

## MY REASONS FOR TRANSLATING SHAKESPEARE

**Barbara Heliadora**

University of Rio de Janeiro  
Brazil

Being now in the finishing stages of my fifteenth translation of a play by William Shakespeare it is somewhat embarrassing that for the first time I should be asking myself in all seriousness why I do it at all. Loving the plays, of course, is not it, since I loved them for many years without translating them, and many people love them without ever getting the urge to translate them into another language. On the other hand, I must say that I never, at any moment, made the awesome decision to become by definition a translator of Shakespeare's plays, and so it will have to be admitted that a whole set of circumstances must have contributed to what in fact took place—and, I am sure, also weighed considerably as to the type of translation that I have been trying to make all these years.

Not only loving the plays but the way I love them is something that must also be taken into account: as the years went on and I both read Shakespeare's plays more often, and came to see a number of them staged in the original (mostly in England but also in the US and Canada), I no doubt became more and more aware of the formal elements, of the use of prose and poetry, and of the impact of the music of the verse (no organ grinding, please!) for the proper transposition of

Ilha do Desterro	Florianópolis	nº 36	p.219-236	jan./jun. 1999
------------------	---------------	-------	-----------	----------------

text into performance, i.e., of the written into the spoken (and acted) word and world. Above all, more and more I became fascinated by the fact that the rhythm of the verse was an aid, not a hurdle, for the actor; and that the way Shakespeare wrote his lines was his manner of giving precise instructions to the achievement of the exact meaning of them: when director and actor discover the correct rhythmic reading of a line, they in fact are finding the proper way of expressing its meaning - to the greater benefit of the public, who then receive the proper guidance both to the contents and the beauty of any play.

In time, while teaching, I became extremely conscious of the need for new translations, precisely because I felt dissatisfied with what I found, at least as adequate venues for making students appreciate the reasons for the admiration I never failed to feel whenever I reread the plays. Therefore, I guess that originally my primary reason for translating Shakespeare was finding for my students a type of text that might preserve at least some of the characteristics with which the author had imbued the original, since in the poet's plays, more than in any others I have ever read, form and content coexisted in the most exemplary way.

The above statement must no doubt sound appallingly presumptuous, and I must therefore clarify it: there seemed to exist, in the general count of translations, an either/or situation: they were either made by literary admirers of Shakespeare to whom no concern for the stage—either in terms of action or of a text to be spoken by actors and fairly easily understood by audiences which heard them—would be relevant. Such translators seemed to believe, in general, that since he lived at the turn of the seventeenth century, Shakespeare must have written in a very pompous and elaborate language, a belief which regularly drove the average student away from the plays, and which in fact quite often made the plays more unintelligible in translation than in the original. In some other cases the translations would be concerned basically with being stageworthy, but abandoned Shakespeare's formal aspects, appearing all in prose, which destroyed a considerable part of

what makes the plays what they are. So, my concern was in fact with trying to achieve a text in Portuguese (and Brazilian Portuguese, at that) that might be both stageworthy, “easy” for the actors, and as faithful as possible to the original shape of the plays, which to me was an essential part of what has made them loved and admired through the centuries.

When I first started to translate Shakespeare I had been a drama critic for a period of six years and had since then been teaching History of Drama and of the Theatre for approximately the same number of years, and it was in fact by mere chance that I did the translation of *The Comedy of Errors*. Earlier, while teaching, I had felt the need for a good translation of *Hamlet*, and I had asked my mother, Anna Amelia de Queiroz Carneiro de Mendonça, a real poet, to do it for me—which she did with beautiful results, as she later translated *Richard III*, with equally wonderful results, and also at my request. But when I was asked to direct *The Comedy of Errors* I ran into trouble, since my mother’s sense of humour was not really on the lines of that kind of comedy, and I was left, minus my source of good texts in Portuguese, just when in immediate need of a translation. So it was in terms of sheer necessity that I did it for the first time. And even though it was a somewhat unexpected project, I guess that certain ideas must have guided me as I rushed in where many a fool has dared, with no certainty of success; fortunately, the run was successful, and the text reached the public quite well.

