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The Historical Overview and the Reception of the Translation of William Shakespeare's Sonnets in Contemporary Iran

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Abstract: The present paper deals with the historical overview and the reception of William Shakespeare's Sonnets in contemporary Iran. The authors examine the chronology of Persian translations of Shakespeare's Sonnets (both scattered and book-length ones) during a century which is a considerable period of time in the examination of the reception of any author in another culture. As poetry is not the most popular genre in Persian translation, the Persian translations of William Shakespeare's Sonnets suffered from a lot of fluctuations. It was in the latter part of the nineteenth century, a turning-point in the history of the country, that Shakespeare was introduced into Iranian audience for the first time. It started with scattered translations and ended in book-length ones. This study indicates early Persian interest in Shakespeare's Sonnets which was followed by a lull. The reason behind it was two-fold: the translation of foreign poetry was dominated by French and Russian languages, and the rich tradition of Persian poetry does not feel the need to translate foreign poetry. The reception of Shakespeare's Sonnets was followed by renewed interest in 1998-2017 and finally book-length translations began to thrive. All in all, Shakespeare's Sonnets did not have a great influence on Persian poetry, as it was expected.

Keywords: Reception; Influence; Shakespeare's Sonnets; Persian Translations.

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1. Introduction

Shakespeare stands out as the greatest and most renowned of poets and playwrights in the history of English literature. Thirty-seven plays, most of them composed of verse, have been attributed to him. Among them, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, created at the pinnacle of his artistic finesse and genius, boast worldwide fame, and four centuries after their composition, are to this day still staged all around the globe. It is in the light of this colossal dramatic success that he stands as England's, and to some scholars world's greatest playwright. Also, the lasting charm of his one hundred and fifty-four sonnets, make him the most distinguished sonneteer in the history of English literature. Four long and short narrative poems, namely, *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *A Lover's Complaint*, and *The Phoenix and the Turtle* complement his already fruitful works. All told, William Shakespeare in all forms of English poem, dramatic, lyric and narrative has both quantity and quality to offer an achievement seldom shared with any other poet in English poetry.

2. Shakespeare in Iran

Before reviewing the Persian translation of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, it is useful to touch upon the history of translation in contemporary Iran. By contemporary Iran, we mean from Persian Constitutional Revolution (1905- 1911) up to the present time. Generally speaking, translation in Persian tradition has a very long and eventful history both in pre- and post-Islam. There is no doubt that it has played a crucial part in the growth and evolution of Persian civilization in different periods. One can say that even in modern Iran, i. e. in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it brought about a little renaissance and injected a new blood into political, cultural and literary issues. For example, new genres, e. g. short story, drama and novel, were introduced to Persian literature. At first some historical and later literary books (mostly novels) were translated into Persian. Little by little Western poetry, basically French poetry, were translated into Persian by poets. In addition, it played an important role in the intellectual life of this era. It contributed to the dissemination of modern European ideas in modern Iran:

Soon, translation activity was directed towards disciplines such as history, politics and literature and became an integral part of various modernization projects ... Thus, Persian translations of the nineteenth century may be said to have played a unique and significant part in Iran's drive towards modernization (Karimi-Hakkak, 498).

There have been some studies on Shakespeare's plays and sonnets in Persian. Most of them have compared his sonnets to those of Hafez and Sa'di, and have pinpointed shared themes such as love, the beloved, lover, panegyric, and *mofakhere* among these poets. The present researchers hold that, there has not been an investigation of the reception of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in Iran. This study aims to fill this vacuum. First, We have attempted to find the list of all translations scattered and book-length ones, in prose and in verse, of the sonnets, in order of publication date, and discuss each one briefly, and then enumerate the reasons as to why they have been well-received or otherwise.

According to newly found documents, Mirza Saleh Shirazi is the first Iranian who in his travelogue, written in the period 1815 to 1820 CE, speaks of William Shakespeare very briefly, and introduces him to the Iranian public. According to Mirza Saleh Shirazi "Shakespeare one of the poets of the age [i.e., Elizabethan Age] is one of the luminaries who was living in this period" (Raien, 1968). Mirza Saleh was one among the first group of Iranian scholars, in Minovi's terms, "first caravan of wisdom", who in 1851 departed for England. On the 10th of Jumada al-Thani, 1815, he along with four other people was sent from Tabriz to England for the purpose of studies at the command of Abbas Mirza Na'eb-es-Saltaneh and returned to Iran on Shawwāl the 2nd 1819. Nonetheless, Yussef Eteessami (1874-1937), also known as Eteessam-ol-molk, should be touted as the first one who really introduced Shakespeare and his works to Iran. Eteessam-ol-molk in 1911 wrote the first Persian biography of William Shakespeare in the monthly *Bahar*, which was published from 1910 to 1912.

