«All my best is dressing old words new»

Carla Dente
(University of Pisa)

The essays collected in this volume constitute a written record of the lively discussions involving both speakers and audience on the occasion of a symposium organized by the Postgraduate Degree Course in Literary Translation, one of the most successful programmes ever organized by the Faculty of Modern Languages at the University of Pisa. The event was the last in a series of three built around the presence of eminent authors and translators who were invited to talk about their fruitful mutual relations with texts in a way that was meant to enhance the students' awareness and experience of the variety and complexity of the activities that go by the name of translation. On the agenda of these three events was our intention to promote the belief that translation can no longer be interpreted as a derivative literary activity but is a cultural process in its own right which stands side by side with original writing in so far as it shares with creative writing the ability to impact significantly on the field of culture.

In previous years this course had concentrated on issues raised by the translation of poetry and prose[1], and at the end of the first cycle it appeared consistent and appropriate to present our students with an opportunity to reflect on theatre translation, which offers abundant food for thought both methodologically and culturally. Theatre texts not only afford interesting historical and cultural insights, but while raising the issue of interlingual translation, they also allow us to focus on intersemiotic transfers to different media, which are becoming more and more varied as technology progresses.

We wanted to stimulate reflection on all these points by focusing on the work of an absent author in order to substantiate the metaphor of a «conversation with the dead» used by Greenblatt in *Shakespearean Negotiations*[2], where he discusses the survival of textual traces within which the social energy of artistic exchange circulates. The image of a conversation with the dead is central to the study of culture, in particular to the forms of the transmission and dissemination of texts, the anatomy of tradition, especially literary tradition, and the structure of cultural memory. If we focus on the first part of the phrase – the word 'conversation' – it is also possible to foreground the idea of an actual exchange which takes place as the present time confronts the time passed.

The quotation from Shakespeare's sonnet 76 chosen as the title of this 'induction' to the collection is purposely, and I believe aptly, used in a de-contextualized manner:

[1] The books which sum up the activities of the Postgraduate Course of Studies in Literary Translation are AA.VV., *La Traduzione di autore*, Pisa, Plus/Pisa University Press, 2007 and *Lexical Complexity: Theoretical Assessment and Translational Perspectives*, ed. by Marcella Bertuccelli Papi, Gloria Cappelli and Silvia Masi, Pisa, Plus/Pisa University Press, 2007.

[2] Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1988.

the author, lamenting the fact that the poems he produces are always similar to one another, explains that the reason for this is that the source of his inspiration is invariably his love for the «fair youth»; he therefore can only spend «what is already spent» and still tell «what is told». In our present context these words are meant to represent a different attitude: the idea that though Shakespeare is the translator's «love» and «argument», the new «dressing» does indeed represent «variation or quick change». This paradigm, we feel, contains the image of Shakespeare's translation across time and space.

Our absent author, Shakespeare, occupies an eminent role in the canons of his own literary culture and of our own, on the Continent, in our own separate ways through several ages… Or are ways and contexts not so separate after all? An answer to this question has been attempted, I believe, in several of the following essays which highlight the role of translation as a form of cultural negotiation and draw a map of Shakespeare translations across Europe, both in the field of literature, and in those of cinema and the theatre. We are all persuaded that translation has played a crucial role in the construction and dissemination of Shakespeare's myth and popularity during the past four centuries, but we also hold the view that, paradoxically perhaps, this reveals a unifying cultural identity on the Continent, which rebounds to Britain itself and should be taken into greater consideration on both sides of the Channel. At the same time, the choice of Shakespeare as a case study author has highlighted the fact that the Renaissance was indeed the site where the construction of differentiated cultural identities in Europe started. This awareness seems to be of particular relevance at a moment when, in the political arena, the recognition of a common European cultural identity has come to a standstill, at least provisionally, and has perhaps given way to the concept, or at least the practice, of unity in diversity, as witnessed by the recent discussions on the draft of the European Constitution.