I must make it clear that I had, before working with Shakespeare, done quite a number of translations not only of books but also of plays by various authors, and that from these latter I had acquired the habit of thinking very much in terms of spoken language (I often spoke out loud alternative possibilities for a line, in fact, in order to test which would sound more spontaneous or authentic). I was equally concerned with writing lines that actors might speak with no major difficulties, so that they might best convey the meaning of what they were saying to the audience. This previous experience, plus the circumstances in which

I found myself translating *The Comedy of Errors* did, of course, determine my approach to the job in hand, and I know that because of them two ideas were to be the most significant for both that and all subsequent attempts.

When I came to Shakespeare I had to face what would become the major issues for all my work: a) if when I enjoyed reading or seeing (and hearing) any one of Shakespeare's plays the shape of the work, its form and variety, its diction and its music, were part of my enjoyment, I could not therefore believe in the validity of any translation in straight prose, as I had several times encountered in Brazilian translations; b) being a true dramatic poet, a true playwright, a true man of the theatre, Shakespeare wrote to be understood by the wide spectrum of the audience attending very capacious venues, such as The Theatre and, later, The Globe. Keeping this in mind, in spite of the size and creativeness of his vocabulary, all overelaborate and/or recondite structures or vocabulary should be avoided: Caroline Spurgeon's book *Shakespeare's Image and What It Tells Us* (1) gives us statistical proof that an ample majority of Shakespeare's images is taken from everyday life - body, habits, home, town - and perhaps no other aspect defines him so clearly as a popular author. This concern with accessibility, I became persuaded, should be the main guide to the choice of vocabulary in any language into which his plays should happen to be translated.

But before actually approaching the specific, let us go back to certain basic values:

The problems and difficulties of Shakespearean translation are not, basically, any different from those of other types of translation. Please note that I write basically, because I am approaching the question from the assumption that every and any translation depends, initially, on the adequate command both of the language of origin and of that into which one intends to do the translation, with a minimum level of betrayal of the text in hand. Keeping the nature and the objective of a text in mind, to anyone translating just simple instructions on how to operate any kind of household appliance, or machines of any sort, for

instance, precision and clarity must be the uppermost exigencies, errors in sense or meaning becoming at the same time the direst of crimes. There exists, in such cases, no literary concern, in spite of the fact that even in the case of the most humble of leaflets the translator should keep in mind what we might call "the elegance of the language itself": that will be the difference between the fluent text and the one that seems to be stumbling along, hard to be spoken and even to be read.

We will start, then, from this basic level of correction of contents and their adequate expression in the target language. A good example of what one must not do in the case of purely informative translations occurred here many years ago, when a group from the Actors' Studio performed at the Teatro Municipal in Rio de Janeiro. The local press received a release in which the curricula of several of the actors were given, and of one of them it was said that he had acted in the play *Olhe Atrás no Hangar* ("Look Behind the Hangar"), a grotesquely imaginative translation of *Look Back in Anger*, the famous John Osborne play that marked the renewal of British playwriting in the 1950s.

Anyone who has ever worked with translation will be aware of how much more serious the problem becomes when we come to face works of literary merit: there is a change in the level of the vocabulary, and in addition to the peculiarities inherent to the language of origin one must face the peculiarities of the style of the author, at which point starts the desperate search for what may be named only the nearest equivalent, an equivalent of meaning, of intention: should I say in Portuguese "*choveu gatos e cachorros*" I may be being literal, but Brazilians will find it very odd, as odd as an English-speaking person would find "it rained penknives", the correct idiom for Brazil. For all texts that are not exclusively informative or technical, idioms will play a major part in translation, and if I should translate literally into Portuguese the expression "all other things being equal" (as has been done), no one would have any idea that I really meant "given the same circumstances".