Later he translated excerpts from four of Shakespeare's plays into Persian, and also published the translated titles of Shakespeare's dramatic works in the same journal. Nevertheless, it was Hoseingholi Saloor (1868 -1932), also known as Emad o-Saltaneh, the grandchild of Mohammad Shah Qajar, who first in 1899 translated the complete text of one of Shakespeare's plays into Persian, namely, the comedy *The Taming of the Shrew*. After him, Abu'l-Qāsem Khān Qarāgozlu (1866 -1927), known by the title Nāṣer-al-molk, translated one of the most famous tragedies of Shakespeare, *Othello*, in the years 1914 - 1917, and it was published in 1961 in Paris: Matbaee Meli, under the title *Othello: The Tragic Story of Moorish Othello in Vandick*. From then on, Iranian translators have shown great interest in Shakespeare and his dramatic works.

Before delving into the history of translations of Shakespeare's poems into Persian, it is a good idea to briefly take a look at the history of translations of Western poems in Iran. Translating Western poems into Persian began in late Qajar dynasty, more precisely,

during the Constitutional Revolution (1905- 1911) of Iran. It should be mentioned that many of these poems of the West were translated into Persian by outstanding poets of the era, figures like Iraj Mirza, Parvin E'tesami and Malek o-Sho'arā Bahār, et al., and were in favor of adaptations than translations, mostly in the form of wisdom and moral-lending poems. But translation of Western poems in the modern sense began in 1930s from the French language.

From the start of the translation movement in the Qajar era in the nineteenth century up to the 1940s, French was the main source and mediator for the materials translated into Persian. The translation of French works into Persian can be traced back to the 1830s and the first printing presses in Persia. Translated accounts of the French revolution played a significant part in driving forth the constitutional movement (1905–1911), and the Persian translation of the Belgian constitution of 1831 served as a draft document for the Iranian Constitution ratified in 1906 (Fomeshi, 63).

After translating narrative and allegorical poetry, Persian translators turned to translating European lyrical and Romantic poems which had a somehow tangible influence on modern Persian poetry. After these two phases “Persian translators translated political and social poems from poets like Paul Éluard, Louis Aragon, Vladimir Mayakovsky and other poets with the same worldview” (Kadkani, 143). On the whole, Western poetry had an influence first on the domain of “content and concept” then on the domain of “image and imagery” and finally on the “language and diction” of modern Persian poetry.

It was in 1940s that translation from English into Persian began to finally thrive, and Shojaeddin Shafa translated poems from several English poets, including Shakespeare, Shelly, Tennyson ..., into Persian. After a short break “following World War II, English gradually replaced French as the main European language taught at Iran’s secondary schools and universities, as well as the principal medium for translation” (Karimi-Hakkak, 500). It was after this decade that poems by Longfellow, Frost, and Whitman were beginning to be translated into Persian. In 1950s, as a result of the political atmosphere, mostly revolutionary poetry from people such as Pablo Neruda, Sándor Petőfi and Vladimir Mayakovsky were translated. Moreover, “at the same time, through a translation effort spearheaded by the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party of Iran, Marxist ideas, particularly in their Stalinist interpretations, began to gain currency in Iran” (Karimi-Hakkak, 500).

