

Hamlet in Esperanto

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In the summer of 1887, a small, 40-page brochure was published in Warsaw with the title (in Russian) *International / Language / Foreword / and / Complete Textbook*. The brochure was printed by the firm of Kelter at number 11 Nowolipje Street and paid for by its author, a young ophthalmologist named Lazar Ludwik Zamenhof, who wrote under the pseudonym Dr. Esperanto. “Esperanto” meant “One Who Hopes” in Zamenhof’s new language. Soon “La lingvo de d-ro Esperanto,” the language of Dr. Esperanto, became “La lingvo de Esperanto,” the language of Esperanto, and so the assumed name of the author was elided with the name of the language.¹

Zamenhof based his language on the vocabulary and semantics of European languages, but used grammatical principles akin to those of the so-called isolating languages, in which invariant lexical elements are used to construct utterances. In his brochure he is rather careful to emphasize that he has presented the grammar of his new language in terms readily understandable by those familiar with the grammatical terms and categories used for the languages that they might know, particularly Latin, but that it actually functions according to rather different principles, involving “words” that can be combined in a more or less infinite series of combinations (see Janton 1993: 44-45):

I introduced a complete dismemberment of ideas into independent words, so that the whole language consists, not of words in different states of grammatical inflexion, but of unchangeable words.... The various grammatical inflexions, the reciprocal relations of the members of a sentence, are expressed by the junction of immutable syllables. But the structure of such a synthetic language being altogether strange to the chief European nations, and consequently difficult for them to become accustomed to, I have adapted this principle of dismemberment to the spirit of the European languages, in such a manner that anyone learning my tongue from grammar alone ... will never perceive that the language differs in any respect from that of his mother-tongue. (Ludovikito 1991:306)

¹ See Zamenhof’s discussion of this topic in an article in *La Esperantisto* 33 (1890) -- Dietterle 1929:86.

Zamenhof is silent on the specifics of his semantics, but it is abundantly evident from his discussion of the derivation of words that he relies on what might be described as the common semantic base of the European languages – the ur-language, as it were, that underlies its manifestations in the particular vocabulary of the particular European tongues. If, after examining the major European languages, he found no phonological commonality for a particular term, “words were drawn from Latin, as being a quasi-international language.” In fact, it is possible for scholars, in describing the structure and conceptual base of Esperanto to see it as everything from revolutionary and non-European to a mere simplification of Latin.

In the course of 1887, Zamenhof produced his brochure in four editions – Russian, Polish, French, and German – with Hebrew following in 1888. An English edition printed in 1888 was so badly translated that it had to be withdrawn. It finally appeared in 1889 in a new translation by “R. H. Geoghegan, Balliol College, Oxford,”² and in the same year the brochure appeared in Swedish and in Yiddish editions. Each of these editions contained essentially the same material: (1) an extensive foreword explaining the principles and genesis of the language, (2) six “specimens of the international language,” (3) a section in which Zamenhof lays out a plan whereby people may sign pledges to learn the language when a certain number of others do the same, (4) a “Complete Grammar of the International Language” on six pages, and (5) a brief vocabulary, in the International Language and the target language, of rather less than a thousand roots, which, if used in conjunction with the grammar, will allow the reader to understand a simple International Language text.

The six “specimens of the international language” consist of (1) the Lord’s Prayer, (2) a brief passage from the beginning of the Book of Genesis, (3) a letter in the new language (“Kara amiko! Mi prezentas al mi kian vizaĝon vi faros post la ricevo de mia letero...”: Dear friend, I picture to myself the kind of face you will make after receiving my letter...), (4) an original poem *Mia penso* (My thought), (5) a translation of a brief poem by Heine (*Mir träumte von einem Königskind: En sonĝo princinon mi vidis*), and (6) a second original poem *Ho, mia kor’* (Oh my heart).