Translating for the theatre makes yet further demands somewhat different from those of literary narrative, and in some ways they are harder to satisfy. The two specific aspects that bring the greatest difficulties are: a) the economy of the dramatic form, and b) the need for immediate understanding on the part of the audience. A play must happen in a limited period of time, the limits of which are determined both by the effective physical difficulty of maintaining a human being sitting down quietly over long periods, and by the fact that the spectator must, in order to enjoy a play, be able to have the whole of the action in his head at its end. It is enough to think of the eternal presence of “scenes from the next instalment” and the repetition of the ending of the earlier one at the end and beginning of any soap opera to be aware of the problem: nobody would be able to keep in mind six or eight months of new facts and add them all up at the end of the story.

The time limit determines a specific economy for the theatrical language; true enough that economy is not always exactly the same: even though in *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare writes of “the two hours’ traffic of our stage”, surely he could not expect *Hamlet*, almost one thousand lines longer, to last the same period of time. In a play, naturally, most of the space a novelist spends describing his characters is replaced by the actor who plays the part, and only indispensable characteristics remain, but woven into de dialogue. But the fact remains, also, that an efficient dramatic dialogue is stripped of all irrelevant matter.

In translating a play (any play, realistic or not) from English into Portuguese the question of the economy is made more difficult because the latter is much less compact than the former, and to preserve the original economy one must look out to avoid becoming telegraphic or even incomprehensible. Retaining the ten syllable line as the equivalent of the iambic pentameter demands a lot of thinking and patience in the search of a way to expressing the poet’s words and thought into an equal space, but in fact this is not always possible; however, I really do believe that the addition of an occasional extra line—or even two—is indeed a better solution than doing the whole

thing in the ampler but heavier Alexandrine, or using even a greater number of syllables, as has been done.

There is no doubt that, given the above-mentioned problems, translating all Shakespeare's dramatic texts into prose is much easier, but that does not mean that such would be the way to the best translation, since one must admit that the poet knew what he was doing when he chose to use both prose and poetry to create a play; it's enough to refer to the widely different percentages of the use of blank verse, rhyme and prose in the various periods of his creative career to grasp the significance of form in his writings.

Should the translator pay heed to the author's form, he will easily take note of a number of aspects already acknowledged by scholars as typical of the poet: prose is largely used for comic scenes and characters, as well as to establish class differences: Falstaff uses mainly prose, so do fools (except for songs); murderers speak in prose (as for instance in *Richard III* and *Macbeth*). Prose may be used to separate main and secondary plots (Lear's story is in verse, Gloucester's in prose), to establish strong contrasts (Brutus' speech is in prose, Marc Antony's in verse), as well as to characterize abnormal states of mind (Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking, Lear's crisis during the storm). How can one deny the significance of the change between the two forms when Hamlet's supposed madness always appears in prose, but all his soliloquies and dialogues with Horatio are in verse, in order to show the spectator that he is not mad?

Since prose and verse do not appear in the text by chance or carelessness, but rather determined by a specific process of thought, to do a whole translation in prose is an arbitrary solution in conflict with the play as it was conceived. It seems very strange to me that someone should read the original, like and appreciate it (and if seriously taking into consideration both form and content) and then dismiss the formal aspects believing that it will make no difference. It is by the means of specific use of language that Shakespeare makes his characters express whatever at that particular moment he felt the need to say; if the story

line were all, in fact, it would make reading something like Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* practically the same thing as reading his plays, when in fact they are two very different experiences.

Vocabulary and imagery are part of the picture, of course, but there is never in Shakespeare's plays anything that is not meant to get through to the audience promptly and efficiently, and the basic music and beauty of lines (and certainly of the most famous ones) is a tremendous aid to the achievement of the communication the poet sought. Trying to be faithful to form and content and, at the same time, thinking of achieving some sort of music and beauty in the target language makes for considerable difficulties.