Though several of the Shakespeare's plays have been translated into Persian over and over again, the narrative poems have not attracted much attention from Iranian translators. From the four aforementioned narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis*, and *The Rape of Lucrece*, according to documents, have only once and that by the hand of Dr. Lotfali Suratgar (1900-1969) been translated into Persian. He published *Venus and Adonis* in serial form in the monthly *Sepidehdam* (1301/1922-1302/1923). It is noteworthy that it was in this same period that Iraj Mirza, Jalāl-ol-Mamālek (1873-1925), based his love poem *Zohreh and Manouchehr* on the same poem. The story is thus told that "Lotfali Suratgar sends an issue of *Sepidehdam* [monthly] to Tehran for Malek o-Sho'arā Bahār, and Iraj Mirza sees the journal there with Bahār, and thinks the story appropriate for versification, and begins to versify it" (Suratgar, 6). Suratgar translated *The Rape of Lucrece* to Persian and named it "The Story of Lucrece", and it was published in his book of poems (Sooratgar, 74-86). This translation was left unfinished, and Dr. Suratgar did not find the frame of mind to bring it to completion: "Several times I decided to finish this story but that turn of mind that stimulated its making did not appear again. For that reason, it is published this day in unfinished form" (Suratgar, 86). All four Shakespeare's narrative poems have been translated into Persian very recently by Omid Tabibzade. (Tabibzade, Omid. (1399). *Turtle and Dove & Lover's Complaint*. Tehran: Niloofar Publishers. Tabibzade, Omid. (1401). *Venus and Adonis & The Rape of Lucrece*. Tehran: Niloofar Publishers).

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper deals with the historical overview and reception of the translation of William Shakespeare's sonnets in modern Iran. According to S. S. Praver "such studies of reception, diffusion and literary fortune from an important part of comparative studies" (Praver, 31). Also, according to Meg Brown the reception of a given translation examines the way a work "confirms to, challenges or disappoints the reader's aesthetic horizon of expectation" (Munday, 154). So, this paper through the prism of "Reception Studies" in Comparative Literature and Translation Studies tries to answer the following questions: a) Was Shakespeare's sonnets received warmly in modern Iran? b) Did Shakespeare's sonnets have any influence on modern Persian poetry? Whatever the answer is, what are the reasons? To do so, the present paper, first, tries to examine the chronology of Persian translations of Shakespeare's sonnets in modern Iran, then provides an analysis of Persian literary taste during this time.

4. Review of Literature

There are some researches on Shakespeare's sonnets in Persian. Most of them compares Shakespeare's sonnets with Hafiz and S'adi's ghazels in terms of love, beloved, patron, and eulogy. To our best of knowledge, there is no research in Persian on the reception of William Shakespeare's sonnets in modern Iran.

5. William Shakespeare's Sonnets

William Shakespeare was the greatest composer of sonnets in the history of English literature. His sonnets amount to 154 pieces and were published in 1609 by Thomas Thorpe. They were published without the author's knowledge and permission or even his consent. Our purpose, therefore, fits into the translation history in Iran that has shifted our attention from Shakespeare's intended to the way his works function in a given culture, and can be seen to reflect aspects of that recipient culture. This cultural change has opened up new vistas for studying Shakespeare in translation. Following his contemporaries Sidney and Spenser, Shakespeare too organized his sonnets in the frame of a sequence. It was first in 1598, eleven years before the publication of the *Sonnets*, that Francis Meres in his *Palladis Tamia, Wits Treasury* spoke of Shakespeare's sonnets and wrote that, "the witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare, witness his Venus and Adonis, his Lucrece, his sugared sonnets among his private friends" (Schoenfeldt, 60). One year later, in 1599, *The Passionate Pilgrim* by William Jaggard included five poems by Shakespeare, including sonnets 138 and 144. There are many ambiguities about Shakespeare's sonnets, and discussing them in detail cannot be taken up here. Some of these conflicts include: the precise dates of the composition of the sonnets, the order of the sonnets, the fair youth, the dark lady, the rival poet, the dedication of the work, and whether or not they are (auto)biographical. There are not definite and clear answers to these questions, only guesses and speculations.

The exact dates of the composition of the sonnets are not known. It seems, nevertheless, that Shakespeare composed the majority of them in the last decade of the 16th century, meaning the same decade in which this literary genre, in the form of sonnet cycles, was at its peak in England. And let it not remain untold how because of the plague, theaters were shut down and Shakespeare found precious time to spend on most of these sonnets and two of his famous narrative poems. Shakespeare's sonnet sequence is different from the ones composed by his peers in significant ways. First, as mentioned before, Shakespeare's sonnets are undated and untitled. Second, although the sonnets

were meant to develop a consistent narrative, they do not reach the coherence and integrity that the other sonnet sequences boast. Third, contrary to the ways of the times, in the majority of the sonnets, the beloved who is being addressed is a male person, an uncommon feature very difficult to digest for the poet's contemporaries. And in the sonnets that were addressed to a female beloved, the lady is not blue-eyed, blond, pious and charming, but dark-eyed, dark-skinned, sensual and promiscuous. Shakespeare scholars typically divide his 154 sonnets into three parts: the first part, sonnets 1 to 126, are about a young man; the middle part, sonnets 127 to 152, are about a dark lady; and the last part, sonnets 153 and 154, are Anacreontic, and not really related to the previous sonnets. The themes of these sonnets are the same themes that were common in the Renaissance period: friendship, love, death, transience of life and immortality, and the relation between the arts of poetry and each of these themes.

