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DIMITRIOS VIKELAS' TRANSLATION OF *HAMLET* (1882)\*

One of the basic problems Vikelas<sup>1</sup> had to solve in translating Shakespeare's plays was the form of the Greek language he was going to use. In his day the puristic form of *katharevousa*, with its stilted and stereotyped phraseology, prevailed in literature. Vikelas was quick to realize that such a vehicle for translating Shakespeare would be not only inadequate but perhaps comic too. In his endeavour to popularise Shakespeare and make him understood by his countrymen, he thought of using a form of language which would both be close to the demotic and still keep the dignity of Greek, a form which he did not hesitate to employ.

In translating Shakespeare I tried to keep to a middle path by writing in the vernacular as it is commonly spoken today. Others will judge whether or to what extent I have succeeded in applying the theory according to which in such a language the vigour and passion, the naturalness, in one word, of the original, can be maintained.<sup>2</sup>

Vikelas' translation is based on H. H. Furness' edition of *Hamlet* (*A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare* (1877)) as it is apparent from note 3 (p. 194) of his translation.

Vikelas translated verse with verse and prose with prose; as for the versification, he used the most popular Greek metrical device, the 15-syllable iambic verse, to render Shakespeare's iambic pentameter. This verse (δεκαπεντασύλλαβος) is considered the national metre and is widely used just as blank verse is in English. It is the metre in which most of the Greek folk songs are written and it was adopted by Solomos and Valaoritis in their poetry. There is no doubt that the familiarity

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1. Σαίξπηλίου Τραγωδία μεταφρασθεῖσαι ἐκ τοῦ Ἀγγλικοῦ ὑπὸ Δημητρίου Βικέλα. Μέρος Ε' Ἀμλέτος. Ἐν Ἀθήναις. Ἐκ τῶν Καταστημάτων Ἀνδρέου Κορομηλά, 1882.

2. *Op. cit.*, p. ια'. The translations of Greek passages quoted are my own.

of this verse made Vikelas' version pass more easily into the people's mouths. Thus one of the translator's aims - to popularise Shakespeare in Greece - was to some extent achieved. Here is an example to illustrate the form of this verse:

◡ — ◡ — ◡ — ◡ — || ◡ — ◡ — ◡ — ◡  
 Νὰ ζῆ καὶ νεῖς ἤ νὰ μὴ ζῆ; Ἴ δὸς ἦ ἄ πο ρί α  
 (To be, or not to be : that is the question)

It is apparent that the Greek verse has five more syllables than Shakespeare's pentameter, which has ten syllables. This might be considered a metrical defect. On the other hand, these extra five syllables provide room for an extension of Shakespeare's poetic diction which is so compressed. Moreover, the paucity of monosyllabic words in the Greek language, undoubtedly compelled the translator to put an extra few syllables in his line in order to include the full meaning of the original.

It is unlikely that Vikelas, who was well versed in German, was not aware of Schlegel's theory in translating Shakespeare, according to which, "a verse work should always be rendered into verse, and, indeed, into verse of exactly the same pattern".<sup>1</sup> But since, for technical reasons, it was almost impossible to compress the meaning of Shakespeare's 10-syllable line into a Greek line of an equal number of syllables without squeezing it too hard or leaving out one or two words, Vikelas preferred to compromise, and treat himself to five extra syllables. These additional syllables have given the translator freedom in shifting the position of words within the line, a practice which provided simplification of the text making it thus easier to understand.

It is noteworthy that Vikelas has closely followed the original in reproducing the rhyming couplets which appear usually at the end of each of Shakespeare's Scenes. The songs in the play are also rendered in the same metrical pattern as in the original.

Some passages from Vikelas' work, compared with the original text, will show clearly the virtues and the inevitable shortcomings of the translation. Here is how Horatio relates to Hamlet the appearance of the Ghost :

1. Quoted by Margaret Atkinson in *August Wilhelm Schlegel as a translator of Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1958), p. 2.

Two nights together had these gentlemen,  
 Marcellus and Bernardo, on their watch,  
 In the dead vast and middle of the night,  
 Been thus encounter'd. A figure like your father,  
 Armed at point exactly, cap-a-pe,  
 Appears before them, and with solemn march  
 Goes slow and stately by them ; thrice he walk'd  
 By their oppress'd and fear-surprised eyes,  
 Within his truncheon's length ; whilst they, distill'd  
 Almost to jelly with the act of fear,  
 Stand dumb, and speak not to him. This to me  
 In dreadful secrecy impart they did ;  
 And I with them the third night kept the watch ;  
 Where, as they had deliver'd, both in time,  
 Form of the thing, each word made true and good,  
 The apparition comes. I knew your father ;  
 These hands are not more like.<sup>1</sup>

(I. 2. 196 - 212) .

