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«Bottom, thou art translated»: Recent Radical Translations of Shakespearean Sonnets in Germany

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Let me begin with an embarrassing confession: I am a translator of poetry. Indeed, the first poem I ever translated was, at the impressionable age of eighteen, Shakespeare's sonnet 18 – a labour of love in, at least, two senses of the word. The confession is embarrassing because who likes to admit he is a translator when he would rather present himself as a poet. There is something ancillary about the translator's craft; real men – and real lovers – are poets in their own right and might. (Note the gender inflection here!) The confession is also embarrassing for a serious scholar, who should produce strong, incisive readings of other people's work and not dally playfully and intuitively between one language and another. (Note the gender inflection again!)

What makes this even more embarrassing is that I have to further admit that I myself have never produced, and cannot see myself ever producing, the kind of translations discussed in this essay. My own translations, from John Dryden to Robert Lowell and Desmond Egan, are not radical in the sense I wish to highlight here. This may have to do with the fact that, as I have admitted already, I am not a poet – unlike the two recent translators of Shakespearean sonnets into German whose work shall be presented as examples of *Radikalübersetzungen*: the Austrian poet Franz Josef Czernin (b. 1952), and the Berlin poet Ulrike Draesner (b. 1962), to whose commentary on her own translations I owe the term *Radikalübersetzung* in the first place¹. When I translate poetry, unlike them I neither claim the kindred spirit or elective affinity between one poet and another nor do I suffer from a Bloomian 'anxiety of influence'² which would make me wish to assert my own autonomy in giving a new shape and meaning to the poem I am translating.

Moreover, when I translate, I tend to translate poems that have never been rendered into German before. I feel, therefore, an almost moral obligation to act as neutrally as possible as a verbal go-between for the German reader and thus

¹ Ulrike Draesner, «Twin Spin: Acht Shakespeare-Sonette», *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 136 (2000), p. 169. More of her 'radical' translations of Shakespeare sonnets can be found in : *to change the subject*, Göttinger Sudelblätter, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold, Göttingen, Wallstein Verlag, 2000. Czernin and Draesner together presented their «Shakespeare Reversions. Die Sonette in radikal-zeitgemäßer Übersetzung» on 29 June 2007 at the *poesiefestival* in Berlin.

² See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997 [1973].

try to make myself as invisible as a translator as possible³. In contrast, my radical translators of Shakespearean sonnets translate poems into German that have already been translated many times. To be more precise, the entire cycle has been translated some sixty times by now and the translations of single sonnets and groups of them are literally innumerable⁴. From Johann Joachim Eschenburg's prose translations of 1787 to the once again rising flood of sonnet translations in the last twenty years, which swamps an already congested market with one or two or even three new German versions of the cycle every year, translating Shakespeare's sonnets has become a literary ritual, a cult, if not a national literary sport. I do not know enough about the presence of Shakespeare's sonnets in other languages, so I cannot confidently claim that this situation is unique in Europe or beyond, but I suspect this is indeed the case. I can, however, confidently state that no other foreign text – not even the Bible or Homer or, if it comes to that, any play by Shakespeare – has been translated as frequently and insistently as Shakespeare's sonnet cycle into German.

Be that as it may, this has turned the translation of Shakespeare's sonnets into a rich field, indeed a classical test case for the historian and theorist of translation, and for Translation Studies in general. It raises a whole gamut of crucial questions: Why should this particular sequence have challenged ten generations of German translators to go through the ordeal of translating yet again these 154 poems, almost all of them written in the same complex form that demands such stamina and bravura on the part of the translator? Is this due to the intrinsic quality of the source text or to a particular affinity between source and target culture, or has it inadvertently become a competitive game that follows its own logic and rules? What kinds of readership demands are supplied here? Is it the wish to read these canonical texts in the language of the day rather than in the dated accents of yesteryears, or is it the liberty of choice between a variety of translations one desires, or is there actually any demand for them? How do translators respond to the ever-changing insights of Shakespeare philology and criticism across more than two hundred years? Do they take them into account by, for instance, working with the latest editions and commentaries, or do they disregard them, or do they try to revise them or forge their own new readings in rivalry with them? Finally, do these translations react to the source text alone or also to previous translations of the same text? Do they try to ignore the extant translations, or do they use them as cribs or quarries, or do they attempt to go beyond them and not only imitate but emulate them?

I am particularly interested in the last aspect here, the triangulation between source text, previous translation and new translation which, in the case of

³ For the metaphor of the translator as go-between see my essay «Inglese Italianato - Italiano Anglizzato: John Florio», in *Renaissance Go-Betweens: Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Andreas Hoefele and Werner von Koppenfels, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2005, pp. 32-54; for the metaphor of visibility see Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, London, Routledge, 1995.

⁴ The bravest attempts to enumerate them all are the bibliographies by Annette Leithner-Brauns in *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 232 (1995), pp. 285-316 and Eymar Fertig in the same journal, 236 (1999), pp. 265-324.