6. The History of Translation and Reception of Shakespeare's Sonnets into Persian

Before exploring the reception of Shakespeare's sonnets in Iran, it is better to take a brief look at how his poetry was received during his lifetime. Today, Shakespeare's fame is indebted to his plays rather than poetry, lyric or narrative. As a matter of fact, today people know him as a *playwright*-poet and not a *poet*-playwright, while Shakespeare's poetry, especially his narrative poems, were during his lifetime very popular and famous, and his fame was mostly based on them. *Venus and Adonis*, for instance, had been published eight times by 1616, the year Shakespeare passed away, amounting to his greatest publication success during his lifetime. Furthermore, this very same poem reached its 15th publication by 1640 (the year of the *Sonnets*' second publication).

Unlike his two renowned narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, his sonnets, except one or two of them, did not draw much attention or admiration during his life, and for one and a half century after their publication, fell into oblivion. It is noteworthy for example that for all Shakespeare's fame in those times, the time span between the first publication of his sonnets (1609) and the second (1640) was a 31-year span. This was mostly due to several causes. First of all, at that time of the appearance of them the literary taste had changed and interest in sonnet sequences had slackened. Additionally, political situation has changed too and the Puritans have risen to power. And finally, the John Benson edition of the sonnets included a great number of alterations that did not help the sonnets as a whole. It was only in 1790 that the sonnets saw a third publication by the efforts of the great editor Edmund Malone, and from then on, they slowly began to be celebrated. And it should be mentioned that the first neglect of his

sonnets occurred in the early years after his death when the first compilers of the works of Shakespeare cared not to include his narrative and lyric poems in *The First Folio* (1623).

There are several translations, complete (book-length) and incomplete (scattered), in verse and prose, of the “sweet sonnets” (Schoenfeldt, 12) of Shakespeare, and they are listed below by order of date of publication. However, Iranian translators, as mentioned above, have not shown much vigor in this area: First, translation of high and rich poetry involves concerns about rhythm, meter, diction, arrangement, figures of speech, tropes, and matters of culture, which makes the undertaking all too difficult and unyielding with little reward. As a result, the number of translators who ventured to undertake this job is few. Another reason is that translating Shakespeare’s sonnets, touted as amongst the highest order of this genre in English literature, is by no means an easy job. It is a battlefield that not many dare enter, and few of those who do, overcome its trials. And last but never the least, the sonnet form in Persian poetry is an old, well-developed and strong genre, and the Iranian reader will hardly accept *any* translation of a sonnet as a proper example of a true sonnet. “Generally speaking, poetry is not the most popular genre in Persian translation; perhaps the rich tradition of Persian poetry does not feel the need to translate foreign poetry. And when foreign poetry is translated, it is traditionally dominated by French and Russian” (Fomeshi, 2019).

It is possible to divide the Persian translation of Shakespeare’s sonnets into two groups: group ‘a’, which includes translations of selections of Shakespeare’s sonnets that are published as part of a book or in various magazines; and group ‘b’, that includes the majority or all of the sonnets and are published in independent books dedicated to them. The first group itself comprises of seven translations that I will discuss by order of date of publication. It is clear that not just any selection of Shakespeare’s sonnets can bring home the true beauty, color, taste and scent of them to the readers. It is true that each poem is independent and complete in itself, however, following the tradition of the times they have been framed inside a long, continuous lyric sequence and an invisible thread runs through all of them, connecting them and making them part of a larger whole. In these verses which were composed in the most tumultuous socio-political conditions of the historical age of the poet, the reader encounters a love triangle: a youthful and beautiful noble; a dark-eyed, dark-skinned and sensual lady; and finally, an amorous and love-stricken poet.

