



SHLONSKY'S HEBREW HAMLET

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SHAKESPEARE'S *Hamlet* is famous throughout the world, and is widely held to be among the finest plays ever written. Abraham Shlonsky is well known as an excellent translator, and his works have won numerous literary awards. He has successfully translated poetry, drama, novels, short stories, histories, and biographies; by authors as diverse as Pushkin, Gogol, Chekhov, Brecht, Shaw, and Shakespeare.

It has been a fascinating experience to follow such an outstanding artist in his translation of *Hamlet* from Shakespearean English into Shlonskyan Hebrew. Other translations exist, but the superiority of Shlonsky's is indisputable.

Perfect translation is, in all likelihood, impossible. An Italian expression compares translators to traitors, and a Hebrew expression, though less harsh, is still revealing: "A translation is like a woman," it says, "either faithful or beautiful, but never both."

Translation is a creative art, and requires a creative artist, especially when poetry and poetic drama are involved. In translation, it may be relatively easy to find an equivalent for a particular word on a single denotative level, but it is absolutely agonizing to attempt to account for the other denotative and connotative aspects that may be associated with that same word.

Recent criticism has stressed the importance of ambiguity in literature. But the importance of ambiguity in *Hamlet* has been recognized for centuries. Empson (1930) writes about seven types of am-

biguity; and, very generally speaking, the basic literary and semantic question which underlies the present work is "Is it possible to maintain ambiguity through translation?"

More specifically, the questions I shall attempt to answer in this essay are "How well did Shlonsky handle the problem of ambiguity in *Hamlet*?" and "How adequate is his translation?"

1. Some ambiguities are replaceable in translation, some are not. Many word-plays or quibbles are inimitable, and very few can be completely translated, preserving all levels of meaning. Shlonsky often succeeds in replacing an ambiguous English word or a witty word-play with a Hebrew one, parallel but not identical, and in such cases he seldom uses a lexical equivalent of the original.

The first words spoken by Hamlet may serve as an example of both a successful free replacement and a glaring omission:

King: . . . My cousin Hamlet, and my *son*,¹

Hamlet: (aside) A little more than *kin*, and less than *kind*

King: How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

Hamlet: Not so, my lord; I am too much i' the *sun* (I, 2, 64–67)²

— והמלט מה, קרובי שלי ובני?

— קרוב מסתם קרוב, אך גם רחוק ממנו.

— מדוע עננים תלואים עוד על ראשך?

— לא כן, מלכי, הן אור זרוע מעלי.

Here, "My cousin" is freely translated "קרובי שלי" in order to facilitate the ambiguity of the next line, where "קרוב" means both "a relative" and "near." This witty double meaning seems adequate in place of the original quibble *kin-kind*, since the pun cannot be preserved in translating word for word.

But, also in this passage, there is a most significant ambiguity in the original, of which there is neither an adequate replacement nor remnant in the translation. This ambiguity is contained in the homophones *son* and *sun*, and, incidentally, appears frequently in all periods and in all genres of English literature. Hamlet's metaphor is an ironic echo of the King's sincerity and hypocrisy. "I am too much i' the sun," is, therefore, most ambiguous. To use Verity's words (1960, p. 144): "Sun is probably a quibble on son in 64. Hamlet means that he is too much in the sunshine

1. Emphases in quotations are mine.

2. All references to *Hamlet* are from Verity (1961).

of the court, and too much in the relation of son—son to a dead father, son to an incestuous mother, son to an uncle-father. . . .” The Hebrew “אור זרוע מעלי”, though idiomatic and metaphoric, is obviously inadequate in comparison to that implied richness.

Whether or not a better translation is possible is quite another question. But it must be remembered that the lines under consideration are Hamlet's first words in the play; they mark Hamlet's very special style. So, an extremely careful translation of those lines is absolutely required. As Verity remarks (1960, p. 143), “It is significant that Hamlet's first words should be a riddle, and cast in that style of ironical jesting which he uses so effectively.” The riddle and the “style of ironical jesting” are partly preserved and partly lost in translation.

Wilson (1962, pp. 105–108) further develops this theme and makes it the key to a new interpretation of the dialogue between Hamlet and Polonius in Act II, Scene 2. He sees Hamlet's sarcastic advice to Polonius not to let his daughter “Walk i' the sun” (II, 2, 184) as a continuation of the same motif and the same pun. “Everything that Hamlet here says,” according to Wilson, “is capable of an equivocal interpretation reflecting upon Polonius and Ophelia. ‘Fishmonger’ . . . means a pander or procurer; ‘carrion’ was a common expression at that time for ‘flesh’ . . . while the quibble in ‘conception’ needs no explaining.”

