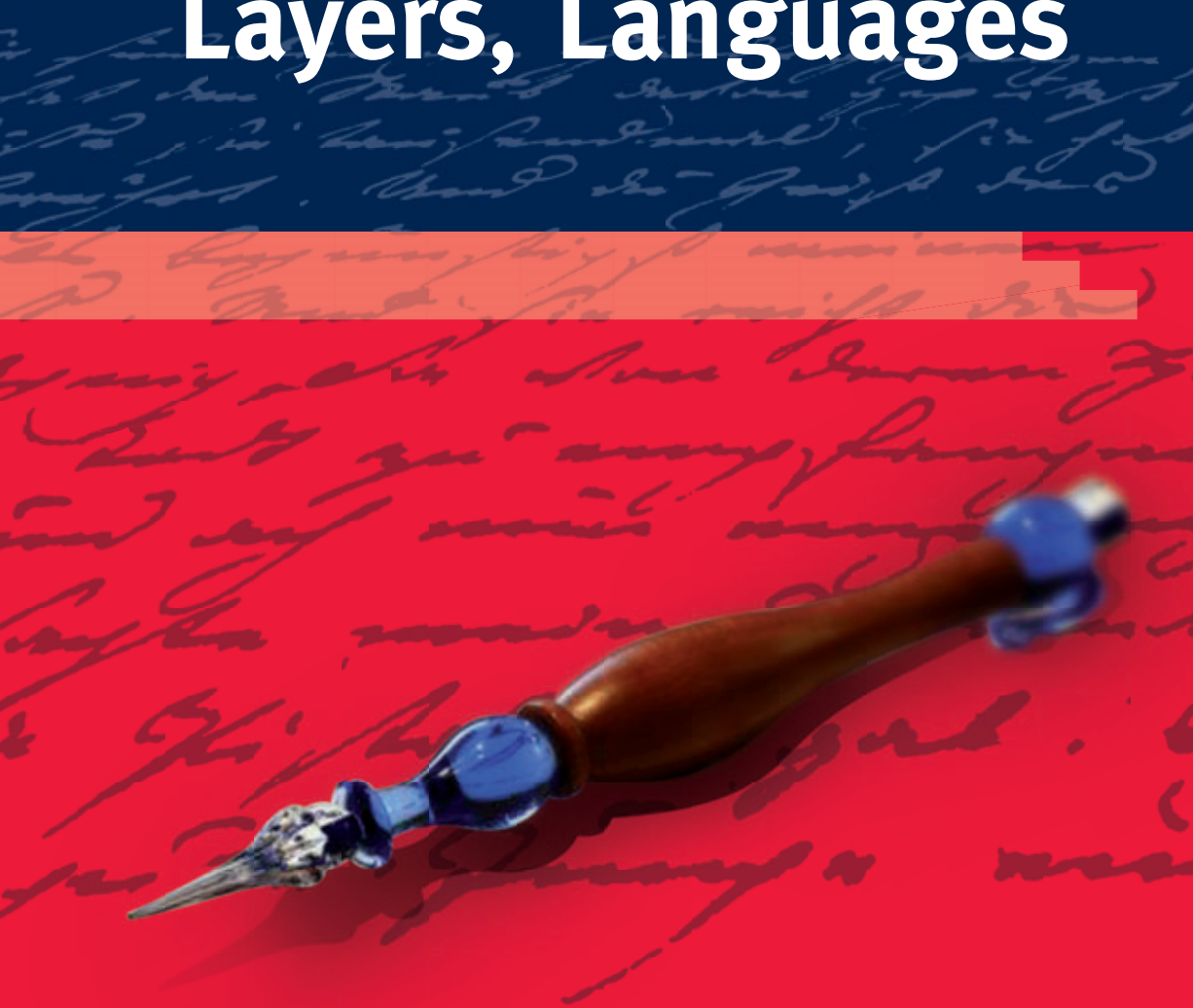


SONJA FIELITZ (Ed.)

