

**TEXTUAL VARIANTS: WHAT HAPPENS TO THEM
IN TRANSLATION? SOME REFLECTIONS ON
THE POLISH CRITICAL EDITIONS OF *HAMLET***

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Abstract

The problem of textual variants of Shakespeare's plays has always been addressed in English critical editions, which discuss them at length and facilitate comparison between text versions. The textual history of a play becomes largely irrelevant in the case of translation, which has a "flattening effect" on textual variants: Shakespeare in translation is Shakespeare standardised. Theatre, a primary recipient of new translations, is likewise not particularly concerned with textual variance. Do problems resulting from the rich textual history of Shakespeare's plays resurface in the case of critical editions of translations, supplemented by rich critical apparatus? If so, in what ways did translators and editors approach them?

The goal of this essay is to examine these questions in the context of the Polish reception of Shakespeare and *Hamlet* in particular. The textual situation of Shakespeare's most celebrated tragedy is complex and Polish translators adapted a variety of approaches to address this issue. This essay takes into account selected editions from the last two centuries. First, the translation of *Hamlet* by Władysław Matlakowski, published in a bilingual edition, was appended with an exceptionally extensive critical apparatus and constitutes a noteworthy position in the editorial history of Polish Shakespeare. Other significant editions are "professorial" translations by Władysław Tarnawski and Andrzej Tretiak. Later translations by Witold Chwalewik and Juliusz Kydryński are pioneering in this regard, as they seem to present editorial revisionism in their attempt to highlight the plurality of *Hamlet* versions.

Keywords

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, translation, reception, critical editions, textual variants

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IN the introduction to *Shakespeare and Textual Studies*, Kidnie and Massai observe that "editing and textual studies achieved unprecedented visibility in the 1980s and 1990s alongside the advent of a certain type of historically oriented scholarship" (2015, 1). This growing interest in the "rationales underpinning modern editorial

methods” (Kidnie and Massai 2015, 1) may still be observed in the particular attention paid to the textual variance of Shakespeare’s plays by the editors of *The Arden Shakespeare* third series. It offers not one, but two volumes focusing on *Hamlet*. The “standard” edition contains “an edited and annotated text of the 1604–5 (Second Quarto) printed version of *Hamlet*, with passages that are found only in the 1623 text (the First Folio)” (Thompson and Taylor 2016c, xxii) printed as an appendix. A second volume, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623* is a supplement without precedent in the long history of *The Arden Shakespeare*, which (like most critical editions of Shakespeare) has been associated in the past with single-text, eclectic editions.¹ It contains the First Quarto and Folio versions of the play in their entirety, edited and annotated. Explaining their decision to offer three different variants of Shakespeare’s tragedy, the editors stated: “we believe that each of the three texts has sufficient merit to be read and studied on its own. We fervently hope that readers will . . . experience the imaginative power of all three texts, and explore and weigh the scholarly debates surrounding their origins” (Thompson and Taylor 2016c, 11). At the same time, they also assured that the supplemental volume is entirely optional: “we imagine the majority of readers will be content with just one *Hamlet*” (Thomson and Taylor 2016d, xxii).

This essay will consider editorial dilemmas resulting from textual variation in the contexts of Shakespeare in translation in general, and the history of Polish reception of *Hamlet* in particular. There is an extensive critical literature discussing Polish renderings of *Hamlet* from translatorial and editorial perspectives;² the focus of this essay, however, is the approach to textual variation which often reveals the need for critical editions. Thompson and Taylor observe “a lack of consensus among *Hamlet*’s editors over the nature of the editorial project” (2016b, 532), but it goes without saying that the majority of problems which preoccupy the editors of Shakespeare’s texts do not concern the editors working on their translations.³ Shakespeare in translation is usually Shakespeare “standardised,” as the translations have the “flattening

¹ “Our edition prints three texts, but almost all previous editors of *Hamlet* have printed just one, basing it on either Q2 or F. (For example, Harold Jenkins in his 1982 Arden edition chose Q2, whereas G.R. Hibbard in his 1987 Oxford edition chose F)” (Thompson and Taylor 2016a, 148). The editors explain their decision and provide a detailed account of the composition of *Hamlet* – the textual history of the play – not only in the large section of the Introduction, but also in one of the appendices to the volume entitled “The Nature of the Texts.” See Thompson and Taylor 2016b.

² Especially significant in the present context is a recent study by Agnieszka Romanowska on the paratextual devices used by translators and editors in the twentieth-century translations, focusing on “socio-political and historico-literary contexts” (2018, 41).