Shakespeare's sonnets in German, often extends into even more complex polygonal relationships⁵. Such polygonal arenas solicit the kind of poly-agonal conflicts, differences, tensions, frictions and dialogues, which I in my own work with mainly 'virginal', i.e. yet un-translated, poems hardly ever engage in, but which in this case provide the matrix for an intertextual – intertextual to the second power! – history of turning Shakespeare's sonnets into German poems.

Of course, the greater part of these numberless translations are run-of-the-mill, playing unthinkingly a pre-established game once again, and engaging with previous translations, if at all, only in tacit quarrying. In this context one hesitates to subscribe to the opinion of Gustav Landauer – philosopher, socialist politician, author of a book on Shakespeare (1920) and translator of some of his sonnets – that «we cannot have enough translations of Shakespeare's sonnets»⁶. The best translators, however, and prominently among them poets in their own right, try to change the rules of the game altogether and in so doing they react energetically or, as the case may be, nervously to the work of their predecessors in order to assert their own readings of the poems and their own poetic voice. Thus, for instance, Stefan George disrupted the 19th-century convention of translating the sonnets into the late Romantic poetic diction of the translators' own times and, by striving towards an almost interlinear literalness, gave a new – a paradoxically modernist – voice to them⁷. For the Viennese satirist and dramatist Karl Kraus this was «ein Doppelfrevel an Shakespeare und der deutschen Sprache» («a double sacrilege on Shakespeare and on the German language»)⁸, to which he responded not only in polemical lectures and articles

⁵ Such relationships become manifest in two useful – and delightful – anthologies documenting the German translation history of individual sonnets: *Shakespeare Sechsendsechzig*, ed. by Ulrich Erckenbrecht, Kassel, Muriverlag, 2004 [2001], offering now 154 (!) versions of sonnet 66, and "... lesen, wie krass schön du bist konkret": *William Shakespeare, Sonett 18, vermittelt durch deutsche Übersetzer in 154 + 1 Versionen*, ed. by Jürgen Gutsch, Dozwil/Schweiz, EDITION SIGNATHUr, 2003. There are also studies of the German translation history of individual sonnets: Paul G. Buchloh, «Shakespeares Sonett XXX in deutschen Übertragungen», *Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 1 (1968), pp. 274-81; Raimund Borgmeier, *Shakespeares Sonett «When Forty Winters» und die deutschen Übersetzer*, München, Fink, 1970; Hannes Stein, «'An mir magst Du sie anschauen, diese Jahreszeit': Shakespeares Sonett 73 in Übersetzungen von Karl Kraus bis Wolf Biermann», *Neue Rundschau* 101 (1990), pp. 59-72. And there are finally three studies dedicated to the history of Shakespeare's sonnets in German translations: Ludwig W. Kahn, *Shakespeares Sonette in Deutschland: Versuch einer literarischen Typologie*, Bern/Leipzig, Gotthelf Verlag, 1935; Otto Eugen Schoen-René, *Shakespeare's Sonnets in Germany: 1787-1939*, Unpubl. Diss., Harvard, 1946; Kathrin Volkmann, *Shakespeares Sonette auf deutsch: Übersetzungsprozesse zwischen Philologie und dichterischer Kreativität*, Heidelberg, Univ. Druckerei, 1998. See also, with a more general and international perspective, Dirk Delabastita, «Shakespeare's Sonnets in Translation», in *Second Hand: Papers on the Theory and Historical Study of Literary Translation*, ed. by Theo Hermans, ALW-Cahier 3, Louvain, Peeters, 1985, pp. 106-27.

⁶ «Wir können an Übersetzungen der Shakespearesonette nicht genug haben». Quoted from *Shakespeare Sechsendsechzig*, cit., p. 200.

⁷ See Olga Marx, *Stefan George in seinen Übertragungen englischer Dichtung*, Amsterdam, Castrum-Peregrini-Press, 1967, and Michael Gramberg, *Stefan Georges Übertragungen*, Köln, Univ. Diss., 1971.

⁸ Karl Kraus, *Die Fackel* 885-887 (1932), p. 47.

in his journal *Die Fackel* but also in his own translation of Shakespeare's cycle published in March 1933, just in time for Hitler's *Machtergreifung*. What he had to offer, however, was hardly more than a return to the glib eloquence of the 19th-century translators whom he himself had denounced as «lyrische Nullen» («poetic nonentities»)⁹.

