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Translational Agency in Liang Shiqiu's Vernacular Sonnets

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Literary translations appeal to readers by virtue of echoes they evoke between cultures, because translations work with, rather than work out of, the space between languages. Translation exposes the fundamental instability of languages as systems of communication by drawing attention to shifting meanings of words or cognates, as Michael Saenger has theorized (3–5). Translations can, on the one hand, erase difference, and, on the other hand, *recognize* difference, with an eye toward equality. An example of this type of contemporary translational agency is Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells' paraphrase of the sonnets in their recent collection *All the Sonnets of Shakespeare*. Their prose "translation," found in a section entitled "literal paraphrases" in the appendices, highlights the many ambiguities, from the gender of the addressee to semantic meanings, in the sonnets (233–290). The translator's agency, rather than superficial compatibilities between languages, has led to the phenomenon

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of modernization of literary meanings. As André Lefevere's study shows, literary translation primarily serves nonprofessional readers who cannot, or choose not to, access the source text (14). In this context, the translational agency is one of artistic creation rather than reproduction of semantics or musicality. The translational agency emerges from an artist's negotiation with the powers that be—political, cultural, poetic. Translators confront various forms of linguistic and cultural otherness and produce just enough familiarity to engage their readers while preserving part of that otherness.

Like Virginia Woolf's 1928 novel *Orlando: A Biography*, the autobiographical and ambiguous nature of *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Never before Imprinted* (1609) challenges the binaries between genders and between the vernacular and the literary across history. Many themes in the sonnets, including their addressees, remain open for interpretation. Over the centuries and around the world, translators have taken up this challenge. Some have turned the poems into expressions of humanism, as is the case of Taiwanese essayist and lexicographer Liang Shiqiu's (1903–1987) translation.¹

Taking a cue from what Susan Bassnett calls the cultural turn in translation studies and the translation turn in cultural studies (123–140), I consider the linguistic and cultural aspects of translational agency by examining both textual and extratextual materials. In the process, I attend not only to word choice but also to literary patronage as well as the translator's own rationale for the project, for, as Lawrence Venuti notes, "every step in the translation process—from the selection of foreign texts to the editing ... and reading of translations—is mediated by the diverse cultural values that circulate in the target language ... in some hierarchical order" (308). This chapter close-reads Liang's annotated translations of the *Sonnets* within the contexts of his stated rationale and of early and mid-twentieth-century historical contexts. To highlight Liang's translational agency, I also offer comparative analyses of his translations and those of his contemporaries.

¹ Liang is his last name. East Asian names appear in the order of family name followed by given name, in respect of East Asian customs, except when they are more familiar inverted (for instance, scholars who publish in English). I adopt the pinyin romanization system for Chinese.

THE POLITICS OF VERNACULAR TRANSLATION

Widely known in the Sinophone world as the first and, so far, the only person to have single-handedly translated and annotated all of Shakespeare's plays, poems, and sonnets into modern vernacular Mandarin Chinese, Liang Shiqiu uses translations of the Western canon to promote the written vernacular (*baihua wen*, or "written colloquial language") during a time when classical Chinese was regarded as the preferred vehicle for literature, especially the translation of canonical, pre-modern foreign literature.

It is valuable for global Shakespeare studies to attend to ideological and sonic differences in translations into languages far removed from European languages, such as the Mandarin vernacular being created and championed by Liang. The challenges he faced are distinct from those confronted by his European peers, because European languages share "patterns of sound-symbolism" with English. Linguist Stephen Ullmann identifies these patterns in the following examples:

Verbs for snoring in many languages contain an /r/ sound (English *snore*, German *schnarchen*, Dutch *snorken*, Latin *stertere*, French *ronfler*, Spanish *roncar*, Russian *chrapét'*, Hungarian *borkolni*, etc.), and those for whispering an /s/, /ʃ/ or /tʃ/ (English *whisper*, German *wispern* and *flüstern*, Norwegian *bviske*, Latin *susurrare*, French *chuchoter*, Spanish *cuchichear*, Russian *sheptát*, Hungarian *súgni*, *susogni*, *suttogni*, etc.). (69)

The sonic and semantic differences between Chinese and Anglo-European languages, for Liang, create linguistic and cultural opportunities in enriching the vernacular and articulating anew poetic sensibilities for both Liang's and Shakespeare's works.

Liang's translational agency emerges from the island republic's history of art patronage and immigration. Historically, Taiwan has been open to elements from different cultures, partly through colonization and partly through international trade.² An island off the southeast coast of China, Taiwan has had complex relationships with the dominant Mandarin-Chinese culture across the strait and with Japan to the north. It was first colonized by the Dutch (1624–1661), before being partially governed by

² For a compelling history of Taiwan in relation to Chinese modernity, see Spence, 46–49 and 51–57.

Zheng Chenggong (known as Koxinga in Europe) from 1661 to 1683 who is best known as the pirate-turned-general who defeated the Dutch colonizers and reclaimed, on behalf of the Chinese Ming dynasty, Taiwan as a territory. The Chinese Qing imperial court took over Taiwan from 1683 to 1895. After China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, Taiwan was ceded to Japan for fifty years. As a result, Japanese forces colonized Taiwan and mandated education in the Japanese language for residents of the island. At the end of World War II in 1945, the Japanese forces in Taiwan surrendered to the government of the Republic of China, known as the Kuomintang Nationalist government.

Currently, some of the main languages spoken on the island are Mandarin, Taiwanese, Hakka, Japanese, and the indigenous Formosan languages. The version of Mandarin used in Taiwan differs from that in China in writing system, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Mandarin in Taiwan (Guoyu), for example, is characterized by its traditional, complex-character writing system (rather than simplified Chinese script). The Standard Mandarin (Putonghua), in use in China, features the frequent addition of a final -r sound to a syllable (known as *erhua* accent). Both versions of Mandarin have four pitched tones. Meanwhile, Taiwanese, an octatonic dialect that exists primarily in oral form, shares linguistic features with Southern Min, the tonal dialect spoken in China's Fujian province as well as parts of Southeast Asia, such as Singapore. Mandarin speakers in Taiwan and China—despite their distinctive vocabularies—are mutually intelligible, but not speakers of Taiwanese and Mandarin. The multilingual, immigrant society of Taiwan influenced Liang's decision to further promote Taiwan's Mandarin vernacular, written in traditional characters, rather than translating Western works into classical Chinese or publishing in the simplified Chinese script that was promoted by the Communist Party in China.

Liang's agenda is twofold. On one hand, he believes in the role of translation in extending the life of the canon. From Liang's perspective, his translational agency is shaped by the moral responsibility of giving his readers access to what he deems world-class literature. On the other hand, he is invested in enriching the modern Mandarin vernacular, a new form he promotes through the translation of pre-modern English literature. In an essay on the sonnet, he championed his perceived connections between Shakespeare's sonnets and his moralist intentions by quoting from William Wordsworth's poem ("an advocate of vernacular literature") in praise of the sonnets (1964: 197):

Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frown'd,
 Mindless of its just honours; with this key
 Shakespeare unlock'd his heart; the melody
 Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound.

Literary translation, for Liang, is both an artistic endeavor and a form of cross-cultural labor to give new life to the vernacular and to extend the afterlife of Shakespeare. A translator's role is to select the best poetry and reproduce its beauty, for literature is the product of "a few geniuses" rather than the masses (1987, 2: 204–205).

