

Shakespeare's Untranslatability

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Responding to questions after a lecture delivered in the Baxter Theatre of the University of Cape Town in 2005, the well-known director and Shakespearean, Sir Peter Hall, was asked what he thought of translations of Shakespeare. "Oh," he responded brusquely, "Shakespeare is untranslatable!" It is not surprising that no one challenged Hall. The occasion was not a forum for debate or discussion. We had gathered to imbibe the distilled wisdom of a man with considerable cultural authority, especially regarding matters Shakespearean. He is English, after all, and he had played a key role in establishing and directing the pre-eminent purveyor of Shakespeare's theater to the world: The Royal Shakespeare Company. If the founder of the Royal Shakespeare Company informs us that Shakespeare lies beyond translation, then what are we to do but nod our heads in silent and obedient assent?

We might do so for two very distinct reasons. We might be acceding to the platitude that Shakespeare is untranslatable because *everything* is untranslatable. This axiom could be qualified with the observation that at least all complex texts, especially complex affective and ideological forms such as literary texts, cannot be transferred without loss into a different language. Expressed in this way the claim becomes a truism: we have known for a long time that languages are intimately and inextricably implicated in the cultural forms of life of their speakers, and since cultures diverge, the complex forms of expression of such cultures are bound to be different. But this general axiom of the impossibility of translation is not what Peter Hall meant when he declared that Shakespeare is untranslatable. He meant that *Shakespeare* especially, or even *only* Shakespeare, lies beyond translation. Shakespeare, who towers above all other writers, of whatever nationality and culture, is *sui generis*. It makes no sense even to try to translate him. It is a happy accident for Sir Peter that Shakespeare happens to be English. But what of those who live in a literary, cultural, and economic wilderness because they have no English?

When Peter Hall dismissed the very thought of Shakespeare's translatability, he was probably not doing so out of any consideration for the theory of translation, but rather from a position of unreflective common sense. It seems to go without saying that translation begins with a text that is, above all, *original*.

Any transformation of that text into a different language will involve a falling off, an inevitable process of loss. This occurs partly because translation by definition introduces difference or change through the replacement of one structure with another, and partly because it must of necessity muddy the original spirit that inspired the prototext. These modes of loss are not the same. One does not have to subscribe to a Romantic belief in the pristine genius of the author as the sole inspirer of the text to claim that translation inevitably involves its betrayal. Shakespeare may be said to be untranslatable either because he is *Shakespeare*, or because his texts are a unique set of linguistic patterns that cannot be duplicated in a different system. The New Criticism, for example, held the latter but not the former position: as insistent upon the intentional fallacy as any proponent of the death of the author, they also saw Shakespeare's texts as complex poetic structures which ultimately lay beyond paraphrase or explication.¹

What is the Shakespearean text? No one asked Sir Peter which *text* of *Twelfth Night*, or *King Lear*, or *Hamlet* he was talking about. Developments in textual bibliography indicate that it is no longer feasible to posit a single, authoritative text that is a reflection of its author's intention. There are two reasons for this. First, despite many attempts by the "New Bibliographers" to resolve the differences between the texts that carry the name "Shakespeare" into a single bearer of authority, the task has proved to be impossible.² Second, the philosophy of language has, since even before the structuralist and post-structuralist revolutions, argued that an author's intention is a retroactive construction made after the process of reading, not a controlling spirit that determines its meaning. Meaning is simply not "in the head."³ Overlaid upon the philosophical truth that meaning is not reducible to the intention of an author,

¹ See the discussion of the "intentional fallacy" in W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (London: Methuen, 1954).

² For an engaging overview of the bibliographical debates from the New Bibliography of W.W. Greg to the new materialists, see Graham Holderness, *Textual Shakespeare: Writing and the Word* (Hatfield, Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2003).

³ Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning,'" in *Mind, Language and Reality: Philosophical Papers Vol. 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 215–71 (p. 223). The philosopher who most radically demonstrated this truth is Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. and trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953). This view is now standard in poststructuralist philosophy, especially in the work of Jacques Derrida. See especially Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

is the bibliographical argument that Shakespeare's texts are the products of a collaborative set of material practices that were the enabling conditions of the early modern theater in which he worked, rather than an idealized ghost reconstructed by subsequent scholarship. To use postmodern parlance, the Shakespeare texts is, and has always been, "different from itself." Poststructuralist philosophy has tended to eradicate the author altogether, positing instead a changing array of intertextual relations that come together only at the point of each reading of the text (or each viewing of a performance). Not quite as radically iconoclastic as Roland Barthes in his piece, "The Death of the Author,"⁴ Michel Foucault uses a theory of the reference of proper names drawn from analytical philosophy (which has in fact been superseded within that discipline)⁵ to show, not that there is no connection between author and text, but rather that the name of an author works in a logically different way from that of an ordinary person.⁶ The name of the author does no more than hold a certain body of texts together.⁷ No information about the author that is not relevant to his or her relations to those texts will have any logical effect on the role of that name. So, if we were to discover that Shakespeare did not marry Anne Hathaway, or that he was not born in Stratford, or that he was indeed a Catholic recusant, this new biographical information would make no difference to the way Shakespeare as the name that covers a body of texts functions; but it would make a difference if it turned out that he did not write SHAKE-SPEARES SONNETS.