Δύο νυκταίς κατὰ σειρᾶν οἱ δύο των, - ὁ Βερνάρδος  
 κι' ὁ Μάρκελλος, - εἰς τὴν φρουράν, εἰς τῆς νυκτὸς τὰ βᾶθη,  
 τὸ εἶδαν μὲ τὰ ῥμάτια των : Τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ πατρὸς σου,  
 μὲ πανοπλίαν ἐντελῆ σιδηροφορεμένον,  
 ἐμπρὸς των ἐμφανίζεται, καὶ μὲ πομπῶδες βῆμα  
 ἀργὰ καὶ μεγαλοπρεπῶς περνᾷ ἐνώπιόν των.  
 Ὡς τὰ ῥμάτια των τὰ ἔκθαμβα ἐμπρὸς, τὰ φοβισμένα,  
 ἐπῆγε κ' ἤλθε τρεῖς φοραῖς, - τόσον πλησίον, ὥστε  
 τοὺς ἤγγιζε τὸ σκῆπτρόν του σχεδόν, ἐνῶ ἐκεῖνοι  
 ἀκίνητοι καὶ ἄλαλοι, λυωμένοι ἀπ' τὸν φόβον,  
 δὲν τοῦ ὠμίλησαν. - Αὐτὰ τὰ εἶπαν εἰς ἐμένα  
 μὲ ἄκραν μυστικότητα, κ' ἐγὼ τὴν τρίτην νύκτα  
 μαζῆ των ἐξενύκτησα, καὶ ὅπως μοῦ τὸ εἶπαν,  
 τὴν ἴδιαν ὥραν τῆς νυκτὸς καὶ μὲ τὸ ἴδιον σχῆμα,  
 λέξιν πρὸς λέξιν κάθε τί, τὸ φάντασμα ἐφάνη.  
 Τὸν ἔξεύρω τὸν πατέρα σου· τὸνα μου χέρι τᾶλλο  
 δὲν ῥμοιάζει περισσότερον.

(p. 21)

1. References throughout, unless otherwise stated, are to *The Oxford Shakespeare*, edited by W.J. Craig (London, 1905 ; reprinted 1974).

Let us first examine the form of the translation in comparison with the original text. There are sixteen and a half lines, containing 130 words, in the original. Vikelas' version has an equal number of lines with just four more words, i.e. 134. This comparison shows that although Vikelas has used a longer metrical line, he has retained the form of the original quite closely. Actually, no Greek translator of Shakespeare was ever able to render the iambic pentametre with lines of equal length. Kavafis and K.Theotokis were the only ones to approach Shakespeare's verse using an 11-syllabic line, and this was at the cost of leaving out one or two words here and there.

A literal "translation" of the translation will allow the reader to see for himself what is left of the original :

[Two nights in a row these two - Bernardo  
and Marcellus - in their watch, in the depths of the night  
saw it with their own eyes : The figure of your father  
with full panoply iron-clad,  
appearing in front of them, and with a pompous pace  
slowly and with dignity passing before them.  
Before their astounded and frightened eyes  
it went to and fro three times - so close that  
its sceptre almost touched them, while they,  
immovable and speechless, melting with fear  
did not speak to it. - They told me these  
things in utmost secrecy, and I, the third night  
spent with them, and as they told me  
at the same hour of the night and with the same form  
word by word, everything, the ghost appeared.  
I know your father ; My one hand  
does not resemble the other more.]

On this passage the following remarks can be made : The noun "gentlemen" of the original has not been translated ; neither have the adjectives "dead" and "vast". The phrase "with his truncheon's length" is analytically rendered by "so near that its sceptre was almost touching them", τὸσον πλησίον ὥστε τοὺς ἤγγιζε τὸ σκῆπτρον του. The present tenses "they speak not", "the apparition comes" are translated by past tenses : "they did not speak", δὲν ὠμίλησαν and "appeared", ἐφάνη. By changing the tenses into the past, Horatio's narration is deprived of its immediacy and in this way much of Shakespeare's powerful effect is lost. Also "I knew your father" has been changed in the translation from past

tense to present tense "I know your father", Τὸν ἔξεύρω τὸν πατέρα σου. The changing of verb tenses recurs in the translation as, for example, in line 58 (I. 1) :

Is it not like the king ?

is translated τὸν πρόωγον βασιλέα δὲν ἐμοιαζε ; where the present tense is translated by a past tense. Similarly, the past perfect tense of the original in "My lord, he *hath* importuned me with love" is translated by the present tense : Μοῦ ὀμιλεῖ, πατέρα μου διὰ τὸν ἔρωτά του.

Polonius' advice to his son Laertes is a much quoted passage characteristic of Shakespeare's use of maxims and proverbial expressions :

Neither a borrower nor a lender be ;  
 For loan oft loses both itself and friend,  
 And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.  
 This above all : to thine own self be true,  
 And it must follow, as the night the day,  
 Thou canst not then be false to any man.  
 Farewell ; my blessing season this in thee!