# Shakespeare's Sonnets: Loves, Layers, Languages



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## Introduction

### An ever-fixed mark: Shakespeare's Sonnets

Sonja Fielitz  
(Marburg)

The year 2009 marked the quartercentenary of one of the supreme achievements of world art, that is, Shakespeare's sonnets. As it has turned out, the slim volume entered in the Stationers' Register on May 20<sup>th</sup> 1609 has become one of the Bard's most memorable legacies. It seems that within the past decade – against a contemporary culture that appears to privilege Shakespeare's plays over his poems, and an academy whose critical approaches during the last decades have largely neglected the 'poetic' and the 'aesthetic' in favour of the 'cultural' and the 'political' – scholars have begun a counteraction movement which revisits Shakespeare's achievements in the field of poetry. Shakespeare studies have indeed entered a new phase of criticism, producing a plethora of monographs, editions, collections of essays, and international conferences dedicated to his poems. No doubt, the renewed interest and research in early modern poetry as such and Shakespeare's poetry in particular has undoubtedly also triggered fresh and exciting perspectives on his sonnets.

When the easily portable quarto format, that is, *SHAKE-SPEARES Sonnets, never before imprinted*, as the title page says, was first published in 1609, readers may not have regarded this event as anything exciting or even extraordinary. And indeed, as a physical object, the Quarto is surprisingly un-intimidating. It has, however, generated a multitude of question marks and critical controversies for over 400 years by now. No doubt, *SHAKE-SPEARES Sonnets* has become one of the greatest and widely discussed works not only in English poetry but world literature. As readers we are nowadays confronted with innumerable editions in which densely packed editorial comments and annotations in small typeface almost bury the 154 short poems that Shakespeare wrote. Secondary literature has flooded libraries and book stores. Among others, questions such as the date and 'proper' order of the sonnets, the riddle of the dedication, possible biographical references to Shakespeare's life, the voice of the sonnets, the addressee(s?), the identity of the "sweet youth" and of the "woman coloured ill," the complex constellation of relationships between the four principal characters, and the degree of emotional reality with which they are rendered, have not been answered yet.

Why then another collection of essays on Shakespeare's sonnets?

From our point of view, the answer is clear: because there is still so much to be said and discovered in fields that are not only related to the texts themselves but also – and this is one of the foci of this publication – in cultural discourses beyond Britain. Our internationally highly renowned contributors and specialists in the field of early modern studies do not only testify to the longevity of Shakespeare's sonnets by covering various



original aspects from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present but also take them beyond England, that is, to Wales and Scotland, and to the Continent. The collection includes, for instance, the first sonnet written in Welsh to be published and indeed the first Welsh sonnet which uses the Shakespearean form. It furthermore presents a thorough analysis of William Auld's *La Sonetoj* (1981), i.e., the first complete Esperanto translation of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* ever to be published.

The collective idea behind the essays included is that Shakespeare's sonnets are structured around and united by shared themes and situations, structural patterns, and specific effects of their characters' interaction, which may even give them a 'musical' quality. Thus, the number of essays in this collection is also united by the essays' common interest in the sonnets' wealth of a specific mood, of feelings and experiences. Furthermore, the volume allows various kinds of border crossings between the disciplines (e.g., Literatures and Cultures of Great Britain, Classical Languages, Celtic Studies) and it also traverses time and space with papers on 13<sup>th</sup> century Italy as well as contemporary literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Against this background, and as the title of this collection indicates, the essays focus on three major fields of criticism: "**Loves**" refers to a section dedicated to the texts themselves, that is, matters of gender and sex, including the fictional identity of the Dark Lady and the "sweet youth." "**Layers**" is related not only to a general idea of 'layers of meaning' but rather to various degrees of friction and synthesis, that is, between form and content, discourses and expression, word and image, and can thus be seen in the wake of Stephen Booth's argument of his 1977 edition (revised 2000) of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*: "I have tried to demonstrate that a Shakespeare sonnet is organized in a multitude of different coexistent patterns – formal, logical, ideological, syntactic, rhythmic and phonetic" (ix). The third section, "**Languages**", covers another original part of our collection, that is, the (linguistic) afterlife of the sonnets not only in Great Britain, but also in languages such as Esperanto and Latin as well as in German dialects.

The opening essay by Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. **Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (Stanford, USA)** claims that there is a specific aesthetic experience, a specific *Stimmung*, produced in the sonnets. In them we find the world of Shakespeare's London assembled and absorbed, and they provide us with the possibility to dive into that world, "not only with our imagination but also with our bodies. Whoever recites Shakespeare's sonnets or performs his plays will add to the words, sentences, and rhythms a particularly physical presence, which will then conjure up the past world – not in the sense of reminding with some distance, as we frequently tend to say, but conjured up, rather in the sense of making it present again. Just as the revived words meet the bodies of those who listen, we experience their contents and images just 'like a touch from inside,' a phrase Toni Morrison invented." As Gumbrecht delineates, Shakespeare's poems show a potential to reach an extravagant concentration and immediacy in the realisation of their own world, which we may never achieve. In his essay, he shows "that this *Stimmung*, and Shakespeare's world, is preserved in the sonnets in various layers, which can – although they are linked by manifold texts themselves – be separated and ordered as individual phenomena." As he develops in his essay, "the dominant impression of the reading is not the impression of a sequence of many episodes or chapters, but one of a many-voiced, suspenseful, and moving unity of tones. This unity of tones is the particular

*Stimmung* in Shakespeare's sonnets." This was the reason to classify Gumbrecht's essay as the "Prelude" of this collection.

