

## The Sonnet Form in Japanese

**Daniel Gallimore**

*Sasakawa Lecturer in Japanese*

*Oxford Brookes University*

[daniel@sol.brookes.ac.uk](mailto:daniel@sol.brookes.ac.uk)

In my research on Japanese translations of Shakespeare,<sup>1</sup> I have been mainly concerned with the peculiar challenges posed to translators by Shakespeare's language and the various solutions they have found: how can Shakespeare's language remain or even become recognisably 'Shakespearean' in Japanese? These questions are bound up with the identity of Shakespeare in Japanese culture, and one can start to discuss them from the viewpoint of at least four conditioning factors.

First of all, Shakespeare is prevented from achieving anything like a literal translation in Japanese due to the considerable differences in language and culture. This is due not only to the fact that English and Japanese are historically unrelated as languages – unlike English and German, for example, where it is quite possible to imitate Shakespeare rhythmic structures – but also there are significant differences in rhetorical values, which is a problem I discussed in my presentation to the first postgraduate seminar in 1999.<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare is a richly rhetorical writer, indeed his dramatic sense depends on it, and yet his rhetoric can seem strangely misplaced in a culture which for the most part lacks the classical tradition of rhetorical schemes and devices in which Shakespeare received his schooling. The corollary of this argument is that many of Shakespeare's figures, for example metaphor and inversion, are already present in the Japanese language and literary tradition and that even where they are not present there are various convincing equivalents that can be used in their stead. I once asked Odashima Yūshi, who is the

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<sup>1</sup> My thesis focuses on the treatment of Shakespeare's prosody (i.e. rhythm, rhyme, and including wordplay) in Japanese translations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It was awarded D.Phil by the Faculty of Oriental Studies, Oxford, in September 2001.

<sup>2</sup> 'Stylistic Mixing: Lyric and Rhetoric in Japanese Translations of Shakespeare *A Midsummer Night Dream* in P. Matanle (ed.), *East Asia Research Review*, British Association for Japanese Studies, pp. 49-58.

best known of Shakespeare translators alive today, how he had translated the phrase ‘Crystal is muddy’ from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (as uttered by Demetrius). He replied, quite simply, *Suisho wa doro da*, and insisted that Japanese audiences would have no difficulty understanding this oxymoron, either by itself or in context.

These first two factors can be demonstrated by comparing Shakespeare’s original texts with the numerous translations to have appeared since the Meiji Era, but my third factor is rather harder to demonstrate. This is the realisation that translated literature, of which Shakespeare must be one of the leading examples, has played a significant role in developing and reforming the language over the last hundred years, especially in introducing new forms and styles of expression. This factor is harder to quantify because, as in the case of the sonnet form, the free transplantation of foreign norms has often met with resistance and even rejection, and has almost always been conditioned by the requirements of the native aesthetic. Yet foreign influences are evident in writers from Futabata Shimei in the Meiji Era to Murakami Haruki in the present, above all perhaps in the influence of the French Symbolist poets on pioneering free verse poets in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Kitahara Hakushū. Symbolism gave these poets a way of condensing imagery which they understood to be a more adequate reflection of the complexity of modernity than the more elusive poetic of traditional forms such as *haiku* and *tanka*. This, then, is my fourth factor: that foreign literature - whether translated or not - can help to fulfil the personal agendas of individual writers and translators, for whom their own traditions may be felt to be inadequate.

In this article, I give examples of how the sonnet form (*sonetto*) has been appropriated by Japanese poets in order to help shape their distinctive poetic voices, and I also show how the form has been recreated in Japanese through the act of translation, looking at Shakespeare’s Sonnet 12. I try to identify what two poets and one translator have retained of the sonnet form, as it is commonly understood, and then what function the form seems to have as a means of expression in Japanese poetry. This analysis reveals inevitable differences between the acts of original writing and translation, but above all aims to consider the extent to which the sonnet remains an essentially alien form through these examples. One reason why this question of authenticity might be a valuable one is that the sonnet was itself an import into English poetry, where it underwent substantial modifications. The great age of the sonnet was the Elizabethan Renaissance through to Milton, who died in 1674. Although it was revived by the Romantics at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it had become an archaic form by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The adaptation of this form by a poet and translator writing in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is likely to be driven less by a modernist impulse ‘to catch up’ with the West than by a postmodernist impulse to enrich the textuality of their output. The extent to which they succeed in doing so is, of course, another matter.