(1. 3. 75 - 81)

Ποτέ νὰ μὴ δανείζεσαι καὶ μήτε νὰ δανείζης·  
 ἔδάνεισες, - καὶ δάνειον καὶ φίλον ξέγραψέ τα·  
 δανείζεσαι, - ἐξέμαθες νὰ εἶσαι οἰκονόμος.  
 Πρὸ πάντων δέ, μένε πιστὸς ἐσὺ 'ς τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου,  
 καὶ ἔπεται, ὡς ἔπεται ἡ νύκτα' ς τὴν ἡμέραν,  
 ὅτι ποτέ σου ἄπιστος εἰς ἄλλον δὲν θὰ γείνης.  
 Στερέωσέ τα μέσα σου αὐτὰ μὲ τὴν εὐχὴν μου.  
 "Ὡρα καλὴ σου.

(p. 28)

[You should neither borrow nor lend ;  
 (if) you lend, write off both loan and friend ;  
 (if) you borrow, you have unlearned what economy is.  
 Above all, stay faithful to yourself,  
 and it follows, as night follows the day,  
 that never will you be unfaithful to others.  
 Consolidate these things in yourself with my good wishes  
 Farewell.]

In any translation one should not expect a word for word replacement of the original. This would be absurd even in languages more closely related than English to Greek. In a Shakespeare translation, with all the more reason, one should not be surprised to see nouns translated by verbs, adjectives by adverbs, participles by clauses etc., provided that the meaning of the original is retained. Despite these grammatical changes, which are numerous throughout Vikelas' translation, the meaning is conveyed satisfactorily. Discernible in this passage are the nouns "borrower" and "lender", which are not translated by the existing corresponding Greek nouns δανειστής and χρεώστης - presumably for metrical reasons - but by the verb δανείζομαι (to borrow), which in its active form δανείζω means "to lend". Furthermore, the accumulation in 3 lines of five cognates - δανείζεσαι, δανείζης, ἐδάνεισες, δάνειον, δανείζεσαι - does not resemble the verbal sound of the original, as Shakespeare uses only two of these words, i.e. "borrower" almost at the beginning of the first line, and "borrowing" at the beginning of the third. The clause ὡς ἔπεται ἡ νύκτα 'ς τὴν ἡμέρα, although it reads smoothly, examined under strict grammatical rule presents some irregularity as far as the syntax of the verb ἔπομαι (to follow) is concerned. The usual syntax of this verb in Greek is ἔπομαι + genitive (ἔπομαι τινός = to follow someone or something), while Vikelas uses it with the preposition (εἰ)ς + accusative (ἡμέραν). As Vikelas was an erudite scholar and could not easily fall into such a blunder, the only explanation one can find is that, very possibly, when he was putting down the verb ἔπομαι he was thinking of the synonymous verb ἀκολουθῶ, which does take an accusative. Discernible is also the inversion of the two sentences "Farewell" add "my blessing season this with thee!" which is made presumably for metrical reasons. As for the debatable meaning of the verb "season" Vikelas has followed Dr Johnson's suggestion in rendering it into Greek, according to whom "season" means "so to infix it that it may never wear out" (see Furness, p. 70).

When the translator reaches "The Tale of Dido", he appropriately changes style and metre. The style becomes, as in Shakespeare, bombastic, almost archaic, and the verse 16-syllabic. A few lines from this passage will illustrate the change :

The rugged Pyrrhus, - he whose sable arms,  
 Black as his purpose, did the night resemble  
 When he lay couched in the ominous horse, -

Hath now this dread and black complexion smear' d  
With heraldry more dismal ;

(II. 2. 430 - 4)

Ὁ δὲ ἄγριος ὁ Πύρρος, ὅστις φέρων πανοπλίαν  
μελανὴν ὡς ἡ ψυχὴ του, εἶχε τῆς νυκτὸς τὴν ὄψιν  
ὅτε ἤρχετο κρυμμένος εἰς τὸν ἀποφράδα ἵππον,  
ἤδη ἔχει ἠλημμένα ἐπὶ τῆς φρικτῆς μορφῆς του  
φοβερώτερα σημεῖα.

(p. 73)

[The wild Pyrrhus, who bearing a panoply  
as black as his soul, had night's face,  
when he came hidden in the ominous horse,  
has already smeared on his horrible figure  
more dismal signes.]

In note 18 at the end of his translation (p. 198), referring to the interposed lines, Vikelas appended the following comment, which echoes Schlegel's observations on the same point :

In the English text the parts recited by the players are in bombastic rhyming couplets [sic], while their style, full of antitheses and metaphors, differs intentionally from that of the tragedy. In order to retain this difference in my translation too, I have not kept the rhyming couplets, but I have changed the metre, and written the inserted verse in more elaborate language.

