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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Balz Engler, ***Constructing Shakespeares: Essays on the Making of a Great Author*** **(Dozwil: Edition Signathur, 2019. Pp. 260).**

Reviewed by *Silvana Carotenuto*[*]

Constructing Shakespeares by Emeritus Professor Balz Engler offers an important critical contribution to Renaissance studies and, together, to performance studies. Consisting of five essays—"Construction," "Monumental Shakespeare," "Occasions: Status and Process," "*Hamlet*: Passages We Live By" and "Re-Productions," with an introduction which sets the book's "Premises" and its final "Coda"—the publication, supported by the Berta Hess-Cohn Foundation and the Max Geilinger Foundation of Zurich, is consistently interested in the Shakespearean *oeuvre* as a performative authority through history via the notion of the deconstruction of the text as a "classic," and in contemporary times through the "media" apparatus that makes it enjoyable and relevant still today, in the global world, among different and differentiated audiences.

The question of the "audience" is the focus of the "Premises," which deals with the modalities in which the Shakespearean text (the main reference goes to Prospero's Epilogue and its final invitation to the audience's indulgence, that is, its applause) inserts the notion of the "performance as process" (17), the play being "an occasion of which the audience is part" (18). Indeed, Engler's position is that the audience takes part, plays a central part in the performance, contributes to the success or failure of the play, and represents the oral/social agent of dramatic authority. "Sociality" and "communication," therefore, are to be considered as essential elements to the "making of a great author," and particularly to the magnitude of Shakespeare, thus advancing a benevolent criticism of the Romantic notion of his texts as "books to *read*" (the reference goes to Charles Lamb's appreciation of Shakespeare's soliloquies). The activity of reading, as Professor Engler maintains, is already and always part of

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Shakespeare's art, supporting his complex views on the status of dramatic texts, if, as an example among many others, Hamlet's appearance on stage "reading a book" realizes the overcoming of the distinction between the reader's isolation and the performance of theatrical reading, the specificity of the skill and its performativity, advocating the vision of reading as a performance that changes, with its own histories and practices, according to its historical authority and the status of the text itself.

Here what is interesting is Engler's reading of the history of criticism that constructed—and keeps constructing—itself around the historical and cultural changes of the value of literature. The scholars mentioned are, among others, Stephen Orgel, Peter Stallybrass and Roger Chartier, and especially Margreta de Grazia who, along her *Hamlet Without Hamlet* (2007), brings attention to the "modernity" of Shakespeare. In the economy of Engler's critical and performative interpretation, Shakespearean modernity finds its privileged locus in "The Media of *King Lear*," the chapter interested in the dramatic communication of the "book," the "stage" and the "video screen." Engler refers to the reading of the book as what promotes the interest in the psychology of a single figure, to the active participation in the dramatic action as what provokes the interest in social and political conflicts, simultaneously showing his fascination for the video's capacity for intimacy, the importance of the camera, the critical distance and the perspective it creates, the tensions and responses it calls for. If *King Lear* is, indeed, the Shakespearean classic that proves that the dramatic world cannot be reduced to a single perspective, the camera is strongly apt to realize such wisdom: as cinematic proofs, and pausing on the scene of the King's division of the kingdom to his daughters, and, finally, to the dialogue between Edgar and Gloucester, Engler refers to an early American *Lear* of 1916, to the BBC version of the tragedy, to Grigory Kosintsev and Peter Brook's films, both appearing in 1970, and to the Granada version of 1983—they all create the framework in which Shakespeare's power of complexity can be contextualized and communicated. "Context" and "communication": in the chapter devoted to "Construction," Engler is interested in European contextualization in terms of production and re-production (two notions that he distinguishes from *reception, influence* and *appropriation*), emphasizing the question of "genealogy" to mean the different European capacities of welcoming Shakespeare geographically and culturally, valuing the social practices that produced, and are still producing, Shakespeare in Europe[1] and also a certain European homogeneity in terms of popular culture, systems of education and lineages of theatrical performances. Here the critical claim goes to the necessity of producing a history of Shakespearean "reproduction" as part of the so-called European common