According to documents, it was first Masoud Farzad (1906-1981) who translated into prose twelve sonnets by Shakespeare – sonnets 29, 30, 55, 58, 60, 65, 66, 72, 91, 97, 106

and 154 – between the years 1933 and 1935, and published them in “*Mehr*” Magazine (1933-1967). Some of Farzad’s selected sonnets are among the best works of Shakespeare. Additionally, the eloquent, articulate and forceful prose of Farzad has facilitated reading them and made possible partaking of their aesthetic treasures. I wish Farzad translated all Shakespeare’s sonnets in such beautiful eloquence.

Majid Movaghar, editor-in-chief at *Mehr Magazine*, translated sonnets 18, 19, 27, 29, 30, 61, 62 and 106, and published them in 1938 issues of his own magazine. Movaghar’s translation is also in a fluent and articulate prose, but not as attractive and impressive as that of Farzad’s. These two traversed an unbeaten path at the beginning of this century, and paved the way for the posterity.

Shafa (1952) published a book titled *The Most Beautiful Masterpieces of World Poetry*. This work comprised of 280 pieces of short and long poetry by one hundred and eleven great European and American poets. He also included brief biographies of these poets and introduced their literary styles and works. He dedicated a chapter to Shakespeare’s poems (pp. 1-6). He translated eight of Shakespeare’s sonnets, namely, 27, 29, 30, 33, 62, 71, 97 and 104, and called them *Naghme* (Persian for melody). His translations are in prose. His prose, for all its integrity and relative coherence, misses out on Shakespeare’s brevity and conciseness.

Jerome Clinton, the famous American Iranologist, in a paper entitled “Foreign Sonnet: Some Sonnets from Shakespeare” (1974) translated nine of Shakespeare’s sonnets – Nos. 30, 50, 64, 65, 75, 97, 99, 146, and 147. It was a word-for-word translation in prose which appeared in *Gohar Magazine* (No. 13, pp. 41-48). He added an “introduction about the foreign sonnet and its history up to Shakespeare’s time and a few words on the importance of his sonnets”. Although Clinton’s translation is readable and fluent, he pays the least attention to the Shakespeare’s form and just tries to transfer the meaning.

The smooth and melodic translations of sonnets 18, 29, 30, 33, and 73 by Eslami Nodooshan, were published in 1976 in a book titled *Fateless Writings* (pp. 374 - 381). He wrote a brief introduction on these sonnets and there took a brief look into the similarities and differences between Persian and English sonnets: “I translated these sonnets by Shakespeare, more so that I can compare the lyrical thought of the West with the Eastern and Iranian lyricism.” Meanwhile, Eslami Nodooshan attempted by virtue of citing poems by great Persian poets, especially great sonneteers — Saadi, Hafez, and Rudaki — to outline the thematic affinities of Shakespeare’s sonnets with the Persian ones. The themes of his selection of sonnets include: tribute to arts and poetry; the cruelty

of the times; the disloyalty of the beloved; complaining about old age; and mourning the transience and passage of life.

Abjadian (1992) has dedicated an expansive chapter in *A Survey of English Literature*, volume 3, to Shakespeare's sonnets (pp. 186–214), and in that chapter included his smooth prosaic translations of 9 sonnets by Shakespeare: sonnets 2, 12, 18, 22, 55, 73, 116, 130, and 144. His translations are excellent works of high precision and accuracy. His attempt at finding an exact Persian equivalent for each English line has been successful. Abjadian has discussed briefly the themes of the 154 sonnets by Shakespeare in those pages. He elaborated on some of the most renowned ones, numbers 2, 55, 73 and 116, for instance, and discussed most other ones in brief because of the limitation of his space. Moreover, Abjadian has touched upon matters such as order of the sonnets, dates of their composition, the dedication of the sonnets, the love triangle (beautiful youth, dark lady, and the rival poet), and Horace and Ovid's influence on Shakespeare. Without doubt, this is the most elaborate and detailed article written on Shakespeare's sonnets in Persian until recently. Since these translations are published not in an independent book but inside the mentioned book, they did not draw much attention.

The celebrated Persian scholar, Fathollah Mojtabaei, selected and translated four of Shakespeare's sonnets – Nos. 29, 60, 71, and 106. His translations were published in a book entitled *Ketabe Sokhan: A Collection of Essays* (by Safdar Taghizade, 1992, pp, 223-231). Mojtabaei's translations are in a well-written prose. All in all, he has done an excellent job. Mojtabaei's has tried to keep Shakespeare's brevity and compactness in target language.