In the opening essay of the section devoted to the topic of *Loves*, Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. **Stanley Wells (Stratford-upon-Avon, GB)** discusses what "critics of earlier ages have tended to sweep under the carpet": "Shakespeare's concern with sex." While much writing in Shakespeare's time treats love in a rather stylized, Petrarchan fashion, Shakespeare is next to Richard Barnfield the only one who does not avoid "explicit suggestion of physicality in the relationship between lover and beloved." Although only some of the poems may actually portray Shakespeare's personal experience, they do illustrate what he could have imagined as personal experience. For Wells, the poet of Shakespeare's sonnets in being so involved with their addressees must have been aware of the fact that he was betraying ideals. Thus, Wells takes on the world of human sexuality and suggests a reading of the sonnets as a product by "a man with a conscience, betrayed by the turbulent sexuality that – if Shakespeare really is speaking of himself – led to his early marriage." As he illustrates by his text-based thorough analyses of the poems, "autobiographical or not, the sonnets afford profound, and sometimes deeply troubling, insights into human sexuality."

In his "The Effect of Shakespeare's Sonnets," Dr. **Paul Edmondson (Stratford-upon-Avon, GB)** presents us "with ways in which we might begin to understand, in part, their genius." He is interested "in their shape and effect as individual poems, their musicality, how their component words make them what they are on the printed page." Paul Edmondson considers the sonnet as a spatial, as well as a literary experience, and by combining both readings he traces how a sonnet can come to life both musically and spatially. In the idea of the sonnets' musicality, his essay ties in with Gumbrecht's since Edmondson sees sound, sight, intellect, and sensibility all affected by the experience of reading the sonnets. Read in this kind of context, "they become like living breathing, musical images and events." As Edmondson develops in the second part of his essay, the effect of the sonnets can be seen in Shakespeare's wider dramatic output, since the Quarto appeared in the same period as the major tragedies. He illustrates how Shakespeare embeds or uses sonnets in his plays, and how this enhances our understanding of what his collection of sonnets might represent: "both Shakespeare's sonnet collection and his plays seem to cry out to be mapped together over a similar landscape of meaning and expression. And perhaps those sonnets that are not readily related to the drama contain the seeds of scenes and speeches in plays that Shakespeare never got round to writing." Finally, in looking at Shakespeare's own creative response to the sonnets, he focuses on *A Lover's Complaint*, printed together with the collection in 1609, as the first creative response to the sonnets themselves.

Prof. Dr. **Paul Franssen (Utrecht, The Netherlands)** focuses on the Dark Lady and investigates her construction "as racially other," that is, how this construct came into being and how it has developed. As he lines out in his essay, this idea of the Dark Lady has come a long way, from a relatively obscure theory in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century scholarship to a factoid promoted by the mass media. Franssen further addresses "an issue raised by Shakespeare's negative characterization of the Dark Lady, that is, how to avoid compounding the ostensible misogyny of the Sonnets with racism," a question the "more urgent as the Dark Lady has been associated with prostitution and

venereal disease.” In this context Franssen also revisits Antony Burgess’s novels *Nothing like the Sun* and *Enderby’s Dark Lady*, Christopher Rush’s novel *Will* (2007), and William Boyd’s Shakespeare biopic entitled *Waste of Shame* (2005), as well as an episode of the British science fiction series *Doctor Who*, entitled “The Shakespeare Code” (2007). The author concludes “that the Sonnets are like a kaleidoscope: we turn them around until we see a combination of shapes and, especially, colours that pleases us.”

