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There's a Double Tongue in Cheek:  
On the Un(Translatability) of Shakespeare's Bawdy Puns  
into Romanian

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**Abstract**

The translatability of William Shakespeare's titillating puns has been a topic of recurrent debate in the field of translation studies, with some scholars arguing that they are untranslatable and others maintaining that such an endeavour implies a divorce from formal equivalence. Romanian translators have not troubled themselves with settling this dispute, focusing instead on recreating them as bawdily and punningly as possible in their first language. At least, this is the conclusion to which George Volceanov has come after analysing a sample of Shakespearean ribald puns and their Romanian equivalents. By drawing parallels between such instances of the Bard's rhetoric and three of their Romanian translations, my article aims to reinforce the view according to which Romanian translators have succeeded, by and large, in translating Shakespeare's bawdy puns into their mother tongue.

**Keywords:** William Shakespeare, translation, Dirk Delabastita, pun, bawdy, Romanian

William Shakespeare is undeniably the most popular English playwright of all time. A man of his time, the playwright was, as Kathryn and Richard Stout aptly put it, "an inveterate punster" (111). Part of Shakespeare's popular appeal is owed to this very aspect of his rhetorical style, of which bawdy puns represent no mean share, having been estimated at close to a thousand occurrences (Kiernan 12). Critics have speculated that the expectations of his spectators dictated their presence (Rubinstein xvii). Even so, catering to the hunger for ribaldry and punning of his heterogeneous audience was a rather difficult task, for he lived and

wrote in a time when the Puritans conducted an extensive anti-theatre lobby (Glyn-Jones 270). Sadly, even after the virulence of their attacks waned, persecution continued: the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century editors continued their legacy (Wells 1), Thomas and Henrietta Maria Bowdler's *The Family Shakespeare*, a severely expurgated edition of Shakespeare's works (vii), being a telltale example in this regard. What is even more disheartening is that translators, Romanian too, have not broken the cycle. Long believed to have been silenced by the communist censorship apparatus, Shakespeare's bawdy puns were shown, in the Romanian translator and critic George Volceanov's 2005 study, "Bowdlerizing Shakespeare," to have suffered instead at the hand of other factors such as questionable skill, lack of access to updated critical material, or prudishness (120). Others, however, have suggested that puns are, more often than not, an "untranslatable stylistic phenomenon" (Ghanooni 93) and as a result, attempts to render them from one language into another are doomed to failure. Yet analysing their potential to survive translation is impossible without first clarifying the concept of pun.

Finding a unanimously accepted definition of wordplay is, to put it mildly, difficult. The *Cambridge Dictionary* highlights its jocular effect ("Pun"), whereas according to the *Collins Dictionary*, it is only sometimes humorous ("Pun"). There is no consensus either as to whether 'pun' and 'wordplay' can be used to refer to the same stylistic device. On the one hand, there are Delia Chiaro (*The Language of Jokes* 4) and Magdalena Adameczyk (13-14) who employ the word 'wordplay' as an umbrella term for a wide array of conceits, with the pun being only one among many others. On the other, there are Dirk Delabastita and Molly Mahood who do not differentiate between the two terms, proposing a more flexible approach to this issue of terminology. For simplicity, I will use 'pun,' 'wordplay,' 'quibble' and 'double entendre' to describe what Delabastita defines as "the textual phenomenon in which certain features inherent in the structure of the language used are exploited in such a way as to establish a communicatively significant, (near)-simultaneous confrontation of at least two linguistic structures with more or less dissimilar meanings and more or less similar forms" (57).

In his *There's a Double Tongue*, Delabastita classifies puns

according to their formal and spatial features, positing the coexistence of two taxonomies: one depending on the number of occurrences of the ambiguous word within the same portion of text and the other on the linguistic mechanisms that trigger them (194). According to him, the equivocal word can appear once or twice in a textual fragment (128), producing either a vertical pun, which relies for its effect on mental association, or a horizontal wordplay, which draws its potential from spatial contiguity (Harris 23). Delabastita refers to this phenomenon as “(near)-simultaneous confrontation of at least two linguistic structures” in his definition. Overlapping with this vertical-horizontal classification, there is another taxonomy that distinguishes between homonymic, homophonic, homographic and paronymic puns. Combined, these two categorizations produce an “eightfold classification of puns” (80), which, in his *There's a Double Tongue*, appears as a grid. Yet, while the horizontal or vertical quality of a quibble can be successfully rendered into a foreign tongue, its other more language-specific feature rarely, if ever, survives translation.