Foucault thus gives us a logical reason why Shakespeare's name should remain coupled to his texts. But there is also an ethical compulsion that lies at the heart of the concept of translation: whereas an interpreter or critic may ignore or suppress aspects of the text that contradict his or her reading, a

For an account of the notion of intention as a retroactive construction, see my "Giving Intention Its Due?," *Style* 44:4 (Winter 2010): 311–28.

⁴ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 49–55.

⁵ See Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), for the classic account of the alternative "causal" theory of reference.

⁶ Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *Language—Countermemory—Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sheery Simon (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), pp. 113–38.

⁷ As a historical claim this is questionable. See Brian Vickers, "Abolishing the Author? Theory *versus* History," in *Shakespeare, Co-Author* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 506–41.

translator is obliged to render as fully as possible the text in its entirety.⁸ This is always assuming that we are certain what that “text” is. Nonetheless, however much the “materiality” of Shakespeare’s text points away from a presiding author to the collaborative conditions of its production, dissemination, and inevitable change, the translator is not quite on a par with such dividers and divisors of the “material” text: the translator is committed to making available a set of relationships recognizable as “Shakespeare”—not the man or the mind behind the text, but whatever has been constituted as “the text.” A translator is someone who is accountable to the text from which he or she is working. The question is: to whom are translators accountable? Derrida might say to the text as *signature*. By “signature” he means to incorporate both a certain “singularity”—we might say “uniqueness” or “originality,” but the traditional associations of such terms renders them suspect—and also the necessary iterability that always splits the authority of their owners; but to act as signatures they have to obey the primary law of language, which is that it must be repeatable, and therefore, to use that phrase again, it is inevitably “different from itself” on each occasion of its use.⁹ A translation of a text should thus strive to reproduce as closely as possible the singularity of its signature, while simultaneously embodying the necessary difference that enables the signature to act as a mark of singularity.

Here, I hope, the fog begins to clear a little. For we have achieved two things. We have given each of two apparently contradictory demands its due: first, the structural nature of meaning as something that is not tied to the intentions of their originator, but of necessity must be repeatable as something different in new contexts; and second, the ethical demand of a certain fidelity to the singularity of the text. Once we acknowledge the former we need also to acknowledge the fact that, however pristine the “original” text may be, even if it is not translated into a different language, its iterations across time bring *inevitable* alterations or transformations. Those alterations may include the slow attenuation or loss of significance, as meanings that were alive for its original audience and readers become so obscure through historical change that they cease to act as part of the living experience of those engaging with the text. Time is thus

⁸ “The translator is in a much worse position than critics or commentators are. They can be highly selective and parade their scraps of erudition with an air of being at home equally well in any place in the book—but the translator cannot shirk a single issue”: Fritz Senn, quoted in Patrick O’Neill, *Polyglot Joyce: Fictions of Translation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 8.

⁹ See Derrida, *Limited Inc.*

the primary betrayer of the text: it is its primary translator, and it acknowledges no ethical duty to preserve any of its meanings, which, as Shakespeare himself recognized, live only “in the eyes of men” (sonnet 16) (and women, we may add, with a genuflection to Time). Here we reach the heart of my argument, which is based upon a paradox. If the *same* text is inevitably altered through time, its translation into different languages may, paradoxically, be precisely what *resists* such transformations: by refreshing the text for new generations of readers or audiences. The translation betrays, but it also recuperates, giving new life to the dead letters within it.

It takes a very simple, but difficult, re-orientation of our attitude towards the relationship between text and translation to overcome Peter Hall’s jingoist common sense. Instead of jealously limiting the Shakespearean text (or “Shakespeare”) to those structures of signs that are either confined to a single language or reduced to the spirit of a particular person, or, just as problematically, dissolving what we call Shakespeare into a great morass of intertextuality now constituted in the subjectively disconnected minds of individual readers, we could, following recent translation theory, encompass within the name “Shakespeare” *all* the translations of the texts collected under that name. One could argue this for all texts, but the particular (singular?) case of Shakespeare makes it easier for peculiarly contingent, historical reasons. However much we may disagree about the nature of the Shakespearean text, the “bad” quartos that many wish to keep as far from Shakespeare as possible are nonetheless bound together under or in Shakespeare’s name. The questionable texts of *Hamlet* or *Richard III* remain *Shakespeare’s*. Similarly, however deviant one might find translations of Shakespeare, it is best to treat them all as *Shakespeare*. This move solves more problems than it creates. For as Patrick O’Neill argues in a new treatment of translations of James Joyce, if we abandon the expectation that the translator will achieve the “hopeless” task of “recovering and repeating a unique original” we will be able to adopt a more inclusive (and less hopeless) model, in terms of which translations become “continuations and extensions, individually and collectively, of the original text, which expands in the process to *include* its translations, with all their consonances and dissonances, within its own textual fabric”; this transforms translation from an always “culpable” transgression into “in principle a process of gain, a process of textual *extension*.”¹⁰

Twaalfde Nag

¹⁰ For these comments, see O’Neill, *Polyglot Joyce*, pp. 11–13.