Where Franssen focuses on the Dark Lady of the sonnets, Prof. Dr. **Thomas Kullmann (Osnabrück, Germany)** focuses on the boy. His thesis is “that there is indeed a literary discourse Shakespeare could draw on to give shape and meaning to the experience described in the sonnets: pederasty, or the love of boys, as practiced in Greek and Roman antiquity.” His “analysis suggests that the Greek practice of *paiderastia* constitutes the discursive system according to which Shakespeare constructed his relationship to the ‘only begetter’ of his sonnets.” Shakespeare, as Kullmann argues, may have seen “himself as a Platonic lover of boys, as one who admired the boy’s beauty for its transcendental perfection, engendering a love which is nobler and more perfect than a love of women which is based on sexual practice. As with ancient Athenian lovers of boys, his admiration for the boy’s beauty oscillates with his wish to educate or improve him. The Renaissance concept of a parallelism between a beloved person’s beauty and virtue is referred to but, unfortunately, found inapplicable.”

The essay by Prof. Dr. **Roy T. Eriksen (Kristiansand, Norway)** is the first of a selection of essays that have been grouped under the heading of *Languages*. Eriksen takes a historical perspective and places the sonnets within their artistic frame of reference, that is, to the time of the ‘invention’ of the genre in 13<sup>th</sup>-century Italy. He allocates Shakespeare’s sonnets alongside Tasso’s, Petrarch’s and Della Casa’s and aims to trace formal features characterising and shaping the sonnet, in order “to bear on how we interpret the mini-genre and its place within the context of contemporary culture.” For this aim, he investigates verbal strategies that create a certain ‘visibility’ for the reader but also cohesion, unity, and a ‘musical’ finish to Shakespeare’s poetry, “a compositional feature Tasso refers to as *temperamento*.” Among several important structural approaches to the form that have appeared over the past forty years, he focuses on the linguistic-structuralist approach associated with the work of Roman Jakobson (1972), the ethical and mythological reading presented by Thomas P. Roche Jr. (1989), and S.K. Heninger Jr.’s analysis of the genre in terms of its underlying spiritual and proportional “subtext” (1994). As an alternative and complement to their analytical methods, Eriksen proposes an approach to the problem of form in the sonnet within the context of what he calls ‘topomorphology’, which considers the rhetorical shape and integration of topoi, or themes, within the body of a poem. For him, it is obvious “that Tasso, like his ideal poet, Dante, thinks of poetry in terms of ‘a rhetorical fiction set according to the laws of music’ (*De vulgari eloquentia doctrina*, II.iv.2), which involves a conception of poetry as a spatial art, where the words are distributed and held together and integrated within a unifying and proportioned design where the words concord.” After his analyses of sonnets by Shakespeare, Petrarch, and Della Casa who all – in varying degrees – designed the texture of their poems so as to make the sonnets’ structural and spiritual subtext become visible to the expert reader and interact according to a technique related to how counterpoint operates in music, he returns to

Shakespeare and his response to some of these techniques in Sonnet 55, which Eriksen sees as a good example “of building in the text.”

Prof. Dr. **Erich Poppe (Marburg, Germany)** takes us from 13<sup>th</sup>-century Italy to 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain and investigates the first sonnet written in Welsh to be published (1833) and the first Welsh sonnet which uses the Shakespearean form (1834). In the first part of his essay he presents these two poems and discusses their contexts. He then provides a brief survey of the metrical forms traditionally used for poetry in Welsh and looks at some issues in Welsh poetics in Shakespeare’s times in order to contextualise the absence of the sonnet before the nineteenth century. As Poppe delineates, the form of the sonnet did not become widely used among Welsh poets before the early years of the twentieth century, and in 1909, three-hundred years after Shakespeare’s sonnets were published, the Welsh poet Robert Arthur Griffith (Elphin) published his most significant work, that is, his “Sonedau’r Nos” (‘Night Sonnets’). In the concluding part of his essay Poppe takes a brief look at one sonnet from this collection and two sonnets by Robert Williams Parry, a twentieth-century writer acclaimed for his use of this particular form.