³ Due to this fact, for the sake of this paper I am using the term “textual variance” in a narrow sense, meaning different text versions (*Hamlet* Q1, Q2 and F1) and without taking into account print variants (variant readings within a single text version on the level of letters) or editorial variants (as traced, for instance, in *The Shakespeare Variorum* editions).

effect” on textual variants: the spelling and punctuation discrepancies between variants are neutralised, and “translated texts usually exhibit greater metrical regularity” (Cetera-Włodarczyk 2019, 60). The theatre as a primary recipient of new translations is likewise not particularly concerned with the editorial problems resulting from textual variance. Therefore, the readers of Shakespeare in translation are rarely given any alternative to, for instance, “just one *Hamlet*” referred to by the editors of *Arden Shakespeare*, and they are denied the possibility to “explore and weigh the scholarly debates” surrounding these texts. This predicament may to some extent be remedied by critical editions. As Anna Cetera-Włodarczyk notes, “without critical editions, the readers of a translation are, in a sense, kept in the dark about these problems; they are unaware of the complex derivation of the original text or the eclectic nature of the basis used by the translator in constructing the target version” (2019, 60–61). Let us then consider selected Polish translations and editions of Shakespeare’s plays which either address this issue from the critical perspective, paving the road for critical editions, or constitute noteworthy translation projects which deal with the issue of textual variance in an unconventional way.

The translation of *Hamlet* by Władysław Matlakowski, an eminent Warsaw physician, is unique from the historical perspective (Cetera-Włodarczyk and Kosim 2019, 257). Published in 1894, the eight-hundred page volume is a bilingual edition supplemented by unprecedentedly long introduction to the text and a critical commentary. The translation itself, written in prose, was of secondary importance and Matlakowski declared it to be merely an addition to the critical text (1894, CCCXCII). As a translator, he adopted a philological approach, focusing on the literal meaning at the cost of poetic values of the text (Cetera-Włodarczyk and Kosim 2019, 258). This made the scholars not consider it as a translation of any artistic ambitions (see, e.g., Tarnawski 1914, 221); the reception focused rather on Matlakowski’s impressive monograph on *Hamlet*, which in the Polish critical literature on the tragedy is a work of unparalleled comprehensiveness even today.

Matlakowski addressed the issue of textual variance at length in his commentary. A long subchapter in the introduction is dedicated to Shakespeare’s sources and the textual history of *Hamlet*, summarised by the end as “a sojourn into a tedious field of hermeneutical investigation” (Matlakowski 1894, CXLIX; my translation). Having enlisted all the main differences between the versions of *Hamlet* and abstracted the prevailing theories regarding their origins and authorship, he concludes that the question about the authoritative text of *Hamlet* remains unanswered. Matlakowski also added his own evaluation of the First Quarto text, which he considered to include passages poetically inferior to the rest of Shakespeare canon.⁴

⁴ With the exception of some passages from *Pericles* and *Henry VI* (Matlakowski 1894, CXLVII).

As a translator and editor, his approach is rather standard in this regard: he relied on the multiple editions of Shakespeare (also in translation) to produce a unified, comprehensive text, noting the discrepancies between variants in the footnotes and accompanying commentary. Even though his monograph has been criticised by many scholars over the decades (see, e.g., Chwalewik 1969, 72), as one of the first comprehensive *Hamlet* studies in Poland it has been considered a major source of information on the famous tragedy. As such, it undoubtedly raised the awareness of the convoluted textual and editorial history of Shakespeare's play.⁵

The Inter-War Period, as described by Krystyna Kujawińska-Courtney, was "the time of Shakespeare's full-fledged entrance into the Polish critical and scholarly studies," and the new editions of Shakespeare's plays published in that period "were usually accompanied with extended introductions written by eminent Polish academics" (2002–2004). In the context of this essay one needs to mention the works of two Polish scholars, Andrzej Tretiak and Władysław Tarnawski. Tretiak wrote extensive introductory text for his translation of *Hamlet*, as well as for *The Tempest*, *King Lear*, and *Othello* (1923–1927). In 1922 Tretiak's own translation of *Hamlet* was published in the renowned series of Biblioteka Narodowa ("National Library") publishing house. The series was of an academic character; the text was accompanied by extensive footnotes and preceded with an introduction, in which Tretiak discusses, among others, the textual and editorial history of the play. Tretiak's translations have been grouped by the commentators along with Tarnawski's as scholarly or "professorial," i.e., "philologically faithful, but without any artistic merits" (Romanowska 2018, 44). Tarnawski during the Second World War worked on translating all Shakespeare's plays. Only eight of them were published: three in the pre-war period and five more after Tarnawski's tragic death in 1951 after the imprisonment enforced by the Security Office of the communist state. Tarnawski's rendering of *Hamlet* was published in two separate editions, which indicates the significance of his translatorial input. Printed first in the series aimed at young students with an introductory essay (by the editor, Grzegorz Sinko) it soon reappeared in a scholarly series from the same publishing house. For that second publication, the translation was revised by yet another literary historian, Stanisław Helsztyński, whose informative essay presented the reader with *Hamlet*'s many textual problems. As assessed by Agnieszka Romanowska, "Tarnawski's solid scholarly version must have been assessed as reliable enough to be presented, within only two years, in two editions with clearly

