu's excessive use of French-derived neologisms was more than a desire to enrich the vocabulary of his language; it was a subtle and possibly subversive way of expressing his allegiance to the revolutionary ideals and ideology.

[3] Le Tourneur's translation of *Macbeth* was first published in 1778.

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His option for a literal translation, to the point of even Frenchifying the text had a solid justification: anything that came or was borrowed from the West, particularly France, could not be bad, vulgar or base. On the contrary, Western values stood for what was modern as opposed to the Slavic obsoleteness; they represented progress and liberation from the Russian and Ottoman tyranny. These were, therefore, the ideological and poetological constraints under which both Bâgescu and Stoica undertook the task of translation. In what follows, I will focus on *Macbeth*'s topicality in the Romanian principalities in the aftermath of the 1848 revolution.

Writing about the reception of *Macbeth* throughout the centuries, Nick Moschovakis has noted that the human plot of the play "speaks directly to any society where fears of treachery are felt; where blood is shed for advantage; and where crimes against unsuspecting allies, acquaintances, and friends are supposed to lead to remorse" (1). *Macbeth*'s depiction and denunciation of the treacherous and tyrannical behaviour of merciless rulers, as well as the optimism and the feeling of freedom and liberation that the end of the play expresses, must have resonated deeply with the Romanian audiences of the time. It is not difficult to imagine *Macbeth*'s extreme topicality in both Walachia and Moldavia, in a period when Romanians were still trying, despite the unsuccessful outcome of the revolution, to free themselves from the oppressive grip of the foreigners who had held the power, both before and after the revolution. Immediately after the suppression of the revolution, the Russian authorities installed a regime of terror and repression, hoping thus to prevent any new acts of rebellion. They drew up lists of those who had been "compromised" during the revolutionary government[4] by enrolling into the national army or by participating to manifestations where the "*réglement organique*" had been torn and burnt.[5] Their fears were not unjustified. The leaders of the revolution, although exiled, were still trying to reassemble and urged Romanians not to give up the fight and be united against their common enemy.

Macduff's urging Malcolm to rise and rebel against Macbeth's tyranny resembled the ideological discourse promoted by the Romanian revolutionaries: "Let us rather hold the revengeful *sword*, and, like brave men, crown with our arms and save from ruin our fortune thrown into *dust*" (Bâgescu 25, my translation). We can hear the echoes of his call to arms in most of the articles published by the Romanian revolutionaries. In the *Proclamation of Izlaz*, which outlined the revolutionaries' main political and social demands, they incited officers to "*take out their swords* and make them shine in the sun of justness and of their country's freedom" (57). Romania's current national anthem, a poem written by Andrei Mureșanu, one of the leading figures of the 1848 revolution, is also a denunciation of tyranny and a powerful call to arms. The first stanza is a relevant exponent of the entire poem:

[4] The revolutionary government lasted in Walachia for three months

[5]The *reglement organique* was the nineteenth-century constitution, imposed under a Russian protectorate, which introduced elected political institutions in the principalities of Moldavia and Walachia (later the nucleus of Romania), but also created oligarchies there and vested political and economic power in the boyar class.

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> Awaken thee, Romanian, from your deadly sleep
> Into which you've been sunk by the brutal tyrants
> Now or never, shape for yourself a different fate,
> A fate to which your cruel enemies will bow.
>
> (Mureșanu, my translation)

Similarly, in the article "Our aim" (1851), the authors exhorted all Romanians to "raise their foreheads *from the dust*," to "break *the yoke*" of bloody tyranny and get ready for a difficult "fight" against it (Crețeanu and Florescu 114).

A Moldavian *Macbeth*

Macbeth's topicality in the Romanian principalities in the 1850s was probably related not only to the people's revolt against the foreign authoritarian powers, but also to their recent memories of the tyrannical and cruel rule of the Moldavian Prince, Mihail Sturdza. Sturdza founded a corrupt and authoritarian regime in Moldavia, where he ruled from 1834 to 1849. He was also the main agent in the suppression of the 1848 Moldavian revolution as his despotic rule was one of the principal targets of the revolutionary discourse.

Most of the passages in the play that describe Scotland's state of terror under Macbeth's rule, his murderous acts, his manifold vices, bore a close resemblance to the discourse of the Moldavian national party, replete with invectives against the tyranny of Mihail Sturdza. The language and terms used in these revolutionary articles and proclamations are sometimes strikingly similar to the formulations in the play.

Thus, Macduff's description of the terrible state of Scotland under Macbeth's tyranny in scene 4, act 4, as well as the reference to the divine power that seemed to condole with the grief of the people, "Every new morning, *new widows, new orphans fill the air with their cries*: every new day their *groans* raise to heaven whose vaults resound as if the sky commiserated with Scotland's misfortunes and made the signs of its grief break out by means of its divers phenomena" (Bâgescu 101, my translation), must have reminded Romanians the similar beginning of the proclamation issued in 1848 by the Moldavian revolutionaries:

> Brothers! God has heard Moldavia's cries and has raised his revengeful hand against the enemy of our wretched Country. Now the throne of MihailSturdza is shaking like a leaf in the storm and soon that throne, the nest of all the crimes that have overwhelmed our poor country for fourteen years, that throne supported by the arms of corruption and the mace of tyranny shall turn into dust.
>
> ("Proclamaţia partidului naţional din Moldova către români" 62)

One year after the publication of Bâgescu's translation, another article published in *Republica Română* (*The Romanian Republic*), a review issued by the group of

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Romanian revolutionaries exiled in Paris, called all young Romanians to rise up against those tyrants who "feed themselves…on the worker's sweat, *on the widows' and orphans' groans*" (Brătianu 126–27; my emphasis).

In a similar vein, Malcolm's depiction of Scotland's misfortunes, as well as his listing of Macbeth's vices, were presumably a painful reminder of Sturdza's own corruption, persecutions and bloody executions that were being denounced in all revolutionary articles: "I know too well that *our country groans beneath the yoke*; that it sinks in tears and blood and that each day new wounds are added to the previous ones" (Bâgescu 102, my translation; my emphasis).

Therefore, Bâgescu circulated through his translation a vocabulary that overlapped with the one used by the Romanian revolutionaries in their anti-authoritarian discourses. Consequently, we may consider his translation a subversive protest against the tyrannical authorities that ruled in the Romanian principalities, a protest that could be counted as one among the numerous acts of the revolutionary propaganda.

Conclusion

Both Stoica's and Bâgescu's indirect translations of Shakespeare's plays are indicative of the cultural, political and ideological changes that dominated the first half of the nineteenth century, in the Romanian principalities. Both translations share common characteristics with other early nineteenth-century drama translations, their assumed purpose being to promote the great works of world drama and encourage the development of the Romanian language and the forging of a solid Romanian national identity.

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