Prof. Dr. **Wolfram R. Keller (HU Berlin, Germany)** turns from Wales to Scotland and from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As he argues, “Scottish independence became a prominent topic – and indeed a demand – in the first half of the twentieth century, a period now generally referred to as the ‘Scottish Renaissance’: the renewed flowering of the Scottish arts in the service of Scottish devolution.” He focuses on Edwin Muir’s poetry, and the sonnet, that he considers pivotal for Muir’s poetics. Keller suggests that in Muir’s two final, highly acclaimed collections of poetry, that is, *The Labyrinth* (1949) and *One Foot in Eden* (1956), “Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnets represent a poetological matrix that ultimately belies Muir’s alleged lack of ‘evident concern for technique’,” which Keller understands “here in formal terms.” Muir’s sonnets, he further contends, posit a refined counter-MacDiarmidean aesthetics, a *formal* alternative to the emphasis on the linguistic and formal experimentation undertaken by MacDiarmid and his followers. “Given that the form of every individual sonnet is naturally and primarily determined by themes of the individual sonnets, such a formulaic listing of the oscillation between Petrarchan and Shakespearean forms may not, at a first glance, seem significant.” All in all, Keller shows that “in poetological terms, the sonnet strikingly represents Muir’s own synthesis of Petrarchan and Shakespearean forms,” in other words, “Muir resolves the tensions between English and Italian forms in a hybrid (‘mid-Channel’) Petrarchan-Shakespearean sonnet.” These hybrid poetics “are indicative of Muir’s aesthetic program, which sidesteps questions of the use of the vernacular so prevalent in the Scottish Renaissance.”

Dr. **Boris Dunsch (Marburg, Germany)** leaves the British Isles in the field of *Languages* and opens up the section of translations. He focuses on the Latin rendering of Shakespeare’s sonnets by Alfred Thomas Barton, and his primary interest lies in a thorough and text-based analysis of individual sonnets. The purpose of his essay is to examine three aspects of Barton’s work more closely. First, he shows “that his *Carmina*, far from being a mere intellectual game, did in fact also serve a practical purpose in the context of Barton’s work as a university teacher of classics.” Further, Dunsch investigates the editorial policies of the published versions and, in the third part of his

essay, studies sonnets 80 and 86 against the background of their originals, providing samples of his philological methods and poetic merits.

**Dr. Uwe Meyer (Bamberg, Germany)** further proceeds to the present and provides a learned and balanced introduction to William Auld's *La Sonetoj* (1981), i.e., the first complete Esperanto translation of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* ever to be published. As Meyer states in his *Objective*, in order to present some necessary background he first outlines the history of Shakespeare translations into Esperanto and provides a concise biographical sketch of one of this history's most important figures, i.e., William Auld. After looking at the genesis of this project as well as at some of the main characteristics of Esperanto and their consequences for anyone trying to tackle Shakespeare's complex collection, Meyer then concentrates on both strengths and weaknesses of Auld's translation and compares his rendering of *Sonnet* 18 with those of other Esperantists. In this context, Meyer reminds us that "we always have to keep in mind that Esperanto is not just a language but also an instrument of peace which makes the rendering of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* with their multiple layers of meaning particularly difficult."

**Christian Pauls M.A. (Marburg, Germany)** further contributes to the field of afterlife of Shakespeare's sonnets on the British Isles in the 1980s. He focuses on a remarkable appropriation of the sonnet form in our own days, which can serve as another illustration of the form's unbroken poetic potential: *Diplopic*, published first in 1983, by the poet Peter Reading. Reading, the author of no less than 27 volumes of poetry (of which *Diplopic* forms the sixth), is one of the most experimental writers of the present, who is primarily known for his formal inventiveness as well as his depictions of shocking social realities. He is also known for "employing narrative structures distributed among several different voices, challenging the reader to reconstruct the different strands thus offered to them." Against this background, Pauls introduces some of *Diplopic's* narrative strands, its dramatis personae and its peculiar structure.

Prof. Dr. **Wolfgang Weiss (Munich, Germany)** for the first time in the (long) history of German translations of Shakespeare's sonnets investigates and interprets selected dialect versions. For him, authors should always be aware "that standard languages are also the media of ideological, political, economic and military power which exerts not only an enormous influence on people through the language used, as political philosophers assure us, but also on the language itself." An analysis of dialect translations appears to be even more rewarding, because dialects are the languages of minorities, even if these may consist of millions of people. It "is also true that dialects are primarily spoken languages that have never been submitted to normative processes. As a consequence, each dialect shows no uniformity in itself but consists of an almost anarchic multiplicity of variants with subtle changes in vocabulary and pronunciation within small areas or even from village to village." An analysis of German dialect versions seems to be particularly enriching, because the greatest handicap to dialects in Germany as socially accepted regional languages and literary media has been the decline in reputation from which they have suffered in the wake of the foundation of the Second Reich (1871) until well in our days.