Guided by these principles, Liang produced a copiously annotated translation of the sonnets. His translation is enhanced by reproduced illustrations from Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke's nineteenth-century edition. Some notes provide criticism and interpretation, while others unpack words or expressions to supply meanings the translation is unable to contain.

LITERARY PATRONAGE

Born in Beijing in 1903, Liang relocated to Taipei in 1949 when Chiang Kai-shek's central government of the "Republic of China" moved to Taiwan and when Mao Zedong's army took over China and established the People's Republic of China. Liang's relocation to Taiwan was also spurred by fierce attacks on his work by leftist Chinese writer, Lu Xun (the penname of Zhou Shuren, 1881–1936), who called Liang "a homeless dog [*sang jia gou*] serving capitalists" (qtd. Bai 166).³ In the China of the 1940s, Liang was derided as a bourgeois and elitist writer due to his preference for literary genres and subject matters far removed from the "revolution" and his rejection of the politicization of literature.⁴ It is the subject matter, rather than his preference for the vernacular, that made Liang a "bourgeois" writer who keeps his distance from the causes of the revolution.

His relocation to Taiwan was a pivotal turning point for his ambitious translation project. Having escaped the tumultuous Cultural Revolution

³ Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Chinese and German back into English are my own. On the severity of the pejorative phrase "homeless dog," see Li (2010).

⁴ For a succinct account of Lu Xun's criticism of the bourgeois and elitist tendency of Liang Shiqu and the Crescent Moon Society, see Wong (2008).

(1966–1976), where foreign works, including those by Shakespeare, were banned, and having been ostracized from the Chinese literary circle, Liang worked steadily and persistently on his translation of Shakespeare in the relatively stable political environment of Taiwan. Part of Liang’s unarticulated agenda was to revitalize the Mandarin vernacular in the traditional script and distance it from the language, in simplified characters, used in the People’s Republic of China which increasingly incorporates Soviet-inspired neologism (Chen 2015; Hsia 1956) and “proletarian” vocabulary such as *gàn* (to do, to make, to kill; also refers to sexual intercourse) and *tóngzhì* (comrades, referring to one’s lovers as well as coworkers, supervisors, friends, family). Liang translates the sonnets into a distinctively non-Communist vernacular.

Translating all of Shakespeare’s writing was a monumental task that occupied Liang from 1930 to 1967. A large majority of his project was completed after he took up residency in Taiwan, having fled the wars from China under the patronage of influential philosopher Hu Shi (1891–1962). Hu Shi initiated the vernacular movement known as *baihua wen yundong* in 1917. The campaign called for the government, educational establishments, writers, and public media to adopt the modern vernacular. Among the eight principles proposed by Hu are the elimination of “old clichés,” an aversion to using couplets, and the intentional use of popular expressions (357–360), all of which are reflected by Liang’s translation of the sonnets. Hu also played a key role in the completion of Liang’s translation. Liang wrote that “even though Mr. Hu did not possess in-depth knowledge about Shakespeare, he knew the importance of translating Shakespeare and made all the arrangements. Without his enthusiastic support, I would not have taken the path less traveled” (1970: 98). Hu was himself a major supporter of the vernacular movement of the time, and, under Hu’s patronage, it comes as no surprise that Liang opted to render the sonnets in vernacular prose. In a time when the Chinese Communist Party was taking over China with Soviet-Marxist ideologies, Liang promoted what he saw as humanist values associated with Shakespeare as a countermeasure.

In 1930, while chairing the translation committee of the China Foundation for the Promotion of Education and Culture, Hu Shi invited five scholars—Liang Shiqiu, Wen Yiduo, Xu Zhimo, Ye Gongchao, and Chen Tongbo—to translate and produce a definitive edition (*dingben*) of all of Shakespeare’s works. Having earned a PhD from Columbia University and served as China’s ambassador to the United States (1938–1942)

and President of the Academia Sinica, Hu was one of the most influential public men of letters in modern China (Chiang 2004). His pursuit of definitive editions of the Western canon was informed by his role in China's modernization movement and his position as a purveyor of Western knowledge within East Asia. Detailed plans were made by Hu, including style ("we shall experiment with verse and prose before deciding on the best approach to translate the texts") and compensation ("the highest possible stipend will be offered, because this collection will sell" (Liang 1970: 94). As part of the "discovery by experiment" scheme, Hu commissioned Wen and Xu to translate Shakespeare into verse, and Liang and Chen to translate the same texts into vernacular prose.

By 1931, it had been decided that only the written vernacular would be used in the translation, that annotations should be added where necessary, and that all proper names should be transliterated into the Chinese script following standard Mandarin pronunciations (e.g., Shakespeare as Shashibiya) rather than translated semantically (e.g., *Mistress Overdone* as *Gan Guotou* [Trying Too Hard]). One drawback is that Anglo-European personal names can become long and unwieldy in Chinese, because Chinese names are commonly only two to three syllables in length. Since Chinese is a monosyllabic language, a name of six syllables (first and last names) will require at least six characters. As it turned out, due to the ongoing wars, Liang was the sole person in the group to complete the work. The large-scale team project fell apart, and eventually Liang single-handedly completed the translation of all of Shakespeare's works.

Liang became a major figure in cross-cultural exchange in Taiwan. Shakespeare's sonnets have not been as popular as his tragedies and comedies there. As Liang himself readily acknowledged, there were few satisfactory translations of the sonnets. "Among the genres of poetry, essay, novel, and drama," wrote Liang, "poetry is the most difficult to translate, especially from English into a language as distant as Chinese." Mandarin prosody is based on changes in pitch as well as in accent of the written character. He reasoned that because "the language of poetry is refined, allusive, subtle, and elusive, it is very hard to reproduce all of the aspects that constitute the experience of poetry" (1987, 2: 200–201). He does not wish to translate suggestive language into explicit declarations of intent, and believes that, to the extent possible, one has to attend to rhyme, rhythm, and form. Liang has played an important role in expanding local readership of the sonnets and helped add the sonnets

to the curriculum. His translation of *The Complete Works* has been a staple in the classroom since the mid-twentieth century.

In terms of poetic forms, Liang's choice in his translation stands out among his peers. The early modern sonnet is commonly known in Chinese as "fourteen-lined poetry," which emphasizes the genre's formalistic feature above all else. Liang opted for rhymed prose to reproduce the metric form of ABAB/CDCD/EFEF/and GG, as in, for instance, lines ending with the words shengyù (to give birth)/bùxǐǔ (immortal) and sǐqù (to die)/fēngliú (merry) in Liang's translation of the first 4 lines of sonnet 1. The lines in Liang's translation, however, have varying numbers of Chinese characters and syllables. The final words in each line, when possible, may share the same vowel and/or tonality, but Liang does not adhere to strictly defined rules of meter.

In contrast, other translators, such as Yu Erchang (1903–1984), another scholar who moved to Taiwan in 1949 and exerted a great deal of influence on Taiwan's Shakespeare studies, translated the sonnets using the heptasyllabic verse (*qīyan shī*), a poetic form that emphasizes even tonality, parallelism, and antithesis. Insisting on fidelity to the original form, Yu used the seven-syllabic format which was perceived to hold the same cachet and prestige in the Chinese literary tradition since the eighth century as the sonnet did in the Renaissance. Each line has the same number (7) of Chinese characters and syllables. Based on the Arden edition, Yu's translation appeared in an English-Chinese facing-page bilingual edition in 1961. Yu recreates a historical distance for his readers, while Liang attempts to modernize the sonnets for the mid-twentieth century. Yu contended that most Chinese translations of the sonnets no longer feel poetic, as "they are at most prose interpretations of the sonnets and read like essays, which has done great injustice to Shakespeare" (1996: 1–5). Yu's translation features fourteen lines with the same number of written Chinese characters (seven in each line) and the same rhyming scheme as Shakespeare's sonnets.