Each culture develops through a process of remembrance and forgetfulness[3], comparing and contrasting motifs and identities in dialectical forms that make cultural identity itself a constant negotiation within and beyond each culture. Each text is a network built out of motifs from other texts, which have been absorbed and transformed in response to different authorial needs in terms of expression and representation. The translator's journey from one text to another, from one culture to another, can be compared to that of a traveller crossing borders, or, to use another very common metaphor, it can function as a bridge across different cultures. I feel that even such a worn-out metaphor is worth repeating, at a time when the encounter with other cultures is very often perceived, instead, as a source of conflict. In this context, the theory and practice of translation, with their focus on a crucial means of cultural transmission throughout Europe, can work today to enhance the dialogue between cultures. This is true to the extent that each culture involved in the process partially discontinues its own national tradition (to make use of a view put forward by Aleida Assmann), and 'translates' and negotiates its identity in a time and space of cultural difference described,

[3] See Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, Munich, Beck, 1997; *Identities: Time, Difference, and Boundaries*, ed. by Aleida Assmann and Heidrun Friese, New York, Berghahns Book, 2001 [1998].

according to Homi Bhabha's suggestive insights[4], as a kind of Newfoundland, or a no-man's land – in short, a third space which is neither here nor there, in which translation comes across as a kind of displaced activity loaded with value.

Interest in this approach is shown by a large number of scholarly works that have appeared in different European countries: here I will only mention a fairly recent collection of essays published in Italy and edited by Maria Del Sapio[5], which deals with the persistence of *Hamlet* as a cultural palimpsest in the context of Continental literature, across different periods in time. The essays in that volume focus on re-interpretations rather than on interlingual/intermedia translations, which instead constitute our dual thematic focus. However, the volume can be seen as complementary to the present one since it adopts the same geographical dimension (European), the same perspective of reciprocity in the cultural exchange between past and present, while also highlighting the translation of epochal codes, the historicity of Shakespearean texts as well as the historicity of the derived texts, with reference to the uses and functions of the reconstructed meanings sprung from the contact of the Modern with the Early Modern[6]. The volume is also praiseworthy in that it begins by pointing out Shakespeare's personal contribution to the dissemination of motifs and themes across Europe and also his own 'translations' of Continental literary materials to England.

British scholars have perhaps somewhat underplayed the foreignness of Shakespeare's own inspiration so as to privilege his attitude towards the representation of Englishness, and the cultural plurality which marked the diffuse practice of literary borrowing during the Renaissance was lost with the increasing affirmation over the centuries of English as a *lingua franca*. This is another way of saying that in Britain Shakespeare has generally been domesticated so as to make him wholly English, while the Continental translator still faces the dilemma of whether to opt for a foreignizing or for a domesticating approach to his works. It is of course the translator who can best appreciate Shakespeare's artistic mastery of the English language. It is the translator whose work is essential to the dissemination of Shakespeare's dramatic texts – known on stage almost only through translation – and to the consequent construction of Shakespeare as a Continental cultural icon. However, the opposition between domestication and foreignization is not so drastic and radical as it may seem; rather, it offers the translator a whole range of sophisticated possibilities in between the two polarities. It is perhaps worth remembering that the emphasis Anglo-Saxon countries place on the transparency of translation amounts to a probable act of violence upon the foreign text and its author. Radical acculturation is itself an option on the political agenda of translators. It is also a controversial one: as

[4] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 2006 [1994], p. 55.

[5] *La traduzione di Amleto nella cultura europea*, ed. by Maria Del Sapio Garbero, Venice, Marsilio, 2002.

[6] Attention is devoted to the pervasive presence of the Hamlet figure in Mallarmé (Risset), to the reception of *Hamlet* in Russia (De Michelis), to the use of *Hamlet* in Portugal during the Salazar regime (Lanciani), to conflicting re-interpretations of Hamlet as a character in Berlin and in Budapest during the Third Reich (Marcus), in East Germany (Fiorentino), and finally in Spain (Grilli).