Hamlet, who calls Polonius “a bawd” and his daughter “a prostitute,” must have overheard the father's words to the King: “I'll loose my daughter to him” (p. 162). And that is why he advises Polonius not to let his daughter walk in the sun. In Wilson's words: “Is it not obvious that Hamlet here means by ‘sunne’ the sun or son of Denmark, the heir apparent, in other words himself?” And “bearing in mind Hamlet's punning retort ‘I'm too much i' the sun’,” Wilson paraphrases Hamlet's advice: “Take care that you do not loose your daughter to me.”

Now the translation of this dialogue, though witty and spicy, is unequivocal. “אל תניחנה לשוטט בשמש” contains no ambiguity whatsoever.

Occasionally, ambiguity does not rest on homophones or wordplays; it is hidden in the word itself. Such is the case with Hamlet's answer to his mother, just after his answers to the King, discussed at the beginning of this chapter. In Bevington's words (1968, p. 8): “To his mother, who must cling to her worldly belief that the death of husbands and fathers is ‘common’ or commonplace and hence to be taken in one's stride, Hamlet wryly counters: ‘Ay, Madam, it is common.’ It is low, coarse, revolting.” The translation is “זה דרך כל בשר”.

Another kind of ambiguity, far more crucial to the plot of the play, involves the essence and appearance of the ghost. By using “הוא” for “it,” in reference to the ghost, a very large mistake is made; namely, the ghost is fully identified with the dead king, and so becomes earthly and natural, whereas in the original it is clearly meant to be mysterious and supernatural.

In addition, the appearance of the ghost is meant to be dubious. The Queen tells Hamlet that it is “the very coinage of your brain” (III, 4, 136–137) and calls it a “bodiless creation ecstasy.” Hamlet himself hints at his “prophetic soul” (I, 5, 40), that might have aroused his imagination to create a hallucination.

In any case, everyone refers to the ghost as “it,” never as “he.” The translation repeatedly uses “הוא”, which limits ambiguity and undermines the supernatural effect. Reading the Hebrew version, one gets the false impression that the ghost and the dead king are one. In the original, of course, it is quite clear that the dead king and his ghost are two separate entities. “He” is a good king; “it” is a ghost—whether good or evil is not immediately known.

It is true that there is no Hebrew equivalent for “it,” but I suggest that it would be appropriate in this case to use “זה”, in order to maintain ambiguity and to establish the separate identity of the ghost. For example, “זה דומה למלך” could replace Shlonsky’s “דומה למלך הוא”, and “הנה זה כמו” could replace “הן הוא כמו אור”. Furthermore, the dialogue: “—’t is here! —’t is here! —’t is gone!” (I, 1, 142) which appears in Shlonsky’s translation as “—הנה הוא פה! —הנה הוא פה! —הוא נעלם!” could well be translated “—זה פה! —זה פה! —זה נעלם!”.

The ghost appears in Shlonsky’s translation as much too earthly. The constant use of “הוא” is the principal reason for this, but not the only reason. It seems as if the translator has been trapped by his own mistake; he consistently (conscientiously?) uses words more realistic and more concrete than the original suggests. When Marcellus speaks about the ghost as “this thing” (I, 1, 21), Shlonsky translates “הדמות ההיא”; “guilty thing” (I, 1, 48) becomes “יצור טמא”. “דמות” and “יצור” are much more concrete than “thing.” “Stay, illusion” (I, 1, 127) is translated “עמוד הצל!”. But a shadow (“צל”) is real, not merely an illusion. Such translation leads to a far too narrow interpretation of the play, and makes other interpretations impossible. It decreases severely the root of artistic excellence—poetic ambiguity.

Shlonsky interchanges “צל” and “רוח” for “ghost” and “spirit,” with no apparent consistency. Sometimes it does not matter; sometimes it

does. "My father's *spirit* in *arms!*" (I, 2, 254) is not "צל אבא בזינור". Not only is "רוח" virtually always more appropriate for "spirit," especially in terms of their connotations, but in this particular phrase the paradox implied in "spirit in arms" is lost in Shlonsky's translation. There is nothing unusual or unnatural in a "shadow in arms"; the shadow of a man-in-arms is certainly "in arms" too. So Hamlet's immediate reaction "All is not well" (I, 2, 254) cannot be understood by the Hebrew reader. Shlonsky replaces that line with "הברִימָה אינו כשורה" which is much milder, and is congruent with the inadequate translation of the former line.