Let us try to establish some preliminary difficulties: there is at least one problem the translator finds not only in Shakespeare but in any Elizabethan author that has no possible solution, the pun. This was appallingly fashionable in Elizabethan England, no doubt thanks to the recent discovery, by the English, that their language could be a lovely instrument, flexible, beautiful, apt to be used for the most incredible plays on words. The classic example of the impossibility of translation comes from the dialogue between Hamlet and the 1st Gravedigger in Act 5, sc.1: a whole sequence is based on the fact that "to lie", in English, has the two meanings of something lying down and of someone telling a lie. There is nothing in the world that can find a completely satisfactory translation for this, as well as for many other such puns to be found throughout most of Shakespeare's works.

It being quite useless to fight with what cannot be done, let us go back to what can, even when it becomes more difficult if one deals with the verse lines, rather than rendering the whole thing in prose. I have had the opportunity to take part in two translation seminars in Shakespeare Congresses, and when one talks about nothing else, one meets up with all sorts of propositions and attitudes concerning that one particular field. The French, for instance, when they do not opt for prose, are staunch defenders of the use of the alexandrine in their translations, based on the premise that "the decasyllable is not a French

verse line", which ultimately means no more than knowing that Corneille, Racine and Molière did not use it for their dramatic works. From Spain, on the other hand, came the idea that provided the proper rhyming sounds appeared at the end of two lines, it would be irrelevant that the two should be of very different lengths.

This latter view was held by Millôr Fernandes in his translation of *King Lear*, but only for couplets at the end of a scene. Since there was no special rhythm in the two lines, the rhyme was not noticed at all, and therefore they did not achieve the end for which Shakespeare strove in the original. When the poet uses a whole series of couplets, even when the speech is meant to express some particularly important idea, no effort was made to preserve this in the translation: Kent's last speech in 1.1. (180-187) is a series of four couplets, translated in straight prose. When Cordelia is about to leave Lear's court to go to France, her speech starts with four lines in blank verse and then she, also, uses a series of four couplets; done in prose, only the last couplet received special treatment, though not quite adequate: "Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind, // Thou lovest here a better where do find" is changed into "*Despede-te deles, Cordélia*" still in prose, followed by three very short verse lines, " *dessa gente má://perdeste o aqui// te dou um melhor lá*". It is one of the more successful attempts, because it does have a certain rhythm, but it does not have either the concision nor the strength of the original.

When I write about the economy of the dramatic form I can offer here a rather strange example, from the successful translation of *Romeo and Juliet* by Onestaldo de Pennafort. The translation in here and there a bit too sweet, but it does have some very good moments. Surprisingly, the translator failed to notice one of the most brilliant examples of Shakespeare's capacity for doing pretty much whatever he wanted with the verse: in a play already full of rhyme, there was a need to find some special way of underlining the first meeting between the young lovers; Shakespeare's solution was to set up, with the first fourteen lines of their dialogue, a perfect sonnet. It is an incredible theatrical

coup, particularly for being so compact, i.e., in accordance with the necessary economy of dramatic writing. Pennafort not only seems not to have noticed the Shakespearean or “catorzain” type of sonnet, but also he uses no less than 22 lines, some of them rhyming, some not, in which the idea of creating a special moment in both form and meaning is lost. That it is possible to be faithful to the original is proved by the lovely translation made by my mother and which I later made use of in my translation of the play: it is compact, lovely, and communicates beautifully with the audience.

I am not quite sure of what may be said about the process of translating Shakespeare; my impression is that the most basic demand is that the translator should have long experience in conversing with the original, that he should be very sensitive to the music of Shakespeare’s verse, and that the rhythms of the original be so easily accessible to his ear that he can look for the equivalent rhythms in Portuguese, for there is nothing worse than a translation into “portuguese”, i.e., the horrible language that is the result of a literal translation (with, shall we say, words that do not fit into the music). It is obvious that no one can translate properly a language over which he does not have full command, but I am sure that anyone who has a working knowledge of English can read Shakespeare, and being a translator does not stop me from believing that everyone should eventually try to read the original: any good edition is a big help for passages containing words the meaning of which the passing of a few centuries has altered.