In 1993 and 1997, Taghi Tafazzoli translated five of Shakespeare's sonnets – Nos. 25, 79, 85, 98, and 99 – in prose which were published in *Kelk Magazine*. Two years later, in 2006, Tafazzoli translated 100 of Shakespeare's sonnets in prose. He published them in a volume under the title of *Shakespeare's Love Poems* which I will discuss them in the next section.

Tahere Saghafi translated four of Shakespeare's sonnets – Nos. 54, 113, 123, and 127 – which were published in *Golestane Magazine* (2000). Her translations are in verse (free verse). She has translated each sonnet in seven 4-line stanzas. To me, her translations are not successful. One can't all them verse (either blank or free verse).

Saeedpour translated five of Shakespeare's sonnets – Nos. 12, 29, 30, 72 and 138 – which were published in *Honar Quarterly* (1995). Later, Saeedpour (2003), in his *From Shakespeare to Eliot*, selected six of Shakespeare's sonnets, numbers 3, 6, 72, 73, 138 and

146, and translated them into clear and eloquent Persian prose. *From Shakespeare to Eliot* is a selection of English and American poems of note, spanning a four-hundred-year period. Saeedpour has translated into Persian 107 pieces by great poets such as Shakespeare, John Donne, W. B. Yeats, Walt Whitman, T. S. Eliot, Sylvia Plath, et al. In a relatively lengthy introduction (pp. 23 - 30) he speaks concisely about the sonnets of Shakespeare, and the similarities and differences between them and Persian sonnets: “Some of Shakespeare’s sonnets are in some respects comparable with Classic Iranian sonnets and share similar themes. But in general, contrary to classic Iranian sonnets which offer a wisdom and knowledge of the universe and existence, reaching out to spiritual matters, Shakespeare’s sonnets engage with tangible and real “worldly” affairs, and when they speak of the beloved, it is a real person and not an abstract or other-worldly phenomenon” (Saeedpour, 2003, P: 27). Saeedpour’s selection of sonnets which he calls *melodies*, are amongst Shakespeare’s most popular sonnets and we come across these pieces in most selections of English poetry. This book, now in its fifth publication, has played a part in giving recognition to Shakespeare’s sonnets in Persian language. Translation of sonnet 60 from this book found its way to third grade High School’s Persian literature textbook and helped students develop a brief familiarity with Shakespeare’s poetry. Saeedpour (2003) has endeavored to hold onto Shakespeare’s brevity and conciseness of language, and except in one case, sonnet 146, he has reached his goal. His translations are in clean, fluent and well-trimmed prose and he sometimes borrows poetic terms from Persian literature such as “high-priced life¹”, “strange wails”, “my initial tears²”, “fall into anguish”, and “come to finish³” in sonnet 30. In 2013, Saeedpour translated in the same way 55 of Shakespeare’s in a book entitled *Read What Silent Love Hath Writ* (taken from Shakespeare’s sonnet No. 23). In 2020, the book ran to second edition.

Elahi Ghomshei (2007) in his *365 Days with English Literature*, which has reached its sixth publication, has offered delightful and agreeable translations for ten of Shakespeare’s sonnets: 19, 29, 53, 55, 62, 73, 76, 116, 145, and 146. His renditions are truly smooth, pleasant and replete with well-made poetical terms. However, they are not immune to imperfections: he has not kept to Shakespeare’s conciseness very much; sometimes has scrambled the order of the lines, or added some lines of his own to the works. For instance, the last line of his rendition of sonnet 19 is of such nature. Moreover,

¹ Sa’di

² Hafez

³ Hafez

he has for the purpose of giving polish and smoothness to his work applied 'interpretive additives', as translators are wont to call them. As you know, Shakespeare's sonnets do not have titles, however, Elahi Ghomshei has chosen for each one a title on the basis of their content. In addition, he has at the end of each translation brought some lines by some great Persian poets, especially sonneteers – Sa'di, Molavi, Hafez, Ferdowsi, Attar and Nezami – lines that bear thematic resemblances to the Shakespeare's sonnet, and is of help to comparative scholars. In general, it may be said that through his renditions one may get the true taste of Shakespeare's sonnets to some extent.