As Weiss demonstrates by close analyses of various dialect versions of the sonnets (e.g. Low-German, Berlin, Saxon, Bavarian), the dialectal translations and parodies are highly valuable contributions to the world-wide discussion about Shakespeare's sonnets:

“as spoken languages they can reveal and enforce the dialogic structure of so many of them and their plain, idiomatic language which in classic High German versions is often transferred into a stilted poetical style, and they can throw new light from unusual perspectives and different mentalities on the enigmatic original.”

In order to celebrate the quartercentenary of *SHAKE-SPEARES Sonnets*, the University of Marburg (founded in 1527), hosted a major international conference in November 2009 in order not only to pay tribute to this event but also to foster critical dialogues and international exchange across boundaries of nations and fields of research. It is an extraordinary delight and honour for me as the editor of this collection of essays to include a number of the papers presented. Our special thanks are due to the *Fritz Thyssen Foundation* for their most generous financial support of the conference. My sincerest debt is to Imke Kimpel M.A. without whose organisational efforts and practical skills the conference would not have been what it in fact was. For the present volume, she was indispensable for matters of translation and innumerable other details for publication. The careful and extremely diligent formatting was fulfilled by Carolina Bauer M.A. whose patience and good spirits seemed endless. I can only express my greatest and warmest thanks to both of them. My further thanks are to Marburger Universitätsbund that partially funded the book at hand, to the editors of *Anglistische Forschungen*, and to Dr. Andreas Barth of Universitätsverlag C. Winter who kindly accepted this volume for publication. Especially the latter has always been of indispensable support and most efficiently guided us to bring this volume on its way. All possible shortcomings are at my responsibility only of course.





# Touched by Shakespeare's World

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht  
(Stanford)

Our English teacher during the seventh out of my nine years at the *Siebold Gymnasium* at Wuerzburg (Germany) was Emil Reuter, and he was known rather as an “original” than for his sophisticated style or his part-time academic ambitions, as some of the lecturers back in those days would have been. His distinctive Lower Franconian accent in his pronunciation of the English language, which he preferably voiced with recitations of classics, was almost legendary. Together with him, we read and slowly discussed Oscar Wilde’s *Canterville Ghost* word by word so that even today, almost forty years later, I know remarkably long passages of the prose text by heart. Just once, in one single lesson, I believe, he recited William Shakespeare’s wonderful “Sonnet XVIII,” whose fourteen lines starting with “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?” I am always ready to reproduce in Emil Reuter’s English, even up to today. What “Emil,” as we called him, could tell us about the sonnet is rather not worth mentioning: that the Shakespearean sonnet has a different structure than the Petrarchian sonnet (though not a single one of us had ever read Petrarch); that “summer days” in England were rather mild and not as warm as in Germany or even Italy and the Adriatic Sea. Emil probably would have ignored or not even noticed that in Shakespeare’s poetry, mostly a male lover talks to a likewise male beloved one.

Yet I remember much more of this lesson than just the little anecdotes. I know that ever since then – without any remembrance of Lower Franconian undertones – I was very happy whenever I came across “Sonnet XVIII,” and I always wished that someday I would have enough time to read all 154 sonnets by Shakespeare. Only, in spite of Emil Reuter’s accent, what is it that I remember for decades just like a promise, whose core I could not quite name? What is it that touched me just enough when I was sixteen or seventeen, to stay with me, just like the little scar on my left hand that remained after I fell off my bike? I know, the little scar reminds me of riding my bike hard, either with or against the wind. William Shakespeare, however, did not invent anything apart from the design, the terms and the emotions by which we experience ourselves as “humans,” and with which we think, as the great Harold Bloom argues, especially with reference to Shakespeare’s plays. And he does not go overboard in this extreme thesis that positions Shakespeare as a permanent contemporary of the modern age. Nevertheless, I am always specifically fascinated by the historically other in his plays and his sonnets. It is as if we had assembled and absorbed a world – the loud, dirty, tender, and dangerous world of William Shakespeare in late sixteenth-century London – that grants us, with just a short glimpse, the possibility to dive into that world, not only with our imagination but also with our bodies. Whoever recites Shakespeare’s sonnets or performs his plays will add to the words, sentences, and rhythms a particularly physical



presence, which will then conjure up the past world – not in the sense of reminding with some distance, as we frequently tend to say, but conjured up, rather in the sense of making it present again. Just as the revived words meet the bodies of those who listen, we experience their contents and images just “like a touch from inside,” a phrase Toni Morrison invented.

