

SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS IN PRINT IN BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE¹

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The cultural influence of William Shakespeare is unquestionable. His plays are constantly performed on the world's stages, while a plethora of translations into the most diverse of languages have been published and continue to be published at an ever faster pace all over the world. Brazil is no exception: after tentative beginnings in the nineteenth century, with translations of selected passages and excerpts, Shakespeare's works soon awakened the keen interest of poets, translators, dilettantes and publishers, leading to the publication of the whole dramatic canon in Brazilian Portuguese in the 1950s (by Carlos Alberto Nunes), the 1960s (by Fernando Carlos de Almeida Cunha Medeiros and Oscar Mendes) and most likely by 2013 (by Barbara Heliadora), besides the coming out of new renderings of individual plays by different translators. In the year 2010 alone twelve new such translations were published.

Shakespeare's plays were first rendered into Brazilian Portuguese in the nineteenth century, commissioned by the theater company owned by João Caetano, an actor-manager who was "at the center of Brazilian dramatic activity for at least three decades (1835-1863)[and] may be accorded the title of 'father' of the Brazilian national theater" (O'Shea 2005, p. 25). Interestingly, a number of such translations were indirect, having a French rendering as a source text. Caetano staged *Hamlet* for the first time in 1835, translated directly from an English original. Due to the negative response of the audience to this version, he then turned to indirect translations from the French, most of them imitations by Jean-François Ducis— not only of *Hamlet* but also of *Othello* and *Macbeth*, obtaining great commercial success and coming under stringent criticisms from Brazilian poets and writers (Gomes 1960, p. 13; Heliadora 2008, p. 324).

As to Shakespeare's plays in print, in that same century the number of Portuguese translations available in Brazil was very low, all by Portuguese translators. Back then, Brazilian poets and writers translated (and published) only excerpts of

¹Part of this research was previously reported in the article "Shakespeare in Brazilian Portuguese: Hamlet as a case in point" (*Accents Now Known: Shakespeare's Drama in Translation*, special issue of *Ilha do Desterro*, edited by José Roberto O'Shea, v. 36, p. 286-307, 1999).

Shakespeare’s plays, in a trend that prevailed until the third decade of the 20th century. The Parnassian poet Olavo Bilac, for one, rendered fragments of *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet* and the soliloquy “To be, or not to be,” as did the writers Francisco Otaviano and Machado de Assis.

The first translation of a whole play of the Shakespearean canon into Brazilian Portuguese from an English language source text was published only in the following century, in 1933, the translator himself being the initiator of the enterprise. His choice was *Hamlet*, apparently the most popular of all Shakespeare’s plays in Brazil.² From then on, Shakespeare’s plays started to be translated in full into our language by poets, writers, and professional translators who have consistently favored English language source texts, adding up to 185 different translations³ of the now revised canon of 39 plays. Also, publishing houses started to publish these renderings out of a concern with featuring major “classics” in their catalogs. However, as such books cannot be said to be guaranteed bestsellers, some kind of backing or sponsorship tended to be sought; sometimes the source of such backing was the translator himself/herself, eager to have his/her work in print.

A brief account of Shakespeare’s drama in translation in Brazil

The 1930s started at the height of the Modernist movement, launched in 1922 in the Week of Modern Art in São Paulo. According to Brazilian writer Erico Verissimo (1995), in the hectic twenties a group of poets, fictionists, painters, and musicians, under the influence of the Europeans Marinetti, Blaise Cendrars, and Jean Cocteau, decided to set the foundations of a new art, capable of expressing more faithfully their country and their generation. They declared the end of all literary taboos, of the sonnet, of the conventional means of artistic expression, of rhyme (considered “foolish”) and meter (deemed as “slavish”) (p. 109), proposing instead free verse full of daring images, cast in new molds.