Hall's assertion about Shakespeare's place beyond translation was thrown into relief by a performance, less than a month after he delivered his magisterial pronouncement, in the same theater, of *Twaalfde Nag*, Uys Krige's translation into Afrikaans of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.¹¹ The production offered an opportunity both to reflect upon and test Hall's first Law of Shakespearean Thermodynamics: that meaning cannot pass from a hotter text to a cooler language. Before the Baxter performance of *Twaalfde Nag*, Westerford High School invited me to give a talk to pupils who were intending to see the play. The students were especially anxious about the point that had exercised Hall: why translate Shakespeare into another language at all, especially Afrikaans? I was therefore asked to focus my talk on why one should bother to see and hear Shakespeare in a language as compromised, in a variety of ways, as our strange, colonially derived dialect of Dutch. After pondering this task for a while, I decided to make no apologies for Afrikaans. I devoted my lecture to a demonstration of why *Twaalfde Nag* is in fact *better* than *Twelfth Night*. This was not merely an exercise in provocative rhetoric. I do feel that the Afrikaans text is better. But we should be clear about what "better" means here. It's not a judgment made without regard to time or place. In fact it is precisely because of the inescapable ways in which place and time shape and reshape both texts and their audiences that this judgment is simultaneously irresistible and provisional.

I've seen two productions of *Twaalfde Nag*, and directed a third. I've also seen at least half a dozen staged productions of the English version and the two recent films of the play. My production of Krige's translation was not of *Twaalfde Nag* as such: it was more *Twaalfde Nag* meets *Twelfth Night*. I joined the English Department of the Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit (now translated into the University of Johannesburg) in the early 1980s, fresh from an exciting period in which, both as an undergraduate and postgraduate student, I had directed student productions of Jean Anouilh's *Becket*, Thomas Middleton's *Revenger's Tragedy*, and Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. I entered my first proper university job determined to master Shakespeare in the theater, and to make him available to the benighted denizens of Auckland Park, Melville, Brixton, and the ominously renamed Triomf, translated in every sense from its previous existence as Sophiatown.¹²

¹¹ William Shakespeare, *Twaalfde Nag*, trans. Uys Krige (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1967).

¹² *Triomf* means "triumph": Afrikaner nationalism trumpeting its success in moving black inhabitants out of the city to the townships like Soweto ("South Western Township").

The first set of auditions presented me with an unexpected difficulty. It wasn't that the number of people who came to audition matched exactly the number of parts I had available—that always happens in amateur dramatics, except on the even more frequent occasions on which one has fewer bodies than parts. It was the distribution of the language skills of those at the audition that gave me pause. The majority of my prospective Shakespeare actors could speak only Afrikaans; a small group could speak only English; and two were bilingual. What to do? My lofty aim of presenting Shakespeare in the enclaves of Afrikanerdom, rendered all the more dramatic by the cross between Darth Vader's death star and a Voortrekker laager that constitutes the architectural structure of the then Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit, seemed doomed to failure. (The buildings of RAU, I was subsequently to discover, were in fact designed by a British architect, who used Stonehenge as his inspiration—such are the vagaries of translation!)

My monolingual cast was unevenly distributed between Afrikaans and English. I did not have enough Afrikaans-speaking actors to cover all the Afrikaans parts, even with some cunning doubling up, while the sorry group of English speakers would not have stretched to so much as a quarter of the play's *dramatis personae*. I was about to give up on the whole project, when it struck me in one of those comic-book, light-bulb flashes that if I used Uys Krige's Afrikaans *Twaalfde Nag*, I could do a bilingual production. Orsino and his household could speak English (and nothing else), while Olivia and hers would be resolutely Afrikaans. Viola and Feste, the two figures who move between the two households were, as luck would have it, bilingual. These linguistic divisions do not quite correspond with the political differences in the play, but they served well enough to delineate the different constituencies of the Duke and Countess, as well as the latter's remoteness from her self-indulgent lover. They also tapped into the contrasts and antagonisms carried by the two languages in South African cultural and political history, giving *Twaalfde Night* a local resonance that *Twelfth Night* could never have had.

Apart from a few glitches—such as Toby Belch deciding to take a full-time job with the South African Broadcasting Corporation a week before the first night, and having to be replaced by the director, and Malvolio's continual threats to commit suicide (not in any way connected to the production)—the production made its way to a week of performances from the pretentiously titled Rand Afrikaanse University Shakespeare Workshop. All Johannesburg was invited. Surprisingly, many came. This was not a little due to the efforts of the University, who had publicized the event far and wide, especially amongst

Afrikaans-language high schools. The masses of green, or brown, or maroon-blazered schoolchildren reluctantly bussed to Shakespeare productions are every Shakespeare actor's nightmare. Yet these audiences were strangely different. They laughed—freely, whole-heartedly, and with joyful surprise. They even kept reasonably quiet during the poetic bits. I was witnessing the reactions of an audience to a Shakespeare they understood and with which they could identify on an everyday, linguistic level. It crackled and caught fire, sparkled and danced, transcending the stumbling efforts of its inexperienced cast largely due to the genius of its translator and his engagement with Shakespeare. And through a language that was their own, *murg en been*,¹³ as we say in Afrikaans, they seemed to find an affinity with the strangeness of the play—its remote setting and time, its weird conceptions of love and desire, its half-familiar play of gender and power, and, of course, its then shocking flirtation with homosexual identity. Some people left at interval, doubtless having lost patience with our Peter Quince-ish performances, but some—I know, because they were friends and colleagues, many from the neighboring, English-speaking University of the Witwatersrand—departed because three quarters of the Shakespeare that they had come to see and hear was in an alien, incomprehensible, not to say “barbaric,” language.