Together, both the sound of the words, which we re-conceive, and the power of their meaning, can put the *Stimmung* of Shakespeare’s world – the *Stimmung* of a world that is so different and so appealing to us that it even reached us in our Würzburgian classroom – into perspective. That they absorb the *Stimmung* of their time is true for almost all texts and artifacts; in detail, however, everything, be it aesthetical or historical, depends on the degree of intensity with which texts absorb the *Stimmung* and the realization of it, in the process of reciting and reading. As love sonnets, the images, tropes and forms of Shakespeare’s poems stand in the Petrarchian tradition, with which the seeming immediacy endowing the poems of the Occitan troubadour were polished to become a rhetorically perfect repertoire of elegant and mostly un-individualizingly distancing formulas. Obviously, these formulas were charged with new and differing energies in Shakespeare’s hands. It is not that we could ever know who specifically inspired them, or whom they were meant to delight; but it is unmistakable enough that we cannot go about imagining the author, as Stephen Greenblatt once wrote, as a genius of the imaginary identification: it seems as if Shakespeare took on a variety of contemporary roles in his writing, and then captured them in his texts. Although we hardly realize that we can be touched by a world of a specific presence and its *Stimmung* in his sonnets, we do not hesitate to believe it; however, we also sense the lack of manifestation of this *Stimmung* in terms of concrete moments and figures.

One cannot go about imagining particular historical moments in the specific presence of the ensuing ages, or, in particular, individual environments, looking for greater or smaller resonance (there is no doubt, however, that the Renaissance had its own particular renaissances during the nineteenth and twentieth century). But even beyond the general historic-hermeneutical logic, William Shakespeare’s texts show a potential to reach an extravagant concentration and immediacy in the realization of their own world, which we may never achieve. I will try to show that this *Stimmung*, and Shakespeare’s world, is preserved in the sonnets in various layers, which can – although they are linked by manifold connections themselves – be separated and ordered as individual phenomena. They will, however, reach the reader or listener of the sonnets simultaneously, so that some dimensions will receive an intermission, while others will be “tuned” just like instruments in an orchestra.

The universe and the stars in their (for Shakespeare) accessible astronomical reality and astrological meanings, limit the broadest cosmological horizon, in which the occurrences of love are embedded

Not from the stars do I my judgment pluck;  
 And yet, methinks, I have astronomy,  
 But not to tell of good or evil luck,  
 [...]  
 But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive,

And, constant stars, in them I read [...]  
(Sonnet XIV)

Almost all the passages that belong to this first layer seem, at first sight (at least, at first sight from our perspective) to translate the cosmological references into metaphorical descriptions of the lover. Historically and more accurately in the context of Shakespeare's sonnets, we understand on second sight that the lovers, as well as their love, are not only realized through metaphors but also, as part of the universe, embody and materialize its evidence and epiphanies. In face of the lover, the incorporation of the whole universe is not only a hyperbolic formula in the love rhetoric (as might have been the case with Petrarch), but rather unfolds its moving influence, when it is particularly perceived in the physical sense:

[...] For nothing this wide universe I call,  
Save thou, my rose; in it thou art my all.  
(Sonnet CIX)

The remark in the second verse cited, "in it," which draws attention to the fact that the lover only notices the lover and no one else in the whole "wide universe," seems unnecessary and almost appears as an oxymoron. Shakespeare never transforms the world of nature and of all things completely into a metaphor for individuals. By leaving them with fresh wordiness and concreteness, he charges them with energy.

This also holds true for the next layer of his world and its *Stimmung*, namely, the seasons of the year and the weather, and their influence on all living things. Shakespeare stresses that all processes of individual human life belongs to the same cosmological reality as the growth of plants does:

[...] When I perceive that men as plants increase,  
Cheered and checked even by the self-same sky [...]  
(Sonnet XV)

The thoughts on the lover refresh the lover just like rain shower the earth: "so are you to my thoughts as food to life, / Or as sweet seasoned showers are to the ground" (Sonnet LXXV). First and foremost, however, nature shows herself in the mercilessness of her power to let bodies wither. The opening sonnets, but not only they, are possessed by the idea that the lover is already marked by the power of nature, just like leaves in the autumn: "that time of year thou may'st in me behold, / When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang" (Sonnet LXXIII). Nature will not spare the lover even in his zenith of his beauty:

[...] When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,  
Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,  
And summer's green all girded up in sheaves  
Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard:  
Then of thy beauty do I question make [...]  
(Sonnet XII)