This note is more appropriate to "The Murder of Gonzago" which is in rhyming couplets than to "Aeneas's tale of Dido". As Coleridge said commenting on the former part, "the style of the interlude here is distinguished from the real dialogue by thyme, as in the first interview with the Players, by epic verse". (Furness, p. 244, note 145).

A passage from Hamlet's celebrated soliloquy "To be, or not to be", which Coleridge characterised as being "of absolutely universal interest", in an examination such as this, should not be omitted.

To be, or not to be, - that is the question ;  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing end them ? To die, - to sleep, -

No more ; and by a sleep to say we end  
 The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks  
 That flesh is heir to, - 'tis a consummation  
 Devoutly to be wish' d. To die ; - to sleep ; -  
 To sleep! perchance to dream! ay, there is the rub ;  
 (III. 1. 56 - 65)

Νὰ ζῆ κανεὶς ἢ νὰ μὴ ζῆ ; 'Ιδοῦ ἡ ἀπορία.  
 Τί εἶναι πλέον εὐγενές ; Νὰ ζῆ, νὰ ὑποφέρῃ  
 τῆς Τύχης τὰ τοξεύματα καὶ σφενδονίσματα τῆς,  
 ἢ εἰς βασάνων πέλαγος τὰ ὅπλα ν' ἀντιτάξῃ  
 καὶ νὰ ἰδῆ τὸ τέλος των μὲ τὴν ἀντίστασίν του ;  
 'Απέθανε, - 'κοιμήθηκε' ἰδοῦ. Καὶ μ' ἕνα ὕπνον  
 νὰ παύῃ ὁ πονόκαρδος καὶ τὰ δεινὰ τὰ χίλια  
 ποῦ εἶν' ἡ μοῖρα τῆς σαρκός, συντέλεια θὰ ᾔτο  
 νὰ τὴν ὀρέγεται κανεὶς ἐνθέρμως! - Ν' ἀποθάνῃ,  
 νὰ κοιμηθῇ. - Νὰ κοιμηθῇ ; Νὰ ὄνειρεύετ' ἴσως!  
 'Ιδοῦ, ἰδοῦ τὸ πρόσκομμα!

(pp. 82 - 3)

[To live or not to live ? Here is the question.  
 What is nobler ? To live, to suffer  
 Fortune's arrows and her slings,  
 or against a sea of troubles oppose arms  
 and see their end by his opposition ?  
 Died, - slept ; Look ! And with a sleep  
 to stop the heartache and the thousand troubles  
 which are destiny's flesh, it would be a consummation  
 to be warmly desired ! To die,  
 to sleep. - To sleep ? To dream, perhaps.  
 Look, look, here is the obstacle !]

One thing that strikes us here, when comparing the two texts, apart from the infinitive "to be" which is not translated by "to exist", is the replacement of the chain of infinitives, - to be, not to be, to suffer, to take, to die, to sleep, to say, etc - of the original by the Greek νὰ + subjunctive. Modern Greek is perhaps the only European language that has lost the use of the infinitive, which has been replaced by a more analytical syntax, as above. Vikelas had no other choice but to follow this



practice ; and he did it up to line 59. In translating the two infinitives 'to die', "to sleep" (line 60), however, surprisingly enough, he rendered them by past tenses ἀπέθανε, κοιμήθηκε (died, slept). This is an inexcusable inconsistency. One can notice also a deviation from the original as far as the syntax is concerned. Shakespare's dependent interrogative clause "Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer" is changed into a direct question : Τί εἶναι πλέον εὐγενές ; (What is nobler ?).

At the beginning of the passage Vikelas takes the liberty translating "To be, or not to be" by a direct question Νὰ ζῆ κανείς ἢ νὰ μὴ ζῆ ; and starts a new sentence Ἴδοὺ ἡ ἀπορία for " - that is the question", thus disconnecting the line. Shakespare's "in the mind" is left out, and so is the adjective "outrageous", while the position of the words "slings" and "arrows" is reversed within the line, for metrical reasons. "No more" is inaccurately rendered by Ἴδοὺ which might imply "that's all". "To say" and "natural" are also left out. The metaphor "that flesh is heir to" is not satisfactorily rendered by ποῦ εἶν' ἡ μοῖρα τῆς σαρκός (which are destiny's flesh). The present tense in the phrase "'tis a consummation" is translated by the conditional clause θὰ ᾔτο (it would be), and the line corresponding to "ay, there is the rub" is filled out with the nonsensical ἰδοὺ, ἰδοὺ, again for metrical reasons.