This, in fact, brings us to another theory put forward by some people otherwise quite competent in the field of Shakespeare, and who should know better: they say that if the object is to make a reader understand well the work of the author, the best should be an absolutely literal transposition to the target language. I even admit that this might be useful as backing for people who are attempting to read the original for the first time, for instance; but one can hardly accept the result as what could be properly named a translation of Shakespeare, for not

only the beauty of the lines would be lost, but also all sense of the economy typical of a play conceived for the stage.

I do not personally believe that anything may be entitled to the category of a Shakespearean translation if it does not accomplish the basic objective of being a text to be staged and acted, since that is what the poet had in mind when he wrote his plays. I am unable to take seriously the idea that there are two different possible translations of Shakespeare, one meant to be read, which would be concerned mostly with literary qualities, and another to be staged, which would eventually become the creation of the director, fully empowered to alter, change, transform anything he felt like. This latter cannot be valid when the director still intends to claim he is doing a play by Shakespeare.

There are a number of perfectly valid performances, like Charles Marowitz's *Hamlet*, which use the original play as material for new ideas, but he does not say that the poet wrote them. On the other hand, Peter Brook, one of the most significant directors of this century, has created highly imaginative and modern performances of *Titus Andronicus*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest* among others, without ever touching the texts, but when he did his experimental performance on themes from *The Tempest* he did not say it was Shakespeare's play.

The main reason why I cannot admit this distinction between a literary and a theatrical Shakespeare is that he never wrote but for the stage: from 1594 he sold his plays regularly to the Lord Chamberlain's Men, and he never even thought of publishing them as his "works", as did Ben Jonson. The plays would not even make a poet of him (he had to publish the poems for that), and now people would deny their essential stageworthiness? I personally read quite regularly a large number of Shakespeare's plays, and this gives me great pleasure; but I must admit that the pleasure from a well staged one is infinitely greater.

This question of acknowledging the plays as being works written for the stage is relevant, because this weighs heavily on choice of vocabulary and sentence structure, as well as on the latitude legitimately

afforded to the translator in order to search for the correct idiom in the target language. In my work with all the plays that I have translated I have always felt that it was the particular play in hand that determined the tone to be used. My very first experience, *The Comedy of Errors*, demanded making a very difficult decision: Shakespeare's language is never bookish (except for *Titus Andronicus*, a youthful beginner's effort), and it is at all times very modern for his time, and - here was the crux - it cannot be denied that the *Errors*, particularly in the scenes with the twin Dromios, comes near to being farcical and must be funny, since obviously that is what Shakespeare wanted it to be. Breathing deeply, I decided to use, particularly in the slaves' scenes, a thoroughly colloquial language, and even some slang, since that was the only way to get as near as possible to the mood of the original. That, of course, did not stop me from continuing to stick to the form of the original, prose, verse, rhyme. There are no objections to the coexistence of these values.

*The Merchant of Venice* was a different story: prose was not used just for comic purposes but to establish Shylock as an extraneous element in Venetian society as well as a very strong personality, while at the same time his integration in his adopted society is expressed by his use of blank verse when dealing with the Venitians. On the other hand, as Shakespeare was by now quite at ease with romantic comedy, in which the main line of action deals with the obstacles in the path of true love, the scenes between Portia and Bassanio are intensely lyrical, not only because they are love scenes but also in view of the significative presence of the world of fairy tales in the choice between the three caskets of gold, silver and lead. When Bassanio makes the correct choice, the sustained mood of lyricism in the long scene was, of course, particularly difficult to translate, since it was necessary to preserve the unsophisticated language of the original (though rich in images), make it plausible as expression of intense feeling and remain comprehensible at all times. One good example of the problems of finding "the nearest equivalent" is the song which is sung while Bassanio makes his choice: Portia does not want to disobey her father's wishes but, at the same

time, she does want Bassanio to be her husband. The only way of helping him that she finds is making her musicians sing a song in which all the early lines rhyme with “lead”, and I simply could not find words that would express what the song says and, at the same time, end in “*umbo*”, as does “*chumbo*”; as the best possible solution I used rhymes in “*undo*”, in which at least the u and the nasal sounds can be suggestive of the right choice.

