

Appreciation of Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 and the Chinese Version by Tu An

Yuqing Xu

School of the English Language & Culture, Xiamen University Tan Kah Kee College, Zhangzhou
363105, China

Abstract

Shakespeare's sonnets are the representatives of English sonnets in the history of English literature, and almost every poem has its aesthetically meaningful value. The paper focuses on Shakespeare's sonnet 18, analyzing the artistic features of Shakespearean sonnet and also the Chinese Version by Tu An, aiming to help readers better understand the profound meaning of the poetry.

Keywords

English poetry; Sonnet 18; Chinese Version By Tu An.

1. INTRODUCTION

English poetry first appeared in the fifth century, with a history of more than 1,500 years from the Middle Ages to modern times. Among the early poems, the most famous one is Beowulf, which is considered the oldest and longest complete literary work in Anglo-Saxon England and even in Europe, which was completed around the eighth century. English poetry has gone through several important stages in its development, such as Old English, Middle Ages, Renaissance Period, Neoclassicism, The Romantic Period and Victorian Period. And each era has its own artistic characteristics. From 1558 to 1603, under the rule of Queen Elizabeth I, Britain entered the golden age of British commerce, art and nationalism, and it was also the greatest era of British drama and poetry. William Shakespeare, John Milton, William Wordsworth, Byron Shelley are all famous representatives in the history of English poetry. This article will briefly introduce the artistic features of English poetry and choose Sonnet 18, Shakespeare's most famous poem, and the Chinese Version by Tu An as the object of appreciation and research.

2. ENGLISH SONNET

IN THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE period of time, the most popular lyric poems are sonnets. The word "sonnet" comes from the Italian word "sonetto", which means "a little sound or song". In the 13th century, lyrics written for love were popular among the people. Later, Italian poet Petrarch adopted it, perfected it and laid a foundation for Italian poems. Therefore, the poems written by Petrarch are called "Petrarchan Sonnet or Italian Sonnet". A typical Italian sonnet consists of two parts. The first part is the first eight lines of the poem, which usually describes a "problem", or puts forward a "question". The rhyme scheme of this part is ABBA ABBA. The second part is the following six lines, which may propose a "resolution". The rhyme scheme of this part usually has two ways, such as CDE CDE, CDC CDC. These two parts together constitute the complete form of "argument". Italian sonnets were introduced into Britain in the early 16th century by English poets. The English sonnet is composed of 14 lines, which are structured at three quatrains and one couplet. Here a quatrain refers to a four-line stanza, usually with an unexpected short turn in the third quatrain. The rhyme scheme of English sonnet is ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. Both the Petrarchan sonnet and the English sonnet are the two main forms of sonnets

in English. They are both written in iambic pentameter. In the English Renaissance, many poets, such as Edmund Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney and William Shakespeare, liked to write English sonnets. English sonnet is also named as Shakespeare Sonnet because Shakespeare became the most famous performer of this form and has much more influence on the later generations.

3. SONNET 18

The sonnets of Shakespeare were published in 1609 as a collection of 154 poems. The poem is divided into two parts. The first part including the first 126 is dedicated to a young aristocrat called the Fair Youth, which enthusiastically praised the beauty of this young man. Especially in the first 17 sonnets, he suggests that the young man should get married and have children, so that his beauty can be passed down and maintained for a long time. The second part consisting of 127 to 152 is written concerning a Dark Lady. In this group of poems, the poet condemns and criticizes the Dark Lady's infidelity to love. The poet praises the loyalty and the eternity of love from the opposite side. The last two sonnets are two traditional stories about Cupid. The poet believes that his poetry is immortal as time goes by and so does his love and friendship to the young man. Thus, time and beauty (the beauty of friendship, the beauty of love, and the beauty of poetry) are two major themes. (Yu 2011) Among Shakespeare's 154 sonnets, sonnet 18 is the most famous one, which praises the beauty of a young man.

Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate;
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dim'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrim'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st;
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

The sonnet is made up of fourteen lines with the rhyme scheme of ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. So the last word "day" in the first line rhymes with "may" in the third line, and the word "temperate" at the end of the second line rhymes with "date" in the fourth line. All lines are strictly in accordance with the iambic pentameter. Each line of poetry has ten syllables. Each pair of syllables constitutes one "foot", in which the first syllable is unstressed and the second syllable is stressed. Each line has "five feet". For structure, the fourteen lines are usually divided into four parts. The first four lines form the first part, which puts forward an argument. The second four lines further explains this point, and then in the third four lines, he turns this point into another direction. The last two lines make a final conclusion.

In the first line, instead of giving a direct expression in praising the beauty whom he praises, the poet raises a question "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?". Then the answer lies in the second line which tells that "thou" are more lovely and more temperate than the summer's day in a strong sense. Among Shakespeare's sonnets, there are many poems about summer, such as

sonnet 18, sonnet 54, sonnet 65, sonnet 68 and sonnet 74. Why does the poet put so much emphasis on the use of summer image? The summer in Britain is different from the summer heat in China, and it is the most enjoyable in Britain after May. Summer is a symbol of sunshine, life, warmth and passion. However, after comparing "thou" to the beauty of summer, he further claims that the beauty of "thou" is more lovely and gentler than summer. In the next two lines, he further emphasizes the cuteness of day by mentioning the gale and the short summer. Therefore, the first quatrain compares the person he loves with the summer season in reality. He puts forward the poetic concept that the person whom he praises is cuter and more beautiful than a summer day.

In the second quatrain, the poet further explains the reasons why "thou" are more lovely and gentler than summer. "Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines, And often is his gold complexion dim'd;" "eye of heaven" refers to sun, "And often is his gold complexion dim'd" means it's cloudy, which means the brilliance of the sun may be obscured by clouds. The last two lines in this quatrain "And every fair from fair sometime declines, By chance, or nature's changing course, untrim'd;" means every beautiful thing may lose its beauty in the change of nature and in the process of growth. Therefore, with the passage of time and natural change, every beautiful thing will begin to decline from that prosperous year, and so will beauty.

All beautiful things will inevitably wither. Will his friend turn into delicate flowers in the May wind, or will he be covered by the bright sunshine? However, the answer is no, there is a turning point in the third quatrain. After the poet says that every beautiful thing may lose its beauty in the changing course of nature he says that, "But thy eternal summer shall not fade, Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st; Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade, When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st. Everything may lose its beauty except the beauty of the young man. His gentleness and perfection are unshakable even death is helpless in front of him because his brilliance will be immortal with the spread of poetry and as long as time itself. In this quatrain, the poet puts forward the most powerful opponents of beauty: death and time. He changes the topic from discussing the loss of every beautiful thing to praising the eternal beauty of the young man.

As shown above, the images created in these three quatrains are so impressive and vivid, however, everything is defeated by the beauty of the man in the end. The reason is given in the last two lines, which is the couplet of the sonnet. "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, So long lives this, and this gives life to thee." With the passage of time, nothing in the world can escape from the sickle of time. However, his beloved friend will live in this world forever, because there is "thou" in the poem. Only when human beings exist, the poem will live forever, and the beauty of "thou" will exist forever. Here, Shakespeare makes beauty and poetry immortal in a philosophical way, and conveys an eternal optimism and self-confidence in beauty with concise and clear language, lively rhythm and striking vivid images, which is a high humanistic and philosophical significance. As Chinese scholar Wang said, "There is a kind of morning dew-like freshness, beautiful mood and enough depth." " Literature is not only the achievements created by people, so it is also a declaration of people's greatness and immortality." (Wang 1993)