I shall come back to them in due course. Here is a sample of what they would have heard:

Feste: En toe, my twee ou maats! Hier's ons nou drie *gekkies* op 'n ry! Is dit nie *gek* nie? *Gekker* as kopaf kan dit nie gaan nie.

Sir Tobie: Welkom esel. En toe, *wysneus*, gee vir ons 'n *wysie* vir drie stemme.

Sir Andries: Op my tabernakel, die *gek* het 'n onkige borskas om mee te brul op note. Ek sou liever so'n been hê om mee te buig en so'n soet asem om mee te sing soos ons *gek* hier as veertig sjielings. Op my erewoord, Feste, gisteraand het jy die *gek* gespeel soos nooit tevore nie toe jy praat van Pigromitus, of van die Vapiane, toe hulle die ekwinoksiaal van Queubus oorsteek; dit was piekfyn, so *waar* as *waar waaragtiewaar* is. En toe het ek jou 'n *stuk* of tien stuiwers gestuur vir jou ou *stukkies*. Het jy hulle gekry?

Feste: Hoe dan nie? Ek het hulle in my blad *sak* gesteek, *sak* en *pak* na my skapie verkas, haar daar *gepak*—en toe is ons tweetjies af op die Jolliekroeg met sy *sakkevol* plesierigheid *waar* daar g'n niemand ooit *sak* en as sit en wurg nie, maar die lewe dikwels dans, dans doller as 'n doedelsak. Maar toe daag julle nie op nie, vervlaks, kon ons nie saam met Sir Toby *wyn vat* nie, moes ons al sy *gevatigheid* mis—om nie eens te praat nie, Sir Andries, van jou *uitgevatheid*, kyk net hoe krul daai kuif, hoe knik daai pluimpies, pronk hulle fraai, fraai verby! Mens sou dalk kon sê

¹³ Totally or completely—“marrow and bone” would be a literal translation of a strangely Shakespearean saying.

sir Toby is half-*wyn*, half-*vat*, maar om te beweer sir Andries Bibberbakkies is ‘n *fat*, ‘n modepop, en ‘n *windsak*, sou wees om sowaar as *waaragtig* die *waarheid* in die gesig te *vat*!

(II.3, pp. 50–51)¹⁴

This is what they would have heard if they’d gone to see *Twelfth Night*:

Feste How now, my hearts. Did you never see the picture of “we three”?

Sir Toby Welcome, ass. Now let’s have a catch.

Sir Andrew By my troth, the fool has an excellent breast.

I had rather than forty shillings I had such a leg, and so sweet a breath to sing, as the fool has. In sooth, thou wast in very gracious fooling last night, when thou spokest of Picrogromitus, of the Vapians passing the equinoctial of Queubus. ’Twas very good, i’ faith. I sent thee sixpence for thy leman. Hadst it?

Feste I did impetico thy gratility; for Malvolio’s nose is no whipstock. My lady has a white hand, and the Myrmidons are no bottle-ale houses.

Sir Andrew Excellent! Why, this is the best fooling, when all is done.

(II.3.15–29)

There are two striking things here: first, Feste’s supposedly witty response to Sir Andrew in *Twelfth Night* is simply not funny. In fact, it is virtually incomprehensible. The New Cambridge Shakespeare glosses each of Feste’s witticisms with the doubtful “This perhaps means ... ,” concluding with the frank declaration “Meaning uncertain”¹⁵ Bruce Smith’s notes for the Bedford Shakespeare Series do little better, repeatedly suggesting “just nonsense” and “Feste’s speech may be mere nonsense.”¹⁶ What is a translator to do under such circumstances? Render this uncertainty in the new language? Taking Sir Andrew at his word that “this is the best fooling when all is done,” Krige chooses to invent a pyrotechnical response for Feste that is an extraordinary, bravura display of wordplay. It is not merely the

¹⁴ Puns are italicized.

¹⁵ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁶ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, Bedford Shakespeare Series (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001). But see Keir Elam’s gloss on these lines in his *Arden 3 Twelfth Night* (London: Arden, 2008), II.3.22–3, where he points out that *kwibus* means “fool” in Dutch.

plethora of puns—there are a dozen or so on the word *sak*¹⁷ and its cognate *pak*,¹⁸ and a further ten on *vat*,¹⁹ within a dozen lines! Krige uses the peculiar alliterative and assonant qualities of Afrikaans to give the impression of a much richer set of verbal relationships than exist in the original, so that virtually every word in the speech rings forwards and backwards its connection with others. Some of the effects are fairly obvious, like the repetitive play of “so waar as waaragtiewaar waar is”²⁰ in both Andries’s and Feste’s speeches, or the persistent wordplay on *sak*. But others are more subtle, working their pleasure through the displacement of meaning via idiom. So, when Feste compliments Sir Andries on his sartorial extravagance, in the form of the “pluimpie”—the flamboyant feather that he wears in his hat—he incorporates in it the sense of “pluimpie” as the compliment that the knight has been paying both Feste for his wit, and Olivia, for her love. Yet there is more to it than a mere pun: to say that the “pluimpie,” both as compliment and peacock’s feather, is a kind of “passing show” (as Shakespeare might have said)—“kyk hoe ... pronk hulle, fraai, fraai, verby”²¹—is to allude to an Afrikaans idiom for lost opportunity, wasted chances—“dit is neusie verby.” None of this is part of Feste’s speech as Shakespeare wrote it, but both the characterization and the dramatic irony are manifest in the play. Krige draws these out in his free improvisation, displaying Afrikaans as a language of singular musicality and trenchant wit. Whereas an English-speaking audience is bound to meet Feste’s speech in *Twelfth Night* with mute incomprehension, its Afrikaans-speaking counterpart is bowled over by the speech in *Twaalfde Nag*: these listeners respond to its multiple resonances and dynamics as their own, with a complete immediacy that is more than merely the effect of conscious attention.