A quite different response to George's epoch-making translation came from the German-Jewish poet Paul Celan after the Second World War. Unlike Kraus, he was impressed with George's renderings in general and consulted them regularly – as, by the way, Kraus had done, who even admitted that he had no English and relied, as he sarcastically put it, on George for it: «Das Englische gibt mir George» («The English is given to me by George»)¹⁰. It was precisely Celan's appreciation for George's versions which made him shun too literal a closeness; in one case, the last line of the second quartet of sonnet 107, for instance, he declined his editor's suggestion for a change; though it would bring the line nearer to Shakespeare's meaning, he argued, it would almost verbatim echo George's rendering¹¹. What was at work here was less the kind of anxiety of influence which any translator knows who has ever translated in the wake of another great translator; rather, it was a matter of the poet-translator's unique vision and voice asserting themselves in minute verbal details as well as in the larger structures linking the lines of the sonnet and the sonnets to each other. And Celan's approach in translating poetry is a microscopic one. To simplify matters: if the focus of Karl Kraus's and his 19th-century forerunners' translation was the sentence and its rhetorical force, Stefan George's was the – preferably monosyllabic – word and its halo of meanings, and Paul Celan's the syllable and letter and the suggestive patterns they form: «From fairest creatures we desire increase» – «Was west und schön ist, du erhoffst ein Mehr / von ihm»¹². This gives to Shakespeare's sonnets a stylistic and semantic micro-texture which is closer to Celan's own poems than to Shakespeare's sonnets and their previous German

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50. For Karl Kraus as translator of Shakespeare's sonnets see Hendrik Birus, «Aus dem Deutschen ins Deutsche übersetzen: Überlegungen zu Karl Kraus' Lyrikübersetzungen», in *Geschichte, System, literarische Übersetzung*, ed. by Harald Kittel, Berlin, Schmidt, 1992, pp. 173-211, and Georg Kranner, *Kraus contra George: Kommentare zu den Übertragungen der Sonette Shakespeares*, Vienna, WUV-Univ.-Verlag, 1994.

¹¹ See the exchange of letters between Klaus Reichert and Paul Celan in «*Fremde Nähe*»: *Celan als Übersetzer*, Marbacher Katalog 50, ed. by Axel Gellhaus et al., Marbach a. Neckar, Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1997, pp. 431-33. For Celan's translations of Shakespeare's sonnets see Peter Szondi's seminal essay «Poetry of Constancy - Poetik der Beständigkeit. Celans Übertragung von Shakespeares Sonnet 105», in Paul Celan, *Schriften II*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1978, pp. 321-44; see also Rainer Lengeler, *Shakespeares Sonette in deutscher Übersetzung: Stefan George und Paul Celan*, Opladen, Westdeutscher Verlag, 1989; Heino Schull, «Übersetzung als Sprung: Textgenetische und poetologische Beobachtungen an Celans Übersetzungen von Shakespeares Sonetten», *arcadia* 32:1 (1997), pp. 119-47; and the excellent postface «'Ich verantworte. Ich widerstehe. Ich verweigere': Celans Shakespeare» by Wolfgang Kaußen, himself a translator of Shakespeare's sonnets, to Paul Celan's *William Shakespeare: Einundzwanzig Sonette*, Frankfurt a.M., Insel, 2001 [1967], pp. 49-92.

¹² «From what exists as an essence and is beautiful you hope more from/of it». This is, of course, the first line of the first sonnet of the cycle.

versions: it leads to a concentrated compactness of the poetic language, energizes its dialogical and performative dynamics¹³, and again and again demonstrates the translator's (ambi-) dexterity «to surpass the source text in lightning flashes of momentary, minute effects»¹⁴. And, of course, Celan brought a different kind of interest to the sonnets from George's: where George translated the whole cycle, warming particularly to its androgynous and homoerotic accents, Celan translated only a small selection of twenty-one, highlighting in particular their metapoetic dimension. Thus, for instance, the five 'procreation sonnets' with which Celan opens his epitome of Shakespeare's cycle in his version suggest a reading that extends the relationship between father and son to that between original poem and poetic translation.

With such allegorizing re-readings we have reached the threshold of what I will turn to now: *Radikalübersetzungen*, radical translations of Shakespeare's sonnets.

I do not feel it is feasible, or indeed even desirable, to give a watertight definition of 'radical translation' – definitions and distinctions in literary studies are never watertight, and perhaps even less so in Translation Studies. There are, however, sliding scales to denote the various degrees of the translator's autonomy and they reach from literal dependence on the source text to ever greater liberties the translator takes in appropriating the source text to his and his audience's own concerns. Each of our languages has developed across the centuries its own, albeit fuzzy, terminologies to denote the various positions – or rather the various claims made for their own efforts by the translators – on this sliding scale. In German it looks something like that¹⁵:

- *Interlinearversion* ('interlinear version'): the degree zero of translating when employed strictly; its function is mainly a *pons asinorum* for readers who have only a basic command of the source language.
- *Übersetzung* ('translation'): the most general and modest term; as such it does not immediately imply claims for a particular poetic value of the target text, although this is not necessarily excluded. (This is the name I prefer to give to my own efforts, being a naturally modest person.)
- *Übertragung* ('poetic transposition'): here the claims for the poeticity of the product of the translation process and for the act of translating are explicitly – and I would hasten to add, often pretentiously – stated. Poet-translators frequently use this term to set off their efforts from those of ordinary drudges in the trade of introducing German readers to English poetry.