Another serious problem for the translation of Shakespeare’s plays arises in the form of address. In English, even when—as in Shakespeare’s lifetime—“*thou*” could be and was used, in fact “*you*” can and is used for practically any situation. In Portuguese, of course, we do have “*tu*” and “*vós*” as the forms to be used for informal and formal treatment, but that is only true today in Portugal, not in Brazil. In some instances I have accepted the use of “*tu*” (since theatre is not real life, anyway), but “*vós*” I have avoided as much as possible, saving it practically only for kings or other heads of state. The number of syllables creates some difficulties, but I have preferred to use “*o senhor*” and “*a senhora*”, since they sound much more plausible to the audience. And of course a further problem arises from the Brazilian usage of mixing “*você*” with second person pronouns—as in a hypothetical “*você ouviu eu te dizer*”. I have tried to avoid this when a fluent and satisfactory alternative presents itself, but on occasion, when this seems to be the only way to express the original in authentic Portuguese, I had decided to make use of it as a regular idiom. But such decisions lie largely on the play in hand: for both *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, in which Shakespeare himself chose to give preference to a more formal and sober language that would suggest the Roman concern with their own importance, something of the same hauteur had to be found in the vocabulary and tone of the translation.

At times it is interesting to discover that passages that did not seem to be particularly troublesome create considerable problems; this happened when I gladly accepted the commission to translate *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* before reading it once again and,

consequently, realizing that no less than a little over 43% of the text is rhymed, but the really unexpected problem came with the Arden forest scenes, with its various names of flowers and birds, typical of English flora and fauna, the names of which in Portuguese not always have the same attractive sound that the originals have for the English-speaking public: wild thyme is *tomilho* (that is not really quite so bad), but oxlips are *primavera-dos-jardins*, woodbine is *madressilva das boticas* while eglantine is *rosa egrantéria* or *madressilva silvestre*. In this instance I admit that thinking in terms of a play to be heard on the stage, it would be better to take considerable liberty with the original and use attractive sounding names of flowers with which a Brazilian audience would be more familiar:

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,  
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,  
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,  
With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine

becomes

*Conheço um campo onde dança a cravina,  
Onde cresce a violeta e a bobina,  
Que a madressilva cobre com seu manto,  
Junto à rosa muscada e o agapanto.*

The same kind of liberty is taken in 3.1. with Bottom's song when Titania meets him:

The ousel cock, so black of hue,  
With orange-tawny bill,  
The throstle, with his note so true,  
The wren with little quill –

.....

The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,  
The plainsong cuckoo grey,  
Who note full many a man doth mark,  
And dares not answer nay -

becomes

*O melro, negro no peito,  
Tem o bico alaranjado;  
O tordo canta direito,  
O pintassilgo é pintado.*

.....

*O pardal e a cambaxirra,  
O cuco que mal emposta,  
Com quem todo mundo embirra  
Mas que ninguém dá resposta.*

I have no excuse for taking these liberties other than being sure that getting the general idea and the rhythm I am being much more faithful to what Bottom was doing with his song than if I used all sorts of unknown bird names - and then how would it be possible to make them rhyme, yet?

A similar problem appears on occasion in the question of names. The allegorical tradition of the Middle Ages, which only affected in significant measure the medieval forms of drama in England in the case of the morality plays, but it made its mark, and there are a few instances of its use by Shakespeare, more often than not with a critical or comic intention: I will have to face the problem, for instance, whenever I come to Shallow and Silence in the second part of *Henry IV*, and of course I did translate the name of the craftsmen rehearsing and

acting the Thisbe tragicomedy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, since each is named after his particular craft. But I found it more of a problem when I came to *Measure for Measure*, where (to say nothing of the irony of Angelo) all the comical characters use allegorical names; it is, of course, possible to retain the original and let just their actions speak for these characters, but while I could not feel any clear need to translate Sir Toby Belch or Sir Andrew Aguecheek, it seemed essential to the concept of what Shakespeare was writing that the meaning of Mistress Overdone should reach the audience, which made her become Madame Japassada, for instance.