This is a good example of how one mistake leads to another. And there are others. The ghost speaks and explicitly says what it is: "I am thy father's *spirit*" (I, 5, 9), which is translated "אני הוא צל אביך" (which should, I think, be "רוח אביך אני"). But it does not say "I am thy father." On what grounds, then, in the following line, does the translator put the word "בני" in its mouth?

"Now, Hamlet hear." (I, 5, 34) = שמעני, המלט בני. Moreover, *it* continues to speak to Hamlet about "thy father's life" (I, 5, 39). It does not say "my life," because the ghost's life and existence are not identical with those of Hamlet's father. The translation simply does not preserve this thin, but meaningful, difference.

The Hebrew reader who does not know the original may consider the fears, hesitations and suspicions of Hamlet and the guards as unreasonable, or at least as exaggerated, missing the point that *it* is not *he*. He may be ignorant of the fact that the ghost is *something* that may represent evil forces. Therefore, to that reader Hamlet's reaction upon its appearance—"Angels . . . defend us" (I, 4, 39)—might seem strange, and the guards' warning "Do not go with *it*" might be misunderstood.

To end this discussion about the ghost, let us examine the words with which Hamlet addresses it for the first time:

Thou comest in such a *questionable* shape
That I will speak to thee: *I'll call thee* Hamlet,
King, Father, Royal Dane. (I, 4, 43–45)

The translation of these lines typifies the whole problem:

מראיך כה מופלא, עדי לפתוח פי
לשיח עמוך; אקרא אליך: המלט,
אבי, מלכי . . .

"I'll call thee" should be "אקרא לך" not "אקרא אליך", it means: although you are not my father, I'll call you (name you) so. And "questionable" is surely not "מופלא" in this context; it implies the ambiguity of the ghost's essence and aim, while the translation misses the point.

After the mouse-trap scene Hamlet is in high spirits, and answers Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who come to summon him to his mother, with wild wit. When Guildenstern tells him that the King is distempered, Hamlet's answer is:

... signify this to his doctor; for, for me to
put him to his purgation would perhaps plunge
 him into more cholera. (III, 2, 290–291)

Dowden³ comments on the ambiguity of the word "purgation": "Medicinally purging the body, legally clearing from imputation of guilt, as in 'As You Like It,' V, 4, 45. Hamlet plays on the two senses." The Hebrew does not encompass the second meaning, and says only "לחת לו" "סם-שלשול". It should be mentioned, though, that the Hebrew dialogue here is as witty as possible, and does include some pure Hebrew puns and witticisms:

—נפשו מרה עליו מאד.
 —מחמת הטפה המרה, אדוני?
 —לא... מחמת המרה...
 —... שנעתים תשחפך עליו מרתו.

"An ambiguity," says Empson (1930, p. 298), "... must in each case arise from, and be justified by, the peculiar requirements of the situation." There could hardly be a situation more fit for ambiguity than Hamlet's. In reading Empson's definition of ambiguity, one is certainly reminded of Hamlet's personality and character: "'Ambiguity' itself means an indecision as to what you mean, an intention to mean several things, a probability that one or the other or both of two things have been meant, and the fact that a statement has several meanings" (Empson, 1930, p. 7). Moreover, Hamlet is driven to ambiguity by his feigned madness. "He would betray himself if he used open, direct language," writes Clemen (1951, p. 110), "hence he must speak ambiguously and cloak his real meaning under quibbles and puns, images and parables."

3. Quoted in Verity (1961, p. 182).

Virtually all critics, regardless of their often conflicting conceptions of Hamlet's character, agree about the importance of ambiguity in both the hero's style, and in the play as a whole. "Hamlet's language puts much stress on the pun and other forms of wordplay," says Bevington (1968, p. 8). And Maynard Mack writes: "Hamlet's world is a world of riddles. The hero's own language is often riddling: how much is real? how much is feigned?"⁴ In any case, Wilson is right when he says that quibbles in Hamlet are "too obvious to be overlooked" (Wilson, 1962, p. v). I would add: too numerous as well, and too difficult ever to be either completely translated or well replaced.