In 1928 Oswald de Andrade wrote the Cannibalistic Manifesto, which exhorted Brazilians to behave as anthropophagi and to lovingly absorb the sacred enemy. The dilemma “Tupy, or not tupy” stated in the Manifesto could be approximately rephrased

² According to Gomes (1960), from 1835 to 1960 *Hamlet* was staged 28 times, by national and international companies, and in languages as different as English, Arabic, Italian, French, besides Portuguese (translated and adapted from English and French source texts and imitations, such as the famous one by Jean-François Ducis).

³ Through 2012.

as “To be Brazilian, or not to be Brazilian”, in which “to be Brazilian” meant “to turn inside and search for our roots”.⁴ The intertextual reference also shows the strong presence of Hamlet (and of Shakespeare, for that matter) in our culture.

In the decade following the clamorous beginnings of the Modernist movement four plays of the Shakespearean canon were published in Brazilian Portuguese: *Hamlet*, translated into prose by the jurist and poet Tristão da Cunha; *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merchant of Venice*, by Berenice Xavier; and *Romeo and Juliet* by the poet Onestaldo de Pennafort. Unfortunately Xavier’s translations are doomed to oblivion, as they are not available in major libraries for scrutiny and analysis of translation strategies and other features, nor are they mentioned or discussed by scholars and critics, which makes it impossible to trace their reception. But even if the poetics of the translator Berenice Xavier cannot be determined, the fact remains that the first published translation of a play by Shakespeare in Brazil was made in archaizing prose and Pennafort’s *Romeo and Juliet* in decasyllabic verse; therefore, neither embraced Modernist aesthetics.

The fact that such works were translated, published and staged for the first time in our country may be partly due to a felicitous conjunction of factors, namely: (i) the expansion of the publishing industry with the end of the so-called “República Velha” and the accession to power of Getúlio Vargas and his nationalist forces;⁵ (ii) the renewal of the Brazilian theater, as pointed out by Barbara Heliodora (1967)⁶. Still according to the same author, one of the basic features of this renewal was a movement of amateur theater, led by the Teatro do Estudante do Brasil, established by Paschoal Carlos Magno, a Brazilian diplomat who wanted to promote English drama in Frenchified Brazil; and (iii) the great incentive provided for arts and literature by the federal government, then headed by Getulio Vargas.

⁴*Tupy* (pronounced as [tuh·pee]) is the name of a native Brazilian people.

⁵Book production in Brazil increased substantially in the 1930s and continued to grow during the Second World War. Government policies greatly affected the book industry: the Basic Education Reform spurred the demand for schoolbooks, and the adoption of a new currency, the *mil-réis* (1930-31), made imported books become more expensive than those published in the country — a factor that helped increase the number of translations and reduce book imports from France (Milton and Euzébio 2004, p. 32; Silva Filho 2002, p. 49).

⁶ “It was in the thirties that the profound changes began which would eventually reshape the Brazilian theater so thoroughly that it is unlikely that one could easily identify, anywhere else, two ‘generations’ of actors, authors, directors, and set designers” (p. 122).

By the 1940s the Modernist aesthetic agenda had already started to lose its appeal. A new generation of poets was taking shape, the so-called *Novíssimos*, who took their inspiration from the poetics of the late-eighteenth-century Parnassians. They favored a “noble” diction and classical meter and such fixed forms as the sonnet, the ode, and the elegy. The publishing industry was strengthened and the government went on fostering literary activity. In the early forties, some critics, such as Eugênio Gomes, regretfully complained that English authors were not popular in Brazil — which was partly due to the fact that very few Brazilians could read English and partly to our readership’s lack of acquaintance with English literature (quoted in Alves 1995, p. 108-9). Consequently, publishers were at first reluctant to print the work of such authors, a situation soon to be reversed. Actually, the 1940s and 1950s were considered the “golden years” as far as translations are concerned (Paes 1990). The major publishing houses launched prestigious collections, featuring foreign translated fiction as well as new or acclaimed Brazilian authors. It was then that the French presence in our culture began to wane; not only was the English language assuming a new, significant role worldwide — preparing for its present hegemony — but also the wide choice of translations made available to the Brazilian readership of works originally written in different foreign languages, thus contributing to make its taste more eclectic. Besides, the translators commissioned by the publishing houses were, more often than not, prestigious authors, which may account for the high standard of such direct or indirect renderings.