In 1888 Zamenhof followed his first book on Esperanto with a second, this time written in the language itself: *Dua Libro / de l’lingvo / internacia*, again printed by Kelter and paid for by the author. In it, he comments further on his project, replying to criticisms that he has received, and commenting on his plan to collect pledges. He supplements this introductory section with sixteen paragraph-long readings so that learners of the language “may repeat in practice the rules of the international grammar and clearly understand the meaning and use of the suffixes and prefixes.” This is followed by a complete translation

² Richard Henry Geoghegan (1866-1943) was a scholar of the Irish language and of Asian languages. Having read an article about his newly-published language, he wrote to Zamenhof in Latin in the autumn of 1887. Zamenhof sent him the German translation of his book, from which Geoghegan began learning the language. When Zamenhof later sent him the English translation, he alerted Zamenhof to its inadequacy and undertook to translate it himself. In 1893 Geoghegan moved from Britain to the United States, where in 1905 he became the first president of the American Esperanto Association.

of *The Shadow* (*La ombro*), a fairy tale by Hans Andersen retranslated from the German, and by a brief collection of fifteen proverbs (*Kia patrino, tia filino*: Like mother, like daughter; *En sia urbeto neniu estas profeto*: No one is a prophet in his/her village – and so on). Completing the brochure are two poems – a translation of the student song *Gaudeamus Igitur* by “Hemza” (probably Zamenhof himself) and another, somewhat awkward, translation of a Heine poem (*Lieb Liebchen, leg's Händchen aufs Herze mein*), this time bearing the initials K.D. but apparently the work of Leo Belmont (Leopold Blumenthal), who had bought Zamenhof's brochure in August 1887 and begun to learn the language.

Belmont was hardly the only person to learn. While pledges fell far short of Zamenhof's over-ambitious expectations, many people ignored the implied suggestion that they hold off until others agree to learn, and immediately began studying. Zamenhof was encouraged. His intention was to publish a series of such brochures, of which the *Dua libro* (the Second Book) was the beginning, but he changed his plans upon hearing that the American Philosophical Society, in Philadelphia, intended to call a conference to consider the question of a planned international language. Zamenhof's early contacts with the secretary of the APS, Henry Phillips, and indirectly with the committee the Society had formed for this purpose, were quite favorable and so he decided to await further action on the conference, and put out a supplement to the *Dua libro* answering additional critics and explaining his intention. In the event, the conference was never convened, and the interests of the APS moved in other directions (Waringhien 1989:52).

The brochure of 1887 carried on its title-page a curious epigraph: *Por ke lingvo estu tutmonda, ne sufiĉas nomi ĝin tia*: “For a language to be worldwide, it is not enough to call it such.” Projects for international languages, Zamenhof seems to suggest, are not uncommon, but a mere project is not a language: if an international language is to be international, people must learn it first. The supplement to the second book, published in 1888, ends with an equally revealing statement:

This brochure is the last word that I will utter in the role of author. From this day the future of the international language is no longer more in my hands than in the hands of any other friend of this sacred idea. We must now work together in equality, everyone according to his or her strengths.... I have done for the cause everything I could, and if every true friend of the international language brings to it even a hundredth part of the moral and material sacrifices that I have brought to it over the past twelve years, up to today, the cause will go excellently and will reach the goal in the shortest possible time. Let us work and hope!

Ni laboru kaj esperu! Let us work and hope. Zamenhof's use of the first person plural, and his insistence that his language belongs to all its speakers, is one demonstration of a truth that he believed in passionately: a language is the possession of a community, not a collection of grammatical rules in a book. His elder contemporary the linguist Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, whose insights on structuralism and whose distinction between the notion of a language (an abstract system) and speech (the application of that system by its speakers) anticipated the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, championed the study of

languages synchronically, on the basis of actual usage, rather than diachronically, the approach prevailing at the time. This linkage of theory and practice (languages as historically analyzable in their own terms vs. languages as ways of human expression) found a ready response in Zamenhof, who clearly saw the community of users as more important than the grammatical details of Esperanto.³ Of course, in entrusting Esperanto to its adepts, he risked losing control – and the battles over reforms that plagued the early years of the language came about in part because the Esperantists felt a sense of ownership and empowerment.