Yu gave priority to diction and classical allusions, while Liang believed it more efficient and accurate to translate the sonnets in rhymed prose with jagged lines. The pleasure afforded by translation lies in the alternating revelation and concealment of the shifting meanings of the sonnets.

UNIQUE FEATURE: ANNOTATIONS

Few East Asian translations of Western works come with such copious notes. Liang's translation features lengthy annotations that elaborate upon the meanings that could not be adequately rendered. Liang reiterated his principles in an essay entitled "A Translator's Tenet":

A good translator should avoid awkward expressions or patterns in the target language. Avoid literal translation at all cost. Annotate all allusions and difficult phrases. Provide sources of citations from authoritative studies in the notes. (qtd. Wu 1998: 51)

There are several instances where Liang admits to not being able to find better words in Mandarin or not being able to fully convey the meanings of the sonnets without interrupting the rhythmic flow of the lines. In a note on the word "conquest" in the last line of sonnet 6 ("Be not self-willed, for thou art much too fair/To be death's conquest and make worms thine heir"), Liang explains that "'conquest' does not refer to possessions acquired by brute force" (which is what the reader would assume from his translation, *qiangzhan*, acquisition by force) but instead, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* states, to "the personal acquisition of real estate with any means other than by inheritance" (1985, 12: 29).

Liang's patron played a role in his decision to add the annotations. While annotations are a staple feature of Liang's translation, his initial plan was to render the *Sonnets* enjoyable by Mandarin-speaking readers without having to refer to notes. As he wrote in his memoir: "I wanted my translation to be readable and enjoyable without any notes. Therefore, I started out without annotation. As I progressed, Hu Shi urged me to annotate key features or passages. Eventually I developed a great interest in annotating everything" (1970: 110).

LIANG SHIQIU'S HUMANIST AGENDA AND TRANSLATIONAL AGENCY

Liang's humanist agenda drives his translational agency. Liang was influenced by Irving Babbitt's New Humanism, as he studied under Babbitt at Harvard University. In an article in the June 1928 issue of *Crescent Moon*, Liang went against the class-based view of literature of his time to contend that "human nature" should be "the sole standard for

measuring literature” (1996: 310). As a humanist, Liang was interested in the universal literary experience and its artistic rather than political function. For example, in his note to the first sonnet, Liang draws on the allegory of poetry as a vehicle for immortality. He writes:

Sonnets 1-17 form a self-contained unit dedicated to a young man. The sonnets revolve around the narrator’s plea to the young man to get married and have offspring to carry on his beauty. This thought is not unusual, for any middle-aged person, having seen the contingency of life, will realize that only procreation will extend one’s blood line. (1985, 12: 182)

His note glosses over the question of the speaker’s affective feelings toward the young man. Without mentioning self-censorship, he does acknowledge that Shakespeare’s texts are full of “profanity” and indecency, and states that he will convey Shakespearean impropriety to the best of his ability.

Liang derives his moralistic view from the first sonnet cycle in Shakespeare’s collection, regarded as “ethically complex and narratively diffuse” (Schoenfeldt 2007: 129). The first sonnet declares: “From fairest creatures we desire increase / That thereby beauty’s rose might never die.” The convention of extolling idealized chaste women established by Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser in the previous decade is appropriated here to urge a young aristocratic man to “pity the world” and procreate so that his “tender heir” will “bear his memory” and carry on his beauty beyond the cruelty of time. Perceiving these lines to be evidence of the moral burden of literature, Liang takes to translating Shakespeare’s sonnets, “the best poetry in the world that has withstood the test of time,” arguing that if one drinks anything at all, one should “drink only first-rate tea and wine,” and if one wishes to read anything, one would do well to read only the classics (1987, 2: 204).

Liang is influenced by Babbitt as well as the Victorian poet Matthew Arnold, who pronounced unequivocally in 1869 that great works of art embody “the best which has been thought and said in the world” (viii). The moralist idea of literature’s socially reparative value, which Liang subscribes to, has a long history, though reparative interpretations of the canon have taken many different forms. In the twenty-first century, Martha Nussbaum has written extensively about how literature makes readers better people by enabling the good life of self-reflection (32–34). Some artists are invested in offering a corrective to the canon to promote

social justice. They reclaim the classics from ideologies associated with colonial and patriarchal practices. Other artists such as Liang, in contrast, draw on the canon's authority to "repair" and renovate performance genres, poetic expressions, and the vernacular. Liang uses the sonnets to claim cultural merit for the vernacular.

THE VERNACULAR SONNETS

To elevate the status of the vernacular, both Liang and his patron emphasize its utilitarian value. They demonstrate its value by translating Shakespeare into the Mandarin vernacular with modern punctuation—which is absent in classical Chinese. Liang's project bears nationalist significance, since the Mandarin vernacular also operates as a lingua franca across the Sinophone world and within the Chinese diaspora. Educated speakers of different versions of modern Mandarin (in China and Taiwan) and dialects (such as Taiwanese, Southern Min, Hakka) can all read written Mandarin in some form. Since Liang opposed the Communist rule of China and the Beijing government's adoption of simplified Chinese characters as the People's Republic of China's official writing system (Tsu 214), he published his translations in the traditional script known as the complex-character writing system which has been in use since the second century CE. It should be noted that the simplified writing system is also in use in Malaysia and Singapore, while the traditional script is widely adopted in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and the Sinophone diaspora. Throughout his illustrious career, Liang never explicitly stated his political stance regarding an independent Taiwan, but his decision to publish in the traditional script suggests his intention to enhance the vitality of the Mandarin vernacular in Taiwan as a form of cultural expression. Literary translation, therefore, is not merely a vehicle of communication but also a tool to renovate Chinese literary forms. Examples below reveal how Liang achieves this, and how his versions contrast with those produced by his peers.

Based on the 1943 reprint of W. J. Craig's Oxford edition, Liang's annotated translations of the *Sonnets* gloss over what he considers unpalatable sexual references. The translation also brushes aside the (then sensitive) question of a male speaker asking a young man to reproduce in sonnets 1–17. Since gendered pronouns are sometimes interchangeable in the Chinese language, with the contexts determining the exact meanings of the pronouns (Iljic), Liang glossed over a male speaker's

praises of the beauty of a young man. In other instances, Liang avoided assigning male or female identities to a speaker in the poems. In his translation of the first sonnet, for instance, he uses the neutral term *zuimei de ren* (the most beautiful person) for “fairest creatures.” It is notable that Liang translates “fair” elsewhere with different vernacular phrases beyond “beautiful.” Likewise, the word “blood” in the final line of sonnet 2 is translated by Liang simply as blood, with a subtle hint at the significance of “blood line” (sonnet 2: “... see thy blood warm when thou feel’st it cold”).