4. APPRECIATION OF THE CHINESE VERSION OF TU AN

The Chinese version of sonnet 18 was translated by Tu An, who published the first complete Chinese version of Shakespeare's sonnet in 1950. He sticks to principle of Bian zhilin in translation, who argued that the rhyme arrangement of translation should strictly follow the original poem, because compared with other literary genres, poetry is a more organic unity in form and content, meaning and sound, so literary translation should be loyal not only to the

content, but also to the form (Bian 1984). Tu An translates the poem step by step by following the original rhyme scheme and replacing the "foot" by the pause:

wǒ néng fǒu/bǎ nǐ/bǐ zuò/xià jì/de yī tiān?
 nǐ kě shì/gèng jiā/kě ài/, gèng jiā/ wēn wǎn;
 kuáng fēng/huì chuī luò/wǔ yuè de/jiāo huā/nèn bàn,
 xià jì/chū zū de/rì qī/yòu wèi miǎn/tài duǎn;
 yǒu shí hòu/cāng tiān de/jù yǎn/zhào dé/tài zhuó rè,
 tā jīn guāng/ shǎn yào de /shēng yán/ yě huì bèi/ zhē àn;
 měi yī yang /měi yā/, zǒng huì shī qù/měi ér/ diào luò,
 bèi shí jī/ huò zhě /zì rán de /dài xiè/ suǒ cuī cán;
 dàn shì/ nǐ yǒng jiǔ de / xià tiān /jué bú huì/ diào kū,
 nǐ yǒng yuán /bú huì/ shī qù /nǐ měi de / xíng xiàng;
 sǐ shén /kuā bù zhe /nǐ zài tā/ yǐng zǐ lǐ /pái huái,
 nǐ jiāng zài /bù xiǔ de /shī zhōng / yǔ shí jiān /tóng cháng.
 zhǐ yào / rén lèi /zài hū xī/, yǎn jīng / kàn dé jiàn,
 wǒ zhè shī /jiù huó zhe /, shǐ nǐ de / shēng mìng /mián yán.

As shown above, there is a natural "pause" between a group of words consisting of two or three Chinese words. This is probably similar to the "foot" in English poetry. So this pause may replace the rhythm of English "foot" to some extent. As a result, "five feet" were replaced by the five pauses. In this way, the rhythms of English poems can be effectively reflected in the Chinese translation. In this Chinese translation, the rhyme scheme is also ABAB CDCD EFEF GG, which is exactly the same as the original poem. The poetic form of the English sonnets has been accurately reflected in this translation to some extent. Of course, in translation, it is more important to convey its spiritual connotation in natural and smooth language. In this translation, this has also been successfully confirmed.

5. CONCLUSION

Sonnet is a kind of lyric style with strict metrical style in Europe. First popular in Italy, Petrarch's creation perfected it, also called "Petrarchan Sonnets", and later spread to European countries. In the 16th century, through Shakespeare and others, the art form of sonnets gained new development in England. It consists of three four-line quatrains and a two-line couplet. The rhyme scheme is ABAB CDCD EFEF GG, with 10 syllables in each line and iambic pentameter. Shakespeare's sonnets are called "Shakespeare Style" or "English Style", which is the peak of the English sonnets. Sonnet 18 is considered to be the most representative one, and it can be said to be the most famous one among Shakespeare's sonnets or English sonnets. As a great humanist, Shakespeare eulogized his passion for beautiful love from the height of humanism, that is, human life is limited, but the humanistic spirit is eternal. China translator Tu An's translation not only accurately reflects the poetic form of this English sonnet to some extent, but also naturally conveys its spiritual connotation with beautiful and fluent language, thus achieving the purpose of cultural exchange.

REFERENCES

- [1] Yu Ying. The pursuit of beauty under the sickle of time: two major themes of Shakespeare's sonnets [J]. World Literature Review, 2011 (1): 85-88.
- [2] Shakespeare Sonnet [M]. Tianjin: Tianjin Education Press, 2005.

- [3] Wang Zuoliang, et al. Selected Notes on Famous English Literature [M]. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1993.
- [4] Tu An. Shakespeare's Sonnets [M]. Chongqing: Chongqing Publishing House, 2008.
- [5] Bian Zhilin. Man and Poetry: Recalling the Old and Saying the New [M]. Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 1984.