¹³ On this quality in Shakespeare's sonnets see my essay «'As an unperfect actor on the stage': Notes Towards a Definition of Performance and Performativity in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*», in *Theory Into Poetry: New Approaches to the Lyric*, ed. by Eva Müller-Zettelmann and Margarete Rubik, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2005, pp. 207-28.

¹⁴ «den Ausgangstext punktuell immer wieder blitzartig zu überbieten». W. Kaußen, «Celans Shakespeare», cit., p. 72.

¹⁵ I omit in this the first and third type of translation itemized by Roman Jakobson, in his typology of translations (1) «into other signs of the same language», (2) «into another language», and (3) «into another, nonverbal system of symbols»; see Roman Jakobson, «On Linguistic Aspects of Translation», in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti, London, Routledge, 2000, p. 114.

- *Nachbildung* or *Nachdichtung* ('reworking') put the claims implied in the term *Übertragung* even more emphatically. Among translators of Shakespeare's sonnets the first was used by Friedrich Bodenstedt, the second by Karl Kraus¹⁶. Such translations are intended for readers who have no English at all and are promised as close a poetic equivalent to the source text as possible – but also for readers whose English is competent enough to actually be able to do without a translation, yet are invited to appreciate the translator's art as an artistic performance in its own right.
- *Umdichtung* ('remake'): to my knowledge, this term was coined by Stefan George for his own versions of Shakespeare's sonnets¹⁷. In contrast to the previous terms, it highlights difference rather than equivalence by foregrounding the frictions and interactions between the linguistic, poetic and cultural codes of source and target text and between the original author and the author of the translation. It can only be fully appreciated by readers who do not rely upon it for access to the original.
- *Adaption* ('adaptation'): the transposition of a poem into a new context, a poetic re-writing with pointed reference to topical concerns in the translator's culture; sonnet 66 and its uses in a number of 20th-century Continental, and specifically Middle or Eastern, European situations of political oppression instance this form of appropriation¹⁸. Such adaptations work only for readers who actually have the original ready in their minds.
- *Radikalübersetzung* ('radical translation'): it is at the very end of this spectrum that I would position what Ulrike Draesner has called *Radikalübersetzung*. She defines her own radical translations as «turning Shakespeare's words round, taking them consciously and intentionally by the 'wrong', the un-canonical end of their polysemy, spinning them upside down from feet to head»¹⁹. This is, of course, a metaphorical description rather than a theoretical definition, but the notion may become clearer when we see it at work in one of her eight radical translations of Shakespeare's sonnets, all of them taken from the 'procreation sequence'.

The selection, as was the case already with Celan's mini-cycle, is meaningful and telling in itself: she singles out sonnets which are about procreating or reproduction and projects them into the present world of genetic technology,

¹⁶ *William Shakespeare's Sonette*, in *Deutscher Nachbildung von Friedrich Bodenstedt*, Berlin, Verlag der Königlichen Geheimen Ober-Hofbuchdruckerei, 1862; Karl Kraus, *Shakespeares Sonette, Nachdichtung*, Vienna, Die Fackel, 1933.

¹⁷ *Shakespeare, Sonnette* [sic], *Umdichtung von Stefan George*, Berlin, Bondi, 1909.

¹⁸ On this see my «Route 66: The Political Performance of Shakespeare's Sonnet 66 in Germany and Elsewhere», in *Four Hundred Years of Shakespeare in Europe*, ed. by Ángel-Luis Pujante and Ton Hoenselaars, Newark/London, University of Delaware Press, 2003, pp. 70-88, and «Route 66 Continued: Further Fortunes of Shakespeare's Sonnet 66», in *'Not of an Age, but for All Time': Shakespeare Across Lands and Ages. Essays in Honour of Holger Klein on the Occasion of His 66th Birthday*, ed. by Sabine Coelsch-Foisner and György E. Szönyi, Vienna, Braunmüller, 2004, pp. 311-15.

¹⁹ «Meine Radikalübersetzungen drehen Shakespeares Worte um, fassen sie bewußt an den ,falschen', nämlich nicht kanonischen Enden ihrer Polysemantizität, stellen sie von den Füßen auf den Kopf [...]». U. Draesner, «Twin Spin», cit., p. 169.

of cloning, artificial insemination, or organ transplantation, but also of other current technological advances in copying and multiplying such as compact discs or the data compression on MP3s. Indeed, it was, as she tells us, news of the cloned sheep Dolly in spring 1997 which launched her project; looking up by chance Shakespeare's sonnets a few weeks later, the graduate in English Studies with a doctorate in medieval German literature found them strangely altered: «I turned to the familiar texts and was amazed: the news from the frontier of biogenetic research had changed the poems – they suddenly spoke about cloning»²⁰. Her *modus operandi* is, therefore, a «will-full misunderstanding»²¹. From a perspective of traditional translation, hers go wrong wherever they can possibly go wrong, producing, as it were, one schoolboy's or girl's boner after another²². One can find cases of such «will-full misunderstanding» in Celan's *Umdichtungen* as well, but where with him they remain local effects, with Draesner they are structural and all-pervasive, systematically infiltrating and subverting the Shakespearean text.

