

Global Shakespeares

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The Global Shakespeares series, edited by Alexa Alice Joubin, explores the global afterlife of Shakespearean drama, poetry and motifs in their literary, performative and digital forms of expression in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Disseminating big ideas and cutting-edge research in e-book and print formats, this series captures global Shakespeares as they evolve.

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W. Reginald Rampone Jr.
Editors

Shakespeare's Global Sonnets

Translation, Appropriation, Performance

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Shakespeare's Global Sonnets: An Introduction

W. Reginald Rampone Jr.

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 Cottegnie’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 Cottegnie 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 Krajnik 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 Trmikova 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*). Krajnik and Drozd juxtapose this production with one performed at the Viola