

**THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO.  
AN ESSAY TOWARD A  
HISTORY OF SHAKESPEARE  
IN NORWAY. A DISSERTATION**

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Dissertation by Martin Brown Ruud

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An Essay Toward a History  
of 'Shakespeare in  
Norway

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND LITERATURE  
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BY

MARTIN BROWN RUUD

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#### PREFATORY NOTE

I have attempted in this study to trace the history of Shakespearean translations, Shakespearean criticism, and the performances of Shakespeare's plays in Norway. I have not attempted to investigate Shakespeare's influence on Norwegian literature. To do so would not, perhaps, be entirely fruitless, but it would constitute a different kind of work.

The investigation was made possible by a fellowship from the University of Chicago and a scholarship from the American-Scandinavian Foundation, and I am glad to express my gratitude to these bodies for the opportunities given to me of study in the Scandinavian countries. I am indebted for special help and encouragement to Dr. C. N. Gould and Professor J. M. Manly, of the University of Chicago, and to the authorities of the University library in Kristiania for their unflinching courtesy. To my wife, who has worked with me throughout, my obligations are greater than I can express.

It is my plan to follow this monograph with a second on the history of Shakespeare in Denmark.

M. B. R.

*Minneapolis, Minnesota.*

*September, 1916.*



## CHAPTER I

## SHAKESPEARE TRANSLATIONS IN NORWAY

## A

In the years following 1750, there was gathered in the city of Trondhjem a remarkable group of men: Nils Krog Bredal, composer of the first Danish opera, John Gunnerus, theologian and biologist, Gerhart Schøning, rector of the Cathedral School and author of an elaborate history of the fatherland, and Peter Suhm, whose 14,047 pages on the history of Denmark testify to a learning, an industry, and a generous devotion to scholarship which few have rivalled. Bredal was mayor (Borgermester), Gunnerus was bishop, Schøning was rector, and Suhm was for the moment merely the husband of a rich and unsympathetic wife. But they were united in their interest in serious studies, and in 1760, the last three—somewhat before Bredal's arrival—founded "Videnskabsselskabet i Trondhjem." A few years later the society received its charter as "Det Kongelige Videnskabsselskab."

A little provincial scientific body! Of what moment is it? But in those days it was of moment. Norway was then and long afterwards the political and intellectual dependency of Denmark. For three hundred years she had been governed more or less effectively from Copenhagen, and for two hundred years Danish had supplanted Norwegian as the language of church and state, of trade, and of higher social intercourse. The country had no university; Norwegians were compelled to go to Copenhagen for their degrees and there loaf about in the anterooms of ministers waiting for preferment. Videnskabsselskabet was the first tangible evidence of awakened national life, and we are not surprised to find that it was in this circle that the demand for a separate Norwegian university was first authoritatively presented. Again, a little group of periodicals sprang up in which were discussed, learnedly and pedantically, to be sure, but with keen intelligence, the questions that were interesting the great world outside. It is dreary business ploughing through these solemn, badly printed octavos and quartos. Of a sudden, however, one



comes upon the first, and for thirty-six years the only Norwegian translation of Shakespeare.

We find it in *Trondhjems Allehaande* for October 23, 1782—the third and last volume. The translator has hit upon Antony's funeral oration and introduces it with a short note:<sup>1</sup> "The following is taken from the famous English play *Julius Caesar* and may be regarded as a masterpiece. When Julius Caesar was killed, Antonius secured permission from Brutus and the other conspirators to speak at his funeral. The people, whose minds were full of the prosperity to come, were satisfied with Caesar's murder and regarded the murderers as benefactors. Antonius spoke so as to turn their minds from rejoicing to regret at a great man's untimely death and so as to justify himself and win the hearts of the populace. And in what a masterly way Antonius won them! We shall render, along with the oration, the interjected remarks of the crowd, inasmuch as they too are evidences of Shakespeare's understanding of the human soul and his realization of the manner in which the oration gradually brought about the purpose toward which he aimed."

Antonius: Venner, Medborgere, giver mig Gehør, jeg kommer for at jorde Cæsars Legeme, ikke for at rose ham. Det Onde man gjør lever endnu efter os; det Gode begravnes ofte tilligemed vore Been. Saa Være det ogsaa med Cæsar. Den edle Brutus har sagt Eder, Cæsar var herskesyg. Var han det saa var det en svær Forseelse; og Cæsar har ogsaa dyrt maattet bøde derfor. Efter Brutus og de Øvriges Tilladelse—og Brutus er en hederlig Mand, og det er de alle, lutter hederlige Mænd, kommer jeg hid for at holde Cæsars Ligtale. Han var min Ven, trofast og oprigtig mod mig! dog, Brutus siger, han var herskesyg, og Brutus er en hederlig Mand. Han har bragt mange Fanger med til Rom, hvis Løsepenge formerede de offentlige Skatter; synes Eder det herskesygt af Cæsar—naar de Arme skreeg, saa græd Cæsar—Herskesyge maate dog vel væves af stærkere Stof.—Dog Brutus siger han var herskesyg; og Brutus er en hederlig Mand. I have alle seet at jeg paa Pans Fest tre Gange tilbød ham en kongelig Krone, og at han tre Gange afslog den. Var det herskesygt?—Dog Brutus siger han var herskesyg, og i Sandhed, han er en hederlig Mand. Jeg taler ikke for at gjendrive det, som Brutus har sagt; men jeg staar her, for at sige hvad jeg veed. I alle elskede ham engang, uden Aarsag; hvad for an Aarsag afholder Eder fra at sørge over ham? Oi Fornuft! Du er flyed hen til de umælende Bæster, og Menneskene have tabt deres Forstand. Haver Taalmodighed med mig; mit Hjerter er hist i Kisten hos Cæsar, og jeg maa holde inde til det kommer tilbage til mig.