For a concrete and telling example, one need only look at what she does to and with sonnet 3. And as not all of my readers will have a thorough command of German, I will have to resort for this to the rather absurd method of back translation, i.e. translating Draesner's German translation back into English – a process that will tax my English to its limits and beyond them. To make this more transparent, I provide an interlinear arrangement of the source text²³, the radical translation in bold print and my programmatically un-radical back translation into English in brackets underneath²⁴:

- Look in thy glass, and tell the face thou viewest
(1) **schau in dein bildschirmtelefon, sag dem gesicht darin,**
(Look into your screen phone, tell your face therein)
- Now is the time that face should form another,
(2) **zeit, daß gesicht sich eine kopie von sich macht;**
(it's time your face makes a copy of itself;)
- Whose fresh repair if now thou not renewest
(3) **spritzt du allerdings die zellen dort dir frisch,**
(though should you inject fresh cells into your face in the screen)

²⁰ «Ich schlug die vertrauten Texte auf, staunte. Die neuen Fakten von der genbiologischen Front hatten die Gedichte verändert – diese sprachen plötzlich vom Klonen». *Ibid.*, p. 168.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 170 (Draesner's own wilfully mis-spelt English).

²² Commenting upon the translations in conversation at the *poesiefestival* (see note 1 above), she said: her translations «machen alles falsch, was man nur falsch machen kann».

²³ In the edition which Draesner used: William Shakespeare, *Sonnets*, ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones, The Arden Shakespeare, Walton-on-Thames, Thomas Nelson, 1997.

²⁴ In this, my back translations, intended as a merely philological bridge, differ sharply from what Tom Cheesman has done to and with Draesner's radical translations in his privately published *Twin Spin Reversions*, Reaction 8, Swansea, 2007, which offer seventeen of her versions in poetic re-versions in English.

- Thou dost beguile the world, unblest some mother.
(4) **begeist du am ende die welt, schwängerst 'ne lebendige frau.**
(you will in the end make the whole world sex-crazy, get pregnant a live woman.)

- For where is she so fair whose unlearned womb
(5) **wo aber wär' die phiole, deren unirdischer schoß**
(But where would be a vial whose unearthly womb)

- Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry?
(6) **sich gegen deine aufwühlende samenspende wehrt?**
(would offer resistance to your deeply stirring semen donation?)

- Or who is he so fond will be the tomb
(7) **und wer ist schon so selbstverliebt, daß er**
(and who would be so self-enamoured that he)

- Of his self-love, to stop posterity?
(8) **sein ich gleich selbst begrüb, durch klonen-renitenz?**
(would not stop short at burying his own self by obstinate resistance to cloning?)

- Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee
(9) **du bist die bildantwort deiner mutter, sie, in dir,**
(You are the image of your mother mailed back. She, in you)

- Calls back the lovely April of her prime:
(10) **ruft ihn zurück, den liebeskabinen-april ihrer zellpotenz:**
(recalls the sex-cabin April of her cells at the height of her potency/fertility.)

- So thou through windows of thine age shalt see,
(11) **so wirst auch du, auf deines alters touchscreen sehn,**
(So you as well shall see on the touch-screen of your old age,)

- Despite of wrinkles, this thy golden time.
(12) **trotz runzlicher chromosomen – deine fruchtbarste zeit.**
(in spite of wrinkled chromosomes, your most fertile period.)

- But if thou live remembered not to be,
(13) **aber lebst du, um von allem gelöscht zu werden,**
(But if you live to have your hard disk completely deleted,)

- Die single, and thine image dies with thee.
(14) **stirb single, und dein DNA-bild, es stirbt mit dir.**
(die a single, and your DNA image it will die with you.)

The translation plays with the distance and proximity to Shakespeare's sonnet: its first and last few words follow the source as closely as possible and in its entirety the text follows the sonnet line by line and quartet by quartet faithfully. Yet it renounces what is of essence for a sonnet: the regular metre and the rhyme scheme. There are not even Celan's frequent assonances to replace and recall the rhyme, and the only rhyme there is – «klonen-renitenz» / «zellpotenz» – appears to be coincidental and bizarre in its anti-poetical sound and semantics:

the parody of a rhyme rather than a sonnet rhyme. As if rhyming were too rich a poetic art to be affordable these days! And then, everything is written in small letters – as in George’s translations of the sonnets, by the way, but where with George this deviation from German orthography conveyed to them an air of preciousness, here it reminds one of writing and spelling under the conditions of computer technology.