Now one could argue that Krige is not translating Shakespeare, and in a sense that would be correct. Still, what would an accurate or faithful translation of that passage be? How does one translate something incomprehensible, especially when a display of wit is at stake? It is also possible to argue that by turning Feste’s lame response into a show of real wit, Krige is in fact misunderstanding the import of

¹⁷ A bag, also to sag or descend.

¹⁸ A pack. So “sak en pak” would be the equivalent of “bag and baggage.”. But the word also is a verb, meaning to attack or accost.

¹⁹ To grab or hold, but also a wine vat.

²⁰ “True as truth’s true.”

²¹ “See them showing off, gorgeous, passing beautifully.”

the exchange. Feste responds lamely and unintelligibly precisely to reveal Andrew's stupidity: the poor knight wouldn't recognize wit if it stomped on his toe. That is certainly a possible interpretation, but the problem is that we just don't know. Feste's reply may well have had comical resonances for an early modern audience that we have now lost, and have no hope of recovering. Krige's decision is made within, not beyond, the ethics of translation, in which being faithful to the original is not the rule that tells one what to do, but the very thing that is at stake: it is what has to be determined in and through the translation, without a set of all-directing rules beyond that process.

We could argue, against purists who would wish Krige to stick faithfully to Shakespeare's letter, that by improvising Feste's witty riff, he is doing no more than being faithful to Shakespeare's own theatrical practice. That is to say, he is adopting the free, self-expressive, improvisatory mode of the Elizabethan player. And what more appropriate character to give this freedom to than the fool? Robert Weimann has persuasively argued that the dynamic power of the early modern English theater arises from its combination in tension of humanist mimesis and a popularly derived practice of self-expressive clowning.²² Hamlet's anxious injunction to the players to speak no more than is set down for them betrays the fact that the practice was common, but Weimann argues that it would be a mistake to take Hamlet's humanist anxiety and desire for writerly control over actorly freedom as Shakespeare's own voice.²³ We can know only what Hamlet thinks on this issue, not what Shakespeare thought, and besides, the recent discussion of the material nature of Shakespeare's text calls into question the very idea of strict writerly control and ownership of what was essentially a collaborative project.

One might think that I have stacked the cards against Shakespeare by choosing a comic passage, one in which the original sense is at best obscure for historical reasons, and which happens to form part of a self-expressive tradition of theatrical improvisation. What about the poetic passages? Surely there Shakespeare wins hands down! Let's look at two passages again. Here's the English:

Orsino If music be the food of love, play on,
Give me excess of it that, surfeiting,

²² Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition of the Theatre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

²³ Robert Weimann, "Mimesis in *Hamlet*," in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 275–91.

The appetite may sicken and so die.
 That strain again, it had a dying fall.
 O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound
 That breathes upon a bank of violets,
 Stealing and giving odour. Enough, no more,
 'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.
 O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou
 That, notwithstanding thy capacity
 Receiveth as the sea, naught enters there,
 Of what validity and pitch so e'er,
 But falls into abatement and low price
 Even in a minute! So full of shapes is fancy
 That it alone is high fantastical.
Curio Will you go hunt, my lord?
Orsino What, Curio?
Curio The hart.
Orsino Why so I do, the noblest that I have.
 (I.1.1–17)

Here Krige would seem to have the losing hand. This is one of the most poetically invested of all speeches in Shakespeare. Perhaps only one other speech in the canon reverberates with greater poetic intensity and fame: Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech. Orsino's opening lines are in fact the speech on which Peter Hall based his lecture, as an example both of Shakespeare's exquisite poetic command and the need, as he emphasized repeatedly, to speak his speeches "trippingly on the tongue," sloughing off the dull weight of convention and "poetic" excess. Part of the problem that Hall was trying to convey with this cited advice was precisely the familiarity—the much more than familiarity—of the speech. This over-acquaintance renders the speech difficult for an actor to speak, but it also makes it well nigh impossible for an audience to *hear*. How many members of the audience know or understand what Orsino says after the all too familiar opening line, especially in the clotted passage about the likeness of the passionate imagination and the copiousness of the sea? In his prologue to the printed translation, Krige writes about the impossibility of translating what he calls this "most poetic opening line in all English drama," and then following that up with an appropriate rendition of the fourth line, "That strain again! It had a dying

fall,” with its direct simplicity and inevitability (his words, or rather my rendition of his “Dis alles so direk, envouding en onvermydelik” [9]).²⁴ This is what he produced:

As musiek dan die liefde voed, hou aan met speel;
 Gee my te veel daarvan sodat, met dié
 Teveel, my smaak mag siek word, en so sterf.
 Dié wysie weer! Dit draal nog, kwyn en sterwe still...
 Dit het my oor verruk soos daardie soet geluid
 Wat wasem oor 'n veld vol violette
 En wyl hy geure steel, hul terggwaai weer.
 Genoeg! Niks meer; dis nie so soet nou soos weleer.
 O gees van liefde! Hoe lewendig en vars is jy,
 Hoe groot, hoe ruim net soos die see en soos die see
 Ontvang jy alles, los jy alles in jou op,
 Is daar niks wat jy nie, al is dit hoe sterk,
 In 'n minuut verdwerg en laat verdwyn;
 So vol gedaantes is die liefdesfantasie
 Dat hy alleen fanstasties ryk en skeppend is!