2. We have already seen how only a slightly inappropriate translation can change the characterization of a hero. We have mentioned, for example, the difference between "All is not well" and "דבר-מה אינו כשורה", and claimed that the principal difference is not what is said by the speaker, but in the character that emerges from the way he speaks and reacts. In short, the words, the style, and the syntax that a character uses reflect the way he thinks, feels and acts.

This last example, of course, does not weigh heavily in the total characterization of Hamlet. His character, including his tendency to exaggerate and to generalize pessimistically, is well established by Shakespeare in many, various ways. A few poor translations cannot spoil the image. At the same time, some characters are flattened and some features simplified in Shlonsky's translation. As an example, the relation between Hamlet and his mother is quite complicated, and has been the theme of a good deal of conflicting commentary. The delicacy of the style of both Hamlet and his mother is not always preserved in Hebrew. The Queen says "Thy *noble* father" (I, 2, 71), which is translated "צלם-דמות אבך"; Hamlet answers "Ay, *Madam*" (I, 2, 74), which becomes "אכן, אמי". The ironic "Good Mother" (I, 2, 77) is not translated at all. Because of this omission, Hamlet's ambiguous and ambivalent feelings towards his mother are oversimplified in the Hebrew.

In addition, in Hamlet's dialogue with his mother in the closet scene, many of the nuances of speech and style are lost in translation. After Hamlet's open accusation: "As kill a king, and marry with his brother" (III, 4, 29), his mother asks: "What have I done?" (III, 4, 39), which is translated: "אך מה עשיתי לך?". Clearly, "לך" here is misleading.

4. In Bevington (1968, p. 49).

Hamlet concludes his detailed description of his noble father: "This was your husband" (III, 4, 63). There is no doubt that the stress is on "this." The translation, "היה זה בעלך" makes it impossible to stress the same key word. It should be, I think, "זה היה בעלך".

In some cases, of course, it is nearly impossible to avoid a misleading translation. "Do not look on me" (IV, 4, 126), says Hamlet, either to the ghost or to his mother, to which the Queen responds "To whom do you speak this?" The Hebrew leaves no room for hesitation: "אל תבט אלי!" cannot possibly be addressed to the Queen, the only person present; and thus ambiguity is lost.

It should be noted, to the credit of the translator, that *almost* all the characters in Hamlet are fairly fully and faithfully preserved. This preservation is appreciable in view of the difficulties that derive from the inferiority of modern Hebrew in semantic and stylistic flexibility. One character in particular, though, seems to have been badly preserved, Claudius. This new, ambitious, egocentric, cunning king enters for the first time at the beginning of the second scene. This scene opens with his monologue, and therefore this speech is very important in terms of his characterization. He is bursting with satisfaction and self-confidence. He sees himself as the successful knave, expert in plot and intrigue, and succeeds in hiding his intentions, but not his character. The key words of the monologue are *we*, *our*, and *us*—all of them in the imperial plural—occurring nine times in the first ten lines, and eighteen times in the whole monologue.

The translation of the monologue misses this point. In the first ten lines we find only "אני", "אנו", "אחינו". "אני" should not be used at all; "אחינו" is less than "*our* dear brother's death" (note the alliteration!); "אנו" is much better.

A Claudius different from the original emerges from the Hebrew translation. There is a saying: "The style makes the man," and this is especially true in a drama. Let us compare line 8 to its translation:

Therefore *our* sometime sister, now *our* queen

זו אחותי אתמול, היום מלכה

The missing alliteration can be pardoned, but the difference between the styles cannot. The translator has omitted the characterizing word *our*, which is repeated in the original of this line, and recurs in the following lines.

Likewise, the same mistake is repeated in IV, 5, 188.

*We will our kingdom give
Our crown, our life, and all that we call ours*

אזי אתן כחרי,
חיי וממלכתי וכל אשר שלי הוא.

Shakespeare repeats this motif in order to characterize the king who declares "*We love ourself*" (IV, 7, 34) and acts accordingly. But Shlonsky repeatedly makes the error of ignoring that motif.

In Act III, Scene 3 we hear Claudius again, in a soliloquy, and it is obvious that he should use the first person *singular*. In the first twenty lines he uses "I" six times, "my" eight times, and "mine" once. The egocentric aspect of his character is reemphasized. Unfortunately, the Hebrew translation misses the point again. Although it is verbally correct in saying "פשעי", "אחי", "ידי", etc., it lacks the stress which could, perhaps, be achieved by "אחי שלי", "ידי שלי", etc. For example:

*I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen* (III, 3, 53–55)

This implies much more selfishness than

הלא עוד עמדי כל מה שהמריצני
לרצוח: כתר זה, שלטון והמלכה.