Den Første af Folket: Meg synes der er megen Fornuft i hans Tale.

Den Anden af Folket: Naar du ret overveier Sagen, saa er Cæsar skeet stor Uret.

<sup>1</sup>It has been thought best to give such citations for the most part in translation.

Den Tredje: Mener I det, godt Folk? Jeg frygter der vil komme slemmere i hans Sted.

Den Fjerde: Har I lagt Mærke til hvad han sagde? Han vilde ikke modtage Kronen, det er altsaa vist at han ikke var herskesyg.

Den Første: Hvis saa er, vil det komme visse Folk dyrt at staae.

Den Anden: Den fromme Mand! Hans Øien er blodrøde af Graad.

Den Tredje: Der er ingen fortræffeligere Mand i Rom end Antonius.

Den Fjerde: Giver Agt, han begynder igjen at tale.

Antonius: Endnu i Gaar havde et Ord af Cæsar gjældt imod hele Verden, nu ligger han der, endog den Usleste nægter ham Agtelse. O, I Folk! var jeg sindet, at ophidse Eders Gemytter til Raserie og Oprør, saa skulde jeg skade Brutus og Cassius, hvilke, som I alle veed, ere hederlige Mænd. Men jeg vil intet Ondt gjøre dem: hellere vil jeg gjøre den Døde, mig selv, og Eder Uret, end at jeg skulde volde slige hederlige Mænd Fortræd. Men her er et Pergament med Cæsars Segl: jeg fandt det i hans Kammer; det er hans sidste Villie. Lad Folket blot høre hans Testament, som jeg, tilgiv mig det, ikke tænker at oplæse, da skulde de alle gaa hen og kysse den døde Cæsars Saar; og dyppe deres Klæder i hans hellige Blod; skulde bede om et Haar af ham til Erindring, og paa deres Dødsdag i deres sidste Villie tænke paa dette Haar, og testamentere deres Efterkommere det som en rig Arvedel.

Den Fjerde: Vi ville høre Testamentet! Læs det, Marcus Antonius.

Antonius: Haver Taalmodighed, mine Venner: jeg tør ikke forelæse det; det er ikke raadeligt, at I erfare hvor kjær Cæsar havde Eder. I ere ikke Træe, I ere ikke Stene, I ere Mennesker; og da I ere Mennesker saa skulde Testamentet, om I hørte det, sætte Eder i Flamme, det skulde gjøre Eder rasende. Det er godt at I ikke vide, at I ere hans Arvinger; thi vidste I det, O, hvad vilde der da blive af?

Den fjerde: Læs Testamentet; vi ville høre det, Antonius! Du maae læse Testamentet for os, Cæsars Testamment!

Antonius: Ville i være rolige? Ville I bie lidt? Jeg er gaaen for vidt at jeg har sagt Eder noget derom—jeg frygter jeg fornærmer de hederlige Mænd, som have myrdet Cæsar—jeg befrygter det.

Den Fjerde: De vare Forrædere!—ha, hederlige Mænd!

The translation continues to the point where the plebeians, roused to fury by the cunning appeal of Antony, rush out with the cries:<sup>2</sup>

2. Pleb: Go fetch fire!

3. Pleb: Plucke down Benches!

2. Pleb: Plucke down Formes, Windowes, anything.

But we have not space for a more extended quotation, and the passage given is sufficiently representative.

The faults are obvious. The translator has not ventured to reproduce Shakespeare's blank verse, nor, indeed, could that

<sup>2</sup> *Julius Caesar*. III, 2. 268-70. Variorum Edition Furness. Phila. 1913.

be expected. The Alexandrine had long held sway in Danish poetry. In *Rolf Krage* (1770), Ewald had broken with the tradition and written an heroic tragedy in prose. Unquestionably he had been moved to take this step by the example of his great model Klopstock in *Bardiete*.<sup>3</sup> It seems equally certain, however, that he was also inspired by the plays of Shakespeare, and the songs of Ossian, which came to him in the translations of Wieland.<sup>4</sup>

A few years later, when he had learned English and read Shakespeare in the original, he wrote *Balders Død* in blank verse and naturalized Shakespeare's metre in Denmark.<sup>5</sup> At any rate, it is not surprising that this unknown plodder far north in Trondhjem had not progressed beyond Klopstock and Ewald. But the result of turning Shakespeare's poetry into the journeyman prose of a foreign language is necessarily bad. The translation before us amounts to a paraphrase,—good, respectable Danish untouched by genius. Two examples will illustrate this. The lines:

. . . . . Now lies he there,  
And none so poor to do him reverence.

are rendered in the thoroughly matter-of-fact words, appropriate for a letter or a newspaper "story":

. . . . . Nu ligger han der,  
endog den Usleste nægter ham Agtelse.

Again,

I have o'ershot myself to tell you of it,

is translated:

Jeg er gaaen for vidt at jeg sagde Eder noget derom.

On the other hand, the translation presents no glaring errors; such slips as we do find are due rather to ineptitude, an inability to find the right word, with the result that the writer has contented himself with an accidental and approximate rendering. For example, the translator no doubt understood the lines:

The evil that men do lives after them,  
The good is oft interred with their bones.

but he could hit upon nothing better than:

Det Onde man gjør lever endnu efter os;  
det Gode begravnes ofte tilligemed vore Been.

<sup>3</sup> Rønning—*Rationalismens Tidsalder*. 11-95.

<sup>4</sup> Ewald—*Levnet og meninger*. Ed. Bobe. Kbh. 1911, p. 166.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* II, 234-235.