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[1] Engler quotes Pechter's *What was Shakespeare: Renaissance Plays and Changing Critical Practices,* appreciating his approach but somehow critical of its Americanism.

culture, a history that should follow different phases—*beyond the rules* (and its aristocratic and hierarchical poetics of the origin), *beyond criticism* (and its poetics of genius), *beyond the text* (and its uniformity of interpretation)—and be interested in setting Shakespeare in education, popular culture, contemporary media, authorship theories, comparison of cultures, and translation in various languages. Professor Engler claims that, in this area of intervention, still much needs to be done, calling for the necessity of important and urgent projects meant for the sake of Shakespearean studies, for the formation of the European "common culture" and, similarly, for the vitality of cultures in all parts of the world.

This is, indeed, "Shakespeare's Passport," which functions not in terms of a national identity but as a "consignment note" that belongs to the arena of international theatre, to its performative process, its theatrical traditions, cultural conditions and institutions, translations, adaptations and dramatic materials— "even without the authority of an author" (80) (which is, especially in the case of Shakespeare, a recent notion, largely, as Margreta de Grazia shows, a product of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that constructed the author as genius, the mythologized and authenticated "quasi-divine creator"). In this sense, the history of the Shakespearean plays evolves, changes, and adapts to new cultural and political situations, always and already in on-going processes. For Professor Engler, this means that Shakespeare's passport is, indeed, the magnificent license to travel through histories and worlds, the author himself being a ghostly presence that crosses borders and travels free and powerful everywhere. If this is the case, then the suggestion is to engage in "The Unmaking of a National Poet," producing a different notion of nationhood by considering three critical elements: narratives (and how they have served the aim of establishing "a sense of community with a shared past," 84), language (which was historically modernized and standardized in view of the adventures of the British Empire like a bond among the different colonies), and poetics (which, here too, served the role of forming a classical tradition tainted by imperial aspirations; Engler also pays attention to the specific context of the German possession of Shakespeare, which especially aimed at the establishment of the *Sturm und Drang* romantic tradition, 87-89). In truth, as Engler clearly states, Shakespeare does not belong to any single country, even if his *oeuvre* can prove, by representing the "free and multifarious spirit of a united Europe" (90), essential in defining a European cultural entity. In order to exploit such an opportunity, what is needed is to deconstruct the "monumentalizing" of Shakespeare, its "canonization" in England. You can follow Engler's own deconstruction of the question of pilgrimage to and tourism at Stratford-upon-Avon, in a section of the book which provides historical facts, notes from the archive of the town, plans and names of Shakespeare's sacred and sanctified "Birthplace" (103-117), in the United States (Chapter 9 is devoted to

"Shakespeare, Washington, Lincoln: The Folger Library and the American Appropriation of the Bard," 118-136), Germany (see the chapter "Weimar: Shakespeare among the German Classics," 137-154) and Italy (the reference is naturally to Juliet and Verona, 155-167), but what matters is that Professor Engler's analysis of the destinies of the Shakespearean text expands to cover the debate on the "politics of place" and the "cultural performance of space" 156).

Engler's deconstruction relies on the opening up of the status of Shakespeare as a public symbol and myth, and on a set of comparative perspectives that *Constructing Shakespeares* adopts in its reading, for example, of the Bard placed between England and Germany during the First World War ("Shakespeare in the Trenches," 168-181), in Post-Second World War Germany (with a reference to *Coriolanus* in the framework of American occupation after the collapse of the Third Reich and Nazi cultural policies, 182-191) and, especially, in the postcolonial world (a short but important chapter is devoted to "Shakespearean Passages" [192-198], that reads the interconnection of the textual passages and their journeys to the Caribbean world, specifically in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, or in Carriacou, Lesser Antilles, through the Shakespearean Mas, *carnival* or *masquerade*).