Liang’s gender-neutral choice stands in stark contrast to the translation by Gu Zhengkun, director of the Institute of World Literature at Beijing Foreign Studies University, as semen and sexual desire (“when your semen is devitalized and blood vessels have turned cold, you can reignite their warmth through the body of your offspring”). Gu’s footnote explains his masculinist reading by emphasizing male desire as the primary force of procreation: “This line refers to familial blood line as well as semen” (161 and 258n.11). In other instances, Liang seems to bend backward to ensure heterosexual themes. He translates “if thou thyself deceivest / By wilful taste of what thyself refuseth” in sonnet 40 into something oddly specific in terms of gender and interpersonal relationships: “if you lower yourself to mingle with a woman whom you do not love.” The “gentle thief” in the next line takes on a moralistic tone: “promiscuous robber.” While Liang pursued a vernacular translation with a conservative agenda, his version turns out to be ahead of his time, as the revisionist approaches of Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells demonstrate that the addressees in many sonnets cannot always be gendered because the context is fluid and ambiguous (27).

Liang has indeed enriched the vernacular by drawing on intuitive and subtle distinctions between various expressions in Chinese. For example, he translated the word “fair” in sonnet 127 (“In the old age black was not counted fair, / Or if it were it bore not beauty’s name”) as *biaozhi* (comely or good-looking) and the word “beauty” as *mei* (aesthetically beautiful). In classical texts, the word *biaozhi* often refers to the attractiveness of female facial features. As such, it is more clearly gendered than *mei* (beauty in the metaphysical sense). The word *mei* circulates more widely in the vernacular—both written and spoken—but the somewhat more literary *biaozhi* was introduced into the vernacular by Liang and eventually became part of the modern vernacular. Liang’s work reflects the phenomenon noted by Umberto Eco, that literary translation tends

to “modernize the source to some extent” by building in new relevance of the work to contemporary readers (22). Plays such as *Hamlet*, as I have examined elsewhere, have the potential to become a more politically charged work or to be used as a platform to discuss sensitive topics (2021). Liang’s sonnets, while they still thematize love, are a vehicle for the promotion of the vernacular.

While his contemporaries opted for the metaphorical in their translations, Liang favored a more colloquial vocabulary. For example, the “eye of heaven” in sonnet 18 is rendered as a giant eye in the sky (*tiankong zhi juyan*) by Cao Minglun (1995) and heavenly eye (*tianyan*) by Ruan Kun (2001). Liang simply translated it as the sun (*taiyang*) without any flourishes, for more immediate impact on his readers.

Liang’s translational agency is evident in his word choices and transformation of the sonnets into vernacular prose, a bold move in his time. It is ironic that Liang was accused of being an elitist in China when he approaches the sonnets with such plain, vernacular language. For instance, he evokes the idea of a court session where a defendant recalls his memories in sonnet 30: “When to the sessions of sweet silent thought/ I summon up remembrance of things past.” Sonnets 30 and 31 are a pair of melancholic sonnets that recall loved ones who are no longer there. The somber tone of sonnet 30 is accentuated by words with voiceless sibilants, such as “sessions,” “sweet,” “silent,” “summon,” and “past.” Together with words with voiced sibilants such as “things,” the sonnet offers sonic echoes of its sorrowful themes (Zhou 76–77). Edmondson and Wells interpret the idea of “session” as “happy and peaceful contemplation” in their paraphrasing, though they do gloss the word as “(court) sittings” (156, 266). In contrast, Liang renders this couplet as a scene in a court: “As I summon memories of past events, I arrive in the court (*gongtang*) of sweet, silenced thoughts.” *Gongtang* often comes with negative connotations, as in the expression “legal confrontation” (*dui bu gongtang*, to accuse someone in a public courtroom or to take someone to court).

Liang’s interpretations and translations of the sonnets have been influential on subsequent translators; for example, his successors ended up adopting the idea of *gongtang* (court of law) in their translations. Cao Minglun renders the lines with an element of legal judgment as “Whenever I summon dusty memories to the public court that judges meditative thoughts” (1995), while Liang Zongdai (not related to Liang Shiqiu) makes it explicit that the speaker has been summoned to court, using even

more specific legal language: “When I appear in the court of musky (*shexiang*), pensive thoughts, I summon memories of past events” (1992). Built around the idea of a court sitting, Liang Zongdai’s version uses Chinese words with similarly voiceless sibilants to create a similar sonic impression: *shexiang* (musky) and *moxiang* (pensive thoughts). These are but many examples of how one word choice by Liang has influenced subsequent generations of translators who expand upon the seed Liang has sown.

Many translators acknowledge the challenges of translating such loaded words as “fair” in contrast to beauty. Renowned Egyptian playwright Mohamed Enani ponders: “How do you translate both words into Arabic so as to distinguish the sense of beauty denied a dark complexion?” He interprets beauty here as something purely physical (“white skin and blond hair”). This stands in contrast to “fairness” which refers to “the abstract qualities [of] goodness and righteous[ness]; the subjective element [that has] enabled the swarthy face to look ... attractive” (121). Enani, after some soul searching, chose *ءانسان* (*hasnā*) for “fair” and *جمال* (*jamāl*, a word derived from camel) for beauty. Likewise, in rendering variegated concepts of “beauty” fluidly relational (from superficially comely to transcendently beautiful), Liang has expanded the vernacular and enriched the translation’s fluctuating relationship to Shakespeare.

Exceptionally in his translations, which are usually full of annotations, Liang does not provide any annotation for *biaozhi* (fair) and *mei* (beauty). This choice most likely reflects Liang’s satisfaction with his achievement of vernacular “clarity at a glance” (*yimu liaoran*) in translating this tricky couplet.

Liang’s translation of sonnet 90 is another example of his occasional deference to the more immediate impact of vernacular expressions, thereby eschewing verbose annotations. Along with sonnet 89, sonnet 90 addresses the emotions of parting with a friend of unspecified gender. The keywords in the first quatrain are “wilt” and “spite of fortune”:

Then hate me when thou wilt, if ever, now,
Now while the world is bent my deeds to cross,
Join with the spite of fortune, make me bow,
And do not drop in for an after-loss.

The opening line is glossed by Edmondson and Wells as “hate me whenever you will,” with a more open timeframe (“whenever” 253). Liang, in contrast, emphasizes the imperative form in the present (“now”) in the first line: “If you want to hate me, go ahead. If you wish, hate me now.” He continues with a liberal sprinkling of more loaded vocabulary than sonnet 90:

Now, right now, when people in the world are bent on beating me and,
Working hand in hand with the god of fortune, to entrap me and force
me to bow.
Do not wait to catch me off guard and torture me in the future. (1985,
12:129)

Among the notable new elements Liang has introduced are the god of fortune (replacing the “spite of fortune”), entrapment, and human foes and gods working hand in hand against the narrator. He also repeats the urgent, temporal designator “now” three times. Instead of footnoting the quatrain, Liang augments the narrator’s rhetorical plea (“If you want to hate me”) with the more dramatic situation of being entrapped by gods.

Liang’s dramatization inspired Fang Ping (1921–2008), President of the Chinese Shakespeare Society and honorary member of the Hong Kong Translation Society. In his translation, Fang introduces the theme of “career” (*shiyè*) while maintaining the imperative in a rhetorical form:

If you want to hate me, hate me now;
Take advantage of this moment when people are sabotaging my career,
To collude with ill fortune to conquer [*zhansheng*] me in battle.
Do not catch me off guard later when you take sudden action. (257)

Setting Liang’s and Fang’s versions side by side, it is notable that some key elements Liang introduced were carried over in Fang’s rendition, such as a tug of war between the narrator and their absent friend and the narrator’s rhetorical plea for the friend to take action now rather than catching them off guard in the future. The simple imperative in sonnet 90 becomes, in both Liang’s and Fang’s translations, a more full-fledged speech.