The potential appeal of the sonnet form to Japanese poets should be evident from its structure, of which there are two main kinds. The original form dates from the Italy of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and is usually named after its most famous exponent, the Florentine poet Petrarch; other well-known sonneteers include Michelangelo. The Petrarchan sonnet is a fourteen-line poem made up of an octave (eight lines) and a sestet (six lines).<sup>3</sup> The octave develops one idea or thought; there is then a ‘turn’ or *volta*, and the sestet grows out of the octave, varies and completes it. Yet the sonnet is a lyrical as well as a rhetorical form, and the lyricism is achieved

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<sup>3</sup> J.A. Cuddon (1979) *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Penguin, pp. 642-6.

partly out of the rhyme scheme: *abba-abba* in the octave, followed by *cde-cde* or *cd-cd-cd* in the sestet. Rhyme gives the sonnet its symmetry but can also be used for various kinds of poignant or witty effect.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Romantic poet Coleridge defined the sonnet as ‘a small poem, in which some lonely [i.e. single and coherent] feeling is developed.’<sup>4</sup> It is, in other words, a model of individual expression that was suited to the style and tastes of the educated young men of Renaissance Europe, and indeed most Petrarchan sonnets are love poems. The sonnet was introduced into England early in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by two aristocratic poets, Wyatt and Surrey, who modified the rhyme scheme. This modified form was the form practised by Shakespeare at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and so it came to be known as the Shakespearean sonnet. It was still a succession of fourteen iambic pentameters but the new rhyme scheme permitted a more antithetical development of the argument and a stronger conclusion, namely *abab* (the first quatrain or four lines), *cdcd* (second quatrain), *efef* (third quatrain) and *gg* (final couplet). Rhyme is less commonplace in English than in Italian (with its profusion of vowel endings) and so can be used in English to greater poetic effect. One example is the rhymes in Sonnet 94 from Shakespeare’s collection of 154 sonnets, published in 1609, where the rhyme of ‘deeds’ and ‘weeds’ in the final couplet is surely one of the most famous rhymes in English poetry:

They that have power to hurt and will do none,  
That do not do the thing they most do show,  
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,  
Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow -  
They rightly do inherit Heaven’s graces,  
And husband Nature’s riches from expense;  
They are the lords and owners of their faces,  
Others but stewards of their excellence.  
The summer flow’r is to the summer sweet  
Though to itself it only live and die;  
But if that flow’r with base infection meet,  
The basest weed outbraves his dignity.  
    For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds:  
    Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

The octave states the argument that virtuous people are rightly blessed for their virtue, while the sestet contends that vice is all the more odious when perpetrated by virtuous people. This dialectical framework is typical of Shakespeare’s sonnets, typical of his plays as well.

It should be clear from this brief account of the sonnet form that the fourteen-line structure is important for developing the poem’s argument and the rhyme scheme for consolidating that structure and developing all kinds of connections and resonances across the poem, and these are both devices that can be fruitfully exploited by the poet and translator in Japanese. Where the sonnet in Japanese will depart from conventional forms such as *tanka* is in being more lucidly rhetorical.

The sonnet was first introduced into Japan during the Meiji Era. This was a time of innovation in Japanese poetry when both poets and academics questioned the capacity of the traditional forms to respond to modernity, let alone match the rhetorical might of over two thousand years

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Ian Ousby (ed.) (1993) *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, Cambridge University Press, p. 889.

of Western poetry. Eventually, the traditional forms were redefined and free verse developed as a new form, and in fact most of the conventional Western forms, such as blank verse, were found to be impracticable, and the traditional rhetoric of *sabi* and so on was revitalised. The sonnet is therefore not exceptional in having been ignored or found wanting by the majority of modern Japanese poets but the few cases of poets who have experimented with it are worth considering, if only for a deeper understanding of what is possible.

The best-known of these is undoubtedly Kambara Ariake (1876-1947), of whom Donald Keene has written that<sup>5</sup>

he may have found it congenial to express his thoughts within a fixed form of relatively brief compass that imposed a discipline welcome to a poet of his essentially conceptual (rather than lyrical) bent.

Ariake was influenced by the French Symbolist Mallarmé and the Victorian poet Rossetti, and one can easily see from his poem ‘Matsurika’ [‘Jasmine’],<sup>6</sup> which is Petrarchan in design, how this broader form enabled Ariake to develop a greater complexity of images than was possible in traditional poetry.

