

The Rhyme and the Marble: Recent Multilingual and Multimedia Translations of Shakespeare's Sonnets

Review of *William Shakespeare's Sonnets for the First Time Globally Reprinted. A Quatercentenary Anthology 1609-2009*
edited by Manfred Pfister and Jürgen Gutsch (Dozwil TG Schweiz: Edition SIGNATHUR, 2009)

Several Shakespeare's sonnets, for example number 63, claim that unlike human beauty, poetry will be saved from decay, disappearance, aging and historicizing processes: "His beauty shall in these black lines be seen, / And they shall live, and he in them still green." Surely, the oblivion into which Shakespeare's sonnets fell during the two centuries following their original publication would undermine such prophesies. Nevertheless, since their 'rediscovery' in the last decades of the 18th century (e.g. by Edmond Malone), the sonnets have attracted increasing attention from readers, artists and critics. Appreciation and criticism of these texts, the plethora of scholarly forums and publications emerging in the last decades solidify the position of the sonnets in the very centre of the English literary canon. Yet, one of the key roles in this process is that of translators, who help to perpetuate the existence of the sonnets by enlarging their international readership. Their work then testifies to Shakespeare's self-assured confidence in sonnet 54 regarding the permanence of poetry transcending the durability of "marble" and "the gilded monuments / Of princes," which shall be outlived by "this powerful rhyme."

One of the most recent examples of the foretold permanence and vibrancy of the sonnets was the publication in 2009 of *William Shakespeare's Sonnets for the First Time Globally Reprinted. A Quatercentenary Anthology 1609-2009* edited by Manfred Pfister and Jürgen Gutsch. Prepared to commemorate an exceptional anniversary - four hundred years since the original quarto edition of the sonnets by Thomas Thorpe in 1609, the ambition of the book is in itself exceptional. As stated in their introductory essay, the editors wanted to "document the impact of the *Sonnets* on the cultural memory and imaginary of the various countries." (13) The fulfilment of such a mission is evidenced by the fact that the seventy-three chapters focus on the translations of Shakespeare's sonnets to different languages. Each section comprises an introductory annotated essay in English by a regional scholar or a translator delineating the character and history of the sonnet translations into a particular language. All contributions are followed by representative examples from available renditions. Such mapping of the sonnets' international reception is not an attempt on the part of the editors to provide a totalizing list of existing linguistic variations. For example, Mongolian translations are not included despite their documented existence. Nevertheless, the variety of languages represented in this volume is remarkable. Besides the major world languages, there are sections respecting original scripts (e.g. Ampharic or Arabic) as well as examples from such marginalized, uncommon languages and dialects as Maori, Esperanto, Farsi (Persian) and Cimbrian. Moreover, the preparations for this publication initiated the translation of selected sonnets into Maltese and sign languages. In other cases, the contributors point at the somewhat tardy appearance of the sonnets in some cultures, for example in Galician, yet an obvious increase in interest on the part of the local translators is emphasized. Perhaps tongue-in-cheek and with the intention to illustrate the unrivalled impact of

Shakespeare's sonnets beyond the surface of the Earth, the editors included a chapter illustrating their importance in the extraterrestrial, Star Trek-inspired Klingon culture, of course including sonnets translations.

Such a display of the ubiquitous reach of the sonnets is sufficiently astonishing in itself. Yet, the design of *Shakespeare's Sonnets Global* - the combination of cross-cultural and historic perspectives - reveals other illuminating facts. It transpires from the essays that there are generally discernible tendencies in the translation techniques and in the forms of presentations. This is illustrated by, for instance, a recent inclination towards annotated and double-language translations. Perhaps most importantly of all, the possibility of comparative readings with other texts highlights the historical diversity with which the sonnets 'conquered' different cultural environments. It becomes apparent from a number of the chapters that the sonnets often transcend their literary and aesthetic function by affecting causes outside literature. As the editors suggest in their introduction and as the essays demonstrate in a way refuting mere fortuitousness, Shakespeare's sonnets have played an important role in the emergence and consolidation of new nations by, for example, being the touchstone for the 'maturity' and civilization of a national tongue struggling for its status. This is also the case of the translations into Czech and Slovak. In his essay, Professor Bohuslav Mánek illustrates the connection between the 'discovery' of the sonnets and the Czech National Revival. Unlike several other chapters (e.g. French), his choice of translation samples was obviously guided by an endeavour to illustrate the work of all major translators on a variety of different sonnets.

Clearly, the chief ambition of the whole publication was to demonstrate the diversity of translations. The vigour of the editors' determination to encompass as great a variety as possible is demonstrated by the remarkable DVD included with the book. Its multi-format character surpasses the label of a 'bonus disc'. Its basic contents are all the essays printed in the book, the original 1609 Thomas Thorpe edition, John Dover Wilson's modern English translations of 1966, and complete word concordance, all in a .pdf searchable format. Indeed, the authors have made every effort to exploit the full potential of such a medium. The disc enables them to transcend the limitations of the hardcover volumes and to explore other forms of 'translation'. First of all, there is a substantial sound archive with audio samples in an .mp3 format of sonnet recitations in English (all 154 sonnets) as well as in other languages appearing in the book (the Czech and Slovak versions being recited by Pavel Soukup and Martin Mňahončák, respectively). Also, some languages can boast of musical renderings, which is also the case of Marek Eben's adaptations of the sonnets 57 and 66 using the 1964 translation by Jan Vladislav.

In addition the disc contains video samples from various materials (films and even a puppet show), including sign language versions of the poems. The visual dimension is enhanced by an image archive which features book covers, illustrations and other visual material from numerous editions of the sonnets (e.g. by Jiří Trnka and Jan Zrzavý). The most unique section of the disc is entitled 'Visions'. It comprises a selection of visual translations of the sonnets, both recent as well as old. There are sonnets 'rewritten' in the form of spears, sausages or crayons whose colours and broken tips indicate the rhyme scheme or the final couplet. Thanks to the creative innovations of the editors, 'readers' can explore the multifarious forms of visual creativity.

The disc was designed with an extreme emphasis on practicality. The authors opted for an internet browser interface, providing an extremely intuitive environment that can be explored with no need for manuals, guidebooks or software installations.

The ambition of the original book is thus enriched by this multi-medial facility convincing of the perhaps boundless possibilities of translating into realms outside standard sign systems. Obviously, in view of Shakespeare's pedestalled position, many

a 'reader' may consider the transposition of the sonnets into the pictorial form of matches, sushi or fish'n'chips as an act of uncouth and desecrating postmodern popularization or as the mistaking of art with the curriculum of a culinary school. Yet, such 'translations' once again support the aforementioned vivaciousness foretold by Shakespeare himself.

Due to the linguistic variety of the project, there is probably no single reader who can appreciate all the translations. Yet, the scale, both geographical and formal, as well as the willingness of the editors to include non-traditional contemporary 'translations' along with artefacts of popular culture in which the sonnets have clearly been 'domesticated' make this publication well worthwhile.

Ladislav Vít