It is this world we are catapulted into abruptly in the fourth word of the sonnet: «bildschirmtelefon», i.e. the modern gadget for producing instant images of oneself replacing the time-honoured mirror with its traditional associations of vanity or self-scrutiny. And we remain within this world of computerized information storage, retrieval, and reproduction with «kopie» (2), «touchscreens» (11) and «gelöscht» (13), i.e. deleted from the file. The noble business of procreation, of which Shakespeare’s sonnet speaks, is thus travestied – ‘trans-vested’ – into an automaton’s processing of data and information. And the information processed here are the genetic data that determine and define the individual: the «chromosomen» (12) and the genetic code of the «DNA-bild» (14). This second pattern of images is supported, and made even more disturbing in its implications for human procreation, by a cluster of images taken from bio-technology: «zellen» and cell manipulation (3, 12), artificial insemination with «samenspende» (6)²⁵ or anonymous insemination in a «liebeskabine» (10), a laboratory room, and finally, the *dernier cri* of all this, «klonen» (8). This is indeed like Bottom’s ‘translation’ in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (III.1.112), his metamorphosis into something monstrous and frightening. Shakespeare’s neo-platonic discourse of idea and image, original and copy, love and procreation is translated into the current lingo of informatics and bio-technology, proclaiming ‘Love in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’. And as if to clinch this process of trivialization and banalization, there are two particularly ‘will-full’ misunderstandings defacing Shakespeare’s poetic register, each of them playing semantic havoc with a single word: the verb ‘to beguile’ is transported across an absurd bridge of near-homophony into the non-existent German verb «begeilen» (4), based on the vulgar uses of ‘geil’ in high-school jargon and meaning something like ‘turning on, arousing sexually’; the adjective «single», with a sleight of hand that does not have to change a single letter, is turned into the German noun ‘ein Single’, a neologism adopted from English and part of the current critical or celebratory discourses about the end of matrimony as an institution, about the vanishing wish in a new generation of young hedonists – surprisingly not all that different from Shakespeare’s fair friend! – to take on the responsibilities of procreation and child-raising²⁶.

²⁵ The archaic and arcane «phiole» (5) in this context seems a far cry from all this in its ironic reference to early modern science and alchemy; a German reader is reminded here of Goethe’s *Faust* (II.2) and an English reader may anticipate the «vial» in Shakespeare’s sonnet 6, line 3, also translated by Draesner as «phiole».

²⁶ A few more examples for such ‘will-full misunderstandings’ of single words or expressions: the «rose» of sonnet 1, line 2, becomes the fruit of the «mandelbrot»-tree, its name alluding to Benoit Mandelbrot, first theorist of fractals; the «fair child» in sonnet 2, line 10, becomes a «schlaues Köpfchen» via a verbal bridge that leads plausible «from fair» to German ‘hell’ (‘light’,

In their pointed and critical references to the topical context of sexuality after the demise of Platonic, Christian and Romantic notions of love and passion, Ulrike Draesner's *Radikalübersetzungen* have something of an adaptation about them, a self-conscious and self-confident re-writing of the poem as an intervention in an on-going social or political debate or conflict. Its claims do, however, go further. They are 'radical' not so much in the political stance they display or in the liberties they take with the canonical source text; they are radical above all in the literal sense of the word, i.e. going to the roots. In their partly real, partly playfully pretended pseudo-etymologies, they dig up the roots of the words of the text they translate, as if this text were a mere surface structure engendered by an underlying deep structure, a matrix capable of generating versions different from the canonical one. Indeed, Draesner encourages us to consider her radical translations as clones in themselves, the products of processes of copying which are always, to a certain extent, a «Fehlkopieren» ('mis-copying')²⁷, as even the most precise ways of technological reproduction from the photocopy or photography to the cloning of cells always also produce variations, deviations, mutations.

In such a model, in which original and translation share the same matrix, the translation refuses to be considered as a second-order derivative version of the original, but claims instead to be of the same order with it and thus calls the distinction between original and translation into question. Or to put that in terms of a family romance: the relationship between original and translation is no longer that of parent and offspring, but of brothers and sisters. And of siblings there can be many and the more there are of them the greater the chances for the family to survive. As Walter Benjamin put it in his essay on the task of the translator, «Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers»: translations ensure the survival of the translated text; they are no mere copies in another language but the very form of its *Überleben* ('survival') and renewal²⁸.

My second example of radical translation are Franz Josef Czernin's versions of Shakespeare's sonnets – or rather, as the title page has it, the *Sonnets* co-authored by Shakespeare and Czernin²⁹. Czernin is a well-known Austrian poet,

'bright') and from there, however implausibly, to 'helle', a colloquial expression meaning 'clever'; «having traffic with thyself alone» (sonnet 4, line 9) is scandalously turned into «masturbieren» on the basis of the German word for sexual intercourse, 'Geschlechtsverkehr' ('sexual traffic').

²⁷ Ulrike Draesner in conversation at the Berlin *poesiefestival* (see note 1 above).