Consequently, scholars such as Chiaro, for instance, hold that puns “owe their meanings to the very structure of the language to which they belong” and “once divorced from it and transported to another language, they could no longer operate as such” (“Translation and Humour” 2). Put differently, words that are homonyms in one language have too different a form or meaning in another. Hence, it is difficult, if not impossible at times, to find a similar, let alone identical target-language counterpart for a source-text punning structure. Translating puns is further hindered by cultural specificity, for, as Chiaro puts it, wordplay has “to play on knowledge which is shared between sender and recipient” (*The Language of Jokes* 11). Thus, time and time again, in their attempt to transfer puns from one language to another, translators surmount linguistic challenges only to find themselves completely at a loss with the cultural ones. At the same time, there are also situations where potentially successful renderings of wordplay, in terms of both language and culture, are sacrificed for the sake of rhythm, rhyme or metre (Newmark 217). That occurs especially in poems and works of prose in which certain prosodic features play a crucial role. However, despite these limitations, puns are

systematically translated, not only or not so much for their jocular function, as for their contribution to character development (Delabastita 139), a realization that brings us to the other side of the argument.

For puns to be successfully recreated in a foreign tongue, educated decisions about what to lose and what to keep can and should be made. Sometimes, their punning effect draws on the likeness of form and meaning between words, and other times, on their culture-bound quality. It is only by becoming familiar with the author's style, era and social background that the translator can recognize the pun for what it is. As a result, much of this translational endeavour depends on prior research. Once the wordplay is properly decoded, it becomes evident whether its effect is language- or culture-based. In the case of the former, one must find a set of terms that not only relies on the same or at least a similar linguistic phenomenon, but also fits the context wherein it appears. As for when the punning effect depends on cultural peculiarities, translators are advised to bridge the gap between the writer and the target audience by tapping into their "common pool of allusions" (Gottlieb 22-23). However, many a time, a pun is intrinsically linked to both the source language and culture. When such translational challenges arise, adaptability is the prerequisite for successful wordplay translation. As seeker of the highest possible degree of equivalence between the source and target text, the translator must "divorce textual means from textual function" (Tatu and Sinu 42) with a view to finding "a functionally equivalent set of words which in so far as possible will match the meaning of the original source-language text" (de Waard and Nida 36). In other words, he/ she should be able to establish a relation of 'functional equivalence' between the source text and its translation with a view to "produc[ing] in the target audience the same effect that the original text produced in the source audience" (Tatu and Sinu 42). To this end, Delabastita developed a series of translation strategies, the practical use of which will be exemplified below.

Example (1) introduces the last two verses of Shakespeare's "Sonnet 138" that, in Naomi Miller's perspective, produce "a conflation of verbal and sexual intercourse" (32). In what follows, I explore the manner in which Shakespeare created a suggestive horizontal pun by building upon the homonymic doublet 'lie/ lie' and extent to which three

Romanian translators managed to recreate it in the target language:

| (1) "Sonnet 138"  | Teodor Bocşa  | Radu Ştefănescu  | Cristina Tătaru  |
|---|---|--|--|
| Therefore I <i>lie</i><br>with her and she<br>with me,<br>And in our faults<br>by <i>lies</i> we<br>flatter'd be. (657) | Astfel, o <i>mint</i> şi<br>eu, şi ea pe mine,<br>Şi, vinovaţi,<br><i>minţind</i> , ne e mai<br>bine. (316) | Şi uite-aşa, cu<br>dulcile <i>braşoave</i> ,<br>Ni-s nopţile mai<br>lungi şi mai<br>suave! (191) | De-aceea-i <i>mint</i> ,<br>de-aceea <i>mint</i> e ea<br>Şi vini, <i>minciuni</i><br>ne măgulesc aşa.<br>(279) |

In this context, both Eric Partridge (177) and Gordon Williams (187) agree that 'lie with' featured in the first verse alludes to sexual intercourse, while 'lie' in the plural form found in the latter denotes 'untruths.' As for the translators' version of this Shakespearean noun and phrasal verb, Teodor Bocşa, for example, replaced the first occurrence of the term 'lie' with 'mint,' the first person singular form of the Romanian verb 'a minţi,' which corresponds to the source-language 'to lie to.' Moreover, he exchanged the noun 'lie' denoting deception for the gerund of the same verb, namely 'minţind,' the target-language counterpart of the English 'telling lies.'

Radu Ştefănescu, on the other hand, substituted the verbal reference to copulation in the first verse with the plural form of the target-language colloquial noun 'braşoavă' which, in this particular case, considering that it is preceded by the adjective 'dulci,' the Romanian equivalent of the source-language 'sweet,' means *sweet nothings*. Although he opted for a colloquial term for 'lie,' his translation of this textual fragment conveys a rather different message: if rendered into contemporary English, the original second line would read "And we both flatter ourselves by lying about each other's faults," while Ştefănescu's version infers that the sweet nothings the lovers tell one another make their nights longer and more sensual.