The Hebrew grammatical form of an inflected noun, common in literature, is misleading here. Of course "*my crown*" is not "כתר זה" and "*mine own ambition*" is more than just "שלטון". But even if it were "כתרי", it would not have been possible to stress *my crown*, unless you use "כתרי שלי". "*Mine own ambition*" is nothing less than "שאפתנותי שלי", or to use Shlonsky's term, "שלטוני שלי".

Clemen (1951, p. 106) maintains that "Claudius' speeches are studied and give the impression of having been prepared." This describes the Claudius characterized by Shakespeare, but does not describe the Claudius of the Hebrew translation.

In a larger sense, Clemen claims that the language and style of the King and Queen, of Laertes and Polonius, and of course, of Hamlet are "subtly adapted to their character" (p. 106). We know how different

these characters are. We can feel the differences of style and diction in the original. In the translation, though, a great many of these differences simply do not exist.

3. "Of all the figures of repetition so highly valued by the Elizabethans, alliteration or paromoeon, as it was called, is the one which we today think of most readily as an embellishment of style."⁵ It is impossible to "translate" an alliteration, it may only be replaced. Often, though, it is better to omit it entirely and compensate for it, a few lines later, according to the creative intuition and ingenuity of the translator.

Puns are sometimes a source of ambiguity; and other times their function is wit or humor. The humorous pun is often based on alliteration. For example, when Hamlet says "And many such-like 'as'es" of great charge" (V, 2, 43), he is punning on *as* and *ass*, which is witty and not ambiguous in the deep sense. But there is also here a quibble on the word *charge*, which does add some ambiguity.

The translation of this line is "וכיוצא בזה 'הואיל' לבלי הועיל", and is a perfect example of the way in which Shlonsky handles such problems. He replaces the Shakespearean pun with an original Hebrew, Shlonskian pun. Generally, his replacements are less witty and less ambiguous than the original, but sometimes our "Nimble Master of the Language"⁶ is very successful, and his quibbling is equal to Shakespeare's, e.g.: "מנעי" "הרחק מדתי" for "Go not to my uncle's bed" (III, 4, 158). This is not only a fair translation and a delicate, witty wordplay, but compensation for the quibbles in the original in preceding lines, which had to be omitted by the translator. This is also true in his translation of "זהו ניב קלוקל, ניבזה נבזה" "הוא" for "A vile phrase" (II, 2, 111), although this example is somewhat less delicate than the first.

These are just two examples, and many more could be provided. Shlonsky had done his best, but it is not easy (and may well be impossible) to do full justice to Shakespeare, especially in *Hamlet*. "Hamlet's way of employing images is unique in Shakespeare's drama," says Clemen (1951, p. 106), who also writes, "Hamlet commands so many levels of expression . . . adaptability and versatility . . . in . . . use of language" (p. 109). No one could find perfect equivalents to Hamlet's "wild and whirling words," to use Horatio's expression, which are so full

5. Sister Miriam Joseph (1949, pp. 78–79).

6. Cf. Preminger (1965, p. 342).

of alliterations and puns, quibbles and riddles. Alliterations and puns present one of the greatest difficulties in any translation, and this is especially true when they are so numerous and so integral to the dramatic weave as they are in *Hamlet*.

Many alliterations are left with no replacement. The following few examples should serve to demonstrate this point:

My most seeming-virtuous Queen (I, 5, 46)

המלכה שצניעותה כחבת

The meaning is there, but the poetic effect, based upon alliterations, special syntax, and the paradox “most \leftrightarrow seeming,” is not. Likewise:

Marry, this is miching mallecho, it means mischief (III, 2, 130)

“מלצ'ו” בסתר, ופשר הדבר: נבלה!

or: *Frighted with false fire!* (III, 2, 252)

הנבהל מיריה של סרק

or: *We with wisest sorrow think on him* (I, 2, 6)

ואנו, בחבונות פי נחאבל על מת.

And even: “malicious mockery” which is translated “זרק וקלס”. This is a kind of loss which may be inevitable, but is nevertheless regrettable. The same loss occurs in the following puns:

(Hamlet asks the gravedigger:)

—Upon what ground? [Has Hamlet lost his wits]

—Why, here in Denmark. (V, 1, 154–155)

The translation tries to follow the original. Whether or not it succeeds is a matter of taste and sense of humor. I find it pale and insufficient:

—על מה זה?