These readings are all connected to the digital project *HyperHamlet* that Professor Engler has established at the University of Basel, and which deals with "intertextuality," "citations," "metaphors," "phrases and passages" whose use allows the understanding of how Shakespeare lives on, influences and forms our language, while claiming the importance of the software (the program Tesserae) and the databank structure which selects, compares and contextualizes the collected material (the archive consists of an immense basin of almost 9000 references only for *Hamlet*). In *Constructing Shakespeares*, Engler is interested in how Shakespeare is alive in our minds and how this affects people's reception and experience of his plays. Stories, figures, the poetic genius, memories of different cultural communities, their perceptions and affections transform and feed the very discourse of the community, possibly, in the case of Shakespeare, of all communities existing in the world. The project *HyperHamlet* is at the core of Professor Engler's critical attention: Chapter 17 entitled "*HyperHamlet*—An Extended Personal Footnote" testifies the reasons why he devoted his practical, intellectual and critical engagement in the setting up and historical development of his project. Engler explains it as an essential part of his interest in anthropology (especially orality ad literacy) and in performance poetry, mentioning the public and academic occasions where he exposed himself to the necessity and complexity of the project (the beginning happening in a conference at the University of Murcia in 1999, then in Timisoara, Romania, in 2002, followed by a seminar with his students at Basel University, the whole project developing through the grant by the Swiss National Research Fund and

the Swiss Academy of the Humanities and Social Sciences, to thank the various institutions and[2] scholars still working on it).

The book gradually unfolds and gathers its final momentum when dealing with "Re-productions" (consisting of "On Gottfried Keller's *A Village…*," 219-230, and *"*Language and Conflict: A Trilingual *Romeo and Juliet*," 231-240*,* two chapters which focus on examples of Shakespearean multilingual productions in multilingual Switzerland). Doing so, it reaches its "Coda. The Relevance of the Inconspicuous," (241-253), which is a word that Engler associates to grammar: comma, semicolon, colon, question, exclamation mark and … full stop. Engler's coda is a happy farewell to the book, to his own writing, to his readers and Shakespeare's audiences. The final stress is on "punctuation," which exists in individual and solitary reading but, especially, even more relevantly today than ever, in poetry reading and performance poetry. In accordance with his approach, Engler closes his important contribution to Renaissance studies and performance studies by mentioning the relevance of popular culture, be it in the forms of rapping or poetry slam, in order to re-claim the power of the voice, his own voice, the voice of theatre, the voices of all powerful and extraordinary Shakespeares.

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[2] See http://www.hyperhamlet.unibas.ch/

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Reviewed by *Maosheng Hu*[*]

Ariel Chu,[1] preferably spelt as Zhu Shenghao by Chinese mainland scholars today, achieves his posthumous success for the voluminous translation of Shakespeare's works into Chinese. He suffered severely from tuberculosis in the middle of translating *Henry the Fifth* in June 1944 and passed away in wartime China on St. Stephen's Day of the same year, at the age of 32. His decade-long efforts of translating the bard's complete works contribute to a Shakespeare legacy in different generations of Chinese readership and a "Shakespeare passport" that "enriches and enhances our lives,"[2] so much so that Zhu Shenghao, a translator of signal expertise in Chinese Shakespeare, rises to the height of a legend in this country, and Duan Zili defines his translation as "a live literary canon" (8).

In the fashion of the founder of New Shakespeare Society F. J. Furnivall's rigid metrical tests on Shakespeare's plays in 1877, or that of Dr. T. C. Mendenhall's graphic exhibitions on the same subject in his "A Mechanical Solution of a Literary Problem" (1901), Duan applies a most thoroughly statistical anatomy towards Zhu Shenghao's translation of Shakespeare, a union of "both quantitative and qualitative perspectives" (1) in understanding the canonisation of his works. To fulfill these purposes, on the one hand, Duan fathoms the innermost veins and textures of the translated works and unveils the implicit qualities of the Chinese texts by developing eight parallel corpuses, decoding the "internal factors" (4) under the light of essentialist canonisation theory; on the other, he is inspired by the constructionist canonisation theory that features a set of "external factors" (4) such as culture, poetics and politics. The author of the book demonstrates how exoteric as well as esoteric attributes work together towards the formation of