Musebinage kō waga mune no kumori monouki  
sha no tobarishinameki kakage, kagayaka ni,  
aru hi wa utsuru kimi ga omo, kobi no no ni saku  
auyō no nuenamekeru sono nioi.

Tama wo mo tarasu sasameki ni sasowaretsutsumo,  
ware wa mata kimi wo idakite naku nameri,  
gokuhi no urei, yume no wana, - kimi ga kaina ni,  
itamashiki waga tadamuki ha torawarenu.

Mata aru yoi wa kimi miezu, suzushi no kinu no  
kinu zure no oto no sayasaya suzuroka ni  
tada tsutau nomi, waga kokoro kono toki saketsu,

matsurika no yoru no hitoma no ka no kage ni  
majireru kimi ga hohoemi wa waga mi no kizu wo  
motome kite shimite kaorinu, ate ni shimira ni.

Here is Keene’s translation from *Dawn to the West*.<sup>7</sup>

Gracefully you roll up the gauzy curtains  
Of my clouded, weary heart, choked with grief, and brilliantly  
One day your face is revealed in the languid, seductive  
Brightness of poppies blooming in fields of excitement.

Even as, allured by whisperings that melt my soul,  
I embrace you again, I feel I shall weep.  
The most secret of sorrows, the trap of dreams - in your arms

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<sup>5</sup> Donald Keene (1999) *A History of Japanese Literature, Vol. 4: Dawn to the West*, Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, p. 231, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1984.

<sup>6</sup> Yano Mineto (ed.) (1977) *Meiji bungaku zenshū 58: Doi Bansui · Susukida Kyūkin · Kanbara Ariake shū* [‘Meiji poetry: Doi Bansui, Susukida Kyūkin and Kanbara Ariake’], Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, p. 322.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 236-7.

My aching arms were imprisoned.  
Again, one evening, I could not see you, but there came  
The indefinable soft rustling of your spun-silk garment -  
That was all I heard, and my heart at that moment was riven.

In a room at night fragrant with the scent of jasmine  
Your smile, mingled in that odour, sought my wound,  
Sank into it, perfumed it, elegantly, again and again.

This is the poem of a young man who has been entranced by Symbolism and wishes to imitate that style, just as *haiku* poets in Europe and North America have been entranced by the *haiku* form and made their own, often very successful imitations, and it also reminds me of those Japanese painters who went to Paris at about the time that Ariake was writing in order to learn Impressionism. Moreover, it seems to me that this is a poem which draws on the synaesthetic eroticism of the traditional poetic to achieve something richer, more sensual, more present. For a poem that was published for private reading off the printed page rather than for public recitation, the sonnet form has the immediate function of giving some shape to this mass of imagery. The dialectic, in this case between the kindness of woman and the sufferings of man, is stated less overtly than it would be in a Shakespearean sonnet, which is psychologically appropriate, and it is also subdued by the use of a seven-five syllabic metre, as for example in the first tercet:

Mata aru yoi wa [7] kimi miezu, [5] suzushi no kinu no [7]  
kinu zure no [5] oto no sayasaya [7] suzuroka ni [5]  
tada tsutau nomi, [7] waga kokoro [5] kono toki saketsu, [7]

The dialectic of the sonnet is developed by more subtle, topological means. The first quatrain presents striking visual metaphors, ‘the gauzy curtains’ and ‘brightness of poppies’, which is countered in the second quatrain by the poet’s physical response. The ‘embrace’ is a sweet one but it also releases secret, unspecified sorrows that are painful for the poet as he is trapped in a tension between erotic longing and fears for his own identity. The tension is resolved in the sestet (or two tercets) through an association of past with present experience; he does not need to be in the woman’s company to be ‘riven’ by her. In a sense, therefore, this is a poem about poetry: about the capacity of language and imagery to become detached from experience, and in that sense also it can be said to belong to the tradition of the Shakespearean sonnet. Ariake can not, however, be said to develop the tensions between form and content in the way that Shakespeare does, although it certainly functions as a rhetorical device that distinguishes between various categories of experience and so reaches a palatable conclusion.

Another, more recent poet to have found the sonnet a convincing framework for his brand of lyricism is Nakamura Minoru, who was born in 1927 and whose first collection *Mugenka* [‘Songs without words’] was published in 1950.<sup>8</sup> Nakamura’s main career has been as a lawyer and so - as Keene suggests of Ariake’s conceptual mindset - the dialectical form of the sonnet is no doubt amenable to Nakamura’s legalistic mindset as well, but more generally in the poems I have read of his there is a concern with social issues that is quite removed from Ariake’s more personal meditations. The following is called ‘Kirameku hikari no naka ni’ [‘Into the glistening sunlight’] and is dated April 1988:

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<sup>8</sup> Nakamura Minoru (1996) *Zoku · Nakamura Minoru shishū* [‘Selected poetry of Nakamura Minoru, Vol. 2’], Tokyo: Shinchōsha, p. 61.

