

## BOOKS

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**William Shakespeare, *Sonnets/Sonete: O nouă versiune românească*, translated by Cristina Tătaru. Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2011, 315 p.**

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To translate poetry of any kind always takes a certain amount of courage on behalf of the translator. Indeed, some argue that the poetry itself is precisely what is lost in the process, yet, as Allen Tate once famously stated, translation remains “forever impossible and forever necessary.”<sup>1</sup> This is particularly the case with Shakespeare’s sonnets, a kind of poetry riddled with rhetorical devices, powerful imagery, as well as figures of speech such as similes, metaphors, and synecdoche, all of which confer to it its aesthetic quality, but are, at the same time, nearly impossible to isolate from their source language. Furthermore, while Shakespeare did write about ageless themes, including love, lust, the brevity of life, or the impermanence of beauty, his sonnets are nevertheless deeply rooted in their time by means of

clever uses of intertextuality and the nuances of a sixteenth century, rural Stratfordian parlance.



Translating the sonnets is therefore a matter of translating the historical time of their production, in addition to the text itself. Such is the daunting task undertaken by Cristina Tătaru in putting forward a new bilingual edition of Shakespeare’s sonnets. Currently an Associate Professor of Lexicology, Stylistics, and Translation Studies, Tătaru has written extensively on both Shakespeare’s work and the issues

of translation from English into Romanian. She has translated a number of Romanian poets, including Vasile Voiculescu, Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, and George Topârceanu, as well as written and published her own volumes of poetry. Tătaru’s bilingual edition of the *Sonnets*, published in 2011, brings together her lifelong work in the field, her experience as a poet, as well as her studies in Shakespeare and humour, in order to provide not only a new translation of the six-

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<sup>1</sup> Humphries, Jefferson. *Reading emptiness: Buddhism and literature*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, pp. 59.

teenth century bard, but also a new interpretation of the latter.

Shakespeare's sonnets are complex poems that often disguise more connotations than they reveal, particularly due to the author's mastery of the subtleties of the English language. Any translator of the sonnets is therefore first faced with the issue of transferring meaning while maintaining an intelligible, natural use of the target language. The process implies some departure from the literal translation of the source text and a balance between the latter and the desire to preserve both message and stylistic devices. This is perhaps one of Cristina Tătaru's most significant strengths in the translation under review. Where previous translations of the sonnets, including the 1974 version by Teodor Boșca, attempt to render Shakespeare's language through an archaic, sometimes forced Romanian equivalent, Cristina Tătaru's use of the target language provides a new solution. Indeed, the new translation focuses not so much on obsolete forms of speech, but rather on the fact that Shakespeare himself grew up near the heart of a rural Warwickshire, which deeply impacted the language he later employed in his work. By preserving archaic forms, previous translations of the sonnets inadequately placed the poems in a sphere of high parlance, whereas Tătaru's choice for a natural, everyday speech successfully delivers the multi-layered flavour of the source text. For instance, in the first verses of Sonnet 7, the morning sun, a metaphor for the Fair Youth in his prime, is greeted by common people, who "Doth homage to his new-appearing sight, / Serving with looks his sacred majesty." If Boșca's version of the same verses reads

"Se-nchină celui ce-nnoit răsare, / Slujind cu ochii sacra-i majestate," Tătaru translates them as the simpler, more natural "Îi dau binețe zilei ce răsare, / Robiți privind la măreția-i, copti." Similarly, in Sonnet 11, the final couplet reads: "She carved thee for her seal, and meant thereby, / Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die." Boșca renders the latter as "Pecete-i te făcu, să-ntipărești / Cu zel modelul, nu să-l nimicești," whereas Tătaru opts for "Ți-a pus pecete Firea, vrând să zică / De-o tipărești, nici copia nu se strică." Not only does the second more aptly transfer the meaning of the couplet using a Romanian manner of speech, rather than merely translating the English wording, but it also better succeeds in conveying the benevolent, yet slightly patronizing rapport between the lyrical voice and the Fair Youth.

Issues of subtlety aside, Cristina Tătaru's version of the sonnets also corrects certain translation errors previously passed unnoticed. The following lines of Sonnet 40 provide just one example: "Then if for my love, thou my love receivest, / I cannot blame thee, for my love thou usest." Teodor Boșca's earlier translation of the above was "De-mi vrei iubita fiindcă-mi porți iubire, / Nu te blestem, căci tu-mi trăiești iubirea." The unnecessary insertion of the noun "iubita" had thus altered the meaning of the entire sonnet. The suggestion was that the lyrical voice had become aware of the fact that the Fair Youth desired the former's lover, the Dark Lady. Certainly, later sonnets make it obvious that the man and the woman betrayed the lyrical voice in some way, yet this is not at all the case in Sonnet 40. Tătaru's translation of the verses, "Pentru iubirea-mi deci, iubirea-miiei, / N-ai vină că iubirea-mi folosești," rec-

tifies the matter and maintains the intended ambiguity of the original poem.