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[1] Ariel Chu is by far the only authorized English name by the translator and poet himself. The combination of Shakespeare's character name Ariel and the Wade-Giles Romanization Chu appears on the end matter of *A Dictionary of English Grammar and Composition.* Usage of the name is also found in the private correspondence between the translator and his then love and later wife Song Qingru, who proofreads all the translation manuscripts and finalizes the first publications of Zhu's work.

[2] See Gregory Doran's use of the terms in the 2016 Richard Dimbleby Lecture "Is Shakespeare Chinese?" at BBC: http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b07474wx/the-richard-dimbleby-lecture-gregory-doran-is-shakespeare-chinese

a literary canon, and further proposes a supplement to canonisation theories with the example of Zhu Shenghao. In this increasingly nominalist life, we are inclined to measure and weigh the physical characteristics of the world with numeracy; in the study of Zhu Shenghao, this one is the first of its kind in size and gravity, and deserves to be placed on the must-read list for a serious study.

The layout of the book is of coherence and focus: it begins with an introduction elucidating the research, its history, methodology and significance. The second chapter discusses the external factors that account for the canon formation of Zhu's translation, such as circulation and reception. The following three chapters delineate three internal factors that are embodied in Zhu's works and constitute key elements in the making of a canon: musicality, interpersonal meanings at the cross-cultural level, and translation of images. The sixth chapter resolves the controversy revolving around translating foreignness by the yardsticks set up from the examination of Zhu's canonical works of Shakespeare translation. The end of the book features an instructive conclusion and an informative list of appendices related with questions at issue and handy for reference.

Chapter Two extracts the extrinsic qualities in the making of a canon from the circulation and reception databases over the past six decades. In this part Duan also attempts to answer the question as to why Zhu's translation of Shakespeare has excelled among various others and gained "a higher degree of canonisation" (26). The press, theatre and education create very favorable conditions for Zhu's works to disseminate knowledge and ideas about Shakespeare as well as the translator. The repute of Zhu grows immeasurably with that of Shakespeare in China and the two become heavily mingled in the reading public. A reader in praise of the 1950's publication wrote to Song Qingru afterwards in the 1980's equaling Zhu to the bard and declaring that "I fall in love with Zhu Shenghao for the love of Shakespeare…and I wonder, isn't he Shakespeare, the man who sacrifices himself for the translation of Shakespeare's works" (Zhu Shanggang 294)? Apart from popularity on the page and the stage, Zhu's translation has also been selected as scripts for Shakespeare on the screen and in the film. Furthermore, compilers of Chinese textbooks excerpt dramatic works of Shakespeare from Zhu's translation. Wide circulation feeds academic interpretation and re-creating of Shakespeare translation. Chinese scholars and translators do not simply rest upon the prevailing version from Zhu; they reread it to locate the errors or omissions and then refine it. The proofreading and patch-up strategy gives birth to "reformed" Shakespeare translations which are in essence Zhu's but revised anew. Proofreaders do not abandon Zhu's translation and replace it with brand new ones, as they do to other versions in Chinese history; instead, they would rather make amendments or additions within Zhu's work. Duan dubs this translation practice "a rare phenomenon in reception" (45). To articulate the rarity of this reception phenomenon, he dissects the erred and omitted parts in Zhu's rendering with

mathematical precision, not only in numerical counts, but scrutinizing contrast to denote how proofreading and patch-up help to promote and accelerate canonisation.

The next three chapters of the book are devoted to the internal factors conducive to the canonisation of Zhu's translation of Shakespeare. Among them is first of all the musicality Zhu infuses into his rendering of Shakespeare's blank verse. Another internal factor that the author apportions into his design of elaboration, among others, is the translator's "conscious construction of interpersonal meanings at the cross-cultural level" (181). Duan assigns the last internal factor in the canon formation of Zhu's works to his success in translating images. He develops statistical devices to calculate the percentage of images faithfully rendered, impressing readers with hard data and insightful observations.