—על האדמה הזאת, על אדמת דניה.

Or a few lines earlier:

Hamlet: I think it be thine, indeed; for thou *liest* in't.

Clown: You *lie* out on't, sir . . . I do not *lie* in't, and yet it is mine.

- Hamlet: Thou dost *lie* in't, to be in't, and say it is thine. 'T is for the dead, not for the quick; therefore thou *liest*.
- Clown: 'T is a quick *lie*, sir . . . (V, 1, 117–123)

Which is translated:

- אכן שלך הוא, ואין זה מוטל בספק, שהרי אתה מוטל בו ומטיל שקריך מחוכו.
 —ואתה . . . ואילו אני איני מוטל בו.
 —מוטל בספק אתה, לפי שאם אינך מוטל בקבר . . . משמע, מוטל בספק אתה.
 —ספק זה . . . יטיל עצמו ממני ויטל עליך.

The translation uses the punning verb nine times; the original only six times. But quantity does not make up for quality. "This man shall set me packing" (III, 4, 210) is translated "האיש הלז יחיש לדרך פעמי". "Packing" has several meanings in English; and many are lost in translation.

The famous line "I'll be your foil, Laertes" (V, 2, 243) is translated into a wonderful Hebrew metaphoric image: "כראי טווש לך אוולת-חרבי, לארטס". But this image still does not say as much as the original, and in this case the importance is beyond mere wit. Bevington (1968, p. 8) writes about this phrase:

Structurally, the play of Hamlet is dominated by the pairing of various characters to reveal one as the "foil" of another. "I'll be your foil, Laertes," says Hamlet, punning on the resemblance that elsewhere he seriously acknowledges: "By the image of my cause I see the portraiture of his."

And Verity (1961, p. 243) explains:

The word *foil* (which Hamlet uses with a quibble on foil, a blunt sword) means the gold or silver leaf (*feuille*, *folium*) in which a gem is set, in order that its lustre may be thrown into relief (i.e. "stick fiery off").

Even Hamlet's last jest is hidden in a pun. Wounded, poisoned, on the edge of death, he says to the King:

. . . Damned Dane,
 Drink off this potion: Is thy union here?
 Follow my mother. (V, 2, 312–315)

The alliteration "Damned Dane" is powerful, as is the pun in "union." Union is "a large pearl," but Hamlet quibbles on its ordinary sense, as if to say to Claudius: You must follow my mother, your partner, and be *united* with her through this poison. Hamlet uses bitter irony to the very bitter end. Needless to say, much of this is lost in the translation.

4. Inadequacies of translation fall into several categories, and this section will deal with lapses of grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and style.

Interrogative clauses containing "not" generally presume a positive answer. This grammatical fact seems to be ignored by the translator. "Looks it *not* like the King?" (I, 1, 43) is translated "דומה למלך הוא?". "Is it *not* like the King?" (I, 1, 58) also is "דומה למלך הוא?". In Hebrew this is an open question, and the presumption of the original is lost. It should be something like "האין הוא דומה למלך?" or even "נכון שהוא דומה למלך?". The same mistake is made at the opening of the second act: "You have me, have you not?" (II, 1, 62) is translated "הבנת לי, או לא?", but should read "הבנת לי, לא כן?".

Ellipsis and syncope are two grammatical devices frequently used by Shakespeare and omitted in the translation. Ellipsis is exemplified by "And he to England shall along with you" (III, 3, 4), which is "corrected" in the translation to "הוא יסע מפה אתכם לאנגליה". Syncope is the removal of one or more letters from a word, such as in "O'ermaster't as you may" (I, 5, 140). Sister Miriam Joseph claims that "the grammatical figures of omission . . . contribute to the compressed character of Shakespeare's later style." I doubt that it is either necessary or advisable to preserve these "omissions" in the translation; I only wish to register the fact that they are not there.

Changes of syntax are barely noticeable, but under close examination, one sees Shlonsky making the same mistake again and again. For example, he changes the order of the words in very dramatic lines, spoken by Hamlet in his great anger: "O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!" (I, 5, 106), is rendered as "אבוי נבל, נבל, נבל ארור, שוחק?". Would it not be more like the original to write "אבוי נבל, נבל, שוחק, נבל ארורי"? Two lines later we have "That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain" (I, 5, 108) which is translated as "כי יש ואיש שוחק, שוחק — והוא נבל". The Hebrew is nicely constructed, but is Shlonsky's line. Shakespeare's version is slightly different, and in my opinion, no less successful. What Shakespeare says should, I think, be translated "כי יש אדם שוחק, ושוחק, והוא נבל". The difference is ad-

mitedly thin. Shlonsky's version cuts the line into two equal, parallel parts, his villain smiles once. The original stress on "smile and smile" has disappeared in the translation.