This passage, although it tries hard to reproduce the meaning of the original, cannot retain the incantatory effect of Shakespare's poetical diction. The tension of the original is slackened, toned down or obliterated. Soliloquies are the most demanding passages which actually put to the test the abilities of a translator. Especially Shakespare's complex and packed imagery is hard to reproduce accurately, and it is here where the weakest point of the translation is discerned.

The following passage includes Ophelia's speech. After her dialogue with Hamlet and his rebuke of her, distressed and brokenhearted she exclaims :

Oh, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown !  
 The courtier's, scholar's, soldier's, eye, tongue, sword ;  
 The expectancy and rose of the fare state,  
 The glass of fashion, and the mould of form,  
 The observed of all observers, quite, quite down !  
 And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,  
 That suck'd the honey of his music-vows,  
 Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,  
 Like sweet bells jangled out of tune, and harsh ;

That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth  
 Blasted with ecstasy ; Oh, woe is me,  
 To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!  
 (III. 1. 150 - 161)

Τί νοῦς λαμπρός, ἀλλοίμονον, ἐδῶ κατεκρημνίσθη !  
 Ἡ εὐπροσήμερη ματιά, ἡ προκομμένη γλῶσσα,  
 τ' ἀνδρεῖον ξίφος, ἡ ἐλπίς, τὸ ρόδον τῆς Δανίας,  
 αὐτός, καθρέπτης τοῦ συρμοῦ, τῆς εὐγενείας τύπος,  
 σημάδι ὅλων τῶν ματιῶν, τόσον νὰ πέση, τόσον!  
 Κ' ἐγώ, ἀξιοδάκρυτη καὶ μαύρη, ποῦ μ' ἐδόθη  
 τῆς μουσικῆς τῶν ἔρκων του νὰ εὐφρανθῶ τὸ μέλι,  
 βλέπω τὸν νοῦν τὸν εὐγενῆ, τὸν ἡγεμονικόν του,  
 ὅσον ραγισμένον σήμαντρον παράφωνα νὰ κράζῃ, -  
 τὸ ἄνθος τῆς νεότητος τ' ἀσύγκριτον τὸ βλέπω  
 ὅς τὴν τρέλλαν νὰ μαραίνεται! Κακὴ, κακὴ μου ὥρα  
 νὰ ἰδῶ ἐκεῖνα πῶς βλεπα, κι' αὐτὰ νὰ βλέπω τώρα!  
 (p. 87)

[What a bright mind, alas, here is overthrown!  
 The courteous glance, the diligent tongue,  
 the brave sword, the hope, the rose of Denmark,  
 he, the mirror of fashion, the model of nobility,  
 a mark for all eyes, so much to fall, so much!  
 And I, deplorable and ill-fortuned, to whom was given  
 the honey of his music's words to enjoy,  
 I see the noble and sovereign mind  
 like a cracked bell sounding dissonantly, -  
 the incomparable flower of youth I see  
 withering in madness! A bad, bad time for me  
 to see those which I saw, and to see these now!]

Here again, as elsewhere, Vikelas has recast the text into Greek, giving the content almost complete, but without his version's sounding like Shakespeare. One cannot expect a translator, of course, to make Greek sound like English. There is no doubt that the Greek passage in itself does read smoothly, but a close comparison with the original does reveal some inaccuracies i. e. "the soldier's sword" is translated as "brave sword", τ' ἀνδρεῖον ξίφος, "the rose of the fair state" becomes "the rose of Denmark", τὸ ρόδον τῆς Δανίας, the descriptive and powerful

metaphor "suck'd the honey" is rendered by "enjoyed the honey",  
 νὰ εὐφρανθῶ τὸ μέλι, "the sweet bells jangled" by "cracked bell", ραγι-  
 σμένον σήμαντρον.

One of the most dramatic scenes of the play is the Scene of Ophelia's funeral. On seeing her body being carried to the grave, Laertes, full of grief, cries :

Lay her i' the earth ; -  
 And from her fair and unpolluted flesh  
 May violets spring! - I tell thee, churlish priest,  
 A ministering angel shall my sister be,  
 When thou liest howling.

(V. 1. 266 - 30)

The Greek version of Vikelas' :

'Σ τὸ χῶμα βάλετέ μου την, κι' ἀνθάκια νὰ φυτρώσουν  
 ἐπάνω 'ς τ' ἀγγελόμορφον, τὸ ἄσπιλὸν της σῶμα!  
 Καλόγερε ἀναίσθητε, 'ς τὰ δεξιά τοῦ Πλάστου  
 ἡ ἀδελφή μου ἄγγελος θὰ εἶναι παραστάτης,  
 ἐνῶ ἐσὺ 'ς τὰ Τάρταρα θὰ ἔχης νὰ οὐρλιάζης!  
 (p. 167)

[Lay her in the earth and let little flowers grow  
 on her angelic, her chaste body!  
 Senseless monk, on the right side of the Creator  
 my sister will be a ministering angel,  
 while you will have to howl in Tartarus'.]