Yashiotsutsuji ga saki, midori wa fukaku  
Nihon rettō ni, haruka tōku kara  
Shimerike wo obita taiki ga chikazuite iru.

Cherunobuiri no sekkan ni tsuite kataru mo ii.  
Kuchi wo tsugunde tachitsukusu nanmin ni tsuite,  
Horobiyuku Kushiro shitsugen ni tsuite,  
Ureigao ni kataru mo ii.

Sono kao wa doremo utsuro ni hankyō shi,  
Hajike chitte sora no takami ni kiete iku.  
Ureigao no kishi yo, kimi wa katariyamenai,  
Iyoiyo anzen to, shikashi kōzen to kao wo agete.

Gogatsu, jinrui no mirai yori mo, chikyū no mirai yori mo,  
Kirameku hikari no naka no issun issun ni, watashi wa  
Hisokana watashi no sei wo kakeru koto to shiyō.

This is how I translated it:

The azaleas are in bloom and the greenery deepening.  
A mass of air, charged with moisture, is approaching  
The Japanese archipelago from a long way off.

We can talk about that sarcophagus at Chernobyl,  
And about the refugees standing exhausted, their mouths sealed,  
And about the swamp at Kushiro running dry  
We can pull long faces.

Our voices will all of them echo in the void,  
They will burst open and be scattered, lost among the heights of the sky.  
Oh doom-laden rider, you who cannot stop speaking,  
Your face is flushed with tears as it is with pride.

As hopes for humanity and the earth recede,  
I can at least risk my secret hopes  
On the May sunlight glistening moment by moment.

Nakamura's sonnet contains the conventional fourteen lines, organised into a non-rhyming tercet following by two rhyming and one non-rhyming quatrain and another non-rhyming tercet. As in Ariake's poem, the rhythm is often syllabic (e.g. *Sono kao wa* [5] *doremo utsuro ni* [7] *hankyō shi* [5] in the penultimate verse) and although the length of lines is more variable than with Ariake, Nakamura does use rhyme in a way that is equivalent to the development of a conventional sonnet. The poem does not stand still (as a *haiku* might) but describes a logical movement from the climactic (first tercet) to the human scale (the two central quatrains) and finally the individual, himself. The movement contains a sub-text of secrecy: the moisture concealed by air, the nuclear power station entombed in concrete, the poet's guilt (perhaps) at living his life in the sun when humanity has lost hope for itself, and of course one can infer that the rain droplets (*shimerike*) in the air mass have been polluted by radiation.

Nor does the prosody stand still. It is striking how the symmetrical structure, which could have been such a static device, is developed by a clear but not exaggerated use of rhyme and repetition. The *abba* rhyme scheme of the first quatrain is one that would probably sound contrived if sustained throughout the whole poem but it here serves two useful purposes:

foregrounding the mournful ‘We can talk about [these terrible things]’ (... *ni tsuite kataru mo ii*) and to prepare the reader for the contrast of *koe* and *kao* in the second quatrain. These are both small words, easily ‘lost among the heights of the sky’, the poet (like all poets) does not want his words to be forgotten, and the prosody serves to foreground them.

Parallelism is often a more accurate term than metaphor for the figuration that happens in traditional Japanese verse (and from which Ariake’s symbolism strikes a more radical departure). Even in Nakamura’s poem, there is a reluctance to explicate the correspondence between the seasonal changes and the human world; in a traditional way of thinking, the latter is so much a part of nature as to preempt any further explication. Yet it can still be argued that the sonnet form forces a degree of correspondence which is inherently more explicit than in the short forms, moreover that the traditionally Japanese passivity of which parallelism is said to be representative is politically insufficient to challenge external threats such as Chernobyl. The nuclear age demands experimentation with foreign forms, in a way similar to the changes imposed on Ariake’s generation in the Meiji Era.