There are relatively few inadequacies of vocabulary in Shlonsky's work, but there are some: "By heaven" (I, 5, 122) = "הֵן צדק"; "chapel" (IV, 1, 37) = "אהל הצלמים"; "unweeded garden" (I, 2, 135) = "גן שומם"; "T is almost *'gainst my conscience*" (V, 2, 284) = "הדבר הוא לי כמעט למורת־רוח"; "How *pregnant* sometimes his replies are!" (II, 2, 205) = "מה נכוחות"; "T is in my *memory lock'd*" (I, 3, 84) = "הן לפעמים תשובותיו"; "But he's an arrant knave" (I, 5, 124) = "אשר אינו נוכל וגם רשע גמור"; (should this not be "שאינו נוכל מובהק", which even fits the meter better?); "To draw him on to *pleasures*" (II, 1, 15) = "למען ימשך לבו למזמוטים". The latter is an example of a slight change in one word, that may mislead the reader. Verity (1961, p. 158), for one, understands "pleasures" differently. He says: "Such as the play scene... he probably knows Hamlet's partiality for the drama."

The word "ambition" is translated in three forms: "השאיפה, השלטון, הגדולות" (pp. 89 and 155 in the translation); and "ambitious" (I, 1, 61) is "גא דברכן".

In a line from the first scene the four elements are mentioned: "In sea or fire, in *earth* or air" (I, 1, 153); the translation is: "במים או באש, בארץ, באויר"; Abraham ibn Ezra⁷ uses the word "עפר" for the element earth; and "ארץ" cannot be used for "earth" in this sense.

The word "חטא" is used once as an equivalent for "impious" (I, 2, 94) and three times for "fault" (I, 2, 101–102). Is it not too strong for both?

At the opening of the play, Hamlet sums up the whole paradoxical situation in an ironic phrase in which the two central words (underlined here) furnish both the paradox and the metaphor:

The funeral *baked* meats

Did *coldly* furnish forth the marriage tables (I, 2, 179)

Both words are omitted in the translation:

שיידיים מפת האכל
היטיבו לבבות בעת החתונה.

The oxymoron "My dearest foe" two lines later (I, 2, 181), stresses the

7. S.v. *yasod* in Even-Shoshan (1956, pp. 967–968).

bitter irony. It is translated “ראש שונאי”, and somehow “in heaven” becomes “בתופת”.

There are other inadequacies of this sort in the ghost scene: Horatio says: “*Be ruled; you shall not go*” (I, 4, 81); in Shlonsky’s words “עמוד, כי לא תלך”. “Be ruled” means more than “עמוד”.

Hamlet’s speech to the ghost ends with the significant question: “What should we *do*?” (I, 4, 57). The stress is on *do* and involves one of Hamlet’s greatest problems; his inability to do, even after he is told what to do. The translation is correct, but insufficient: “מה שומה עלינו?”.

The ghost repeats the word “unnatural” when referring to the murder. There is neither an equivalent nor a replacement in the translation. Keeping in mind the importance of “nature” to the Elizabethans and their moral, social, and religious condemnation of anything “unnatural,” this omission is regrettable. It was an Elizabethan belief, well put by Shakespeare, that “unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles” (*Macbeth*, V, 1, 79).

Sometimes the translation suggests a generalization while the original does not:

... so like the King
That was and is the question of *these* wars (I, 1, 110–111)

is translated:

שכה דומה למלך,
אשר כעת כאז, קודר המלחמות הוא.

The Hebrew version is interpreted as a general truth: Kings are the source of wars. This results from the omission of “these,” while the original refers specifically to the wars with Norway.