Lawrence Venuti[7] has argued, while the dominant paradigm of the invisibility of the translator, realized through the fluency of a domesticating translation, seems to foreground the author's idiosyncratic style, it also paradoxically points to the reconstruction of the text according to a model of pre-existing values, beliefs and idioms in the target language, which might be justified only within a concept of 'essentialism' which transcends the historicity of both the text and its author. The possible opposite strategy, that of foreignizing Shakespeare, makes, in its turn, another political point in that it shows how a text may resist the dominance of some inherent human 'essence', by foregrounding cultural difference and linguistic marginality, and possibly also by challenging them from inside the same target culture, sometimes displaying an anachronistic turn. The awareness that a translation may wield great power in the construction of cultural and national identities in foreign countries, then, ultimately helps us to reflect on the kind of trans-cultural politics embodied by the translation itself: it can be instrumental to the maintenance or to the revision of conceptual paradigms. Thus, the decisions of the translator are never neutral, and any subdivision of the discipline named Shakespeare Studies, professed by any scholar on the Continent and elsewhere, should take into account the nature and the size of the circulation of the translated texts before assuming any definitive critical stance.

Paradoxically, however, Shakespeare has become a foreigner in England herself owing to the absolute taboo against any modification whatsoever of his language, which it is considered unthinkable to update and thus make more meaningful for a present-day general audience, notwithstanding the difficulties many encounter in fully understanding Renaissance English[8]. The opposite process has taken place in Italy where constant re-translations have favoured the concept of the impermanence of the translated text, with the result that we do not have any 'recognized' stage language for Shakespeare's translated works, as is the case elsewhere in Europe. We cannot therefore perceive a line or a sentence as distinctively Shakespearean, and, with very few exceptions, we do not have a single, established way in which memorable citations are translated into Italian. On the other hand, if compared to the standards of the other European countries, the English publishing industry imports fewer books in translation and I am aware that while this may be a further consequence of the international affirmation of English as a *lingua franca*, it might also involve questions of industrial policy in commissioning translations. Elsewhere on the Continent, though questions of policy remain, translations form a substantial part of the books and articles on the booksellers' shelves and a good number of these translations are dramatic texts, often published on the occasion of an actual staging.

[7] See Chapter 1 of Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, London, Routledge, 2003 [1995].

[8] Intralingual translation, to use Jakobson's well known terminology, i.e. a modernized version of Shakespeare texts in the source language, is a process that has very limited currency on English stages and is invariably the result of collective stage practice exercised on very few textual cruxes. When Stanley Wells was the Director of the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford, he unsuccessfully made a plea for intralingual translation to widen Shakespeare's impact on the general public in Britain.

Time and geography are essential to translation and have always implied moving targets: from one language, culture, or issue to other languages and cultures, to an emphasis on other issues and themes, to transfers to other media.

Drama translation shifts the target of the text from the reader to the audience since the dramatic text itself is what has aptly been defined as the «servant of two masters»[9], an allusion to the in-betweennes of its nature, at once printed word, literary text and word to be performed, a communicative potential to be realized on stage through visual and aural means. This raises the problem of whether translators should also act as mediators in this field, whether, in other words, they should take responsibility for the text's performability in the target language. Without going into the interesting details of this debate it may be stated, however, that an awareness at least of the scenic potential of the written text needs to be part of the translator's kit. Theatre translation, more than other forms of translation, is especially concerned with the context in which the speech act takes place, since dramatic language is perhaps best defined as 'word in (physical) context'.