The presence of literary translations, and indeed of original poetry, in the first two brochures on Esperanto⁴ points to an important concern on Zamenhof's part. This ambitious yet bookish young man (he was 27 at the time, beginning a medical career and starting a family) conceived of Esperanto not as a code, or a simple auxiliary language designed to permit basic communication, but as a complete language. Literature was to be a part of it from the start.

Zamenhof's interest in the relationship of literature and community antedates the so-called First Book of 1887. From a very early age he composed poems in Russian (Boulton 1962: 23). When, a few years later, involved in the Zionist movement, he compiled a grammar of Yiddish, he included several poems in that language to illustrate Yiddish prosody. Before he published the final version of Esperanto, Zamenhof experimented, over a period of almost ten years, with other versions. Fragments of these so-called pre-Esperantos survived into the 1930s in several notebooks examined in the 1930s by Waringhien (1989: 19-54) but subsequently destroyed during World War II. One of the notebooks, in a version of Esperanto dating from 1882-83, includes two works that reappear in 1887 – a translation of Heine's *Mir träumte von einem Königskind* and an earlier version of "My Thought" (*Mia Penso*).

The centrality of literary interests in 1887 and thereafter should not therefore come as a great surprise. For Zamenhof, literary and linguistic composition were closely related. The first separate publication in Esperanto by someone other than Zamenhof, Antoni Grabowski, was a translation of Pushkin's short story *Blizzard* (*Neĝa blovado*). In 1891 Zamenhof published his translation of Charles Dickens's *The Battle of Life*, undertaken, as he says in a later preface, on a species of dare:

³ Baudouin de Courtenay, who was teaching at the University of Yuryev (now Tartu, Estonia) at the time of Esperanto's publication, was an early convert to Esperanto and later became the president of the Polish Esperanto Association. Saussure also had a connection to Esperanto: his younger brother René was a convinced Esperantist and contributed to discussion of the linguistics of Esperanto in a number of extended essays. In fact, Esperanto bears many marks of structuralist thought, as is evident from Zamenhof's discussion of the morphology of the language in the first brochure (1887).

⁴ In his essay on "pra-Esperantoj," Zamenhof's drafts of the language before its publication in final form in 1887, Waringhien 1989:19-37 includes a number of transcriptions of original and translated texts from a notebook of 1882 that was apparently subsequently destroyed by the Nazis in Austria. The transcriptions include earlier versions of *Mia penso* and of Heine's *Mir träumte von einem Königskind*, and also excerpts from several Hans Andersen stories, including *The Shadow*.

In the first years of the existence of Esperanto a certain gentleman showed me a German book (a translation of a work by Dickens) and said, “This certainly couldn’t be translated into Esperanto.” To show this gentleman that he was mistaken, I took the book and translated it. (IRPVZ 2377)

The Dickens translation was in some sense an accident of history – a significant but not particularly important work that happened to be to hand. But Zamenhof’s translation of *Hamlet*, published in 1894, when the language was a mere seven years old, was of a quite different order. In an essay in the journal *La Esperantisto* shortly thereafter (reprinted in Dietterle 1929:202-207), Zamenhof takes issue with one of his correspondents who argues that the Esperanto movement should devote all of its resources to the production of textbooks: the translation of literary works into Esperanto, wrote this correspondent, is a waste of time when people can always read them in the original. On the contrary, writes Zamenhof, there are few things more convincing than a major literary work well translated.

Textbooks, advertising etc. are necessary, but literature is no less necessary, indeed more so. If we read the motives advanced by the indifferent world, especially its educated theorists, against our cause, we observe that the most frequent and almost the only apparently powerful weapon by which they seek to annihilate us in the eyes of the world is the opinion that our language is some unnatural creation, restricted and inflexible, which “serves only to express short and isolated thoughts for contact with post and telegraph offices, or as a lame solution in foreign hotels, etc, and can never serve as a language for the free expression of all the brilliant works of human literature.”

Several friends, added Zamenhof, had suggested that the publication of *Hamlet* was one of the main reasons why the disputes and confusions of the previous year ended so harmoniously and generated so much new energy.