It comes as no surprise that Shakespeare was a major beneficiary of the burgeoning publishing industry and the newly established love affair with all things English during this period, resulting in a flurry of new translations of his plays into Brazilian Portuguese. In the 1940s six new translations came out, of the all-time favorites — *Julius Caesar* (by Oscar Bastian Pinto), *Macbeth* (by Artur de Sales), *King Lear* (by J. Costa Neves), then *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Hamlet* (all by Oliveira Ribeiro Neto). Most of these translations combined prose and verse, following the original; only Bastian Pinto and J. Costa Neves rendered the whole play in prose. It is worth noting that, as far as verse is concerned, Brazilian Portuguese meter is syllabic, whereas Shakespearean meter is accentual and mostly iambic in stress. This leaves

Brazilian translators with a great source of frustration: the impossibility of transposing Elizabethan meter into Portuguese as spoken in Brazil.⁷

By 1953, the publishing industry had stopped growing and was actually experiencing a setback, but the Juscelino Kubitschek administration (1956-1960), whose motto was a 50-year development in a 5-year term, gave a new boost to that industry in the country. This was accomplished by means of a series of measures, such as tax exemption to the book sector (including the exemption of customs tariffs over foreign books) and the creation of subsidies to the Brazilian paper manufacturing industry (HALLEWELL, 2005, p. 533).

In the 1950s the first project that involved translating and publishing all 37⁸ tragedies, comedies, and histories in Brazilian Portuguese was carried out by Melhoramentos publishing house. The job was accomplished from 1950 through 1958 by Carlos Alberto Nunes, a scholar who rendered Shakespearean iambic pentameter in ten-syllable verse lines and ornate diction. There were also three other published translations: *Hamlet*, in alexandrines (by the prestigious Neo-Parnassian poet Péricles Eugênio da Silva Ramos), *Othello*, in decasyllabic meter (by Onestaldo de Pennafort) and *Macbeth* in prose only (by Nelson de Araújo). Again, similarly to what had happened in the previous decade, most of the 40 translations seemed to adhere to target-culture contemporary poetics.

The dawn of the sixties gave new impetus to the publishing industry. The U.S. government decided to fund the translation and publishing of books in Brazil under the famous MEC-USAID agreement, the purpose of which was to influence Brazilian culture and to boost the now weakened publishing activity. In poetry, the major innovation was the so-called Concretist movement, which came into being in the late fifties and treated the poem as a language object. Among the most prominent features of such poetry are the use of wordplay for sound effects, visual effects, and the abundance of neologisms and plurilingual words. However, renderings of Shakespeare’s plays published in the sixties did not resort to this poetics; in fact, verse translations favored textual models of Parnassianism, even though prose-only translations prevailed. In this decade, new translations were published of the then full canon of 37 plays by Fernando Carlos de Almeida Cunha Medeiros and Oscar Mendes (1969). The plays were rendered

⁷ The reason I stress Brazilian Portuguese is because the variety spoken in Portugal has been increasingly showing an accentual pattern, in which the unstressed vowels are barely pronounced.

⁸ The official canon at the time.

in prose by Medeiros, while Mendes was responsible for revising the translations, writing the notes and translating the songs. Alongside this huge undertaking, some new translations were also brought out of individual plays, of which two were prose-only and four were in prose and verse, as the original Shakespearean text. The first group includes the first and only translation to be done with explicitly political objectives in mind: Carlos Lacerda’s *Julius Caesar*, first published in 1965 (Rio de Janeiro: Record) and reprinted in 1992 (Rio de Janeiro: Bibliex). An important Brazilian journalist and politician, Lacerda was a leading galvanizer of the opposition during former dictator Getúlio Vargas’s campaign to run for president in 1950 and throughout his presidency until August 1954. He formed alliances with members of the military who had taken part in the coup-d’état and with opposition parties in a concerted effort to topple Vargas, and aired anti-Vargas accusations in his own newspaper, *Tribuna da Imprensa*. On August 5th 1954, he was shot at the entrance to his home. He survived, but the assassination attempt had the effect of triggering a chain of events that culminated in Vargas’s suicide 19 days later.