The word the translator chooses, however, also attains a performative dimension when it engages with poetry and is thus ostensibly destined for the page alone. One of the concluding points in Manfred Pfister's essay – «'Bottom thou art translated': Recent Radical Translations of Shakespearean Sonnets in Germany» – is that poetry translation these days «speaks of translation», and foregrounds the translator and his/her work, deliberately rejecting the history of invisibility Lawrence Venuti has so convincingly delineated. Pfister does so by tracing a lineage of translational products defined by the degree of autonomy the translator exercises and enjoys, ranging from the severe constraints of *Interlinearversion* to the increasingly vindicated poetical independence of *Nachdichtung*, *Umdichtung* and *Adaption*, to the opposite end of the spectrum represented by *Radikalübersetzung*, exercises in translation which totally, and often playfully, subvert Shakespearean poetical patterns in the light of the new technologies and even of biological engineering. Translation for the page here engages with different successive renderings of the same poem in a sequence of historical moments framed in each version, refusing «to play the traditionally ancillary function in the service of Shakespeare's sonnets». The source text becomes instead «playful material for […] intertextual games». The customary distinction between original text and derivative text is thus wholly overthrown, even though, on a different level, we could also argue that the centrality of the poetic subject in Shakespeare's sonnets is perhaps never better maintained than in the new translated text which now reflects the centrality of the *translator*'s subjectivity.

The second essay in the collection, Rui Carvalho Homem's «'Of Languages and Kings': Names, History and Shakespeare in Portuguese», dialogues with the first essay along the dimension of Time. Both are deeply concerned with the past, with history and with the issue of translation as a bridge across time, showing the effects of distancing and alterity, or conversely the effects of domestication and naturalization. By focusing on how the proper names of English characters

[9] See Sara Soncini, «Intersemiotic Complexities: Translating the word of drama» in *Lexical Complexity: Theoretical Assessment and Translational Perspectives*, cit., pp. 271-78. See also, in the same volume, Carla Dente, «Intersemiotic Complexities. The Word of Drama», pp. 261-69.

in the history plays could be translated in a Portuguese context, with its special links with the history of England in certain periods, Carvalho Homem's essay unexpectedly brings to the surface the problems connected with the practice of re-contextualization.

Ultimately, the position this essay endorses is that of the legitimacy and indeed the appropriateness of heterogeneous choices in the translator's decision-making process, if these choices are consciously pursued and historically motivated. The historical dimension of Shakespeare's plays has been prominent in recent work in Shakespeare Studies, regardless of the kind of approach adopted, and overall this particular focus promotes a greater awareness of the workings of collective memory. Nowadays the translator is alert to possible internal frictions in the strategy of presentism which may affect the translation's consistency, the first, and more obvious one, concerning the attribution of new meanings to old stories. There is also, however, a strident, albeit not so obvious, contradiction at work in the apparently 'progressive' practice of making Shakespeare 'our contemporary', since this ultimately results in the enhancement of the very same trans-historical aspects which had been overemphasized by the critical establishment till well past the middle of the 20th century, fostering a humanistic interpretation of Shakespeare's works. In translating a Shakespeare play, the alternative we are faced with of either making history appear close and new, or distant and old can be seen as a sort of emblem of uncertainty containing the ideas of both time and space and pointing to a number of possible translation practices, from linguistic archaism to radical modernization.

Within this framework we can read Ángel-Luis Pujante's discussion of an unusual occurrence in contemporary European theatre, the 2004 staging of Leandro Fernández de Moratín's late 18th-century translation of *Hamlet*, which was performed at the Festival de Teatro Clásico in Almagro. The alternative between domestication and distancing, as well as a meaningful play with time, is here embodied by a version of Shakespeare's text which is distant not only from the original, but also from the context and audience it was first written for. Time also involves a form of textual hierarchy, the closer to us a text is, the more relevant it appears. Besides, in a Spanish context, it is very difficult to decide whether the label of 'classical text' is more pertinently attributed to Shakespeare or to Moratín. Thus the gesture behind the director's unusual choice can be interpreted as a polemic statement against any effort to artificially distance the translation of a classical text: «Moratín's language […] had aged in a natural manner, whereas some well-known contemporary translations […] were […] artificially archaic».