Hamlet was the first of a series of translations that Zamenhof produced in the following years, among them Gogol’s *The Government Inspector* (1907), Molière’s *Georges Dandin* (1908), Goethe’s *Iphigenie auf Taurus* (1908), Schiller’s *Die Räuber* (1908), and the entire Old Testament, beginning with *Ecclesiastes* (1907) and the *Psalms* (1908). The year 1910 saw the publication of his translation of Eliza Orzeszkowa’s feminist novel *Marta*, which found its way to East Asia, where it was retranslated into Chinese and Japanese and stimulated the nascent movement for women’s emancipation in those countries (Boulton 1962:207). After his death in 1917 the complete tales of Hans Andersen appeared, and also Heine’s *Der Rabbi von Bacharach* and Sholom Aleichem’s *Gymnasium*. By the time of the publication of most of his translations, the art of translation in Esperanto was well established: in addition to large numbers of shorter works, Kofman’s retranslation of the *Iliad* dates from 1895-97, Motteau’s *The Tempest* from 1904, Valienne’s *Aeneid* from 1906, and Kazimierz Bein’s translation of the massive novel *Pharaoh*, by Bolesław Prus, from 1907.

Why the emphasis on literature? In part because, as he remarks, Zamenhof wants the public to understand that Esperanto is a *complete* language, or has the potential to be – much as the Pléiade sought to make that point about French in the mid-sixteenth century, or Spenser sought to do so with the publication of *The Shepherd's Calendar* in 1579: French and English were, their authors suggested, as complete and as venerable as the classics. But Zamenhof also had models closer to hand, since the Romantic movement that swept Europe a hundred years earlier and the independence movements that followed in its wake made such claims about a second generation of literary languages – first German, and then Polish, Hungarian, Finnish, Estonian, Lithuanian, and other languages of the newly established and emerging nations gradually gaining emancipation from the old established European empires. Theories on the connection between language and nationhood sustained the nationalist movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, in his *Addresses to the German Nation* (1808), advanced a theory of national identity and national education rooted in the notion of a common language. Johann Gottfried Herder saw German folk poetry as the true expression of the people, looking behind the expanding industrialization of his own time to the true spirit of Germany, much as Elias Lönnrot did the same for the Finnish spirit in the collection of folk poetry that he wove into the continuous “epic” the *Kalevala* (1835, enlarged 1849), and, in a more limited way, Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald did with the Estonian *Kalevipoeg* (1862). In each of these instances, the apologists of nationhood invented, or discovered, a history of their peoples, expressed in the language of the people, that, through a kind of manifest destiny, justified the existence of the nation.

We might argue that Esperanto was the very antithesis of the search for national roots and the building of national histories – but this is not entirely so. As Eric Hobsbawm points out in his seminal essay on the subject, invented traditions “are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition” (1983:2). He adds, “It is the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant, that makes ‘the invention of tradition’ so interesting for historians.” Such traditions are a device for the “discovery” of a common history – the archeology of nationhood. This process of discovery, and above all the mythography that accompanies it, is a process of inclusion. What emerges is, according to Benedict Anderson (1991:7) “imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”

While one might maintain that social movements provide a better model for explaining Esperanto than nationalist movements, social movements seldom have language as a driving force. Zamenhof, having initiated a linguistic revolution (his language, he insists, is different from other languages, and yet can be presented as similar), set about creating a movement to accompany it in which he laid special stress on the ingathering of all users of the language: the language, as he repeatedly emphasized, belonged not to him but to the community, and to all its adepts on an equal basis – the “deep, horizontal comradeship” that Benedict Anderson finds in nationalist movements. In some sense Zamenhof’s language was revolutionary and, at least in some of his poems and public

statements, he emphasized the break with the past. But in other respects he was engaged in a program of linguistic archaeology similar to that pursued by nationalism, and, I might add, by its near-cousin Zionism. In this archeological endeavor, he found the roots of the language (roots in every sense of that term) in the common European lexicon and semantics out of which he constructed his language.