²⁸ «Übersetzungen, die mehr als Vermittlungen sind, entstehen, wenn im Fortleben ein Werk das Zeitalter seines Ruhmes erreicht hat. Sie dienen daher nicht sowohl diesem, wie schlechte Übersetzer es für ihre Arbeit zu beanspruchen pflegen, als daß sie ihm ihr Dasein verdanken. In ihnen erreicht das Leben des Originals seine stets erneute späteste und umfassendste Entfaltung». Walter Benjamin, «Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers», in *Illuminationen*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1961, p. 58. For an English translation of the essay see Walter Benjamin, «The Task of the Translator», in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn, New York, Schocken Books, 1968, pp. 69-82.

²⁹ William Shakespeare and Franz Josef Czernin, *Sonnets, Übersetzungen*, Munich, Carl Hanser, 1999.

writer and literary figure, an experimentalist in various genres, and working at computer programs for analysing and actually producing poetic texts. His sonnet translations are, however, man-made and try to explore, as he writes in his lengthy afterword «Zur Übersetzung», the spaces in-between Shakespeare's and his own language and period; only in this way, he argues, can they claim to be autonomous poems – contemporary poems, an essential part of whose form and meaning derives from their being translations: «A successful translation would carry with it particular characteristics of both languages and periods and would still be an autonomous poem in so far as it succeeds in conjoining these characteristics in a way that would result in a poem in keeping with the present times – a poem for the form of which, and that is to say, for the meaning of which, its being a translation is of essence»³⁰. 'Translatedness' and poetic autonomy are here not seen as opposites for which some kind of balance would have to be found, but the one is an element, a condition of the other. The texts such a deconstruction of original and translation generates do no longer, as most previous translations according to Czernin have done, restrict themselves to a «Dienst am Original», i.e. to serving the original. Moreover, in the face of the many extant 'servile' translations, which have already sufficiently familiarized German-speaking readers with Shakespeare's sonnets, he considers his own «presumption in translating [them] into poetry as comparatively slight»³¹.

With the poet-translator's refusal to play the traditional ancillary function in the service of Shakespeare's sonnets, these become the playing material for his intertextual games. There are however, as with Draesner's rewritings, self-set rules and regulations to the games they play, which put limits to the radical deconstruction: both poets follow Shakespeare's text line by line and quartet by quartet. To foreground these games, Czernin even provides two versions for the last three of the sonnets in his completely restructured cycle, Shakespeare's sonnets 141, 128, and 62. The first version, closer to the source text, he calls *Übersetzung*, the second, a translation to the second power, as it were, he calls the *Übertragung der Übersetzung*.

Below is a concrete example of what results Czernin's translatorial strategies lead to, his two versions of sonnet 62³². Again, the target texts have been highlighted in bold print, with the *Übertragung der Übersetzung* set off in italics this time, and in both cases with my back translations added in brackets:

Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye,
(1a) **mein blick, so süß wie böß, ist von sich selbst besessen,**

³⁰ «Die geglückte Übersetzung würde bestimmte Eigenschaften sowohl beider Sprachen als auch beider Zeitalter tragen und wäre dennoch insofern ein eigenständiges Gedicht, als es diese Eigenschaften so vereint, dass sie als zeitgemäßes Gedicht glückt, zu dessen Form, und das heisst: Bedeutung gehört, dass es eine Übersetzung ist». W. Czernin, *Sonnets, Übersetzungen*, cit., p. 126.

³¹ «Fast alle [bisherigen Übersetzungen der Sonette] jedoch beschränken sich [...] auf den Dienst am Original. Seine Kenntnis ist also gewährleistet. Nicht zuletzt deshalb scheint mir meine Anmaßung, Shakespeares Sonette in Gedichte zu übersetzen, vergleichsweise gering zu sein». *Ibid.*, p. 100.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 96-8.

- (My gaze, as sweet as it is angry/evil, is possessed by itself.)
(1b) **mein wort, so mächtig, gross gesetzt, von sich besessen,**
(My word, so mighty, writ large, possessed by itself,)
- And all my soul, and all my every part;
(2a) **fesselt mich ganz, mit haut und haar in eignem sinn;**
(feters me entirely, completely in/to its own sense/meaning;)
(2b) **umschlingt mich ganz, mit haut und haar, im eignen sinn;**
(embraces me entirely, completely, in its own meaning;)
- And for this sin there is no remedy,
(3a) **kein kraut gegen dies giften wächst, wie macht vermessen**
(there grows no medicinal herb against such poisoning/anger: how arrogant)
(3b) **kein kraut gegen die blüte wächst, wie süß vermessen**
(there grows no medicinal herb against such blossoming: how sweetly bold)
- It is so grounded inward in my heart.
(4a) **mein fleck mich, blind, da ich, was blendet, selber bin.**
(does my spot make me, how blind, for what blinds me is my self.)
(4b) **sich meine zunge spaltet, zweifach gepflanzt mir bin.**
(does my tongue split into duplicity, how doubly planted I am to myself.)
- Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,
(5a) **Nichts reizt mich mehr als dies, mein eigenes gesicht,**
(Nothing charms me more than this, my own face,)
(5b) **nichts reizt mich mehr, als mir leibhaftig selbst zu blühen,**
(Nothing charms me more than blossoming for myself,)
- No shape so true, no truth of such account,
(6a) **kein aug ins auge sticht wie meins, nichts sich erbaut**
(no eye strikes mine as does mine; nothing derives)
(6b) **da nur in höchsten tönen bin aus mir gelegt,**
(as I am only made up of the highest/loftiest tones;)
- And for myself mine own worth do define
(7a) **dran schön wie ich, selbst bin mir ich mein höchstes licht,**
(more beautiful pleasure than I; I myself am to myself my brightest light,)
(7b) **mich's eigne wort, schön bis zum letzten deut gediehen,**
(to me, mine own word, beautifully flourishing to the last point,)
- As I all other in all worths surmount.
(8a) **ein gut, das besser ist als alles, was es schaut.**
(a good that is better than everything that my eye sees.)
(8b) **zum besten hält, besser, als was es überträgt.**
(appears teasingly as best, as better than what it translates.)
- But when my glass shows me my self indeed,
(9a) **doch wenn ich mich dann selbst gespiegelt seh, in scherben,**
(But when I then see myself mirrored in shards,)
(9b) **doch wenn durch dich uns wieder weiss gegeben,**
(But when by you insight is given to us again,)