CONCLUSION

Translations create new communities. The new vernacular community Liang creates echoes the kind of community described by French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, a shared community of “being-together” that is defined by its “being-in-common” but not by universal sameness (xxxix). The concept of community can be applied to translation studies to reveal what translations share in common with the translated, namely “the being-in-common, the standing-in-relations between two texts.” In expanding the meanings of the Sonnets and the vernacular without subjugating one to the other, Liang renders the otherness in familiar and uncanny forms.

Liang’s revolutionary vernacular prose translations have been well received. Zhang Chong, Shakespeare scholar at Fudan University in Shanghai, for instance, praised the contribution of Liang’s prose translation: “Prose as a form enables the translator to adjust the length of each line of the sonnet to more fully express cultural, historical, and linguistic subtexts. The sonnets in prose would appeal not only to general readers but also actors and audiences” (70). Reflecting on his decision to transform the sonnets into prose poetry, Liang remains open minded: “While I prioritize prose as a form, I very much support any translator who opts for the poetic form” (qtd. Ke 48). In conclusion, in Liang’s sonnets, the form is part of his message.

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Shakespeare's Global Sonnets: An Introduction

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The sonnet and the sonnet sequence or cycle have long been a staple of the literary landscape in Britain. The English or Elizabethan sonnet had been very popular throughout the sixteenth century, when one of its most notable uses was as a means by which young men communicated their heartfelt affection for their beloveds. I recall being told as an undergraduate that some 300,000 sonnets had been composed during the English Renaissance. One could easily imagine a young man with aristocratic pretensions penning a sonnet to his lady love, but one must wonder how such a numerical determination could have been made by literary historians, but apparently it was. From Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* to Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti* to Michael Drayton's *Idea* to Lady Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, the early modern period abounds with brilliant sonnet sequences.

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While Shakespeare was the composer of some 154 sonnets, which comprised his sonnet sequence, he also included sonnets in his plays, where they are penned by love-sick young men. Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells assert that “The most heavily sonnet-laden of all Shakespeare’s plays is *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, written we believe around 1594–5, at the height of the fashion for sonnet writing” (2020, 11). The climax of the play arrives when the King of Navarre and the three courtiers overhear each other reciting sonnets that they have written to ladies whom they claim to love. Certainly, they are not the last male characters in a Shakespearean play to make such attempts at writing sonnets. Orlando in *As You Like It* is chastised by Jaques for attaching sonnets to trees in the Forest of Arden. Even Hamlet’s attempt at writing a sonnet to Ophelia is criticized by Polonius for his use of the “vile” phrase, “beautified Ophelia.” Benedick, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, is yet another inept composer of sonnets, who has finally admitted to himself that he loves Beatrice and laments his inability to express his love in verse: “Marry, I cannot show it in rhyme; I have tried; I can find out no rhyme to ‘lady’ but ‘baby,’ an innocent rhyme; for ‘scorn,’ ‘horn,’ a hard rhyme; for ‘school,’ ‘fool,’ a babbling rhyme; very ominous endings; no, I was not born under a rhyming planet, nor I cannot woo in festival terms” (5.2.33–39) (147). Yet, in the same play, as Edmondson and Wells point out, Claudio hangs an epitaph on Hero’s funeral monument, “which has the rhyme scheme of a sonnet sestet (though it is written in trochaic tetrameters, not the usual iambic pentameters) which is followed by an additional couplet” (13). This is followed by lines that form a quatrain, and then another quatrain. Perhaps the most archetypal of all Shakespeare’s couples is Romeo and Juliet, who express their love for each other via a sonnet when they initially meet at the Capulets’ masked ball. Marjorie Garber describes this as a “most unusual sonnet, in that it is spoken by two people, and thus breaks the convention of the love sonnet of the adoring lover who writes of, and to, his beloved because he cannot reach her in person, whether she is married to someone else, or because she insists (like Rosaline) on remaining chaste” (2005, 194).

Shakespeare’s sonnet sequence is highly unusual in the period for refusing to name its beloved(s), generating considerable interest in the real-life prototypes for these “characters.” Alvin Kernan praises the sonnets as “the supreme love poems of the English language, and attention has long focused almost exclusively on their exquisite language and subtle feelings” (1995, 172), but he goes on to refer to the “older,

socially inferior poet” and the “aristocratic young patron.” John Kerrigan observes that, “When the Sonnets appeared in 1609 they were introduced by a dedication which included [the Earl of] Southampton’s initials in reverse” (2006, 73), though he questions whether the initials, W. H., refer to Henry Wriothesley or to Shakespeare’s future patron, William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke, to an unidentified man, or a fictive personage (74). How we answer these questions will influence how we interpret the poems as a whole, but at the same time, “the answers will also be shaped by the experience of grappling with particular poems” (74).

The purported division between the first 126 sonnets, supposedly addressed to the young man, and the remaining 28 sonnets, addressed to the proverbial “dark lady,” dates back to 1780 when Edmund Malone edited the Quarto (Kingsley-Smith 2019, 2). This bipartite division of the sonnet sequence has been a source of contention for many years. Writing the introduction for the Signet edition of the sonnets in 1964, W. H. Auden noted the seeming division within the sonnet sequence, but he also noticed that not all of the sonnets appeared to be in correct chronological order, as Sonnets 40 and 42 “must be more or less contemporary with 144 and 152” (xxi). Even if readers were to take the first 17 sonnets of this sonnet sequence as one thematic cluster, Sonnet 15 does not belong in this unit as it does not mention marriage (xxi). Literary scholars, however, are slowly changing their minds regarding this bipartite division within the sonnets, just as Auden did 58 years ago.

In *The Afterlife of Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, Jane Kingsley-Smith suggests that “the reasons why we continue to perpetuate a bipartite division are varied but include the fact that ‘it is easier to discuss these poems critically if one can determine to whom they refer and what story they tell.’ It certainly makes them easier to teach” (3). Likewise, editors have seen fit through the ages to change whatever they considered necessary about the sonnets. For example, John Benson thought it was best in his 1640 edition of the sonnets to change “pronouns from male to female in Sonnet 101 and [he] replaced ‘boy’ with ‘love’ in Sonnet 108” (Kingsley-Smith 3), but Benson was not the last editor to change the gender of the male addressee. We will see in Line Cottagnie’s essay, “The Rival Poet and the Literary Tradition: Translating Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* in French” that Leon de Wailly “changed the gender of the addressee to female in two sonnets, even though he also argued that the sonnets to the dark lady were at least as immoral as the ones to the young man, if not more.”

Edmondson and Wells have brilliantly cut the Gordian knot regarding the sexuality of the speaker in the sonnets by suggesting that he is actually bisexual: "Whilst some critics have focused on reading Shakespeare's Sonnets through a gay lens, relatively few have celebrated them as the seminal bisexual texts of literature in English" (31). They cite Marjorie Garber's bisexual reading of the sonnets and her challenge to critical orthodoxy: "Why avoid the obvious? *Because* it is the obvious? Or because a bisexual Shakespeare fits no one's erotic agenda?" (31).