Although Lacerda’s translation of *Julius Caesar* was only published in 1965, it was actually done much earlier in 1955, just a few months after Vargas took his life. In their article, “Translation and Politics: the Adaptations of Monteiro Lobato and Carlos Lacerda’s *Julius Caesar*”,⁹ John Milton and Eliane Euzébio recall that in his book, *Depoimento* (1977), Lacerda makes specific references to the end of Vargas, especially the importance of the former president’s *Carta Testamento* (literally, *Letter of Testament*, written on the eve of his suicide):

When I reached home the great mistake was already beginning. The [vice-president] took over the government immediately [...] And the radio stations, almost all in the hands of Getúlio’s men, were mentioning the letter of testament every ten minutes... which was accompanied by background music, somber pieces, funeral marches, etc. and was read with the greatest of solemnity [...] And the people started to spill out onto the streets in a frenzy. Getúlio’s body on display, visited by thousands of people who were crying, yelling, fainting, throwing fits and attacks. [...] Seeing the atmosphere of frenzy on the streets and rioting [...] what happened in Brazil was the same as what happened in Shakespeare’s drama, and it was no coincidence that I translated this drama: *Julius Caesar*. The same crowd that hailed Brutus and those that had killed Caesar started to call for the death of those who had assassinated Caesar when Mark Antony made his speech holding his body in his arms. [...] That was how I switched from being a victim to being Vargas’s murderer [...]. Vargas, who at a certain time was perhaps not hated but certainly despised by most of the people, upon dying, whether for sentimental reasons or because of this kind of exploitation or even because

⁹In MARTINS, M. A. P. (Ed.) *Visões e identidades de Shakespeare no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Lucerna, 2004.

of some natural aversion on our part to any continued attack against a man who has taken his own life [...] ended up being Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar. (1977, p. 149, my translation)

According to Milton and Euzebio (2004),

[t]he analogy with Shakespeare’s play thus becomes quite clear. Lacerda’s own speeches on the radio and television and the articles published in newspapers on the eve of Vargas’s suicide are Brutus’s speech before Caesar’s body, trying to justify the leader’s murder. Brutus has the support of the Citizens, just as the anti-Vargas protesters were behind Lacerda and held demonstrations against the government in front of Catete Palace [the official presidential residence] and other parts of Rio de Janeiro. The *Letter of Testamentis* Mark Antony’s famous eulogy for Caesar— “Friends, Romans, Countrymen”. Likewise, the constant repetition of the *Letter of Testament*, a document of great rhetorical weight, on the government’s radio stations, which the vice president, Café Filho, was unable to stop, alongside the support which Vargas, “the father of the poor”, had earned, particularly amongst the poorest sector of the population, ultimately turned the tables. The crowds bayed for Lacerda’s blood as they shed tears for Vargas, just as the Citizens in *Julius Caesar* called for the blood of the conspirators; and Lacerda, like Brutus and the other rebels who fled Rome, had to keep a low profile for a while. (p. 95, my translation)

After comparing the last three paragraphs of the *Letter of Testament* with a passage from the funeral eulogy in the play the authors could clearly see a connection, especially in the references to sacrifice, blood and betrayal (Milton and Euzebio 2004, p. 95). They also hypothesize that Lacerda may have decided to publish the translation ten years after completing it upon perceiving a new opportunity

to draw a parallel between *Julius Caesar* and the political circumstances in Brazil, after the military coup of 1964. Once again, the politician and journalist was viewed as the leading civil figure of the right-wing coup, a Brutus-like figure, while President João Goulart took on the Julius Caesar role: “When the head of the Executive gives himself the right to make a public apology for subversion and incite the masses against the powers of the Republic that stand in the way of the march to Caesarism, one can state that the dictatorship, albeit not institutionalized, is a *de facto* situation.” (*Estado de São Paulo* – 14/03/64). (Milton and Euzébio 2004, p. 97, my translation)

