From Printed Text to Performance Text

Brazilian Translations of Shakespearean Drama

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A word is dead
When it is said,
Some say.
I say it just
Begins to live
That day.

Emily Dickinson

Translating and staging translations of dramatic literature is an activity akin to writing and staging original drama, and the genre specificity of drama bears equally upon play translating and play writing, be such specificity related to the printed text or the performance text. Drawing on working definitions of drama, theatre, translation, and theatre translation, as well as a typological model by Patrice Pavis, I shall in this article reflect on dramatic translation, and present examples from my own annotated verse translations of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Cymbeline, King of Britain* into Brazilian Portuguese.

Bypassing the debate on the status of the dramatic text, meaning, in Pavis’s words, “the question of whether a play can exist inde-

pendently as a text or whether it can only exist in performance,” I first want to stress that a play text exists in two basic dimensions – written and oral – and to foreground the corresponding general distinction between drama and theatre. As is known, drama is most often understood as dramatic literature, written language, “the verbal script which is read or heard in performance.” Being relatively fixed and certainly recordable, being read and perceived in similar ways as fiction, poetry, or any other written form, drama enjoys *ars longa*, bearing such an affinity with literature that literary theory and literary studies have a tendency to think of – and reduce – theatrical activity to drama. No wonder, actualised by means of written language, drama is, for one thing, dominated by a linguistic model, enjoying and depending on the hegemony of the written text over signification, for another, the element of theatre most accessible to examination and appraisal. However, as has often been pointed out, a major hindrance in the development of theatre studies seems to be precisely this continuing emphasis on the written text, to the detriment of other sign systems that partake in theatre.

Unlike drama, theatre is not just written text on a page. Having *vita brevis*, theatre is not fixed, hardly recordable, unrepeatable, and difficult to measure. Theatre is performance, even if the performance of a drama text; it is “all that is visible or audible on stage.” Theatre is spoken language signifying side by side visual, aural, and sensorial language, by means of actors, space, movement, props,

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