Another point Pujante forcefully makes in his detailed discussion of this translation is that, even though Moratín was no unconditional admirer of Shakespeare, the production establishes that his translation, notwithstanding all its neoclassical features, can still have currency for a contemporary audience, used to appreciating Shakespeare in ways which are still greatly conditioned by the heritage of Romantic bardolatry. This essay brings us closer to substantiating our claim that there is such a thing as a European Shakespeare, which we believe to be a culturally significant construct relevant to an understanding of Shakespeare's reception and therefore deserving of more careful study and assessment on the part of our Anglo-American colleagues.

Among those stage events which challenge the theory of translation can be included the case discussed by Sara Soncini, who examines a 2002 production of *Hamlet* by the Italian director Federico Tiezzi. Tiezzi's re-reading of the tragedy is built around the effects and significance of mingling different translations of the text belonging to two different periods. Soncini's essay is again concerned with the dialectic of the temporal dimension, which in the theatre, through the process of intersemiotic translation, is also necessarily connected with body and space, once more involving a choice between naturalization and estrangement, or, to put it another way, between domestication and foreignness. The canonical stance of Italian translators of Shakespeare has been to focus on the audience rather than on the source text, an attitude which implies the disguising of the temporal dimension in the translated text. This approach, which is responsible for the translation's impermanence within both the literary and the theatrical system if compared to the relative permanence of the source text, should be seen as a historically determined feature of poetics rather than a natural mechanism of literature. This becomes evident when one considers that for contemporary English-speaking audiences, Shakespeare is instead perceived as always inscribed within the past, accessible only through a language that is genuinely archaic, and hence not immediately comprehensible to the general public. In Italy, then, the translator's choice has to be viewed as a deliberate stance which prefers the effects of acceptability to those of adequacy.

Tiezzi is very much aware of the fact that for an Italian audience the source text is as unattainable as a rare bird forever emerging from the ashes of successive translations: his contrapuntal use of Michele Leoni's 18th-century translation with Gerardo Guerrieri's contemporary one gives the different sections of the play an authentic flavour of the past. The two versions, with their embedded temporal alterity, dialogue with one another on two interrelated levels: that of the constraints they lay on the performance, and that of the conscious choices made by the director-*dramaturg* for strategic moments in the production.

With Mariangela Tempera's «'Whose grave is this?' References to *Hamlet* V.1 in Italian Cinema» and Mariacristina Cavecchi's «Shakespeare in the Vucciria: 'Fair Verona' in Roberta Torre's *Sud Side Stori*», both discussing Italian film versions of Shakespeare's plays, we move more decidedly into the realm of space and of space as an index of popular culture.

Tempera investigates the recurrence of allusions to the gravediggers' scene in Italian B-movies, considered as manifestations of popular culture. Her analysis concentrates on the gravedigger(s') presence itself rather than on other details of the original scene, since the skull, which will immediately remind a British audience of *Hamlet* V.1, has been in the Italian context frequently relocated in parodies and adaptations of III.1 and of the famous «To be or not to be» monologue. The gravediggers in particular do not have a very remarkable stage history in Italy because, as Tempera aptly comments, the mixture of tragic and comic which characterizes this scene is one of the most difficult to translate into both the Italian language and theatre tradition, and is therefore very frequently cut. Any allusion to the scene, consequently, is caught only by the most cultivated members of the audience while, for those who do not recognize the quotation, the re-contextualization of the skull where it belongs in Shakespeare simply goes

unnoticed. Tempera's overview is representative of the most popular sub-genres belonging to a season of post-war movie comedies which relied, sometimes heavily, on the fame of the actors they employed and on their immediately recognizable powers of comic characterization. The films discussed range from the Spaghetti Western to the *Commedia all'italiana* and therefore embody different attitudes to their source, from the wilful foregrounding of the gravediggers' scene in Sergio Corbucci's *Quella sporca storia del West* (where it is perfectly in tune with one of the thematic loose ends of the genre, the championing of the underdog) to the misquotation in *Fantasmi e ladri*, which instead plays conspicuously with visual allusions provided by certain features of the actor's appearance and in the setting. In *Susanna tutta panna*, the device of replacing, in the crucial scene, the skull with the cake which has been the object of a frantic chase (a staple in comic silent films) also provides the opportunity for satire against what was seen as the pretentiousness of both the theatre directors and the bourgeois audiences of post-war Italy.