The verbal sound here is rich and the style highly lyrical. The mood is produced in the translator's own medium. Nothing is lost of the poetry, and perhaps, something is even added, when "her fair and unpolluted flesh" is turned into "angelic and chaste body", τ' ἀγγελόμορφον, τὸ ἄσπιλὸν της σῶμα, without seriously impairing the content. In the answer to the Priest, also, Vikelas puts some additional words into Laertes' mouth, i. e. his sister will be "on the right side of the Creator", 'ς τὰ δεξιά τοῦ Πλάστου, while the Priest will lie "in Tartarus", 'ς τὰ Τάρταρα.

The Queen's farewell to Ophelia and her scattering of flowers over

the grave are accompanied by these highly emotional words :

Sweets to the sweet ; farewell !  
 I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife,  
 I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,  
 And not t' have strew'd thy grave.

(V. 1. 231 - 4)

"Ανθη 'ς τὸ ἄνθος!  
 "Ω, χαῖρε! Τοῦ 'Αμλέτου μου σὲ ἤλπιζα γυναῖκα,  
 μ' ἄνθη νὰ στρώσω ἤλπιζα τὴν νυμφικὴν σου κλίνην, -  
 ὄχι, παρθένε μου γλυκειά, τὸν τάφον σου νὰ ράνω.

(p. 167)

[Flowers to the flower !  
 Oh, farewell ! I hoped you would be my Hamlet's wife  
 I hoped to deck your bridal bed with flowers, -  
 not, my sweet virgin, to strew your grave.]

The touching phrase of endearment, "sweets to the sweet", is rendered by a Greek phrase of equal sensitivity and felicity, although different etymologically : "flowers to the flower" "Ανθῆς τὸ ἄνθος! The remaining three lines lose nothing of the poetry of the original.

Finally, almost at the end of the play, while the destructive power of the poison is eating at Hamlet's life, he has time just to utter the following words to the audience :

You that look pale and tremble at this chance,  
 That are but mutes or audience to this act,  
 Had I but time (as this fell sergeant, death,  
 Is strict in his arrest) oh, I could tell you -  
 But let it be. - Horatio, I am dead ;  
 Thou livest ; report me and my cause aright  
 To the unsatisfied.

(V. 2. 321 - 7)

'Εσεῖς ποῦ βλέπετ' ἔντρομοι κι' ὠχροὶ αὐτὴν τὴν θεάν,  
 κ' εἶσθε βωβοὶ ἀκροαταὶ αὐτῆς τῆς τραγωδίας,  
 καιρὸν ἂν εἶχα, - ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ὁ μαῦρος δεσμοφύλαξ,  
 ὁ Θάνατος, ἐπάνω μου χέρι βαρὺ ἀπλόνει, -  
 "Ω! εἶχα πράγματα νὰ πῶ! 'Αλλ' ἄς τ' ἀφήσω. - Φίλε,  
 ἀπέθανα, σὺ ὁμως ζῆς, καὶ σὺ δικαίωσέ με  
 κ' ἐμένα καὶ τὰ ἔργα μου.

(p. 188)

[You that frightened and pale are looking at this  
and are mute listeners to this tragedy, (sight,  
had I time, - but this black gaoler,  
Death, lays on me his heavy hand, -  
Oh! I had things to say! But let them be. Friend,  
I am dead, but you live, and you must justify me,  
both me and my deeds.]

Vikelas' version is not quite free from a number of shortcomings the most striking of which are the following :

1. Mistranslations :

(a) "When he the ambitious Norway *combated*" (I. 1. 61) is translated *ὅταν τὸν ὑπερήφανον τὸν Νορβεγὸν ἴνικοῦσε* (p. 7). (When he *defeated* the proud Norwegian). Shakespeare by "combated" does not mean here "defeated" but opposed in single fight.<sup>1</sup>

(b) Similarly, the line "*No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm*" (I. 1. 163) is translated *δὲν φαίνεται Νεράϊδα, δὲν πιάνουν στρίγλας μάγια* (p. 11). (Neither does fairy *appear*, nor witchcraft takes effect). Vikelas mistranslates the verb "takes" by "appears". "To take" here means to have malignant influence, said of supernatural powers or "to bewitch".<sup>2</sup>

(c) "As any the most *vulgar* thing to sense" (I. 2. 99) *ὡς ἀνὰ τίθε ἄλλο αἰσθητὸν ἔς τὴν πρόστυχὴν μας φύσιν* (p. 16) (Like anything else perceptible to our vulgar nature). In Shakespeare's time the adjective "vulgar" meant "common, ordinary", without the modern narrowing down of meaning.<sup>3</sup> "Sense", too, is used in Elizabethan times to indicate not "nature", as Vikelas translates it but "understanding, power of sound reasoning". Moreover, the adjective "vulgar" in the translation, wrongly placed as it is, qualifies the noun "nature", while in the original it has not the same function.