The last translator, Cristina Tătaru, followed in Bocşa's footsteps, replacing Shakespeare's allusion to sexual intercourse with the first and third person singular forms of the target-language verb 'a minţi,' namely the English 'to lie to.' As far as the source-text 'lies' is concerned, she translated it word-for-word as 'minciuni.' What distinguishes these two adaptations is that Tătaru's version advances the idea that the lovers are

lying about their age rather than to each other because the first person singular form of the verb ‘a minți’ in the first line is succeeded by ‘-i’, the unaccented Romanian personal pronoun that stands for the noun ‘years’ in the previous verse not featured above that reads, “And age in love loves not to hear years told.”

Analysed against Delabastita’s competence model, Bocșa’s and Tătaru’s translation strategies fit what Delabastita defined as the PUN > NON-PUN technique according to which the source-text pun is replaced with a selective non-pun where only one member of the titillating pair of punning homonyms is rendered into the target language, while the other is left out. As far as Ștefănescu is concerned, his translational solution qualifies for Delabastita’s PUN > PUNOID whereby a wordplay-related rhetorical device is used to compensate for the lost pun. In this particular case, the translator resorts to an allusion that conveys the sexual message at the expense of the original tone.

Example (2) features two lines belonging to Leontes, one of the characters in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, which, according to Brendan Kiley, is “a meditation on sex” (“Bawdy Planet”). Three translators variously render Shakespeare’s horizontal ribald wordplay on the homonymic doublet ‘neat/ neat’ into Romanian as follows:

| (2) <i>The Winter’s Tale</i>  | Dragoș Protopopescu   | Dan Grigorescu  | Violeta Popa   |
|---|---|---|--|
| Leon. ...We must be <i>neat</i> ; not <i>neat</i> , but cleanly, captain:<br>And yet the steer, the heifer, and the calf,<br>Are all call’d <i>neat</i> . (1.2.124-126) | Leontes. . . . Dar vai, să ne <i>spălăm pușin</i> pe față,<br>Că și vițelul, junca sau juncanul,<br>Oricât, sunt animale <i>curățele</i> (19) | Leontes. . . . Ieduțul meu. . . Nu ied! Nu! Fără <i>coarne!</i> . . . Dar junci, viței, juncani au totuși <i>coarne</i> . (238) | Leontes. . . . Să fim <i>curați</i> – n-am spus <i>cornuți!</i> – Și totuși!<br>(Îl șterge pe față pe Mamillius.)<br><i>Cornute</i> li se spune boilor, junincilor, vițelilor. (383) |

In this particular case, the translator is faced with a rather rare instance of horizontal wordplay built on three words. However, the metalinguistic punning effect relies solely on the confrontation of the first

two occurrences of 'neat,' the last one serving the mere purpose of strengthening the reader's assumption that this textual fragment contains a pun (Partridge 197-198; Williams 214). The homonymy of these words is certified by the fact that the adjective 'neat' in "we must be neat" comes from the Anglo-French 'neit' ("Neat" adj.), while the noun 'neat' in "not neat, but cleanly" and "Are all call'd neat" originates in the Old English 'neat' ("Neat" n.).

In order to understand this pun properly, it is necessary to discuss the context in which it appears. By this time, Leontes, the king of Sicily, began to suspect his wife, Hermione, of cheating on him with his childhood friend, Polixenes. He even starts to wonder whether Mamillius is in fact his son, despite the fact that his offspring is his spitting image. The situation in which Leontes delivers these lines is especially tense—he is in the presence of his heir, wife and her lover, tempted to reprimand them for their fornicating in front of Mamillius, their alleged love child. As a result, he admonishes Mamillius to "be neat," only to correct himself soon afterwards by adding "not neat, but cleanly." As Lois Potter aptly puts it, "anyone who had been to grammar school would have understood why this jealous husband suddenly jumped from the adjectival meaning of neat to the noun meaning cattle – in other words, . . . cuckolds" (21).

In his attempt to recreate this pun, Protopopescu, for example, substituted the first occurrence of 'neat' with "să ne spălăm puțin," eliminating the noun 'neat' that appears immediately after. However, he preserved the third 'neat,' which also functions as a noun denoting 'cattle,' but replaced it with 'curățele,' the target-language counterpart of the English 'slightly clean.' Yet, back-translated into English, his version infers that Leontes advises his son to wash his face a little, for even the steer, the heifer and the calf are fairly clean, an adaptation that shares some denotative similarities with the source text.