Group 'b' includes four translations (complete and selected ones) and one pseudo-translation that I will discuss by order of date of publication.

1. Taghi Tafazzoli's translation, titled *Shakespeare's Love Sonnets* (1998) which includes 100 sonnets in translated into prose. This translation features a brief introduction (pp. 5 – 9) about Shakespeare and his works, but does not include any interpretation or elaborations otherwise. In his introduction there are several mistakes, for example on page 6 the name of Shakespeare's son is written "Hamet", while Hamnet is the correct name. In the translation of the sonnets, he has aimed to "offer a correct and proper translation, and try to reflect as much of Shakespeare's greatness and the glory of his poetry as possible through an eloquent and sweet prose" (p. 9). However, only a small part of this promise has been fulfilled as in a translation of verse, in addition to meaning, such features as form, conciseness, and the subtleties of sound should also be conveyed. Shakespeare's poetry is one of the best examples of brevity and conciseness in English literature, a characteristic that is absent in the bulk of Tafazzoli's translation. His translation in numerous cases makes use of unnecessary synonyms. Instances include Sonnet 18. Another disadvantage of this translation is the lack of a poetic form. The translator has not tried to convey the poetic form used by Shakespeare, therefore fails to give the reader the sense of a work of poetry.

2. Behnam Moghaddam's translation (2000) is titled *Shakespeare's Sonnets* and offers verse translation of 87 sonnets. His translation features a short preface (pp. 4 – 7) about Shakespeare and his sonnets. This brief introduction is not free of defects. For instance, "[Shakespeare] after some time took up a job taking care of horses at a theater" (p. 4). There is no historical evidence to base this statement upon, and it is better to seriously avoid the likes of it in scholarly works, to avert muddling up young minds. Around Shakespeare's history, personality and works, like many other great figures of world literature, there has been no shortage of legend and myth with no historical basis.

Moghaddam has added a short interpretation or explanation in English at the end of each piece. But if this book is addressed to Persian readers, what may be the use of interpretations/elaborations in English? Moreover, he has added to this book the translation of 13 famous pieces out of Shakespeare's plays. As far as I know, this is the only Persian translation in verse of more than half of Shakespeare's sonnets. Although "in the translation of these sonnets keeping to the original as far as possible has been the goal, and it is clear that keeping to the original at the same time as composing new poetry in the target language is a very difficult task" (P. 7), one cannot help but notice that he has not been able to live up to this promise, because it suffers from some metrical problems. It is clear that most of these translations cannot be named "poems", while they may be called verse at the most, though the reader might come across a poetic line every now and then as well. Without doubt, translation of Shakespeare's sonnets into verse is a very difficult task. It takes a poet of Shakespeare's own level of mastery and gift to undertake such a heavy work, and to manage rendition/recreation of these poems in another language while not losing anything of their originality.

3. Nematollah Shomosi's translation (2006), *The Selected Sonnets of William Shakespeare*, consists of 25 sonnets "in blank verse or poetic prose" (p. 11). Some years later, Shomosi, with his colleague Kazem Maskani, produced a new version of this book, entitled *Sonnet to Sonnet: The Verse and Prose Translation of William Shakespeare's Sonnets* which includes 22 sonnets. Here, I concentrate on the new version, i. e. the joint one (2015). They have added an introduction to the book which deals with different ideas on the translation of poetry and its kinds (translation to prosodic poetry, free verse, and blank verse), Shakespeare's life, time and his sonnets. As we know, Shakespeare's sonnets are untitled, but translators have given a title to every translated sonnet and tried to translate the selected sonnets first into prose and then to verse. The prose translations are not faithful to Shakespeare's form and brevity and the number of lines varies from 18 to 23 (while all Shakespeare's sonnets have 14 lines). It is worth noting that their verse translations vary from 4 to 7 couplets. All in all, this translation, both the prose and the verse one, is not a brilliant job and did not get much attention.

4. Omid Tabibzadeh's translation (2017a), *The Sonnets of William Shakespeare*, comprises of 154 sonnets in prose. This is the first complete translation of all Shakespeare's sonnets into Persian, and is different from the previous translations in three major ways: Firstly, it includes all 154 of Shakespeare's sonnets. Secondly, the translator has featured a lengthy and elaborate introduction (P: 13-59). This is a good source of information, not only about Shakespeare's sonnets, but also about England in

the Renaissance. And thirdly, Tabibzadeh has added precious explanations and interpretations from varied, reliable and up-to-date sources after each sonnet, and this is a great help in understanding Shakespeare's poetry. This translation is in a vivid and elegant prose, and is a smooth read. The translator has endeavored to turn each English line into a Persian line, a very burdensome task, easier said than done for all the 154 sonnets. I dare say he has also triumphed in conveying the outstanding conciseness of Shakespeare's poetry to Persian language.