Regardless of what controversy engages the world of Shakespearean studies, people from all over the globe will continue to read Shakespeare's sonnets in their own unique fashion, just as the speaker in Sonnet 18 states in the couplet, "So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,/ So long lives this, and this gives life to thee." In keeping with the theme of the globality of these sonnets and their applicability to all nations and nationalities, Kingsley-Smith makes clear in her own essay, "'Mine is Another Voyage': Global Encounters with Shakespeare's Sonnets," how Shakespeare's sonnets have migrated from the British Isles to every region of the world. In many ways, this collection of essays demonstrates not only the on-going popularity of these sonnets throughout the globe, but also how powerfully they affect and influence those who read them or watch them performed in front of live actors. These essays are extraordinarily wide-ranging, taking readers from Helsinki to Hong Kong and from Italy to India. They are not simply interpretative analyses of the sonnets as printed texts, but consider the treatment of these sonnets in both the dramatic and cinematic spheres. In Nely Keinanen and Jussi Lehtonen's essay, "Institutions of Love and Death: Shakespeare's Sonnets in Elderly Care Facilities," Keinanen describes how Lehtonen poignantly performed these sonnets in convalescent homes for the entertainment of the sick and elderly, who responded very powerfully to the themes of love, loss, and death. Lehtonen reported that one nurse thought that his performance of the sonnets was "not suitable for old people's homes. 'Because the residents prefer very traditional art.'" It is hard for me to envision more "traditional art" than Shakespeare's sonnets, but, be that as it may, the residents in these convalescent homes were greatly moved by Lehtonen's performances. Obviously, not all of the essays in this volume pull upon one's heartstrings as this essay does, but this particular essay shows how the sonnets can be put to use in a therapeutic, salutary, and practical fashion and do not necessarily function as rarified, literary documents that bear little if any relation to the experiences of ordinary women and men.

In another example of an essay that renders the sonnets in an unexpectedly beautiful fashion, "Reclaiming the Sonnets in *The Angelic Conversation*: Derek Jarman's Queer Home Movies," Jim Ellis invites us into the extraordinary world of this gay, British independent filmmaker. Jarman created a truly magical, dramatic iteration of the sonnets in his film, *The Angelic Conversation*, which depicts a gay male relationship set in an Elizabethan manor while the actors wear the conventional attire of men in the 1980s. This was a truly ground-breaking cinematic rendition of two gay men interacting with each other, as veteran British actress, Judi Dench, read 14 of the 154 sonnets in such a way as to structure a relationship between the two men. This film, made in 1985, was especially apropos given the outbreak of AIDS in the gay community at this time. The two essays written by Keinanen and Lehtonen and Ellis serve as powerful examples of how the contributors to this collection have interpreted the various ways in which the sonnets have been taken out of the study and into the lives of ordinary men and women.

GLOBAL TRANSLATIONS: DEFINING THE NATION, REFINING POETICS

Line Cottagnie's essay, "The Rival Poet and the Literary Tradition: Translating Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in French," offers an extraordinary overview of the chronology of the various translators who have tackled these sonnets. As she states: "This chapter offers a comprehensive study of the translation history of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* over 200 years. Focusing on several key aspects of the cultural and literary history, it shows how translating Shakespeare's sonnets has often been a way of confronting the ultimately canonical 'rival poet,' but also of challenging the French literary tradition." She addresses the major concerns that have troubled translators over the centuries, specifically the "sonnets' autobiographical nature, the elusive identities of the addressees, and the enigmatic narrative thread," as well as the sonnets' perceived homosexuality. Nevertheless, Shakespeare's sonnets have been perceived as the "ultimate touchstone, a holy grail of poetry" by nineteenth and twentieth century French translators.

Just as Cottagnie is concerned with the history of the translation of Shakespeare's sonnets, so too are Allison L. Steenson and Luca Trissino in their essay, "A Stylistic Analysis of Montale's Version of Sonnet 33: Translation, Petrarchism and Innovation in Modern Italian Poetry." They

observe early on in the discussion that “The text of sonnet 33 as translated by Montale provides a clear illustration of one of the main aspects of literary translation, i.e. its functioning as a site for cultural mediation and providing a space for the negotiation of cultural (linguistic, ideological) constructs.” As in Cottegnie’s essay, Steenson and Trissino emphasize how Shakespeare’s poetry “inform[s] modern literary traditions in languages other than English.” Montale uses a paradigm based upon the “high style of the Italian tradition, while at the same time treasuring Shakespeare’s formal exhortations and adapting the idea of faithfulness to the form of his own poetic score.” The essay offers an extremely fine close reading of Sonnet 33, which is virtuosic in its exacting textual analysis.

Valerio de Scarpis’s essay, “Addressing Complexity: Variants and the Challenge of Rendering Shakespeare’s Sonnet 138 into Italian,” first discusses the differences between the version of this sonnet that appeared as the first poem in the 1599 *Passionate Pilgrim* miscellany and its later inclusion in the 1609 Quarto collection as No. 138. What is most striking about this essay, apart from the support it offers to the idea of Shakespeare as a reviser of his sonnets, is the wide range of rhetorical terms that de Scarpis deploys, employing such terms as polyptoton, chiasmus, polysemy, and syntactic amphibology. He makes clear that the major division within the poem concerns the (in)sincerity *vs* sexual (mis) behavior of the speaker and his interlocutor, and explores the implications of the sonnet’s textual variants. Subsequent translators follow two precisely defined interpretations: “that of a straightforward, more candid reading, and that of a probing, malicious reading, both substantially legitimized by the ambivalence of the text.” De Scarpis examines three modern Italian translations of Sonnet 138 in detail to demonstrate how divergent interpretations can be.

Balint Szele, too, provides a wonderfully comprehensive overview of the history of the translation of the sonnets in his country in “‘Far from Variation or Quick Change’: Classical and New Translations of Shakespeare’s Sonnets in Hungary.” In the first complete edition of Shakespeare’s works, the sonnets finally appeared in print thanks to Karoly Szasz (1829–1905) and Vilmos Gyory (1838–1885). Although their sonnets “follow[] the form and structure of the original,” Szele informs us that “the imagery is weak, the language is contorted, many metaphors and puns are omitted, moods and feelings are not conveyed adequately.” It was Lorinc Szabo, who, in 1921, “translated all of the

sonnets into a contemporary, modern, clear Hungarian version.” Since Szabo’s translation, others have tried their hand, and Szele focuses on three contemporary poets—Tibor Csillag, Anna Szabo T., and Sandor Fazekas—all of whom demonstrate their appreciation of the sonnets’ complexity.

Melih Levi’s essay, “*Sonnets* in Turkish: Shakespeare’s Syllables, Halman’s Syllabics,” focuses on Talat Sait Halman’s translation of the sonnets in Turkish from a “comparative prosody angle.” Halman chose “syllabic verse, one of two dominant metrical structures in Turkish poetry, the other being *aruz*, a quantitative scheme based on syllable length.” Levi notes that both Shakespeare and Halman chose meters that “had claims of nationalism, nativity, and plainness attached to them.” Once the modern Turkish Republic was founded, reforms in language were introduced, which solidified the movement for syllabic verse. Although Halman had his doubts about syllabics, he finally decided upon 14 syllable lines with a caesura in the middle: “Syllabics proves perfect for capturing this tension between experiential stability and variability, between sustained conviction and self-deception.” Levi’s essay sustains a cogent and compelling argument about the superiority of syllabics over *aruz* in the translation of Shakespeare’s sonnets into Turkish and raises the question of whether Halman’s translations influenced the syllabic renaissance of the 1990s. He concludes that “a comparative approach to debates concerning verse and poetic form in these divergent contexts [of Shakespeare and Halman] reveals conceptual engagements that are strikingly similar in nature: the association of syllabic verse with plainness, a native style, nationalism, and a desire toward epigrammatic rhetoric.” Levi’s essay provides his audience with a wonderfully comprehensive understanding of Turkish poetics regarding the sonnets that readers will appreciate for years to come.