Grigorescu, on the other hand, interfered with the original lines to quite a large extent. What he did was to remove the reference to cleanliness by substituting it with a term of endearment triggered at Mamillius, 'ieduțul meu,' the target-language counterpart of the English 'my little kid.' His Leontes hastily corrects himself by adding 'fără coarne,' the Romanian equivalent of the source-language 'no horns.' As

for the idea his adaptation advances, it is clear that Leontes calls his son a kid because he is confident that the mother of his child cuckolded him.

Violeta Popa, the last translator, approached the text sense-for-sense: she replaced the Shakespearean punning homonymic doublet with a pair of Romanian near-paronyms, namely ‘curați/ cornuți.’ However, the meaning of ‘cornuți,’ according to the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language*, is totally different from that of his paronym, ‘cornute.’ Namely, the former is the target language equivalent of the English ‘alpine chickweed’ in the plural form (“Cornuț”). ‘Cornute,’ on the other hand, is synonymous with the source-language noun ‘neat.’ It can also be speculated that ‘cornuți’ is the masculine plural form of the adjective ‘cornut,’ the Romanian counterpart of the source-language ‘horned’ (“Cornut”) or even a portmanteau word that brings together ‘curați’ or the adjective ‘neat’ and ‘cornute,’ the feminine plural noun denoting cattle.

As is evident from the interpretations above, Protopopescu opted for a selective non-pun, translating only the adjective ‘neat’ into the target language and failing to reproduce the source-text pun. As far as Grigorescu’s and Popa’s versions are concerned, it is quite difficult to pinpoint which of Delabastita’s pun translation techniques they used. The safest guess would be that the second translator opted for a wordplay-related device, namely the repetition of ‘coarne,’ the English ‘horns,’ while Popa’s handling of Leontes’ wordplay fits, to a large degree, the PUN > PUN strategy via ‘cornuți,’ which, in this particular context, serves as a portmanteau word.

Example (3) introduces an utterance belonging to Antonio, the title character in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, a play Partridge perceives to be “dirtier than most teachers think” (56). Here, Antonio puns on the paronymic doublet ‘purse/ person,’ producing an instance of horizontal wordplay rendered as follows into Romanian by various translators:



(3) *The Merchant of Venice* Dan A. Lăzărescu Petre Solomon Horia Gârbea

|                                     |                          |                           |                        |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Ant.</i> . . . My <i>purse</i> , | <i>Antonio.</i> . . . Și | <i>Antonio.</i> . . . Fii | <i>Antonio.</i> . . .  |
| my <i>person</i> , my               | <i>punga</i> mea și tot  | sigur că-ți voi           | <i>Persoana</i> mea și |
| extremest means,                    | ce am la mine,           | pune la-ndemână           | <i>punga</i> ei vor fi |
| Lie all unlock'd to                 | Ți le voi da, voind      | Tot <i>sprijinul</i> și   | La dispoziția ta,      |
| your occasions.                     | să-ți fac un bine.       | <i>punga</i> mea, de      | desferecate. (44)      |
| (1.1.139-140)                       | (35)                     | asemenea. (440)           |                        |

At first sight, it may seem that Antonio is offering to help his friend Bassanio in any way he can. And, to some extent, this assumption is true. But, according to Janet Adelman, Shakespeare inserted in line 140 a clue indicating that his proposal is not just a proof of friendship. To be more specific, she argues that “Antonio’s use of ‘lie’ – a word often sexualized in Shakespeare . . . – may underscore that [homoerotic] valence here” (118). One such instance where this particular verb has a sexual connotation appears in Hamlet’s punning dialogue with Ophelia (*Ham.* 3.2.120-124). Therefore, in light of the fact that “Antonio’s love for Bassanio was identified as homosexual as early as 1963” (Bulman 38), we can assume that his offer to help sounds “too passionate, too submissive and too eager” to be a mere sign of friendly support (Bergmann 234). This perspective, coupled with Burton Raffel’s theory that ‘person’ refers to Antonio’s body (12) and Williams’ inference that purse hints at this character’s scrotal sac (250), is sufficient to conclude that this proposal “is at once financial and sexual” (Hammond 91). Actually, this play is not the only one that features this punning pair of paronyms. It appears once more in Lord Chief Justice’s allegation that Falstaff has used Mistress Quickly to “serve [his] uses both in purse and in person” (*2 Henry IV* 2.1.131), a context where the erotic allusion is quite vivid.