(I.1, p. 17)

I don't have the space to dwell on the particular strengths of this translation—on its specific deployment of what Krige calls the own peculiar “genius” of his home language, “its subtle musicality, rich in long double vowels, its mobility, strength, powers of expression” (these very qualities are exemplified in the inadequacy of my translation—“die subtiële musikale eienskappe van die Afrikaanse taal, van sy rykdom aan lang dubbele klinkers, sy beweeglikheid, frisheid, sêkrag ...” [9]). Even those who do not understand Afrikaans will have detected something of this powerful musicality in Orsino's fantasy. One will do well to listen to the way in which Shakespeare's “That breathes upon a bank of violets, / Stealing and giving odour” becomes “Wat wasem oor 'n veld vol violette / En wyl hy geure steel, hul teruggwaai weer,” or to the sense of passionate urgency with which Krige invests Orsino's invocation of the sea by introducing repetitive patterns absent from the letter but not the spirit of Shakespeare's English: “Hoe groot, hoe ruim net soos die see en soos die see / Ontvang jy alles, los jy alles in jou op.”

²⁴ “It is all so direct, simple and inexorable.”

On occasion, however, Krige and his home tongue are simply stumped, as in Orsino's pun on "hart." In Afrikaans the words for heart and deer are close, but not quite close enough: *hart* and *hert*. Krige responds to Curio's "Die hert," with Orsino's line, "Dit doen ek reeds, die eedelste in my, my hart." And yet, the language has its own systematic power to generate meaning out of accidental relationships: *hert* evokes *hertog* and *hertogin*—Duke and Countess—suggesting that the h(e)art that Orsino hunts in the form of his unobtainable noblewoman is in fact none other than his own self-absorbed and absorbing figure, his own heart. We could dwell on these details forever. The general point that I want to make is not merely that Krige and Afrikaans are quite capable of rendering Shakespeare insofar as translation is indeed generically possible, but that the translation allows us to listen to this over-familiar speech with new ears: it refreshes Shakespeare, allows those of us who have command of both English and Afrikaans (or of a language other than English, which would make other translations accessible) to receive these words as their original audience might have—with surprise, delight, and wonder at their powerful newness. The fact that we actually *understand* what is being said is a bonus.

So much for poetry. What of proper names? Jacques Derrida has discussed the peculiar difficulty with proper names along the same lines as his analysis of the logic of the signature: as a designator of either an actual or fictional object, the proper name is strictly speaking untranslatable.²⁵ As a combination of letters that refers to this person or that city, it refers but it does not signify, it does not *mean* anything. My name is David, not *Dawid* (its Afrikaans equivalent), and certainly not Dawid Rogueburrough.²⁶ To speak of Dawid Rogueburrough would be to refer to someone else entirely. And yet, as a signifier within a system of language, the proper name is necessarily capable of being moved in the direction of a common noun, that is to say, precisely in the direction of meaning.²⁷ Such is its capacity to skulk about, to act the rogue. Toby Belch, Andrew Aguecheek: following a well-established comic tradition, Shakespeare imbues his characters' proper names with common meaning, and often in an ironic sense, so

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel," in *Difference in Translation*, trans. and ed. Joseph F. Graham (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 165–207.

²⁶ The equivalent of the Low German *schalk* is a rogue, while a *wyk* is a borough, quarter or suburb.

²⁷ See David Schalkwyk, *Literature and the Touch of the Real* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004).

that the common meaning is contradicted by the nature of the proper person.²⁸ What is the translator to do? Remain proper, or turn common?

My reading of this comic passage makes it evident that Krige has chosen to translate the names of the two comic characters. But he does not do so literally. Toby is not *Tobie Opbreek* or *Uitbraak*, but *Tobie Wynvat* (“Winevat”); Andrew Auguecheek is not *Andries Kouekoorswang* but *Andries Bibberbakkies* (“Quiverface” or “Shivercheek”). Contrasted with the wonderful concreteness of *Bibberbakkies*, which gets frail flesh to enact, in the process of pronouncing the name, the idea contained in Auguecheek, *Wynvat* is in itself not an especially profound translation. It is certainly more appealing than the too graphic *opbreek* or *uitbraak*; but its chief merit lies in the space that it provides for punning. As I recall, Shakespeare does not play on Toby’s first name—*Wynvat*, separable into *wyn* and *vat*, is the foundation for countless forms of wordplay, some of which are realized in the passage I read earlier, especially in the deft movement in the Fool’s complaint: “Maar to daag julle nie op nie, vervlaks, kon ons nie saam met Sir Toby *wyn vat* nie, moes ons al sy *gevattigheid* mis—om nie eens te praat nie, Sir Andries, van jou *uitgevathheid*,”²⁹ followed in turn by the play on Andries as a *fat* with an f: a dandy or sartorial show-off. The nonce sense *wynig*, to be drunk or full of wine, is also a homonym for *weinig*, little or nothing, empty, an apt way of characterizing Toby himself.

