

Oana-Alis Zaharia. 2015
*Cultural Reworkings and Translations in/of
Shakespeare's Plays*
Bucharest: ProUniversitaria

Mădălina Nicolaescu
University of Bucharest, Romania

It is always impressive to see how Romanian scholarship in an area that is as competitive and as prestigious as Shakespeare studies can lay claim to a position of cutting edge research. This is the case with the present book, which looks at Shakespeare by adopting new angles derived from theories on cultural reworking and translation as key factors in the transnational circulation of major texts.

Oana-Alis Zaharia initiates an ample project that both focuses on Shakespeare and decenters his position, investigating meanings circulated across Europe, which were either absorbed by his plays or were subsequently generated in their reception. The book thus charts two movements, involving a dual process of translation and cultural reworking: firstly there is the sixteenth-century movement that starts in Italy with the publication of the important and equally controversial text, Niccolò Machiavelli's *Il Principe*, and which moves on to responses to, translations and reworkings of this text in Italy, France and then England to culminate in its appropriation in Shakespeare's plays. Oana-Alis Zaharia discusses important texts such as Francesco Guicciardini's *The History of Italy* and Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* along with the lesser-known *Anti-Machiavel* by Innocent Gentillet and offers minute analyses of their translations in Shakespeare's England to trace differences and new meanings generated in the cultural negotiations the translations involve. This undertaking therefore looks at Shakespeare's plays as a product of translation and re-working. The second movement in the book traces another journey, this time starting with translations of Shakespeare's

plays and thereby moving from England across the Channel to France and Germany, and having as its final destination the translations at the eastern border of nineteenth-century Europe, namely the Romanian principalities. Shakespeare's plays are now viewed as sources for further successive re-workings, which make up a network of meanings and concepts that spans across Europe.

The multidirectional pursuit of the book allows for a variety of approaches which range from investigations in the field of the history of translation and the history of political thinking to "thick descriptions" of political and cultural micro-contexts of the reception or generation of the texts discussed. The various perspectives converge in a coherent argument that moves smoothly from one location and from one text to another, reinforcing the feeling of an intellectual journey across geographical and temporal spaces. The multiple *Ansatzpunkte*, as Erich Auerbach would have called the critical perspectives adopted in the book, establish a theoretical dialogue which makes a stimulating contribution to the issue of how to research the transcultural reception history of early modern giants such as Niccolò Machiavelli, Michel de Montaigne and William Shakespeare. Needless to say, the interaction of these perspectives adds to the richness of the specific analyses undertaken and lends weight to the global image the book conjures up.

An important merit of the book is to have extended European scholarship in the field by including the under-researched area of Shakespeare in Romania, without marginalizing the latter. Shakespeare translations into Romanian are treated on a par with the corresponding French versions, and shown to be participating equally in the European circulation of texts and meanings. The chapter on Romanian translations explores virgin territory in Romanian translation and theatre studies and in the role Shakespeare played in the articulation of cultural values in this geo-political area. At the same time, it pays great credit to Shakespeare by showing how the meanings developed in his translations played an important role in the discursive and political battles of nineteenth-century Romanian history.

Special attention is attached to the historical investigation of the contexts of translations and re-workings, whether they relate to the publication of Francesco Guicciardini's *The History of Italy* and its translations and appropriations in England or the translations of

Julius Caesar in the revolutionary mid-nineteenth century in Romania. The reconstruction of the political and cultural forces that shaped the various re-workings discussed in the book further enables the reader to understand the performative role of translations: the book provides conclusive arguments not only in favour of the role translations had in the construction of emerging national languages and cultural identities (English, French as well as Romanian), but also in favour of the specific interventions that they achieved as a form of overt political action. Thus Zaharia undertakes micro-contextual analyses to show how readings performed via translations (be they of Machiavelli, Gentillet, Montaigne or Shakespeare) played an active role in the complex power struggles that shaped the political make up of Europe across the centuries. Keeping translations as the starting point, she points out new connections between Guicciardini and Shakespeare on the one hand and between Machiavelli, Montaigne and Shakespeare on the other.

This new area at the intersection of translation studies and Shakespeare studies, together with the wide range of perspectives adopted and detailed microanalyses of texts and contexts, all add up to ensure a most stimulating and innovative reading experience.

How to cite this review:

Nicolaescu, Mădălina. Review of Oana-Alis Zaharia (2015). *Cultural Reworkings and Translations in/of Shakespeare's Plays*. Bucharest: ProUniversitaria. *SEDER* 26 (2016): 223–25.

Author's contact: madalinanicolaescu@gmail.com

Postal address: English Department – University of Bucharest – Str Pitar Mos 7-10 – Bucuresti 990023 – Romania