(d) "Thy *knotted* and *combined* locks to part" (I.5.18) is translated *καὶ τ' ἀπλωτὰ μαλλιά σου νὰ χωρισθοῦν* (and your loose hair to part). Hamlet's hair is not "loose" *ἀπλωτὰ* but, on the contrary "knotted", hat is tangled. The word "combined" is left untranslated.

(e) "No, let the candied tongue lick *absurd pomp*" (II.2.55).

1. Alexander Schmidt, *Shakespeare Lexicon* (Koenigsberg, 1874 ; republished N. York, 1971), p. 215.

2. E. A. Abbot, *A Shakespearian Grammar* (London, 1870 ; republished N. York, 1966), p. 15.

3. J. Copley, *Shift of meaning* (London, 1961), p. 73.

Ἦς γλυκογλείφη

τὰ μεγαλεῖα τὰ τρανὰ ἢ ζαχαρένια γλῶσσα.

(Let the sugared tongue sweetly lick the *great* grandeurs). "Absurd" means "insipid, tasteless", not "great", τρανὰ.

## 2. Inaccuracies :

There are numerous inaccuracies in translation, resulting either from a lack of meticulous insistence on the particular meaning of a word or phrase of the original or because a synonymous Greek word fitted the metre better. Here are some examples : "assail" = προσβολή (I. 1. 31) instead of ἔφοδος ; "was offended" = ἐθύμωσε (I. 1. 49) instead of προσεβλήθη ; "the *ambitious* Norway" = ὁ ὑπερήφανος Νορβηγός (I. 1. 61) instead of φιλόδοξος ; "impotent" = γέρος (I. 2. 29) instead of ἀδύνατος. It should be more accurate to translate "selfslaughter" (I. 2. 132) by αὐτοκτονία = suicide than by αὐτοκτόνος, for "self-slaughter" is an abstract noun and denotes the action (Schmidt, p. 1024), not the person who commits suicide, as in Vikelas' version. "He was a goodly king" (I. 2. 186) is translated by Τί βασιλεὺς γενναῖος (what a brave king), where the adjective καλός (fine, fair) would be closer to what Shakespeare meant. "Season your admiration" (I. 2. 192) was translated by the metaphor τὸν θαυμασμὸν χαλίνωσε (bridle your admiration), but it would be more appropriate to translate "season" by μετρίασε "temper it", as Johnson suggested (Furness, p. 50, note 192), and "admiration" by ἐκπληξιν (astonishment), as in III. 2. 311. The "ungracious pastors" is turned into κακὸν διδάσκαλον (bad teacher), while the strong phrase "taints of liberty" (II. 1. 32) is translated by the much weaker γεννήματα τῆς ἀνεξαρτησίας (offsprings of independence). Ophelia's description of Hamlet's being "pale as his shirt" (II. 1. 81) is rendered simply as ἄσπρον ὡς τὸ παννί (white as a sheet), whereby the audience or the reader does not learn that the Prince was dressed in a white shirt. "Thyself *do* grace to them, and bring them in" is translated Ἐσὺ χαιρέτισέ μου τοὺς λοιπὸν καὶ φέρε μού τοὺς. (Do you greet them for me, then, and bring them to me) ; "to do grace" means to do honourable distinction, to do honour, not "to greet". "Steals away" (III. 4. 134) is translated simply by φεύγει (leaves), without the sense of furtiveness. "What, art a heathen ?" (V. 1. 33) has become Τοῦρκος εἶσαι ; (Are you a Turk ?).

## 3. Rendering of puns and quibbles :

Shakespeare's puns and verbal quibbles are the weakest points of Vikelas' version and are undoubtedly a baffling problem for any translator. These literary devices, as they depend on linguistic connotations, are difficult to reproduce in another language and for a foreign audience

or reader to appreciate. Faced with this problem Vikelas is compelled to admit his weakness. In note 40 (p. 204), referring to the gravedigger's pun "Adam digged ; could he dig without arms?" which he rendered 'Ο Ἀδάμ ἔσκαπτε. Καὶ τί ἔσκαπτε ἂν δὲν εἶχε χωράφια ; (Adam digged. And what did he dig if he had not fields?), Vikelas wrote :

I request the reader's indulgence for the unsuccessful paraphrase of the untranslatable, as far as myself is concerned, quibble in the text. Adam, says the gravedigger, had arms. Arms means both "coat of arms" and "arms", hence the quibble. I could not omit this passage completely because of the continuity.

The two puns in the following lines are discarded altogether and only the one layer of meaning is given.

POLONIUS I did enact Julius Caesar ; I was  
killed in the *Capitol* ; *Brutus* killed me.