These possibilities of Afrikaans are themselves untranslatable because they arise from the accidental or arbitrary nature of the signifiers that make up respective languages. *Malvolio* thus offered extra space for play in Afrikaans during the scene in which the other servants torment the steward for being insane by allowing the first syllable of the name—*mal* means “mad” in Afrikaans—to be provocatively accentuated. Where languages are linked genealogically, such terms may be similar enough to translate the pun into the other language, sometimes with results that are more brilliant and satisfying

²⁸ See Simon Stockfish, the fruiter, in *2 Henry IV* III.2.31.

²⁹ “But then you two didn’t turn up, damn you, and we couldn’t take wine [*wyn vat*] with Sir Toby, had to miss all his witty capers [*gevattigheid*], not even to mention, Sir Andrew, your sartorial splendor [*uitgevathheid*]”; although Eric Nicholson has pointed out to me that “belch” is probably played on, physically if not verbally, at I.5.116–17, when Toby utters the “plague o’ these pickle herring” line in likely response to his own burping or belching, and that there’s a complex pun here on the “Pickelhering” clowns of the Dutch and German lands. For information on “Pickelhering” clowns and references, see the chapters by M.A. Katritzky and Pavel Drabek in this volume.

in the target language. The English translator of the Asterix comic's transformation of the relatively unexceptional name of Obelix's dog, "Idèfix," into "Dogmatix" is a signal case. Puns and proper names do not so much show that languages are untranslatable, but rather that such translation cannot be expected to follow a simple, linear process, in which the target word is always, because it is subsequent, inferior to the original. Rather, decisions such as Krige faced when confronted by the proper names of Shakespeare's characters or by an incomprehensible passage in the play, are made in an historical moment that always looks both forwards and backwards, and which is as much open to the opportunities that the target language makes available as it is bound to the restraints of the original text.

In a superb discussion of the problem of decision-making in translation, and its relation to the proper name and to history, Jacques Lezra focuses on an apparently incidental translation of a proper name in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.³⁰ Here Wittgenstein writes about Excalibur, the legendary sword of Arthurian legend. The "original" German text, however, refers to quite another blade: "Nothung," the equally legendary sword of Siegmund and Siegfried in the *Nibelungenlied*. Lezra shows that the translation from "Nothung" to "Excalibur," which was sanctioned by Wittgenstein himself, was anything but arbitrary. It signals not merely the practical need to substitute a reference that would be readily recognized by an English reader, but also a whole world of historical and cultural associations. The translation was undertaken at the time of the Anschluss, when Wittgenstein suddenly found himself a German (rather than an Austrian) citizen. Expressing horror and revulsion at the idea, he asked his friend John Maynard Keynes to help him convert to British citizenship. The apparently simple move from the imperialist, Wagnerian symbol of Siegfried's sword to the founding myth of enlightened British political culture was clearly determined by a combination of intensely personal and historical pressures. Whole worlds are evoked by the names "Excalibur" and "Nothung," and from 1938 to 1945, when the translation of the *Philosophische Bemerkungen* was being undertaken, they were indeed worlds apart. Lezra points out that, even though these respective proper names do almost identical work in exemplifying Wittgenstein's philosophical point about the relationship between names and their referents, they invoke different senses of community, of belonging to a group of people with a particular, informing history.

³⁰ Jacques Lezra, "The Indecisive Muse," in *Divided Loyalties: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. Louis Menand (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

Wittgenstein and his translators' choice to replace "Nothung" with "Excalibur" thus was shaped by an acute sense of such communities and their historical conflict.

Lezra's astute analysis warns me, however, not to fall into the trap of idealizing the Afrikaans translation of *Twelfth Night*. Krige was invited to undertake the translation in the early 1960s by a friend in TRUK³¹—the *Transvaalse Raad vir die Uitvoerende Kunste*, or the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal—one of the cultural bastions of an Afrikaner nationalism that, having declared a republic and withdrawn from the Commonwealth, was anxious to assert its independence from a political world that was increasingly beginning to resist its forms of oppression, and from an especially English culture that had basked for too long in its assumed superiority. Within two decades two costly, ostentatious and frankly fascist public buildings, in the form of the State Theatre in Pretoria (adorned with a monstrous bust of J.G. Strydom, one of the most openly racist of apartheid's prime ministers) and the Nico Malan Theatre in Cape Town (called after the first apartheid prime minister), had been erected as symbols of separationist cultural power. Although *Twaalfde Nag* had its premiere in 1964 at the modest Alexander Theatre in the heartland of English-speaking, commercial interests, it subsequently became the flagship Afrikaans theatrical production in the Nico Malan Theatre in Cape Town, and was given multiple performances in Pretoria. Given more publicity than any piece of theater in South African history up to that point—if the dust jacket is to be believed—it was repeatedly mounted as a showpiece of Afrikaans cultural and political power. There is a certain paradoxical quality to this: Shakespeare, the quintessence of Englishness, deployed as the stage on which Afrikaner nationalism flexed its cultural muscles. Yet we should not be surprised that Shakespeare's cultural capital should have been used to cash in the reserves of a relatively new language, the dramatic resources of which were considerably thinner than its poetry or prose. Besides, the Krige translation was doing what the founding general secretary of the African Native National Congress (precursor of the ANC), Sol Plaatje, had sought for his translations of Shakespeare into Setswana half a century earlier: it was using a consensus about the incomparable quality of Shakespeare to show that it could indeed be matched by a language dismissed by some as having too meager cultural and expressive resources for the task.³²

³¹ See *Twaalfde Nag*, p. 7.