For her final example Tempera turns to a late (1989) and markedly self-reflexive specimen of the genre of the *Commedia all'italiana*. Vittorio Gassman, the most popular Italian stage Hamlet, was cast as the gravedigger in *Mortacci*, a film which again does not overtly exploit Shakespeare's language but merely *Hamlet*'s stage images even though, with its question about «whose grave is this?», it aptly hints at the declining course of the actor's career.

Within the issue of the shifts in location which take place when a Shakespeare story is transferred to the screen, the interpretive polarity of local/global Shakespeare, which has recently attracted much thought, is central to Cavecchi's exploration of a recent Italian film version of *Romeo and Juliet*, which apparently reveals yet again our author's supposed 'universality' and the propensity of his work to be used as a mediating device towards the reduction of antinomies. Set in Palermo, Torre's *Sud Side Stori* focuses on the cultural clash which surrounds the passion between a young Palermitan boy and a Nigerian prostitute, involving issues of identity, race, and difference expressed significantly through setting, body language, and music. While Torre's film consistently exploits the dimension of filmic intertextuality, and therefore, through its allusion to earlier filmic versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, would seem to make a case for Shakespeare's universality, the local orientation of her adaptation is foregrounded through specific allusions to Sicilian culture, both high (Guttuso) and low (pop and traditional music), and through the visual relevance given to certain unmistakable Palermitan settings. The geographical relocation of Shakespeare, as a matter of fact, does not take the spectator back to the 'original' Italian setting of his play, as in some films which endorse a romantic view of Italy, or in others where an anglicized, tourist-oriented version of the landscape prevails, but to a somewhat caricatured Palermo, often depicted through a succession of realistic shots which superimpose on the a-temporal image of 'Fair Verona' that of «the typical Sicilian city rife with racial prejudice, prostitution, rackets and superstition, a city which is real and fake at the same time».

As in Guttuso's famous painting of the Vucciria market, the iconic representation of Palermo's decay seems to encompass both the landscape and its inhabitants. Torre's decision to cast ordinary people both in the lead roles and as supernumeraries harks back to the tradition of Italian neo-realist cinema; at the same time, the

unusual emphasis placed on the actors' 'real', sometimes positively ugly, bodies is in opposition to the tendency, within mainstream Shakespearean cinema, to exploit the sex appeal of famous film stars. The music, too, with its odd mixture of traditional songs, African sound and kitsch Italian pop highlights difference and even conflict instead of universality, and is a deliberate move away from the 'hip' international soundtracks of more commercial takes on Shakespeare such as Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* or Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet 2000*. With its insistent focus on local distinctiveness and unresolved contradiction, the movie by the Milanese-Palermitan filmmaker is shown by Cavecchi as posing a challenge to the globalized version of Shakespeare that has been promoted by the film industry over the past few decades, a version which *Sud Side Stori* at the same time quotes and playfully, but programmatically, subverts.

Ton Hoenselaars's contribution provides an ideal epilogue to all the issues presented and discussed so far. His essay offers an overview of today's 'broad' understanding of translation as expressed in the media and also verifies its presence in recent academic discourse, which is very much concerned with the exploration of exchanges between different cultural contexts. The 'existential question' of whether we should start re-focusing on language is inflected through a selection of very recent contributions to the general discussion which allow us to perceive new ferment that hopefully will lead to further developments towards, as Venuti says in his anthology, «a [constant] interest around the translated text, an audience to whom it is intelligible and who puts it to various uses»[10]: each time a new lap of a – possibly never-ending – journey.

[10] Lawrence Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader*, London, Routledge, 2004, p. 491.

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