In the seventies, a somber decade in Brazilian cultural and social life, there were only three published translations of Shakespearean drama: *Macbeth* (by Geir Campos) in ten-syllable verse lines; *King Lear* (by Maryland Moraes) and *The Taming of the Shrew* (by Newton Belleza), in prose. As we have seen, since 1964 Brazil had been under military rule, which imposed severe censorship, closed down the Congress and limited civil liberties, clamping down on leftist activities. Literature and arts in general

were naturally stifled, especially from late 1968.¹⁰ However, none of the printed translations had any explicit political implications and/or motivations, although a handful of renderings commissioned for theatre productions did, but unfortunately these were never published.¹¹

The political situation did not change until the mid-eighties, when the restoration of civilian government ratified the country’s re-democratization. Opportunities were opened for new authors, genres and languages, supplying the readers with “general information” books and titles by foreign writers who had not yet been translated into Brazilian Portuguese. Literary aesthetics became more eclectic and less dichotomic (in tune with the political situation — both domestic and international — since the traditional opposition between left- and right-wing ideologies was becoming blurred). The Shakespeare translations published in the eighties were mostly in prose and in colloquial language; according to critic Mario Sergio Conti (1981) translations became less scholarly and concerned with retaining the changes of register and diction within the play. Differently from previous renderings, obscenities and bawdy language became more explicit. If we consider, for example, different translations of certain passages of *Hamlet*, such as the coarse exchange between the Prince and Ophelia right before the performance of the *Murder of Gonzago* by the strolling players (Act III, scene 2), or that between him and Gertrude in the so-called *closet scene* (Act III, scene 4), a new pattern of cruder language in Portuguese can be observed in contemporary translations. It may be assumed that the end of strict censorship and the growing liberalization of social customs played a role in this change. Eight new translations were published: *King Lear*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Hamlet* by the playwright and translator Millôr Fernandes, all in prose and stage-oriented; another *Hamlet* in prose by the diplomat Geraldo Silos; a page-oriented *Othello* in decasyllabic verse by Péricles Eugenio da Silva Ramos; *Twelfth Night* in verse by Sergio Flaksman; and *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Comedy of Errors* by Barbara Heliodora, also in decasyllabic verse.

The last two decades (the 1990s and 2000s) were extremely prolific as far as Shakespeare translations are concerned. Not only was new work published but also early translations that were out of print were republished. This renewed interest in

¹⁰ On December 13, 1968, the AI-5 (Institutional Act Number Five) was issued, instituting the preliminary censorship of music, films, theater and television, as well as the censorship of the press.

¹¹ For an analysis of a staging of *Coriolanus* with a political subtext see ROCHA, Roberto Ferreira da. “Hero or Villain: a Brazilian *Coriolanus* During the Period of the Military Dictatorship”. In: KLIMAN, Bernice W.; SANTOS, Rick J. *Latin American Shakespeares*. Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont, 2005. p. 37-53.

publishing the Bard may have been fueled by both the publishers’ growing emphasis on pocket book series, mostly featuring classics, and the current Shakespeare boom worldwide, which has been much commented on and praised by literary critics such as Harold Bloom (1994 and 1998) and the media in general. Appealing film versions of tragedies, comedies and histories of the canon have drawn millions of viewers and spectators around the world, encouraging publishers to tap this market of prospective readers by supplying bookstores with a wide assortment of translations. Besides the all-time favorites, plays that were not previously favored by Brazilian translators (with the exception of Nunes and the Medeiros-Mendes team who, as we have seen, had translated the whole canon in previous decades) are now being rendered into Portuguese, such as *The Winter’s Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *Titus Andronicus*.