- Beated and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity,
 (10a) **gegerbt, zerhaun, längst angeschwärzt von allen dingen,**
 (tanned, beaten to pieces, blackened for quite some time by all things,)
 (10b) – *so schlank dein wuchs, wie wohl gestaltet, zart –*,
 (– you, so slim of shape, so well-formed, delicate –,)

- Mine own self-love quite contrary I read –
 (11a) **dann dreht sich bild um wort mir um, mein werben**
 (then image for word turns round in me; my wooing)
 (11b) **dann kehrt den sinn mir um, lässt mich, mein überheben**
 (then you turn my mind around and make all my presumption)

- Self so self-loving were iniquity:
 (12a) **um mich: mir graut davor, mich selbst so zu umschlingen:**
 (myself – it makes me shudder to embrace my own self so passionately:)
 (12b) **aus worten, wolken fallen, meine eigne art**
 (tumble down from all words and clouds; my own manner)

- 'Tis thee, my self, that for myself I praise,
 (13a) **wär ich, wie ich mich preise selbst, mich selbst verzückend,**
 (were I, praising myself, so delighted with myself,)
 (13b) **mir über, welk wird. ach, ins frische, reine übertragen**
 (tires me and becomes stale. Oh, translated into what is fresh and pure,)

- Painting my age with beauty of thy days.
 (14a) **was in mir frisch erglänzt, mein selbst!, wärst du, mich schmückend.**
 (while what in me so freshly shines, my self!, would be you, adorning me.)
 (14b) **wär's deine stimme – allein die meine muss versagen.**
 (it were your voice – my voice alone must fail.)

In both versions, Czernin does not only translate from English into German but also from an English syntactically complex, yet transparently organized, into a German in which drastic syntactical elisions, ambiguous conversions of verbs, nouns, or adjectives, and puzzling reflexive uses of verbs quite self-consciously jeopardize comprehensibility. What is generally maintained, however, or even heightened in additional parallelisms and vernacular phrasings, is the energetic *gestus* of Shakespeare's verse – the emphatic appealing or denying, self-accusations or self-affirmations. There is a performative aspect to this: the language in its heightened self-reflexivity performs the speaker's self-centredness that is the subject of both Shakespeare's sonnet and Czernin's re-writings. And this performative aspect is radicalized in the second version, where from the first line onwards Shakespeare's image of the speaker's self-reflected face in a mirror is replaced by that of a voice listening to itself: «mein *blick* [...] ist von sich selbst besessen» (1a) becomes «mein *wort* [...], von sich besessen» (1b). This radical change in semantic direction turns Shakespeare's moral problem of a narcissistic «sin of self-love» into the meta-poetical dilemma of the speaker self-enamoured with his own voice and at the same time dismayed at being so self-enamoured with his own inadequate words. And at the very centre of his second version, Czernin initiates a further, even more radical departure from his source text, which turns his meta-poem into a meta-translation. Twice (8b, 13b) the verb «übertragen»

resounds as an emphatic rhyme word through this *Übertragung der Übersetzung*, suggesting as the only solution to his poetic autism the translation of, and fusion with, another voice – the friend's, Shakespeare's.

A translation that speaks of translation, a translator who performs within his translation his utopian desires for a fusion of his own voice with that of the other – a fusion that would deconstruct the hierarchical opposition of original and translation: this is a far cry from Lawrence Venuti's 'invisible translator'³³! Thus, as a conclusion to Venuti's admirable history of translation as a history of the translator, still foregrounded in humanist translations, vanishing from the surface of his translated text and making himself invisible, I would add a final note, or even chapter, on the return of the visible translator in our times: the radical translations I have discussed are radical also in staging highly manifest translators performing self-reflexively their office of translating against the backdrop of the problematic history of translating, its uncertain status and its aporia.

³³ L. Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, cit.

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