In Tabish Khair and Anne Sophie Refskou’s essay, “New Words: Language and Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* in the Global South,” we move even further south and east as the sonnets travel into India, the Caribbean, and Brazil. Khair and Refskou begin with the translation work of Rabindranath Tagore, who was greatly influenced by Shakespeare’s sonnets and plays, and acknowledge also the Malayalam critic and writer, K. Satchidanandan, who has recently published verse and prose translations of the sonnets. Looking back to the 1930s, Khair and Refskou discuss Una Marson’s “Caribbean engagements with the sonnets” in her *Tropic Reveries*, which “evoke a Shakespearean presence.” Moving on to

Brazil, they consider the work of Geraldo Carneiro, who has translated the sonnets in *O Discurso do Amor Rasgado* (*Speeches of torn love*). Finally, in the global North of Canada, Sonnet L'Abbé, writing as a mixed-race Canadian woman, "draws on the poetics of erasure to rewrite the Sonnets, but she does so by rearranging each letter of the original Shakespearean sonnet into a new, and lengthier prose version which subsumes and overwrites the original." Khair and Refskou conclude that "this text-centered network ... is a diverse, global Shakespearean textuality," and most certainly, that is exactly what a "Global Shakespearean" community is.

Reiko Oya's essay, "The Pauper Prince Translates Shakespeare's Sonnets: Ken'ichi Yoshida and the Poetics/Politics of Post-war Japan," examines Yoshida's engagement with the Sonnets, "against the backdrop of the rapidly democratizing Japanese society of the late 1940s through the 60 s." Oya's essay takes us from Yoshida's initial interest in Shakespeare's poetry because of his fascination with line 4 of Sonnet 18 through to the rewriting of his book, *English Literature*, in a colloquial style. The translator of 50 full-length books, Yoshida was most well-known for his 1955 translation of 43 of the 154 sonnets. He uses two different second-person pronouns so that his perceptions of the young man and the Dark Lady are more clearly shown—his view of the Dark Lady being overtly misogynistic. Oya concludes her essay by arguing that Yoshida's translation of Shakespeare's sonnets "created a new language for contemporary Japanese society," as well as influencing contemporary poets and the language that they used to create their own art. Her overview of post-war politics and poetics in Japan is both engaging and edifying, an intellectual delight for anyone interested in the assimilation of Shakespeare's sonnets into Japanese literary culture.

Alexa Joubin's essay, "Translational Agency in Liang Shiqui's *Sonnets*," discusses the problematic process of translating Shakespeare's sonnets into a language that is not Anglo-European. Citing the scholarship of Stephen Ullmann, Joubin discusses the linguistic challenges of translating a European language into Chinese because it does not have the same "patterns of sound symbolism." Liang was the first literary scholar to translate all of Shakespeare's work into Chinese, driven by two commitments: to "the role of translation in extending the life of the canon" and to "enriching the Chinese vernacular, a new form he promotes through the translation of pre-modern English literature." Liang was very fortunate to have patronage from Hu Shi, an important philosopher, who encouraged

Liang in his translation of Shakespeare's plays and poetry, during his time in Taiwan, where he lived having fled China. Joubin argues that Liang and Hu's goal was to "elevate the status of the vernacular." His decision to use gender-neutral pronouns anticipates Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells' claim that the "addressees in many sonnets cannot always be gendered because the context is fluid and ambiguous." Joubin concludes her essay by arguing that Liang's "concept of community" reflects that of the French philosopher, Jean-Luc Nancy, and that Liang "expand[s] the meanings of the Sonnets and the vernacular without subjugating one to the other." In many ways, this essay forces one to reflect upon the in-betweenness of translation, as both texts strive to provide as accurate a reflection of reality as their particular language is able to provide.

SONNETS IN PERFORMANCE: THEATRE, FILM, AND MUSIC

Filip Krajník and David Drozd's essay, "Playing the Poems: Five Faces of Shakespeare's Sonnets on Czech Stages," once again takes us into the realm of the theatrical performance of the sonnets, represented here by five twenty-first century productions. In the program for the 2001 production *Sonety, panove, sonety!* (*Sonnets, Gentlemen, Sonnets!*), the dramaturge, Zora Vondrackova, explains the play's feminocentric perspective: "In 28 pieces, addressed as the Dark lady is a woman mainly subjected to reproach for the suffering that she causes to the poet and his friend ... These sonnets are concerned with the fear of death, the changes of time that affects both the human soul and body, and other more general issues, and one can find consolation in the hope that, when writing this rich poetry, Shakespeare had women in mind as well." This production's *mise en scène* was a women's prison, a "world of men that dominates and objectifies women." The second production in question, written by Lucie Trmíková and directed by Jan Nebesky in 2013, was entitled *Kabaret Shakespeare* (*The Shakespeare Cabaret*). Three principal characters appear: "the Poet, the fair Youth, the addressee of the first group, and the mysterious Dark Lady, the addressee of the second group," and the performance focused upon the sexuality of the relationships. In 2017, the producers of the Municipal Theatre of Mlada Boleslav (Central Bohemia) transformed the sonnets into a narrative of Every Man and Every Woman in a production entitled *Sonety* (*The Sonnets*). Krajník and Drozd juxtapose this production with one performed at the Viola

Theatre in Prague, entitled *Svatecni Shakespearova posta* (*Shakespeare's Festive Letters*), in which the poet and director, Milos Horansky, impersonates Shakespeare and meets Martin Hilsky, the most significant and well-known translator of Shakespeare's sonnets. The final production that they critique is a 2019 production in Dlouha Theatre in Prague, entitled *Sonety* (*Sonnets*). These spellbinding dramatic performances will forever change audiences' understanding of the sonnets.

Marta Minier's essay, "Not for the Faint Hearted?: Volcano Theatre's *L.O.V.E.* as a Physical Theatre Adaptation of Shakespeare's Sonnets" explores the play created and first performed by a Welsh experimental theatre company in 1987. This "narrative dramatization" of the sonnets was written for three actors, the Lovely Boy, the Poet, and the Dark Lady. Minier describes the controversy caused by *L.O.V.E.* on account of its inclusion of a male-male kiss and locates it within the context of Volcano's approach to physical theatre, in which the "sexiness" of corporeality" is stressed "over the weight of erudition." The actors in this production of the sonnets interrogated "bourgeois theatre-going habits" by invasive interactions with the audience: kissing them, sitting in their laps, or through some other form of intimate interaction. By doing so, Volcano Theatre challenged the audience's notion of what constituted appropriate actor-audience behavior.

In moving from spoken word to music, Manfred Pfister's essay, "Music to Hear...?: From Shakespeare to Stravinsky," explores Sonnet 8 as adapted for musical performance. The first section explores the similarities and differences between two music-themed sonnets, 8 and 128. In Sonnet 128, the speaker "stages a living genre scene in which the lover watches his lady perform on a virginal," focusing on a particular object "close to erogenous parts of the beloved's body," while in Sonnet 8 the speaker implores the beautiful young man to marry. In his discussion of Igor Stravinsky's adaptation of Sonnet 8, Pfister notes how he changed the older male speaker's voice to that of a female, a mezzo-soprano. Stravinsky made this change in order to transform the young man's narcissism into the woman's voice as wooer. Pfister believes that Stravinsky is "working with, and against, Shakespeare's poem at the same time, marking historical distance and difference while attempting to bridge it in his subtle inter-art negotiations between Renaissance and present, between poetry and chamber music."