Beneath the blood-soaked soil of Europe, he seemed to suggest, he found a language of peace that was both new and immeasurably old, both fresh and familiar. This reassembled past was a past discoverable by the users of the language that in some sense pre-existed both their adoption of the language and even the creation of the language itself. Thus Zamenhof created a new kind of nationalist movement, a kind of nationalism of all believers – a nation open to all right-thinking people across the world. Today we might call it a virtual nation. While Zamenhof himself did not take these initiatives, within a few short years, this international/national movement had its own Hymn (one of Zamenhof's own poems, published in 1890), its own flag, and a worldwide system of Esperanto "consuls."

And it was appropriate that it should have its own literature – perhaps in due course an original literature, but initially particularly a translated literature linking the language to the great literary works of what the late nineteenth century still regarded as the "civilized" nations. In this context *Hamlet* was an obvious choice. In the literary traditions that Zamenhof knew best – German and Russian – Shakespeare occupied a dominating presence, the Germans seeing him as the "third German classic" alongside Goethe and Schiller, and Goethe and Schiller themselves being great admirers of Shakespeare's art. As for the Russians, Pushkin referred to Shakespeare as Russia's "father" and Turgenev later in the century suggested that Shakespeare was "engrafted" into Russian flesh and blood. It is worth noting that the years 1875-77 saw the publication of the three volumes of Shakespeare's complete plays in Polish translation, edited by Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (1812-87) (Trepínski 1965). Józef Paszkowski was responsible for thirteen of the translations, including *Hamlet*. Zamenhof might well have seen Polish performances of *Hamlet* in Warsaw: the celebrated actor Bolesław Ładnowski first performed the role in 1872 and continued to do so up to 1900. Finally, we should mention the fact that Shakespeare and Shakespeare translation played a special part in the national revivals of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: for several languages of central Europe, translations of his plays marked their emergence as fully-credentialed literary languages – *Macbeth* in Czech (1786), *Hamlet* in Hungarian (1790), for example.

Of all of Shakespeare's plays, it is *Hamlet* that is most often mentioned and most often praised, and the brooding figure of Hamlet himself becomes symbolic of the post-Romantic psyche. In a celebrated essay, Turgenev refers to Hamlet as a dark and enigmatic figure, who yet "wages relentless war" against evil and "is irreconcilably at war with falsehood" and "through this very quality he becomes one of the foremost champions of a truth in which he himself cannot fully believe." For Dostoyevsky, whose work is steeped in his reading of Shakespeare, *Hamlet* dominates; the same is true for Chekhov (Stříbrný 2000).

So Zamenhof chooses for his first great translation the writer who is perhaps most universally regarded as sublimely great, a lover of freedom and the darling of national revivalists. And he chooses from among Shakespeare's works the play that is most universally known, not least for its central conflicted character.

The seeds of this interest in Hamlet lie in the poem *Mia Penso*, My Thought, the poem of Zamenhof most directly identifiable with beginnings of Esperanto and with the inner conflicts of his early years. It is also in my opinion Zamenhof's most accomplished poem, addressing the tension between youth and duty through a song of hope sung by a friend at nightfall. I have analyzed this poem in some depth elsewhere and will here add only the observation that the tensions displayed by the young man who is the speaker of the poem are the tensions that Zamenhof's generation discerned in the figure of Hamlet.

“Good translations are the fastest and most dependable way to enrich a language,” wrote Jean le Rond d’Alembert (1717-83) in his *Observations on the Art of Translation* (Ragnarsson 2006). Zamenhof expressed similar views, urging on his fellow Esperantists the need to address “difficult tasks” of translation because “only in that way will our language become fully developed” (Kalocsay 1984: 58). Translations force on the speakers of a language linguistic solutions to problems not yet encountered in real life, and plays come closest to jumping the gap between written and spoken language, ultimately enriching both. While we might suppose that verse drama is somewhat removed from everyday speech, it performs a different function, much like Zamenhof's Yiddish poems – it exposes the language to prosodic solutions. One of the most startling characteristics of this translation in a new language is Zamenhof's seemingly easy mastery of the iambic pentameter.