In poetry, as in literature, prevailing aesthetics reflected postmodernzeitgeist; there was room for different poetic styles. According to critic Alfredo Bosi, “poetry seems to have broken with all possible links to an idea of unity, be it ethical-political or aesthetic” (1995, p. 488, my translation). In the 1990s, 26 new translations of the plays were brought out, and a further 53 were published in the following decade. A new project to translate the whole canon was completed, this time by theater critic and scholar Barbara Heliadora, whose translations in ten-syllable verse lines of all the tragedies and comedies have already come out in two volumes, while the histories are forthcoming. Other prolific contemporary translators are Beatriz Viégas-Faria and José Roberto O’Shea; the former has published 19 prose translations and has finished another one, whereas the latter has already translated five plays in decasyllabic meter, including the first quarto of *Hamlet*, and is now working on his sixth, which will be the first rendering in Brazilian Portuguese of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

In the current decade, two new translations have been published and there are 12 in press, which is very auspicious news for such an early stage into the 2010s. Remarking upon the sheer quantity and variety of translations produced in Brazilian Portuguese in a period of less than 80 years, it seemed to us that there was a need for a broad-based study of these works with a view to contextualizing them, finding out about their respective publishing and translation projects, analyzing the different products, tracking down their reception and also examining what representations they build up of the author in our cultural system. We therefore established the Reference Center for Brazilian Translations of the Works of William Shakespeare, which comprises both a database containing information about the

published translations that can be consulted by keyword search at the website “Escolhaseu Shakespeare” (Pick your Shakespeare)¹² and a collection of translations, publications of the plays in English, theoretical and critical works and other texts of importance available to the public in the *ColeçãoShakespeariana* at the PontifíciaUniversidadeCatólica do Rio de Janeiro’s library.

The database contains the description of 178 different translations of 38 of Shakespeare’s plays. They were all done by Brazilian translators from the English source material and were published in book form. It does not include translations presented as adaptations or recreations of any kind, such as those aimed at young readers, or translations for stage productions that were never published. The latest additions to the Shakespearean canon, *Edward III* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, are now starting to be translated in Brazil; the first rendering of the former play came out in 2010 and the latter is due in 2014.

The database is updated regularly, with new translations and analyses thereof being added to it.

We believe that the Reference Center may also contribute more broadly to the historiography of translation in Brazil, in that it sheds light on certain translation and publishing practices observed over the last eight decades, and may help inform and expand Shakespeare’s readership and audiences.

Concluding remarks

When we look at the characteristics of the translations that have been made since Tristão da Cunha’s pioneering *Hamlet*, in 1933, there is a fairly even balance between texts that reproduce Shakespeare’s original combination of blank verse, rhymed verse and prose, and those that are totally in prose, occasionally keeping the songs in verse. Millôr Fernandes, Beatriz Viégas-Faria and the translation duo Cunha Medeiros and Oscar Mendes are a few of the translators that prefer to use prose, while Barbara Heliadora, Onestaldo de Pennafort, Carlos Alberto Nunes, Jorge Wanderley and José Roberto O’Shea use ten-syllable verse as a Portuguese language equivalent of the original iambic pentameter. There are even a few incursions into twelve-syllable verse, such as the translations by Péricles Eugênio da Silva Ramos of *Hamlet*, Artur de Sales of *Macbeth*, and recently, Lawrence Flores Pereira of *Hamlet* (in press).

¹²<http://www.dbd.puc-rio.br/shakespeare>

At the present time, there seems to be a trend amongst publishers to bring out pocket book editions, such as L&PM and Lacerda. In the case of the former, the strategy also includes diversifying to points of sale outside the traditional bookstore, and keeping the retail price low.

From what we can see, there is rarely a political agenda behind the choice of play to translate or the translation strategy employed. With the notable exception of Carlos Lacerda’s *Julius Caesar*, no other published translations seem to have had political motivations, although this is not unknown for stage productions, but incomplete or unpublished translations fall outside the scope of our research and are therefore not included here.

Brazilian critic and Shakespeare scholar Eugênio Gomes notes in his book *Shakespeare no Brasil* (1960) that Brazilian translations of Shakespeare should be redone periodically, as is the case in other countries. When this happens, the existence of diverse translations into Portuguese of a given play gives readers an opportunity to choose from amongst the different “Shakespeares” with a Brazilian accent the one they most identify with and which best matches their expectations and their idea of the playwright and his work.

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