A plausible biographical reading connects this text to the young Earl of Southampton – as famous for his beauty as for his rejection of marriage – to whom the knowledge of the transitory nature of physical perfection might have offered the motivation to pass on his beauty to his offspring in a legitimate marriage. As already mentioned, such speculations will probably never reach beyond a hypothetical status. The fact, however, that Shakespeare's sonnets provoke such imaginations and theses, despite all skepticism, appears as a symptom of their vibrant past. Signs of maturity lead from the overall common association with the seasons of the year, and intensify in the description of the lover:

The glass will show thee how thy beauties wear,  
 Thy dial how thy precious minutes waste,  
 The vacant leaves thy mind's imprint will bear,  
 And of this book, this learning may'st thou taste:  
 The wrinkles which thy glass will truly show  
 Of mouthed graves will give thee memory [...]  
 (Sonnet LXXVII)

The wrinkles in his face will eventually turn into something more serious on the next level of decay, which will leave scars: "thus is his cheeks the map of days outworn, / When beauty lived and died as flowers do now" (Sonnet LXVIII). No pitch is more present in the complex *Stimmung* of the world of Shakespeare's sonnets than the ever-growing feeling of time passing by that we see now, and whose rhythm no will, no lust and no victim will be able to end.

Even the space beyond the stars, the seasons, and maturity are a layer of the world that encompasses the lovers and remains a stage for movement and evanescence: "like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore, / So do our minutes hasten to their end" (Sonnet LXV). First and foremost, however, the space that is conjured up in the sonnets separates the maturing lover from the vividly young lover, who can be reached by a jump – at least a jump in thought:

[...] No matter then although my foot did stand  
 Upon the farthest earth removed from thee,  
 For nimble thought can jump both sea and land  
 As soon as think the place where he would be [...]  
 (Sonnet XLIV)

Once the spatial proximity is established, the physical presence of the others will lead to the next manifest layer of the world and its *Stimmung*: companionship, as this layer could be called, is in Shakespeare's sonnets never only one dimension of intentions, strategies or opinions; it does not swell through "communication." Rather, it is primarily recorded in the voices of persons in the environment:

[...] when her mournful hymns did hush the night;  
 But that wild music burdens every bough,  
 And sweets grown common lose their dear delight:

Therefore, like her, I sometime hold my tongue,  
Because I would not dull you with my song.  
(Sonnet CII)

The presence of others – and, we assume, our presence for them – is generally perceived as a disturbance, and sometimes even as a threat, and very rarely as the reality and fulfillment of life: “that use is not forbidden usury / Which happies those that pay the willing loan” (Sonnet VI). Even the presence of the lover only brings about the possibility of pain:

[...] I do forgive thy robb'ry, gentle thief,  
Although thou steal thee all my poverty;  
And yet love knows it is a greater grief  
To bear love's wrong, than hate's known injury [...]  
(Sonnet XL)

Fulfilling proximity is not excluded from Shakespeare's world, however. It surfaces whenever the inspiring physical proximity to the beloved unites with the presence of the lover and thus becomes the breath and voice of Shakespeare's poems:

How can my muse want subject to invent  
While thou dost breathe, that pour'st into my verse [...]  
(Sonnet XXXVIII)

In these verses, I believe, to “breathe” is not merely a metaphor for the spiritual revival brought about by the lover. For breath, voice, and vividness primarily arm the sonnets with physical presence. So, in the end, the physical unity of the lovers is the core, the innermost fulfillment in the world of the sonnets, and the *Stimmung* that encompasses both in various tones and layers up to the stars. Just like a magnet – as the innermost energy of the world – the substance of the lovers draws the layers of the world in, “what is your substance, whereof are you made, / That millions of strange shadows on you tend?” (Sonnet LIII), and thus the lovers' soul takes part in the substance and energy: “Poor soul, the center of my sinful earth, / Feeding these rebel powers that thee array” (Sonnet CXLIV).

The explicit play, with manifold contrasts, between heterosexual and homosexual eroticism, belongs to the vividness of Shakespeare's world, which we are touched by in his sonnets. It was one of the elegant conventions – at least one of the preferences – of that historical moment, to celebrate sexual fascination between men as the more beautiful and happier form of proximity, without devaluating the strength of pure attraction between man and woman:

Two loves I have, of comfort and despair,  
Which like two spirits, do suggest me still:  
The better angel is a man right fair,  
The worser spirit a woman coloured ill [...]  
(Sonnet CXLIV)