The question then arises as to whether ‘purse’ and ‘person’ qualify as paronyms both in Shakespeare’s time and today. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, ‘purse’ is pronounced /pɜːs/ (“Purse”), while ‘person’ is uttered /ˈpɜːs(ə)n/ (“Person”). Since these two words have different meanings, yet are pronounced similarly, they are eligible to be considered paronyms, as far as modern English is concerned. The same applies to

them in the Elizabethan period as David Crystal argues that ‘person’ was then uttered /pɜːɪsən/ and ‘purse’ was pronounced /pɜːɪs/, meaning that Elizabethans too considered them paronyms (413, 443).

When it comes to the Romanian translations above, a mere skimming over them will reveal that both Lăzărescu and Solomon omitted to transfer Shakespeare's ‘person’ to the target language. More specifically, they only rendered ‘purse’ and ‘extremest means’ into Romanian, probably because they felt that ‘person’ is redundant. However, this is a clear indication of the fact that they failed to notice the playwright's pun on this paronymic pair. What further supports this assumption is that they translated line 140 as “Ți le voi da, voind să-ți fac un bine,” which sounds similar to “I'll give them all to you, for I wish to be of help” in English and “Fii sigur că-ți voi pune la îndemână,” which can be back-translated as “You can be sure that I will put at your disposal.” Although their equivalent of the Bard's ‘purse,’ ‘pungă,’ alludes to the scrotal sac, since the Romanian counterpart of the English ‘scrotal sac’ is ‘pungă scrotală,’ their versions are still not up to par as they left out Shakespeare's ‘person’ and interfered with line 140 to such a degree that it does not support the original pun anymore.

Gârbea is the only one who not only detected the playwright's wordplay, as is evident from his explanatory footnote, but also attempted to recreate it in his translation of Antonio's utterance. To be more specific, he translated it more or less word-for-word. What is however particularly striking about his translation and, in my opinion, an indication of the fact that he succeeded in reproducing the pun in his first language, is his changing the original word order. By doing so, roughly back-translated into English, his Antonio's first line reads “My person and its purse will be.” Albeit inventive, his version does not make much sense in English because the majority of English nouns do not have grammatical gender. Gârbea's version of line 139 makes it easier for target-text readers to spot Shakespeare's wordplay. It is true that ‘trupul,’ the Romanian counterpart of the English ‘body,’ would have made the pun even more easily noticeable; however, considering that it would have sounded rather unnatural and forced, we can confidently establish that his adaptation is about as close as any Romanian translator could realistically get to

translating this character's utterance, all the more so as he preserved line 140 to a large extent.

Given that the wordplay is a horizontal one, relying on the occurrence of both members of the paronymic set within the same textual fragment, Lăzărescu's and Solomon's treatments of the original pun fit, to a large degree, the PUN > ZERO procedure. Although their 'punga' may prompt some to believe that they managed to recreate the *double entendre* in the target language, even if they did not succeed in finding an equivalent for the playwright's punning pair of paronyms, the fact that they interfered too much with line 140 is an indication that their faithfulness to Shakespeare's pun is merely incidental. Gârbea's adaptation, on the other hand, does qualify as an outcome of the PUN > PUN strategy, even if he also used an editorial technique to notify his readers that Antonio's utterance has an erotic connotation. Indeed, he did not manage to replace the Bard's 'purse/ person' with an equally bawdy and punning paronymic pair, but in this context, his word-for-word approach proved crucial in producing a faithful translation of the original meaning, especially in terms of equivocation.

Example (4) features an utterance belonging to Sir John Falstaff, one of the characters in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a play Partridge considers to be as bawdy as *Much Ado About Nothing*, deeming it "the sexual-worst of the Comedies" (57). Here, Falstaff puns bawdily on the homophonic pair 'waist/ waste' that appears as follows in three different Romanian translations:

| (4) <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>  | Dragoș Protopopescu   | Vlaicu Bîrna  | Adriana and George Volceanov   |
|--|---|---|--|
| Fal. . . . Indeed, I am in the <i>waist</i> two yards about; but I am now about no <i>waste</i> ; I am about thrift. Briefly, I do mean to make love to Ford's wife. (1.3.43-46) | Falstaff. . . . E drept, am <i>talie</i> doi coți și jumătate, dar mai sunt și un fel de <i>coate-goale</i> . Într'un cuvânt, mi-am pus în cap să fac curte nevestei lui Ford. (20) | Falstaff: . . . E drept că doi coți englezești nu ajung ca să-mi coprînză <i>mijlocul</i> , dar nici prin gînd nu-mi trece să strîng curea; dimpotrivă, caut un prilej să-i pot | Falstaff: . . . Așa e, am o cușmă-n cap, dar nu de ea o să mă folosesc, ci de ideea pe care am copt-o, să-mi meargă din plin. Pe scurt, am de gînd să mă iubesc cu nevasta lui |

desface      bine      Ford. (399)  
 băierile. Pe scurt,  
 am de gând să mă  
 iubesc cu nevasta  
 lui Ford. (470)