Shakespeare's sonnets are replete with all types of literary figures (*mofakhere*, metaphor, figurative language, gender ambiguity, puns, etc.), mythical and Biblical allusions, historical, religious and philosophical, as well as recurrent literary references; thus, but for correct and valid elaborations and interpretations, one cannot grasp the intricacies of the poems.

In order to understand these poems and unlock the chest of their mysteries, the translator has made use of a specific procedure. He first offers a brief description of the sonnet's subject matter and its general characteristics, and also its place in relation to other sonnets, while also throwing light on some historical, philosophical or religious matters, understanding of which is necessary for a full grasp of the meaning of the sonnet. Tabibzadeh (2017a) also supplies the reader in plain language with different readings and interpretations of certain lines, Shakespeare's source of inspiration for some lines or stanzas, the influence of previous English poets and his contemporary sonneteers on him, the comedy and satire hidden inside the poems, language plays and semantic ambivalences, various puns, gender ambiguity, proverbs and sayings prevalent in the Elizabethan Age, political events, and the works and philosophies that have helped make up his system of thought.

5. Pouya Shahriyari rad's pseudo-translation (2015), *Shakespeare's Love Poems*, is in prose and includes all Shakespeare's sonnets. According to translator, the present book "includes the translation of all 154 sonnets by Shakespeare for the first time in Persian" (p. 17). For fuller understanding of the sonnets, he has drawn upon different explanations and interpretations of Shakespeare's sonnets and when necessary has looked up French, Spanish and Arabic translations. Also, Shahriyari rad has added some informative footnotes. In his short introduction, he has referred to previous translations of Shakespeare's sonnets in Persian (Tafazzoli and Moghaddam's translations) and very briefly has commented on them. This fluent translation is indifferent to the format of sonnet in English and his rendition is in the form of a paragraph. I called it a "pseudo-

translation” because it is not the real rendition of the original sonnets but it is the translation of a simplified version of sonnets. In other words, he has translated the paraphrases not the real sonnets. Shahriyari rad’s translation didn’t get gain a good readership. In short, the book-length Persian translations of William Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* was not as expected. For instance, in comparison to German translations of Shakespeare’s sonnets it seems scanty. There are thirty complete (book-length) and sixty incomplete (scattered) translations of Shakespeare’s sonnets in German language (Tabibzadeh, 2017b, 12).

7. Conclusion

Reception of Shakespeare’s sonnets in modern Iran has seen ups and downs, and in comparison, to his plays, the sonnets have not been shown much attention, except in recent years. Based on all that came in this study, up until recently, Persian translators mostly went to Shakespeare’s sonnets not for undertaking a serious and complete translation of the sequence. It was only in 1990s that some translators endeavored to translate half or two third of his sonnets into Persian. Eventually, in 2017a, Omid Tabibzadeh brought to fulfillment a long-lasting wish by his full rendition of all of William Shakespeare’s sonnets into Persian language. As mentioned previously, the reasons for this inattention are literary and otherwise: First, translation of poetry is generally burdensome and seldom fruitful, and thus few people venture to take up this difficult road.

Moreover, greatness of William Shakespeare’s name and works should be added to all that makes the job all the more daunting. Second, sonnet form is an ancient, and long-time developed literary genre in Persian language and it seems that the translations of these sonnets are not as rewarding and rich to the minds of Iranian readers as they should be with regards to imagery, language plays, figures of speech and tropes, and they cannot add to the literary knowledge of the Persian reader. Third, translation in Iran from the beginning of the recent century has been drawn more to French poets than poets of other European languages such as English. Furthermore, during the peak of translation from Western poetry, translators engaged more in political and revolutionary rather than lyrical works. And finally, the reception and “influence of English poetry on Persian poetry can be found in T. S. Eliot’s poetry not in Shelly, Shakespeare and Yeats’ poetry” (Shafiei Kadkani, 230).

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