⁵ Matlakowski's comprehensive study proved to be influential in the following decades, as it was a source of knowledge and inspiration for artists such as Stanisław Wyspiański and other translators like Roman Brandstaetter. For more on Matlakowski's influence and the reception of his work, see Cetera-Włodarczyk and Kosim 2019, 259–64.

educational aims” (2018, 46). The input of Tretiak and Tarnawski into Polish reception of Shakespeare, only briefly outlined here, is not to be understated and their translations constitute essential works in the context of Polish critical editions.

In 1963 Witold Chwalewik published an edition of *Hamlet* which on the most superficial level may be compared with Matlakowski's, as they are both philological translations published in bilingual editions abundant in editorial and translatorial paratexts.⁶ Chwalewik was a prominent, yet somewhat controversial figure in the history of Polish reception of Shakespeare. Fascinated with Shakespeare's references to Poland, in 1956 he wrote a much discussed monograph *Polska w "Hamlecie"* ("Poland in *Hamlet*") and in the commentary to his translation he argued that one of Shakespeare's sources for the tragedy was a semi-legendary Polish story of a king eaten by mice. As an editor and commenter of *Hamlet*, he was rather selective. Stanley Wells in his review of the volume observed that Chwalewik's translatorial paratexts accompanying the English part of the publication are "a series of individual notes to the play rather than a running commentary to it" and that he wrote "about those aspects that most interest him" (1966, 97). Nevertheless, Chwalewik's editorial strategy is notable in the context of this essay due to his attention to the textual variance. An introductory note in English is preceded by a longer foreword in Polish focused "mainly on the history of good and bad editions and on textual intricacies" (Romanowska 2018, 47). The edition provided a reprint of the First Folio text (from the Globe edition), supplemented with meticulous endnotes enlisting the differences between textual variants, and Chwalewik's translation of the play from both Folio and the Second Quarto variants. Significantly, the information about sources used by the translator is indicated on the title page as a subtitle of this particular edition, highlighting its relevance. Agnieszka Romanowska assessed that "Chwalewik's paratexts reveal that his temperament was that of a scholar, not that of translator" and, what is worth emphasising, that "this edition was of undeniable value at the time when the availability of foreign scholarship was limited by the iron curtain" (2018, 48).

The other Polish rendering of *Hamlet* which may be considered pioneering in this regard was Juliusz Kydryński's translation of the First Quarto text published in 1987. Kydryński is best known as an author of commentaries which accompanied the Shakespearean translations by Maciej Słomczyński, one of the most influential

⁶ In 1970, Grzegorz Sinko referred to Matlakowski's and Chwalewik's translations as "bilingual, commented editions" which he found most useful as they represent the state of Shakespeare studies; he also added that in his commentary Chwalewik takes into account more contemporary critical literature and his own perennial studies on the subject (1970). It needs to be mentioned, however, that Chwalewik himself was very critical of Matlakowski's monograph (1969, 72).

Polish translators in the twentieth century.⁷ The afterwords by Kydryński were criticised as rather superficial and overly laudatory to the work of his collaborator. Nevertheless, Kydryński – a huge admirer and enthusiast of Shakespeare without academical background – took upon himself the task to educate the Polish readers on the subject of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. He produced translations of the plays by Marlowe, Jonson and Kyd, among others, previously unknown to the Polish audience. His ambition behind *Hamlet*, the only translation of Shakespeare he wrote himself, may be seen in the same light: Kydryński saw the role a translator primarily as cognitive and educative for the benefit of a given society (1969). Although the translation of the First Quarto was originally commissioned by theatre (but was never staged; Kydryński 1993, 246n1), in the introduction Kydryński argued that publishing such a text may help to understand the historical contexts and the textual history of Shakespeare's tragedy (1987, 98). Like other non-artistic renderings discussed earlier, his translation was focused on the literalness in the philological sense, striving for the semantic accuracy at the cost of poetic qualities of the text. However, he also emphasises that his publication does not have an academic character and is not targeted at scholars. Supplemented only by a concise introduction, it is a highly original translation project of a vastly different kind than Chwalewik's. It is noteworthy in the context of "Polish Shakespeare" as a publication which arises from a conviction that "non-conventional" variants of Shakespeare's plays are more than a mere curiosity to be mentioned in a footnote. Kydryński's text remains the only Polish translation of this version and even though it has never gained much critical attention, it is to be appreciated as a translatorial undertaking which "introduced in Poland the idea of independent value of various editions reflecting various stages of Shakespeare's plays' original reception" (Romanowska 2018, 51). As a text targeted at a wider audience it is a noteworthy attempt at raising the awareness of *Hamlet*'s complex textual history using entirely different means than his more scholarly-oriented predecessors.