What is more, in spite of using a simpler dialect and a sentence structure that is more appropriate for the target language, the translation under review neatly transfers the metaphors and conceits upon which many of the original sonnets rely in order to function stylistically. One excellent example in this respect is Tătaru's translation of Sonnet 46, one of the notorious eyes-heart sonnets. Here, the conceit is initially built around the war-like struggle taking place between the poet's eyes and heart for possession of the Fair Youth. The innovation brought by Shakespeare lies in the poem's turn towards the judiciary, as the conflict moves from metaphors of war to the inside of a court room. This is aptly maintained in Tătaru's version of the sonnet, which employs terms such as "titlul de proprietate", "juriu", or "verdict" in order to mirror the legalese in the source text. Other conceits skilfully rendered in the new translation include Sonnet 97, with its portrayal of winter as a metaphor for the departure of the Fair Youth, as well as Sonnet 15, with its depiction of man as a plant, boasting its "youthful sap," but immediately forgotten after death. The translation of the well-known Sonnet 130 is also noteworthy, not necessarily for Tătaru's use of metaphor, but particularly for her masterful use of irony. If, for instance, Teodor Boșca's translation of verses 11 and 12, "I grant I never saw a goddess go, / My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground," is rather literal, reading "Eu n-am văzut vreo zână cum pășește:/Când umblă, doamna-mi calcă pe pământ," Tătaru makes fuller use of the valences of the Romanian language in order to

preserve the biting humour of the original poem: "Nu știu cum merg zeițele, -când vine, / Iubita-mi calcă bine în pământ."

At times, the sonority of the sonnets is as essential to understanding their meaning as the text itself. This is, once again, a phenomenon that is particularly difficult to isolate from the source language, yet Cristina Tătaru manages to do so on several occasions. Sonnet 55, one of the rare poems where the lyrical voice overtly displays confidence in the power of their writing, is a fine example. In the original text, across the 14 lines, numerous alliterations build texture, a musical rhythm, as well as the emphasis on the grand nature of the subjects at hand – the ephemerality of life against the permanence of art: "No marble nor the gilded monuments / Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme, / But you shall shine more bright in these contents / Than unswept stone besmeared with sluttish time." Although Tătaru is forced to adjust the alliterative sounds, the alliteration itself is maintained in the target language: "Nu marmura, nu monumentele-n aur / De prinți, mai mult ca versu-mi viețuiesc, / Ci tu, lucind în versul meu de faur, / Nici piatra, care vremile-o pălesc."

Finally, there can be no translation of Shakespeare's poems without an answer to the matter of Will, as it presents itself most famously in Sonnets 135 and 136. Here, the bard masterfully conflates into a single word, "Will," his own name, the idea of volition, as well as a slang reference to male and female reproductive organs. The result is a thoroughly humorous address, riddled with sexual innuendo, and intended for the Dark Lady. However, much of the above is inevitably lost in translation. The Romanian for "will," either "vrere" or "a

## BOOKS

vrea,” can never stand in for the poet’s name, nor have the same erotic connotations. Cristina Tătaru’s text offers an elegant solution, alternating between the use of “Will” and capitalized “Vrere” in order to draw attention to the multifaceted meaning of the original poem. She explains her choice in her own verses immediately following the sonnet, so that the reader can easily access the interpretative game proposed by Shakespeare, even when Shakespeare’s language may be inaccessible.

Ultimately, Cristina Tătaru’s version of the *Sonnets* finds sophisticated answers to several translation issues pertaining to Shakespearean texts. This alone renders her bilingual edition a

great introduction to the bard’s most popular poems. Perhaps more importantly, her adaptation is an excellent example of *transcreation*, that is, of the way in which a translation may benefit from the inspiration, the creative force, and the language mastery of a poet, all the while remaining faithful to the kernel of the source text. Through a mix of Tătaru’s artistic persona and her comprehensive familiarity with Shakespeare’s works and exegeses, the Romanian reader of the present bilingual edition can experience some of the subtleties of rhythm, polysemy, and figurative language that have consecrated the Renaissance writer through the ages.

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