“As early as 1894, Zamenhof published a complete translation of *Hamlet*,” writes the Esperanto poet William Auld in the journal *Monda Kulturo*. “It was his first extensive literary translation and among other things it served to prove incontestably the elasticity and power of expression of this merely seven-year-old language. It rooted the iambic pentameter firmly in Esperanto, and established criteria allowing us to measure and assess the success and poetic qualities of all subsequent translations.” Pointing out that Zamenhof began his translation when Esperanto was at most six years old, because he quotes from the third act in an article in 1893, Reto Rossetti (1987) declares, “Zamenhof's translation of *Hamlet* was not just a weapon against the clamorous agitation for reform in 1893-94, nor merely a demonstration of Esperanto's cultural capabilities, but it was also a matter-of-fact assertion of youthful genius taking as an example not some smoothly conquerable classical texts, but one of the most formidable masterworks of world literature.”

Many scholars (e.g. Boulton 1987) have emphasized over the years the key position of this work in the development of the language, noting also the relatively small vocabulary with which Zamenhof worked and the fact that for the most part he used words already in

the dictionaries.⁵ But at issue here is more than simple development of the language. In focusing our attention on the procedure whereby the lexicon of Esperanto gradually developed, we are apt to forget what accompanies this word-stock, namely the semantic territory lying behind it: Zamenhof did not just create expressions in Esperanto but carried into the language both through and for these expressions the semantic values that fixed their meaning. This communal semantics, created in this way in the early years of the language, was drawn from the common semantic inheritance of the languages of Europe. Clearly, the translation of *Hamlet* was not just a personal challenge for the young Zamenhof, but also a conscious effort to do through literature what he sought to do through the language and its semantics, namely take into Esperanto, and so, as it were, into the cultural heritage of the new language, this major work of European and world literature. The Esperanto movement was certainly not a nation, but Zamenhof rightly understood that to make it live he had to create a heritage for it. His translation projects were part of that program.

Another part of the program was the creation of a kind of instant folklore. Over several years, Zamenhof's father, himself a linguist and polyglot, collected proverbs from several languages, comparing them and finding abundant parallels. His son was also interested in proverbs: in the Second Book of 1888, he had included a brief list in Esperanto. Marcus Zamenhof published three collections in 1905 and 1906, and in 1910 Lazar Ludvik produced a similar volume mostly covering the same list of proverbs, but now in Esperanto. The *Proverbaro* of 1910 was a further example of the effort to build a common past. With his translation of *Hamlet* Zamenhof tried to do in literature what he had already done linguistically and was later to do with folklore.

As I have explained elsewhere, Zamenhof translated *Hamlet* not simply to reproduce the text in Esperanto but to make it an Esperanto text. His goal was not fidelity but appropriation. The result was a text that did not always follow in detail the complex meaning of Shakespeare's words, and did not attempt to reproduce the compact density of the original, but that delivered the essence of this theatrical work in fluent poetic lines. When, years later, L.N.M. Newell decided to translate the play again, he applied completely different principles, emphasizing faithfulness to the original rather than simply reproducing the spirit of the work. Rossetti, the brilliant translator of *Othello*, assisted him by checking and commenting on the first two acts, but subsequently the two of them quarreled. Giorgio Silfer (2004) quotes from a letter written by Newell in 1966: "Rossetti insists that it should be possible to do the translation as though Shakespeare had written the play originally in Esperanto, were he an Esperantist of today. I, on the other

⁵ In 1907, the British Esperantists John Ellis, Edward Millidge, Alfred Wackrill and Louisa Schafer, on behalf of the Language Committee, noted 95 words used in the *Hamlet* translation that did not appear in the *Universal Dictionary (Universala Vortaro)* of 1894 (Wackrill et al. 1907, Lingva Komitato 1907). In a later note in the same year, Parisot added a further seven, for a total of 102. Setälä (1951) found only nine in the first act, but Albault (1963) rightly pointed out that for the most part these words had already appeared in the *Russian-International Dictionary (Vortaro Rusa-Internacia)* of 1889. Using the table in Ludovikito (1989), I compared the list of Ellis and his colleagues and that of Parisot with the roots in the 1889 dictionary and found a total of 39 roots that appeared neither in 1889 nor in 1894 (although some of them did appear in Beaufront's dictionary of 1892).

hand, am insistent that that's absurd, and that we must render what Shakespeare actually said, with maximum fidelity. Allowing for possible exaggeration on Newell's part, we can see clearly (as is also evident in the polemic between the two of them in the newspaper *Heroldo* in the previous year) two quite different approaches to the art of translation – approaches readily definable in translation theory.