As in the above instances, problems that are peculiar to a particular play make it as impossible to generalize about translations as the vocabulary and style that both theme and authorial point of view determine. The choice of words is thoroughly conditioned by these and if my aim has been at all times to find a fluent and contemporary language, accessible to both actors and audience, it has also seemed crucial to avoid slang and modish expressions that might become passé in a very short time. There is no point in going through the usual apologies for all the moments when it becomes impossible to translate anything being at the same time faithful to the letter **and** the spirit of what is being translated; I doubt that there has been at any time any translator who did not face such moments, and I can only say that my personal way out of this insoluble problem has been, as I have already said, to look for "the nearest equivalent". It might be said, I guess the main part of the job of translating rests on a constant return to the original, in search for what one will eventually consider the true meaning of the play. That, of course, implies a constant rethinking of the play as a whole, for identification of main concepts and general tone, as well as serious consideration of the dramaturgical significance of its shape in terms of content.

In the shaping of the dialogue one may find the main expression of the crucial difference between the dramaturgy of the classics and that of the Elizabethan period, i.e., the actual presence of action on the

stage, inherited from the naïve form of the “realism” of medieval plays. To suggest action not only the occasional use of short lines but also the choice of vocabulary must be regarded, as for example the high number of verbs of violent action (crack, tear, break, etc, etc) in *King Lear*, since these create the necessary image of action: everybody “knows” that things like deaths, battles and such others are not really happening on the stage, so what is said must be the vehicle for the commitment of the imagination of the audience to the dramatic event—and as far as possible all translations should retain the atmosphere of the original.

Some of the suggestion of action also comes from the fact that the scene is the basic unit of the Elizabethan play: at first, when Shakespeare was still learning his craft, as in the case of *The Comedy of Errors*, the scenes are still fairly equal in length, no doubt because he was following the Plautine scheme very closely. In Act 1 the first scene has 155 lines, the second 105, in Act 2 they are 115 and 219, in Act 3, 123 and 184. But when we come to Act 4 the alterations introduced by Shakespeare are affecting the plot structure and resulting in added action, and there are four scenes of different lengths, while the untangling of the whole plot in Act 5 is made up of a single scene 425 lines long: more and more the length and number of scenes will vary and be determined by the dramatic significance of each. Because of the Roman influence, also, the whole of the action of *Errors* takes place in a neutral outdoor space. At the opposite end of the spectrum one may refer to (so far not attempted by me) *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which, in some twenty-odd different places, there are no less than forty scenes, the two shortest being only four lines long, the longest 364.

My intention here has not been to write about translation in general or to examine in detail other people’s work and how or why it was done this or that way, since I am utterly incapable of theorizing about the subject. I can only be sure that the greatest help I have had in translating Shakespeare has come from my many years of constant reading of the plays, since that has left in my ears the music, the rhythm, of the poet’s dialogue.

My reasons for translating plays by Shakespeare have been, as I hope can be seen from the above, of a very practical nature, and I guess that it was because the very first attempt, as well as some of the subsequent ones, was very definitely conceived in terms of a text for the stage, that it never even occurred to me to add notes or any other aspect of the critical apparatus. On the other hand it is quite possible that I have avoided a very academic form because I have been fighting all my life against the idea that Shakespeare is a “very difficult” author accessible only to the privileged few.

Throughout my work as a translator of Shakespeare’s plays my main concern has been the search for a fluent Brazilian Portuguese music and rhythm that might be acceptable as “the nearest equivalent” to the original, so that ideally at least something of the translation might remain at least near the dramatic poetry that Shakespeare wrote, while at the same time finding an idiom that would give both actors and audiences the feeling of ease and identification one finds only in one’s own language.

It is my fondest hope to have at all times avoided the excesses of Bardolatry, and to have thought of the plays as plays—exceptionally good and beautiful plays, no doubt, but nonetheless stageworthy works of an extremely talented playwright who knew all the secrets of the stage he was writing for, and who always wrote with his actors in mind.