Nakamura’s sonnet gives evidence of how the traditional poetic may be challenged from within: in other words, that Japanese poetry has changed not so much for change’s sake but for all kinds of social and historical factors as well, which is reassuring evidence if Shakespeare translation is to be considered to have any kind of relevance to the modern culture. Yet Shakespeare translators are still constrained first and foremost by the words on the page, and in Takamatsu Yūichi’s version of Sonnet 12<sup>9</sup> we find a translation that addresses first the formal, rhetorical problems of this poem before achieving a remarkable interpretation of its actual content:

Toki wo tsugeru tokei no oto wo hitotsu hitotsu kazoe,  
Kagayakashii taiyō ga minikui yoru no yami ni shizumu no wo miru toki,  
Sakari wo sugisatta sumire no hana wo nagame,  
Kuroi makige ga kotogotoku hakugin ni ōwareru no wo miru toki,  
Katsute wa kachiku no mure wo shonetsu kara saegitte yatta  
Taiboku ga, ha wo hagi torare, hadaka ni naru no wo miru toki,  
Natsu no midori no ōmugi ga tabanerare, himo de kukurare,  
Shiroi kowai hige wo sarashite, teguruma de hakobareru no wo miru toki,  
Sonna toki ni, watashi wa kimi no utsukushisa wo omoi, kō kangaeru.  
Kimi mo, toki no kōhai kara nogareru wake ni wa ikanai,  
Yasashii mono mo, utsukushii mono mo, yagate wa suitai shite,  
Hoka no bi ga sodatsu no wo minagara, onaji hayasa de shinu no da, to.  
Toki no kami ga kimi wo kono yo kara hissaratte yuku toki ni,  
Kare no ōgama wo fusegitachimukau no wa, shison shika inai to.

When I do count the clock that tells the time,  
And see the brave day sunk in hideous night;  
When I behold the violet past prime,  
And sable curls all silvered o’er with white;  
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,  
That thou among the wastes of time must go,

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<sup>9</sup> Takamatsu Yūichi (tr.) *Sonetto shū* [‘The Sonnets’], Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, pp. 21-2. Kerrigan, p. 82.

Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake,  
And die as fast as they see others grow;  
And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence  
Save breed to brave him when he takes thee hence.

For Takamatsu the key word of Shakespeare's poem is 'time'. Shakespeare uses the word only three times, which is quite enough to secure its various emblematic and metaphorical figurations over the rest of the poem. The figure in line 8 ('Borne on the bier with bristly beard') is emblematic of the subjection of fecundity to time and is expressed metaphorically in line 10 ('the wastes of time'). 'Time's scythe' in line 13 is a familiar emblem. The main irony of the poem is that while the speaker lectures another on the transience of life, he is equally subject to the movement of time; in the line 'And die as fast as they see others grow', it is surely the speaker who is closer to death and the beautiful other who still grows.

The movement of time is figured most deeply in the movement of the iambic metre and logical progression of the poem. In addition to its insistent emblematisation, time is also connoted by the word 'prime' in line 3, which can refer to the first part of the monastic day. In translation, such cultural references - not to mention Shakespeare's prosody - are either absent or obscure but can be compensated by more feasible devices such as alliteration. The word *toki* occurs ten times in this translation, including in a compound word *tokei* for 'watch'. As a word meaning 'time', it is a less substantial word than the abstract 'time' in English for the simple reason that it more usually means 'when'. *Toki* is used five times for the series of 'whens' in the source but the fact that the same word has these two meanings gives the translator liberty to exploit its alliterative potential, most strikingly in the first line.

*Toki* is reduced to its basic alliterative element *to-* which is repeated five times in the first line to imitate the ticking of a clock. As in the source, the two *-k-* sounds precede the *to-* sounds in *hitotsu hitotsu kazoe* ('counting one by one'), so that alliteration is used not only for its own sake but to support a rhythm that is only apparent by its artificiality. An unstressed syllabic rhythm gives way to an accented syllable followed by two unaccented syllables (equivalent to the dactyl) in the second half of the line (... *no oto wo hitotsu hitotsu kazoe*). *Toki* meaning 'time' becomes a rather banal word (a word that requires explanation) which is indeed just what Takamatsu makes of it. Just as Shakespeare's elegiac pastoral is extended over two quatrains, Takamatsu methodically concludes the second, fourth, sixth and eighth of his lines with this word and then registers the change in mood in the source by bringing the word back to the beginning of the line and again in the next.