It is not easy to follow the different levels of style used in *Hamlet* and to keep pace with all their nuances. Sometimes the translation lags behind, sometimes it runs ahead. “שקדי נא לבשרני”, said by Laertes to his sister, is more suggestive than the simple, conversational: “Let me hear from you” (I, 3, 4). “הקור — לאין נשוא” is too literary for: “It is very cold” (I, 4, 1). When Claudius speaks to Hamlet (I, 2) he tries hard to maintain a simple man-to-man style. But in translation “cousin” becomes “שאָר” “בשרי”; “Think of us as of a father” = “לֵאב הָאִמִּיָּהֲנִי”; “Take it to the heart” = “נִסְעִיר לְבָנוּ”; and, moreover,

A heart unfortified, a mind impatient
An understanding simple and unschooled (I, 2, 96–97)

is translated:

ללב באין משגב, לקצֶר המִשִּׁי (!)
לשכל אין בינוֹת ובעֲרֹת מדעָה

The King flatters Hamlet: “Be as ourself in Denmark” (I, 2, 122). Three lines later, the King equates himself with Denmark: “Denmark drinks today . . .” and this is well translated “ישא המלך כוס ברכה”. But the translation of I, 2, 122 reads: “בדנמרק שב כמונו”. I would suggest “היה כמונו בדנמרק”, which preserves the flattery and promise.

Polonius’ words to his son, “Give thy thoughts no tongue” (I, 3, 58), again receive a translation too poetic, which spoils the beautiful metaphor, brilliant in its simplicity: “אל פִּתְחוּךְ־פִּה תחיש להרהורי לבך”.

Hamlet, addressing Rosencrantz, uses an offending style: “Have you any further *trade* with us?” (III, 2, 317), to which the reaction is: “My Lord, you once did love me.” The reaction itself highlights the offending style and tone. The Hebrew here says: “העוד לך דבר אלי?”, and therefore the answer seems strange: “לפנים אהבתני, הנסך”.

Even Shakespeare’s famous statement about women is altered in the translation: “Frailty, thy name is woman!” (I, 2, 146) is stronger than “אכן, קלות הדעת — זהו שמך, אשה” — קלות הדעת — זהו שמך, אשה. In the original, frailty is called woman, while the translation suggests just the opposite. In this case, it would be enough to change the punctuation, and thus the tone, in order to recapture the original meaning and strength: “אכן, קלות-הדעת, זהו שמך: אשה!”

Finally, Shakespeare’s “tendency to double and redouble words and phrases”⁸ is well known. “With figures of repetition”—as Sister Miriam Joseph says (1949, p. 289)—“Shakespeare weaves a haunting harmony of sounds.” It is therefore astonishing that the translation does not preserve every repetition. There should be no difficulty in so doing. And yet, in “O, that this *too too* solid flesh” (I, 2, 129), the intensive repetition is missing in the translation. Also, “*Bloody, bloody* villain” (II, 2, 557) is translated “בליעל איש-דמים”, while “To pay *five* ducats, *five*” (IV, 4, 20) becomes just “בחמשה זֶהוּבִים”.

Sister Miriam Joseph continues (p. 289): “The figures of repetition in his later work give beauty, emphasis and strength to the thought and

8. Harry Levin, “Interrogation, doubt, irony,” in Bevington (1968, p. 74).

feeling." It would seem that, for lack of such figures, the translation does have less "beauty, emphasis and strength" than the original.

All in all, Shlonsky's Hebrew Hamlet is a masterpiece. Empson (1930, p. 315-316) writes about "two sorts of literary critic, the appreciative and analytical." The appreciative critic would be impressed by the richness of language, by the almost perfect rhythm and meter, and by the accuracy of the translation of the plot. He would admire Shlonsky the poet and master of the Hebrew language. The analytical critic would examine details, looking for imperfections, and find many.

Imperfections, mistakes, and inadequacies can be found in any translation, especially where ambiguity, wordplays, and the like are involved. Shakespeare, needless to say, utilizes these devices to the fullest. He always plays on both the denotative and connotative senses of words. This is especially true in *Hamlet*, where such devices are not only numerous but are interwoven.

In addition, Shakespeare uses many levels of style. Each character has his own special style, and some characters use different styles for different circumstances. "Hamlet," says Clemen (1951, p. 109), "commands so many levels of expression."

In short, it is not easy to translate "this myriad minded man" as Sister Miriam Joseph (1949, p. 289) calls Shakespeare.

Some failures in Shlonsky's translation are probably unavoidable, but some are certainly unnecessary. Some are very serious because they begin a chain reaction of sorts, misleading the reader. Others mar the beauty, the richness, the strength or the wit of the original.

We have seen that even an excellent translation may have many imperfections. Whether or not a *perfect translation* of a masterpiece is possible remains an open question.

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