In "Shakespeare's Sonnets in Russian Music: Traditions-Genres-Forms," Stefan Weiss argues that to "set a sonnet to music is likely to lead

to unusual interpretations of form based on a strophic conception.” He provides two examples of this practice. First, in Sonnet 130, Weiss shows how Igor Novikov “shapes two musically identical strophes (A) from the first two quatrains,” and then how Valery Golovko stresses the couplet as the point of climax. Having provided his readers with two demonstration models, Weiss divides the essay into two sections: Shakespeare Sonnets in Russian and Soviet Art Song Traditions (1900–1970) and Shakespeare Sonnets in Soviet Popular Music (1970–1990). Weiss notes that there was an increase in setting the sonnets to music during World War II when the Soviet alliance became engaged with the culture of their allies. By 1974, the sonnets had become so popular that Leonid Kharitonov’s version of Dmitri Kabalevsky’s Sonnet 30 was actually filmed as it was performed.

Mike Ingham’s essay, “‘Moody Food of Us That Trade in Love’: Re-Mediations of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* in Popular Music,” follows in the same vein as Weiss’s essay concerning the incorporation of the sonnets into popular music. Ingham’s essay “explores the intertextual and remedial relations between the respective singer-songwriters’ settings and their hypotexts, as well as focusing on the intrinsic qualities that lend themselves to musical adaptation found in the sources.” Ingham cites the adaptations of Sonnets 20 and 29 and 18 and 138, produced by Rufus Wainwright and Paul Kelly, respectively, and how they interpret the sonnets’ musical qualities such as melody and tempo. Ingham opines that “Wainwright’s piano and vocal rendition of Sonnet 29 (‘When in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes’)” was truly “‘a marriage of true minds’, inaugurating what has proved an enduring relationship between Shakespeare’s sonnets and Wainwright’s songwriting and performance practices.” Of Kelly’s adaptation of Sonnet 18, he writes that “the song’s characteristic interplay between major and minor harmony not only underscores the light and shade that is central to its meaning, but also informs its binary imagery.” Ingham performs a virtuosic analysis of all four sonnets musically, but goes on to suggest that they might better suit the genre of hip hop, because rap is “closer to spoken-word delivery than most other genres.”

GLOBAL ISSUES IN THE SONNETS

The final section of the collection examines contemporary issues that transcend national boundaries and are particularly likely to inform the work of the sonnets in the classroom. Sophie Chiari’s essay, “‘O’er-green my bad’

(Sonnet 112): Nature Writing in the *Sonnets*,” argues that “the amorous ordeal of the poet is conveyed in terms of ecological crisis.” Chiari divides her essay into three sections. In “Good Husbandry,” she explores the association of the fair youth with the word “green,” suggesting comparison with a plant which needs to be nurtured so that it does not wither away. At the same time, “the language of nature is intertwined with that of commerce.” There is an innate antipathy “between nature and market,” which is “challenged early on in the poems: natural beauties are undermined by self-interested relationships and monetary ambitions.” In the second section, “Black Pastoralism,” Chiari explores a shift in the sonnets’ natural imagery to reflect feelings of “envy, despair, disgust, and helplessness.” In the third section, “Nature’s Agency,” the speaker “de-centres the traditional anthropocentric perspective on which most early modern poets relied. Whereas they compared plants to humans, he compares humans to plants.” In her conclusion, “Overgreening the Sonnets,” Chiari argues that “Shakespeare’s sonnets reveal a changing dynamic between the Elizabethans and their environment. We have seen that the natural habitat presented by the poet, marked by the advent of the Anthropocene, is in no way a space untouched by humans.” This essay is an intense intellectual interrogation of how Shakespeare’s sonnets engaged with the natural world.

Duncan Salkeld’s essay, “Black Luce and Sonnets 127–54,” suggests that “the connections between blackness and beauty” in these sonnets are informed by Shakespeare’s familiarity with Black Luce, a celebrated prostitute who operated a brothel in Clerkenwell. Her name is listed among those who attended the Great Hall of Gray’s Inn in December 1594, only eight days before Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors* was to be performed there; a play in which “Dromio puns on the name of the kitchen-maid Luce, whom he describes as ‘swart.’” Another “dark lady,” Rosaline, appears in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and occasions an impassioned defense of black beauty from Biron. Like Rosaline, the “dark lady” of the sonnets “allows us to see a power in the mistress’s complexion: to dazzle, captivate, create wonder, and poetry.” Perhaps the early modern English world’s notion of beauty was as complex as that of the twenty-first century.

Simona Laghi’s essay, “Shakespeare’s Sonnets in the ELT Classroom: The Paradox of Early Modern Beauty and 21st Century Social Media,” takes up the theme of beauty and colorism, examining how Sonnets 127–130, 131, and 132 “might be the starting point to reflect on the impact

that unrealistic digital images disseminated via social media has on identity formation as well as on mental health, and how these images become the basis of discrimination.” In the first short section, Laghi debunks the notion that these sonnets are necessarily divided into two clearly demarcated sections, Sonnets 1–126 and Sonnets 127–154, or that the sonnet sequence narrates a biography of Shakespeare’s life. She argues that the “discourse of beauty and identity that circulated in the Renaissance appears to be embedded in Sonnets 127, 130, 131, and 132,” but that it also resonates surprisingly with today’s beauty standards. It goes without saying that having students close read Sonnets 127, 130, 131, and 132 could be extremely conducive in improving their analytical skills concerning early modern English poetry, but at the same time this exercise makes them acutely aware of how one’s complexion influences the way one is perceived and judged.

Katalin Schober’s essay, “Pop Sonnets: The Interplay Between Shakespeare’s Sonnets and Popular Music in English Language Teaching,” analyzes popular songs rewritten as sonnets by Erik Didriksen. Like the Shakespearean sonnet, these songs have three quatrains and a couplet, and are written for the most part in iambic pentameter. Schober demonstrates how Didriksen’s versions of the Spin Doctors’ “Two Princes,” Van Morrison’s “Brown-Eyed Girl,” and Soft Cell’s “Tainted Love” are very similar thematically to Sonnets 21, 116, and 147. Schober explores the pedagogical value of these sonnets in creating “multiliteracies,” a term which “on the one hand ... comprises a sensitivity to different cultures entailing a sense of empathy, that is the capacity to imaginatively put oneself in one someone else’s shoes in order to gain some understanding of his or her condition. On the other hand, the concept of multiliteracies refers to the ability to decode various modes of meaning making.” Schober argues that these pop sonnets encourage students to ask questions about what they wish to do with their lives and what is of importance in friendships and romantic relationships. The tables with instructions that Schober provides are especially helpful for teaching the sonnets.

Encompassing some 20 essays by writers from 15 nations, this collection offers a multiplicity of topographies, chronologies, and critical approaches. When readers have completed their reading, they may be confronted with the question of how these essays change how they read, study, and teach Shakespeare’s sonnets. Will they understand the sonnets in a radically new, transformative fashion? Will they perceive how film

and theatre can transform these stunningly beautiful sonnets into extraordinary productions of sound, voice, color, and movement? Will their appreciation for the art of translation be enriched and expanded because of these fine essays? It is my hope that these essays will enable their readers to accomplish all of these goals. If anything, it is my hope that all those who read these essays will be more fully aware of the global reach of these sonnets' influence on individuals' lives and can even change their lives for the better, wherever they call home.

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