According to Stockton, “for Falstaff, his fatness equates with self-possession: he controls himself and his body insofar as he remains large” (29). However, for all other characters, Falstaff’s corpulence “signifies what Mistress Page calls his ‘wantonness of spirit’ and his ‘way of waste’” (29). This is not the only time Shakespeare uses the pun on ‘waist/waste.’ One other notable example includes the first verse of his “Sonnet 129” (639). What differentiates these two occurrences is not only that, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, as opposed to “Sonnet 129,” both members of the homophonic doublet appear within the same textual fragment, but also the fact that they are employed to allude to two different things. While in this particular context the wordplay on ‘waist/ waste’ interconnects Falstaff’s large waist with his wasteful sexuality, in “Sonnet 129,” it hints at fornication (Williams 330, 332).

Aware of his inability to find a punning target language counterpart for the playwright’s pun on ‘waist/ waste,’ Protopopescu compensated for its absence by creating a new one on ‘yards.’ He substituted ‘yards’ with its Romanian equivalent ‘coți’ and ‘waste’ with ‘coate-goale,’ the target-language correspondent of the English slang term ‘ragamuffin,’ exchanging Shakespeare’s horizontal homophonic wordplay with a horizontal (near-)paronymic one. Yet, in his attempt to make up for the loss of the pun on ‘waist/ waste,’ the first translator interfered with the source text to quite a large extent. Paraphrased in contemporary English, the original portion of text containing the pun reads “It’s true that I am two yards around the waist; but I’m not talking about waste now,” whereas in Protopopescu’s version, Falstaff admits that he measures two yards and a half around his waist, but he also acknowledges that he is some sort of a ragamuffin. It should also be noted that his “I am about thrift” is nowhere to be found in the first translator’s adaptation of this textual fragment.

Birna, on the other hand, did not go to great lengths to come up

with a punning target language counterpart for Shakespeare's 'waist/waste.' Yet, this does not mean that his translation strays too far from the original. It is nevertheless difficult to pinpoint the equivalents of the Shakespearean 'waist' and 'waste' in his version of Falstaff's utterance. 'Mijlocul,' the Romanian correspondent of the source-language 'midsection,' coincides with the character's 'waist,' 'să strîng cureaua,' 'to tighten my belt,' a Romanian expression alluding to thriftiness, replaces the source-text 'tight,' while 'să-i pot desface băierile,' 'to loosen its buckle,' substitutes the original 'waste.'

Adriana and George Volceanov's adaptation of Falstaff's utterance departs drastically from the source text. The character's reference to his corpulence, namely 'waist' and his plan to seduce other people's wives for profit, "that is [no] waste," are missing in their translation. Actually, the last two translators' version bears little to no resemblance to the original. Back-translated into English, it advances the idea that Falstaff admits that he is wearing a fur hat, while also acknowledging that he plans on using something else, an idea he has had for quite some time, to land himself a better life, a message far removed from the one Falstaff seeks to convey.

As for the wordplay translation strategies used, Protopopescu's method qualifies for Delabastita's PUN > PUN strategy as he replaced the pun on 'waist/ waste' with a non-parallel one on 'coți/ coate-goale.' Although this new wordplay conveys a similar jocular effect, it fails to recreate the original's ribaldry. At the same time, however, his version of Falstaff's utterance also fits the NON-PUN > PUN technique as it is built on the target-language counterparts of the source-text 'yards' and 'ragamuffin' that replace the Bard's 'waste.' Vlaicu Bîrna, the second translator, resorted to what Delabastita calls a "non-selective non-pun," rendering both 'waist' and 'waste' into Romanian, but failing to reproduce the pun on them in the target language. It should be noted nonetheless that his adaptation of Falstaff's "I am now about no waste; I am about thrift" matches, if not surpasses, Shakespeare's level of bawdiness. Adriana and George Volceanov's treatment of this character's lines corresponds to what Delabastita calls "diffuse paraphrase," a technique whereby none of the meanings of the original wordplay are transferred to the target language, yet the target text passage nonetheless shares some semantic

similarities with its corresponding source-text fragment.