HAMLET It was a *brute* part of him to kill so  
*capital* a calf there.

(III. 2. 109 - 12)

ΠΟΛΩΝΙΟΣ (Ἵπεκρίθην) τὸν Ἰούλιον Καίσαρα.  
Μ' ἐσκότωσαν εἰς τὸ Καπιτώλιον. Ὁ Βροῦτος μ'  
ἐσκότωσεν.

ΑΜΛΕΤΟΣ Πῶς νὰ τὸ κάμη αὐτὸ τὸ κακὸν ὁ Βροῦτος!

(p. 94)

[POLONIUS (I enacted) Julius Caesar. They killed  
me on the Capitol. Brutus killed me.

HAMLET How could Brutus do this evil thing ? ]

Shakespeare's quibble is completely lost. The note appended in the back of the translation (p. 199), which simply indicates that there is a double word-play based on "Capitol", "Brutus", "brute", "capital" does not help at all to reproduce the so essential quibble of the original.

#### 4. Imagery :

Shakespeare's use of imagery is such a vast subject that, as Caroline Spurgeon put it, "it would demand at least a book - if not a small library-

to itself". Shakespeare's literary figures - metaphors, similes, personifications, metonymies - these "little word-pictures" are devices which, according to the same scholar, "are used by a poet or prose writer to illustrate, illuminate, and embellish his thoughts."<sup>1</sup> Their translation presents a complicated problem, as each language has its own stock of figurative speech which only can exist by chance in another language, if it does so at all. Vikelas at times substitutes a metaphor with a near equivalent, as in the following example :

Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death  
The *memory be green*

(I. 2. 1)

"Αν και δὲν ἔλαβε καιρὸν ἀκόμη νὰ μεστῶση  
ἡ μνήμη τοῦ φιλότατου μας τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ Ἀμλέτου,

[Although there has been no time yet for *the memory*  
of our dearest brother Hamlet *to ripen*,]

Shakespeare's "the memory be green" has become "for the *memory to ripen*", νὰ μεστῶση ἡ μνήμη. Likewise, for "heart of strings of steel" (III. 3. 70), Vikelas writes καρδιά πέτρινη (stone heart). More frequent are the cases of images deprived of their peculiar meaning, when translated with an explanatory abstract paraphrase : Claudius says to Gertrude:

Well, we shall *sift* him.

(II. 2. 58)

Καλᾶ, ἄς τὸν ἀκούσωμεν και βλέπομεν κατόπιν.

(p. 54)

[Well, let us listen to him and afterwards we  
shall *see*].

Similarly, the phrase "A king of shreds and patches" (III. 4. 103) has become βασιλέας τοῦ δρόμου (king of the street).

In a number of cases Vikelas skilfully renders Shakespeare's imagery with a Greek counterpart, for instance :

There is something in his soul

O'er which *his melancholy sits on brood*.

(III. 1. 164 - 5)

1. Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's imagery and what it tells us* (Cambridge, 1935 ; reprinted 1971), pp. 8, 9.



Κάτι κρυμμένον ἔχει  
εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ τὸ κλωσσᾶ μὲ τὴν μελαγχολίαν  
(p. 88)

[He has something hidden in his soul and *he broods*  
*over it with melancholy.*]

5. Omissions :

There are at least ten lines omitted which were thought by Vikelas to be indelicate or obscene, since he was a conservative man, as far as morals were concerned. In one of his notes appended to his translation of *Romeo and Juliet* he wrote :

To those intending to compare my translation with the English text I owe an apologetic explanation for having toned down some times and for the omission of some expressions of the original. In view of the difficulty of translating and my hesitancy to publish such expressions in all their nakedness I considered preferable their concealment of the suppression of a very few passages.

The omitted passages are indeed very few also in *Hamlet* and the measure of excision is taken because of the translator's prudishness. Omitted are the lines 108-13 (III. 2), where Hamlet is sitting at Ophelia's feet. Also lines 241-3 (II. 2) where Hamlet's dialogue with Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern refers to "the secret parts of Fortune". Vikelas also tends to omit parenthetical phrases such as "not to crack the wind of the poor phrase/Running it thus" (I. 3. 108-9) and "I believe it is a fetch of warrant" (II. 1. 38). Another line which is omitted is "In equal scale weighing delight and dole" (I. 2. 13) from Claudius speech, and some minor other omissions of phrases not affecting the text. No one of these omissions is in the "Errata" at the end of the book restored.

To summarise : Vikelas' translation considered as a whole, if not accurate for the scholarly-minded, was undoubtedly a work with many virtues : it reproduced the original content, although with very slight deviations, it conveyed the spirit, although toned down here and there, it had clarity and fluency reading like a Greek ballad, and preserved some of the poetical diction and the dramatic effect of the original, although wearing a very Greek dress.