³² See Sol T. Plaatje's translations of *Julius Caesar* (*Dintshontsho Tsa Bo-Juliuse Kesara* [Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press, 1937]) and *The Comedy of Errors* (*Diphosphosho* [Morija: Morija Printing Works,

What difference does this material history or context make to our evaluation of Uys Krige's translation as such? That is hard to say. I suspect that the play as performed in the Baxter Theatre of the University of Cape Town or at the *Kleinkaroo Nasionale Kunstefees* (Little Karoo National Arts Festival) in Oudtshoorn in 2005 fell on both the ear and mind very differently from the same text enacted in the Nico Malan Theatre in the early 1970s. My son's Afrikaans teacher confessed to me that he had urged his classes to see *Twaalfde Nag* with some trepidation: not because it was Shakespeare, but because he thought that its Afrikaans might not be up to the demands of the twenty-first century. He feared that an Afrikaans translation now approaching its fiftieth year might be too *ouderwets*—too old-fashioned and out of touch with not only a new millennium but also a new society. He was relieved and delighted by its continuing capacity to speak to and engage its audience, more than half of whose members, on the night I went, would not have been allowed to set foot in the all-white preserves of Nico Malan or J.G. Strydom because they were members of Cape Town's so-called "coloured" community. Although of mixed race, these people speak Afrikaans as their home language. I have never attended an English version of Shakespeare in which the audience, to a person, was so swayed by pleasure, so immediately engaged. The experience recalled my sense of the audience response at my bilingual production 25 years before, and even further back, to the performance in the early seventies in the Nico Malan Theatre, where responses to the comic ribaldry were more muted in an audience somewhat more attuned to Malvolio's sensibility than Toby Wynthat's. I recall the two elderly women behind me periodically exclaiming, "Haai sies!" ("How disgusting!"), and then bursting into gales of delighted laughter. No *Haai sieses* in the Baxter 30 years later, but plenty of laughter.

Of course, the conscious as well as unconscious choices that Krige made to ensure that engagement are beginning to show their age: the comic improvisations which draw on Afrikaans's deep engagement with Shakespeare (see also Brian Willan, *Sol Plaatje: A Biography* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1980) and David Schalkwyk and Lerothodi Lapula, "Sol Plaatje, William Shakespeare and the Translations of Culture," *Pretexes* 9:1 (2000): 9–26. Although parallels could be drawn between Plaatje's and Krige's translations of Shakespeare, there are also some significant differences. Plaatje was concerned with the preservation of forms of Setswana that were falling into disuse with the advent of modernity. In part, then, his translations seek to preserve expressions and proverbs that had already become archaic in his own language. This may have something to do with the fact that there is no record of any production of Plaatje's translations. Krige, on the other hand, wished to mobilize a language that had been in political and cultural ascendance for some time.

and long connection with farming and the *platteland* (the countryside) are now somewhat attenuated for an increasingly urban Afrikaans-speaking population. Krige's reference to Malvolio as a "Dopper" (an arch-Puritan) would once have evoked an instantaneous, lived association with the hyper-puritanical church of the *verkrampes*—the party and church of the now thankfully forgotten Dr. Albert Hertzog, who kept television from sullyng the pure souls of white South Africans and inflaming the political passions of its black inhabitants—in a situation in which English associations with Puritanism are fairly distant. Most Afrikaners themselves have now lost touch with the intensities of the particular form of religious and political fundamentalism represented by the arch-conservative *Gereformeerde Kerk van Suid-Afrika* (The Reformed Church of South Africa). There is a certain irony in this, since these connections to Afrikaner experience and cultural representation are closer to Shakespeare's society than a secularized, urban English-speaking experience in a globalized world. Although it clearly continues to speak to present-day speakers of Afrikaans, Uys Krige's 1967 *Twaalfde Nag* will no doubt slowly drift away from the kind of cultural and political community that Lezra invokes in his analysis of the historical and ideological charge of Wittgenstein's endorsement of the translation of "Nothung" into "Excalibur." Krige's translation will in time be subject to that intermittent charge, and perhaps even the fine gauze of dulling familiarity, that already besets Shakespeare's texts for their native speakers.

Let us return, then, to Peter Hall's comment that Shakespeare cannot be translated. The implication of this response is that nobody who does not speak English can have access to Shakespeare. Recall those colleagues who left my bilingual production because it contained too much Afrikaans and too little Shakespeare. Pity them. For no English-speaking audience can properly understand Shakespeare unless they have access to another language through which he may be made available to them *in translation*. This is so because of the inevitable historical and cultural distance that all English-speakers experience in their reception of Shakespeare's texts. Keeping those texts "pristine" paradoxically involves preserving that distance, often to the point of incomprehension. It is not merely translation that betrays; time is the greatest traitor of all. Translation may in fact go some way towards enacting what Shakespeare hoped to achieve through his sonnets: escaping the abrasive work of time by transforming the text so that it continues to live in the "eyes of men." Furthermore, if we see translations like *Twaalfde Nag* not as a falling off from a pristine original, but rather as an extension of Shakespeare—part of a more broadly conceived Shakespearean text confined to no single language or nation—then we would save ourselves

from Peter Hall's bristly indignation. *Twaalfde Nag* is a better play than *Twelfth Night*. But not in all places, nor for all time.