Example (5) features an utterance belonging to Mercutio, one of the characters in *Romeo and Juliet*, whose sex-spatter, Partridge argues in his *Shakespeare's Bawdy*, is the most lyrically tragic of the play (56). In this monologue, he bawdily quibbles on 'poprin,' producing a vertical homophonic wordplay that has been translated as follows into Romanian:

| (5) <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>  | Mihail Dragomirescu   | Șt.O. Iosif   | Virgil Teodorescu   |
|--|---|---|---|
| <i>Mercutio:</i> . . .<br>And wish his<br>mistress were that<br>kind of fruit<br>As maids call<br>medlars, when<br>they laugh alone.<br>O Romeo! That<br>she were, O! That<br>she were<br>An open-arse,<br>thou a <i>poprin</i><br>pear. (2.1.35-38) | <i>Mercutio:</i> . . .<br>Vrea ca drăguța<br>lui, ca fructul copt<br>. . . (45) | <i>Mercutio:</i> . . . Și-<br>ar vrea iubita lui<br>în sân să-i pice<br>Întocmai ca un soi<br>de rod de-acele<br>Pe care le botează<br>drăgănele<br>Râzând în taină<br>fetele la țară. (49) | <i>Mercutio:</i> . . .<br>gîndind<br>Că draga lui s-<br>aseamănă cu<br>poama<br>De fete botezată<br>drăgănea,<br>Cînd chicotesc<br>pe-ascuns.<br>Romeo, ah, de-ar<br>fi să fie ea<br>Deschisă<br>drăgănea <i>et</i><br><i>caetera</i> –<br>Tu pară<br>lunguiață. (82) |

According to Helge Kökeritz, "in the 15th and 16th centuries, people still spelled very much as they pleased" (20). Although 'poprin' may prompt readers to believe that Mercutio referred to the town of Popering(h)e in West Flanders, modern-day Belgium, known for its famous beauty pear (Partridge 213), the seemingly incorrect spelling of 'poprin' should not be attributed to the lack of stabilization and consistency in matters of Elizabethan English orthography. A simple imagination exercise is enough to realize that it was meant to be read *pop'er in*, a ribald wordplay that is, in fact, quite self-explanatory (Williams 230-231).

On the surface, every Romanian translator featured above except Teodorescu expurgated Mercutio's lines containing the wordplay in question. What sets Mihail Dragomirescu and Șt.O. Iosif apart is the fact

that the latter introduced a new punning phrase earlier in the utterance as a means of compensating for the omission of the source-text quibble. While the original third line reads “And wish his mistress were that kind of fruit,” Iosif’s, back-translated into English, reads “And wish his darling dropped onto his breast.” Although the picture this syntagm paints is substantially less graphic than Shakespeare’s ‘poprin,’ at least he attempted to compensate for the loss of the source-text *double entendre* as opposed to Dragomirescu who bowdlerized the lines altogether. Teodorescu, on the other hand, is the only one who attempted to find an equivalent for the playwright’s quibble on ‘poprin.’ More specifically, he replaced this punning word with ‘lunguiață,’ the Romanian counterpart of the English ‘elongated.’ Even if he did not manage to find a corresponding homophonic pair, he did nevertheless opt for a word that creates a phallic image, leaving enough room for interpretation.

If judged against Delabastita’s taxonomy of translation methods for puns, Dragomirescu’s strategy would fit Delabastita’s PUN > ZERO technique whereby the lines containing the original *double entendre* are completely eliminated from the target text. The second translator, Iosif, created a new punning phrase in order to compensate for the omission of the passage featuring the source-text wordplay, thus qualifying for Delabastita’s NON-PUN > PUN strategy. Teodorescu, on the other hand, by attaching the adjective ‘elongated’ to ‘pear,’ succeed in retaining the phallic image, yet at the expense of the other, more sexually dynamic meaning, ‘to pop ’er in.’

Example (6) features Benedick’s last line in Act 5, scene 2 of *Much Ado About Nothing*, a play the very title of which introduces, through ‘nothing’, its first sexual punning reference (Williams 219). The following textual fragment features yet another such instance of language, relying this time on the confrontation between the denotative and connotative meanings of ‘to die.’ In the case of this vertical pun, the following Romanian translations have been proposed:

(6) *Much Ado* Dan A. Lăzărescu Leon Levițchi Lucia Verona  
*About Nothing*

*Bene.* I will live *Benedick.* Ce *Benedick.* Vreau *Benedick.* Voi trăi

|                             |                           |                            |                            |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| in thy heart, <i>die</i> in | vreau este să             | să trăiesc în inima        | în inima ta, voi           |
| thy lap, and be             | viețuiesc în              | ta, să <i>mor</i> în poala | <i>muri</i> în poala ta și |
| buried in thy               | fundul inimii tale,       | ta și să fiu               | voi fi îngropat în         |
| eyes; (5.2.108-             | să <i>mor</i> cu capul în | înmormântat în             | ochii tăi. . . (287)       |
| 109)                        | poalele tale, și să       | ochii tăi; (306)           |                            |
|                             | fiu înmormântat           |                            |                            |
|                             | în ochii tăi. (217)       |                            |                            |