These rare attempts at highlighting the matters usually overlooked by the publishers, editors, or translators, are all the more noteworthy in the light of the silence on the subject of Maciej Słomczyński and Stanisław Barańczak, the two most influential translators of Shakespeare of the second half of twentieth century. Słomczyński's translations, originally published with the afterwords by Kydryński, in the subsequent editions were complemented by the texts by Jan Kott (the second, bilingual

⁷ It is noteworthy in the context of this essay that Słomczyński's translation of *Hamlet*, with the afterword by Kydryński, was published first in 1978 as a bilingual edition; however, unlike Chwalewik's translatorial project, it was not planned as a scholarly edition, but rather targeted at wider audiences. See Romanowska 2018, 49.

edition of *Hamlet*, 1999) or the leading Shakespeare scholar, Marta Gibińska (hard cover, eight volume collected edition of Słomczyński's translation, 2004), but none of the publications had scholarly ambitions nor were particularly concerned with the textual variants. In a somewhat similar manner, the first editions of Barańczak's translations (especially *Hamlet*) were published in a way which manifested their theatrical origins, and after a change of the publisher, later editions included foreign critical essays as the only paratexts.⁸

In the introduction to *Translating Shakespeare for the Twenty-First Century* it is observed that “exploding the traditionally narrow boundaries of the domains of bibliography and textual studies, more and more work is being done on the wealth of implications to be drawn from textual variants and divergent editions” (Carvalho Homem 2004, 7), what ultimately emphasises the instability of Shakespeare's texts. In the context of Polish reception of Shakespeare such a tendency can be observed in the way the most recent Shakespearean translations by Piotr Kamiński are being published. Produced in collaboration with Anna Cetera-Włodarczyk, a Shakespeare scholar editing and supervising the series, the translations are accompanied by an extensive critical apparatus consisting of a detailed introduction and commentary. In the interviews Kamiński emphasised the semi-scholarly character of these publications, stating that it may be considered the first actual critical series of Polish translations of Shakespeare (2012). In all six volumes published since 2009,⁹ the textual basis is discussed: it is stated that the translator worked on the multiple critical editions of the English texts, all of which are enlisted in the bibliography. The scholarly approach is highlighted in these publications and the significance of the critical series of Shakespeare's plays in modern Polish translation is not to be overlooked. However, the form of the series and its publishing history indicates certain problems resulting from attempts at balancing between the critical ambitions and the market attractiveness as understood by the publisher. There are notable issues with the distribution of the editorial paratexts which are the effect of the negotiations with the publishing house, such as the footnotes limited only to the necessary passages so as not to disrupt the reading experience.¹⁰ The complex relations between translator, editor, and publisher signal still existing preconceptions disregarding an extensive critical apparatus

⁸ E. g., in 1999 Znak publishing house issued Barańczak's *The Tempest* with the afterword by Northrop Frye and in 2000 his *Julius Cesar* with the afterword by S. F. Johnson. See Romanowska 2018, 52.

⁹ The six plays translated by Kamiński and published in collaboration with Anna Cetera-Włodarczyk are *Richard II* (Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2009), *Macbeth* (W.A.B. 2011), *Twelfth Night* (W.A.B. 2012), *The Tempest* (W.A.B. 2012), *The Winter's Tale* (W.A.B. 2015), and *The Merchant of Venice* (W.A.B. 2015; second edition: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2021). *Hamlet* in Kamiński's translation was staged in Warsaw in 2019 (Teatr Dramatyczny), but the translation has not been published in printed form.

¹⁰ See Cetera and Kamiński 2014.

as superfluous to a text of literary value on its own, or intimidating to a potential reader. In order to unreservedly address the matters of textual variance in translation, such prenotions need to be overcome.¹¹

Discussing these issues, Anna Cetera-Włodarczyk observes that “the lack of critical editions enforces translation strategies based on strong domestication of the text; due to a false idea of the homogeneity of Shakespeare’s style, such strategies also eliminate the differences in style and register exhibited by the originals” (2019, 61). The diagnosis is decisive: “the decline of critical editions testifies to a crisis in the humanities” (Cetera-Włodarczyk 2019, 61). The critical series of Kamiński’s translations not only constitutes the most recent chapter in the history of Polish critical and translatorial reception of Shakespeare; it also signals “paradigmatic changes that have affected textual scholarship and the editing of Shakespeare and early modern drama in recent years” (Kidnie and Massai 2015, 2) in the context of translation.

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¹¹ Another notions outside the scope of this essay which shape the series in question and are worthy of discussion are the textual authority of the translator and the legal issue of the copyright to the editorial version of the texts.

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