Takamatsu's sudden shift in register is if anything more 'dramatic' than the source. In his final six lines, the word *toki* - so much a reassuring presence in the first two quatrains - is quite literally torn asunder becoming a feeble *to* at the end of the twelfth and final lines. As with so many of the Sonnets, the moral dialectic stated by Sonnet 12 suppresses an emotional ambiguity about the relationship between the 'I' and the 'Thou' in that the subordination of Other to Time can be a metaphor for whatever emotional grip the other has over the speaker. The emotional tension is figured in a graphological tension in the translation. Except in lines 1 and 10 where the Sino-Japanese character is used, the word *toki* is always written in *hiragana* and is anyway a proto-Japanese word rather than one borrowed originally from Chinese. Written in this way, the word contrasts with the character for 'beauty' or 'beautiful'. The fact that it appears first in its native Japanese form (*utsukushii* in line 11 meaning 'beautiful') and



in the next line in its Sino-Japanese form (*bi*, ‘beauty’) corresponds with the similar treatment of *toki* and underlines the dynamic relationship between the two concepts.

Next to the graphological tension an even more subtle tension occurs, one that provides perhaps the strongest evidence that this poem has been absorbed within its Japanese context. This involves a contrast between the words *mono* and *koto*. Both words are proto-Japanese words that broadly mean ‘thing’, but whereas the English word ‘thing’ can refer both to concrete and to abstract entities, *mono* is representative of concrete objects and people, *koto* always of abstract things such as emotions and ideas. Like *hitotsu hitotsu* in line 1, *mono* is foregrounded by repetition and phonic echo in line 11: *yasashii mono mo* (‘both a gentle person’); *utsukushii mono mo* (‘and a fair one’). The sudden association of the concrete and abstract is unexpected, rhetorical and compelling, and in Takamatsu’s version, the opposing *koto* is pushed outside of the poem, being implied in the word *to* at the end of the twelfth and fourteenth lines. *To* means ‘that’ in this context, as in ‘I think that ...’, and could therefore be linked with *kō kangaeru* (‘thus to think’) at the end of line 9. Even while the translator is conscious of an abstract dimension, he manages to distance himself from it.

The inference of the verb in this way is typical of spoken Japanese and therefore in keeping with the colloquial style of the translation but still has the effect of pushing the verb of thinking or speaking into the mind of an imagined speaker. The prosodic effect is abrupt, final, even angry, but also (as I have suggested) concealing a hidden brokenness. The use of the verb *kangaeru* at the end of line 9 is also interesting since it is combined with another word for ‘think’, *omou*. *Kangaeru* means ‘to think over a process of time’ (‘to consider’); *omou* is more spontaneous and can even mean ‘feel’ and in classical poetry ‘to love’. This combination of two verbs is Takamatsu’s rendering of Shakespeare’s ‘do I question make’. His interpretation suggests that six lines of rhetorical argument don’t just happen: that they have to be properly mulled over. Takamatsu could equally have used a verb like *utagau*, which means ‘to doubt’, but the fact that he gives such emphasis to the cerebral process reinforces this anxiety about the transience of youth and beauty.

Takamatsu reinterprets a profound poem about time in the language of a culture where time seems to move so quickly that the concept has become a cliché; to quote Keir Elam on Shakespeare,<sup>10</sup> Takamatsu Yūichi brings ‘directly into force the sense and meanings of words’. His strategy is to seek out rhetorical as opposed to literal equivalents within his target language; rhetorical equivalence is not only a matter of flexibility within a single category of poetic devices (e.g. between accentual and syllabic) but also across categories. If there is little opportunity for accentual rhythm then one adequate alternative is that of phonemic patterning, i.e. rhyme and wordplay.

In the three sonnets I have discussed, I have tried to show how the form becomes something else in Japanese, while retaining its most important characteristics, the fourteen-line structure and rhetorical turn. In Ariake’s poem the form renders the sensuous imagery as allegory rather than metaphor, as previous critics have noted. He is not trying to seduce his readers, but simply to present his fabrication as one with its own internal logic, and for Japanese readers the fabrication is made even more credible by the fact that it is rendered in seven-five syllabic. In

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<sup>10</sup> Keir Elam (1984) *Shakespeare’s Universe of Discourse: Language-Games in the Comedies*, Cambridge University Press, p. 14.

Nakamura's poem, by contrast, the logic is metaphorical, allowing for a greater elasticity of line and imagery. Finally, Takamatsu familiarises the formidable terrain of a Shakespeare sonnet, even exposing his debt to the master by adding a few touches of his own. Like all those other foreign imports that have gained currency in Japanese culture, the sonnet is something to have fun with.