In reference to the verb written in italics, Shakespeare scholars Partridge and Williams argue that it alludes to the height of sexual arousal (118), all the more so given that it is succeeded by a syntagm such as ‘in thy lap’ (98). ‘To die,’ in this particular case, draws on the French description of orgasm, ‘la petite mort,’ according to which the climax is described as a brief and temporary “breaking of the corporeal body” (Liepe-Levinson 147), meaning that on this occasion too the denotative and connotative meanings of the term share a common ground in the realm of ideas. Williams and Partridge’s interpretations are grounded in the fact that the sexual sense of this verb was especially widely used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, most notably in poems such as John Donne’s *The Canonization*, “where the speaker tells his beloved, ‘We die and rise the same, and prove mysterious by this love,’ thus fusing imagery of sex with that of resurrection” (Morton 228). Yet, although its popularity has decreased, ‘to die’ is still employed in an erotic sense to convey the idea of being consumed with desire (Liepe-Levinson 147).

At first glance, all three Romanian translators produced a word-for-word adaption of this textual fragment, including Benedick’s ‘to die,’ yet on closer inspection, it becomes evident that their versions share far less similarities than previously believed. Lăzărescu, for example, replaced Shakespeare’s “to die in thy lap” with “să mor cu capul în poalele tale,” a syntagm that, paraphrased in English, bears a striking resemblance to Hamlet’s “my head upon your lap” (*Ham.* 3.2.124). However, on this occasion, the said phrase paints a more risqué picture since, back-translated into the source language, it infers that Benedick wishes to die with his head in Beatrice’s lap as opposed to the other Shakespearean character who uses this syntagm to show that his meaning is innocent. This bawdy message is backed by Lăzărescu’s translation of “to live in thy heart,” which he rendered into Romanian “să viețuiesc în fundul inimii



tale,” that, paraphrased into English, advances the idea that Benedick wants to live at the bottom of his love interest's heart. The addition of ‘bottom,’ a word that, in other Shakespearean texts, is used to mean ‘buttocks,’ therefore supports the assumption that “to die in thy lap” is anything but non-sexual.

Levițchi, on the other hand, substituted Benedick's “to die in thy lap” with its target-language counterpart “să mor în poala ta” and provided the Romanian readers with an endnote in which he reveals that this phrase is also used by Pierre de Ronsard in his *Les Amours*, his explanation, unfortunately, ending there (335). It remains a mystery whether the purpose of this clarification was to inform the target-text audience that the Bard was not the only one to use this syntagm or to make a subtle reference to the fact that ‘to die,’ in this context, carries a different meaning. Verona's handling of ‘to die’ is in no way different from that of Levițchi as she too replaced Benedick's “to die in thy lap” with its target-language equivalent “voi muri în poala ta” and included a footnote. What differentiates the two translators is that Verona provided the Romanian readers with a clear-cut explanation by stating that ‘to die,’ in this particular case, has an erotic connotation (287).

Analysed against Delabastita's translation strategies, it becomes evident that the second and the third translators resorted to more or less successful editorial strategies so as to inform the target-text audience that ‘to die’ should be interpreted in the sexual sense. Lăzărescu's version, on the other hand, manages to reproduce – if not enhance – the suggestive punning effect of the original fragment, inserting the potentially connotative ‘bottom’ in Benedick's “to live in thy heart.” By succeeding in doing so, his treatment of the pun on ‘to die’ qualifies for Delabastita's PUN > PUN strategy.

In conclusion, the mere fact that the Shakespearean bawdy puns in the above-mentioned comparative analyses were translated, no matter the method opted for, breaks the myth of their untranslatability, while challenging the general belief according to which the communist censorship apparatus interfered with the process of translation. Of the six instances of ribald wordplay featured in this article, four have been found equally licentious and punning target-language counterparts by various

Romanian translators, both before and after the fall of the communist regime. Moreover, all but one of the puns analysed in this essay resurface in their corresponding target-text fragment which points to the fact that bowdlerization, for reasons of a political nature or not, is not usual practice among Romanian scholars. These realizations, I argue, reinforce Volceanov's conclusion according to which the factors responsible for the less successful translations of Shakespeare's bawdy puns are rather timeless, sharing no political agenda or undertones.

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