Newell's translation has its merits (as Boulton attests), as does its detailed introduction, but the result is more interesting as a key to the English text than as a significant contribution to the art of translation in Esperanto: Newell is for reading, Zamenhof is for acting. Rossetti echoes those theorists who suggest that a text has a kind of independent incorporeal existence separable from its manifestation in a given language: out of this virtual text emerge versions of the text in different languages (see Tonkin 2004). Zamenhof's translation is a manifestation of this kind in Esperanto. We can only regret that Zamenhof did not live long enough to re-do his translation with the knowledge of Newell.⁶

Various critics have drawn attention to the limitations of the Zamenhof translation. Waringhien, while praising the translation in general, points for example to Zamenhof's inability to render the puns and wordplay of the original (a criticism echoed by de Jong 1985, Rossetti 1987 and Pesce 1995). Others, however, point out that Zamenhof seems to have used a German translation and may not have even looked at the original.⁷ We know that Zamenhof's knowledge of English was very imperfect.⁸ But the fact remains that this was the text that Zamenhof used to test and demonstrate the effectiveness of his language. More than any other indicators, the choice reveals the ambition and the high aspirations of the young initiator of this new language, and at the same time throws an interesting light on his psychic makeup. If *Hamlet* became part of Esperanto's heritage, it also became part of the spirit of its initiator.

In his *Life of Zamenhof*, Edmond Privat quotes from a “four-page paper” that was found unfinished on Zamenhof's desk after his death. In this paper, Zamenhof writes, among other things, about his loss of religious faith and the depression that seized him when he was around fifteen or sixteen:

⁶ The eighth edition of Zamenhof's translation appeared in the same year as Newell's – a happy coincidence that allowed readers to compare the two texts. This eighth edition, edited by D. B. Gregor, performed an important service because it went back to the text of the first edition, i.e. to Zamenhof's text. As Waringhien explains in his “critical apparatus” of 1959, the second edition of 1902, published by Hachette, “is much less accurate than that of 1894” because it includes various changes imported by Beaufront and possibly not approved by Zamenhof. The third through seventh editions are in fact reprints of the second. The first edition was in fact published in nine installments, beginning in June 1894, as the inaugural volume of the projected Library of the International Language Esperanto (Biblioteko de la Lingvo Internacia Esperanto). See the notes by Ludovikito in Zamenhof 1984:439 and Ludovikito 1998:123-124.

⁷ This is Gregor's view, though Rossetti suggests that Zamenhof used the English text with help from a German translation. Banham, in an interesting analysis of Zamenhof's translation, recounts that Stephen Andrew, after studying Zamenhof's text in detail, concluded that Zamenhof did not use the German translation of Schlegel, but less accomplished translations. The question still lacks a definitive answer.

⁸ See the extensive material assembled by Holzhaus on this subject and the analyses of Banham 1933, Plehn 1933, and Waringhien 1933.

All of life lost, in my eyes, all sense and value. I looked at myself and at others with contempt, seeing in myself and in them only a senseless piece of meat, created, I knew not for what reason nor for what purpose.... What was I living for, why was I studying, why was I working, why did I love? It was all so senseless, worthless, so absurd.

“How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world!” Hamlet declares (1.2.133-134). “I have of late,” he says to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the second act (2.2.303-304), “lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory....” Did Zamenhof’s early meeting with Shakespeare’s Hamlet last an entire lifetime? Perhaps so.

At the end of the page were notes for the next part, which Zamenhof never completed: namely that in his seventeenth year “I began to feel that perhaps death was not a disappearance... that there were at least some kind of laws in nature... that something was saving me for a high purpose.” The rest is silence.

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