Duan concludes the book with a chapter on how to reconcile the differences between source culture and target culture in translation. He proposes an effective mixture of creativity and fidelity in the pursuit of translation ethics. Achieving a good balance between the two, Zhu's translation has stood the test of time and been marmorealized in its symbiotic relationship with Shakespeare's collection of works.

Elizabethan England gave birth to a host of elite dramatists and poets, such as Christopher Marlowe, Michael Drayton, Robert Greene, George Peele, and others, who might have had the chance to replace the bard, the untimely "upstart crow" in the eyes of some peers. Like Shakespeare himself, Zhu struggled to make a living in metropolitan Shanghai, a celebrity-packed place where established intellectuals like Lu Hsün, Bakin and Lin Yutang were at the peak of their literary careers. One of his contemporaries, Cao Weifeng, had already started the translation of Shakespeare since 1931, and prepared to pay his homage to Shakespeare via Royal Leamington Spa on the way home to London from Oxford in the spring of 1939. Back in Shanghai in 1937, the devout disciple of Konstantin Stanislavsky, Zhang Min, debuted his sensational *Romeo and Juliet* at Carlton Theatre, which Zhu might be interested in after being hospitalized for scarlet fever. In two months' time, Shanghai would be caught in the blaze of world war, and Zhu's manuscripts of comedies, scheduled for press soon, were burnt in the fire at his residence. He fled to his aunt's place, barely able to save anything but his Oxford edition of Shakespeare and scanty documents only to restart from the scratch. Although readers have appreciated and adored Zhu Shenghao's works since their first publication in 1947, none but the author of this book has approached it on such a statistical and scientific scale.

Nevertheless, Duan seems to have overlooked certain historical facts about Shakespeare readership and translation in China. First and foremost is the reception of Shakespeare preceding Zhu's translation. He conveniently concludes that "to a large extent canonisation of Shakespeare in China is no more than that of Zhu's translation" (70), a very friendly pose towards his subject of interest but not a level playing field for the bard and other contributors to the Shakespeare

cause in this country. Ever since David Garrick's 1769 jubilee and the Victorian literati's zealous promotion, as that from Charles Dickens, James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps and others, Shakespeare has become increasingly known and loved by people all across the globe. The canonical status of the bard has been shared for centuries among readers throughout the world and Chinese people are without exception part of this global Shakespeare canonisation. They studied Shakespeare in England, America or Japan and introduced him back to China. For example, recently I came across a list of presentations from the legendary Buddhist master, professor and artist (highly skilled in music, calligraphy, painting and drama) Li Shutong on the eve of his monasticism in 1918, and in the gifts bestowed upon his student Tse Ka Fong is "a collection of Shakespeare's complete works in the original tongue" (Chen Xing 159).

Besides, the author's narrative of critical inquiry would have been more convincing if the data collection is devoid of undercoverage. Although Duan is well aware of the fact that Zhu's translation has been in circulation for more than sixty years, he gives explicit priority to criticism in the 1980's, 1990's and the first decade of this century, while readers have responded enthusiastically since its publication in 1947. For instance, Guo Binhe, professor of English from National Central University had to purchase the books directly from the press via the widowed wife of Zhu in 1947, and he placed Zhu's translation high above others in a letter to her afterwards. When evaluating complimentary comments in Chapter Two, Duan begins somehow with the year 1981. Furthermore, the corpus data based on evaluation can be rather controversial and sometimes erroneous, which compromises the very principle of accuracy such a device pursues. In Appendix Six, the author views Zhu's translation of the name Helen (from *The Second Part of Henry the Fourth*) into "美人" (beauty) as a case of image loss (270). The misconception does not perform a full analysis of the translator's intention and the effect he aims to achieve for the face of Helen speaks for beauty itself.

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