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Half-Heard Voices of the Primal Zone; Sleep and Waking in a Poem by Cao Shuying

George O'Connell with Diana Shi

In spring 2017, the New York Times writer Holland Cotter published a review of a small but fascinating exhibit at Manhattan's Onassis Gallery, titled "A World of Emotions: Ancient Greece 700 BC to 200 AD" (Cotter 2017). While the exhibit included objects Cotter described as "true glam" (truly glamorous), such as "an apparitionally perfect marble *kouros*," a freestanding statue of a noble youth, and a cup attributed to the great but anonymous 5th c. BC Penthesilea Painter, it also featured more touchingly ordinary artifacts, such as a number of *ostraka*, the broken pottery fragments, occasionally inscribed, with which Greek citizens voted in secret ballot. A "no confidence" vote by the majority could unseat public officials or even banish them, hence the term "to ostracize." Speaking as an American, and perhaps for many Hong Kong residents, such direct and uncomplicated dismissal of wicked or incompetent politicians seems these days particularly attractive.

Cotter praised the exhibition for using "objects to tell a human story," for bringing a view of the past into the living present, "making it ours." Yet he also noted that our natural familiarity with the human might lead us to make certain inferences and assumptions. A relief of a child playing with a dog, for instance, seems warmly attractive until we discover it's a tombstone, yet another instance of the difficulties in reading emotion cross-culturally. For those of us fond of believing in a shared human condition, this can be unsettling, especially when

one seeks to translate poetry with some measure of faithfulness as well as grace. Of course one might ask “faithfulness” to precisely what?

Cotter observed that in visual art conveying emotion, words can be at least as important as images. Many items in the exhibit carried signatures, narrative cues, or memorial dedications. A plain marble funerary *stèle*, lacking any visual image, bears instead an inscribed poem about a young woman who died in childbirth, along with her infant. The poem tells all who might read that the child “left sunlight behind” without a single cry.

We are reminded that pre-4th c. Greek sculpture carried “a demeanor of grave restraint,” partly due to limitations in technique, but also to an ideal that emotion represented should be tempered, poised, and thought through. This despite the contemporary realities of wild excess in both the mythically divine and all too actual worlds. The stiffness of such restraint certainly seems less flexible, less playful, less human than the spare sublimities of poetic expression in classical Chinese and Japanese. Yet one wonders how dissimilar might be the aesthetic impulse. In this poetry, formative for so many of us as poets or translators, instead of strutting diction and too-clever linguistic capers we find the extraneous and the ostentatious sliced away, amplifying space and silence, letting the words that remain vibrate with latent resonance, “nodes” as Pound said, through which energy pulses, inviting the sacred and profound. It seems hardly necessary to note that restraint and resonant depth are fundamental to poetry. These, along with the music of artful language, make us shut up and listen, stunned or shaken quiet. Unless we are addressing what calls itself poetry but somehow is not, often surrounded by sheaves of critical palaver.

I also recall a dark line from the late American poet Jon Andersen, who wrote, perhaps in exhaustion at teaching too many creative writing workshops, “the secret of poetry is cruelty.” Cruelty perhaps to tell hard truth, but certainly to cut the dross, or excise the lovely, well-wrought phrase that finally doesn’t fit.

Such economies, cruel or empowering, naturally depend on the mastery of the poet/translator in making and refining effective poetry in his or her own language. It’s that which lets a poem or translation draw breath as more than dead paraphrase or inanimate literalism.

Mostly, the labor is unglamorous, even if it's the source for those "minor" inspirations that accrue strength and power. It's here we weave and jockey tangled syntax toward simplicity and fluency, hold out for the right word, chase synonyms, tune phrases, sidestep excess syllables and prepositions. If we can't handle the target language with craft, dexterity, and economy, or fail to potentiate syntactical drama, we're usually left with something cluttered, less focused, less alive.

But even before this necessary work there seems another, partly pre-lingual aspect. Forgive me for again reaching toward the past, but Wordsworth's famous phrasing inevitably comes to mind, taught in so many English literature classes that it's become something of a cliché. In his 1802 *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, he characterized poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling" that "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility." However well remembered, and drummed into the skulls of undergraduates, this notion's more deeply informed by what Wordsworth said next:

the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was *before the subject of contemplation* [italics added], is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on [...] (Wordsworth 1802, par. 23)¹

Though I find the American poet Theodore Roethke more compelling on this aspect, and don't consciously consider Wordsworth when in the throes of composition, I believe Wordsworth's testimony points one way toward effectively poetic translation. I mean an interiorized re-imagining, a re-inhabiting, based on what is available and imaginable in the source language. In our case, since we began working together during my 2005–2006 Fulbright professorship at Peking University, I've depended almost entirely on my native speaking co-translator Diana Shi for this availability in Chinese, her native tongue. Co-translation for us also includes wholly collaborative assessment of the English as it refines through final drafts. Our

1 The Preface within has been republished many times, with varied pagination. Widely available online, e.g.: <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/lbprose.html#preface>

methods may thus differ from many current translators of Chinese poetry, though perhaps less from poet/translator pairs who precede us.

Nonetheless, even if I “understand” a poem’s core imagery and drama, I miss much of the magic and music heard by native speakers. Regrettably, I am largely deaf to the original’s happy and mysterious poetic moments, those fortuitous junctures when a poet’s ordinary limitations are overcome by the current of compositional suggestion and association. By that I mean the chordal, musical braiding of word and connotation, those subtly ambiguous strands that evoke and release more than the poet may have initially or consciously thought or intended. Gifts of the process, when live energies of the language flow like wind or wave, they emanate from a place unseen, passing through rhythm and word, sound and image, conveyed partly by the unconscious. Often glimpsed less in the act of writing than afterward, such moments are seldom possible to echo in translation. Yet with luck and persistence, others may arise from the new language’s own inner life, threading the translation like a distant melody. Missing as I do the original’s full grace and power, I’m at first one-eyed, one-eared. But however illusory, I’ve found that inhabiting a poem enough to set forth on a translation somehow releases a parallel tide in the English, streaming from its own hidden depths. To be sure, one looks back at the original as one goes, nudging the tiller this way or that.

While words’ magical and subtle powers draw us onward, every word we write or say, even in our native tongue, is already a translation from pre-utterance, swiftly fitted or reduced to language. When a poet composes, he or she often dwells first in that primal zone of feeling and sensation, recalled or imagined, before matching experience to word. Once embarked, we are free to move in and out of this zone, listening for new words magnetically enticed by those now chosen. A skilled translator, guided by the original, may also enter this imagined clearing, a place perhaps not so different from the original poet’s. Alert, receptive to sensations that might yield concrete or palpable terms, the translator relives and revives the poem in the force field of the target language.

If composition in the original language thus sways between conscious intention and subconscious impulse, between deliberately

steering toward evocative accuracy and letting the words' own pressures fill the sails, the most successful translations can also embrace this fruitful and erotic dance, an oscillation between a wordless but sensual abandon and the harnessings of verbal craft.

This may be what Wordsworth suggests three paragraphs later, saying “emotion is contemplated” until “a species of reaction” alters the tranquility of contemplation, replacing it with “an emotion kindred to” the original, in which composition may then fruitfully proceed (Wordsworth 1802, par. 25). Such practice can foster strong translation, since it admits the observing mind to the living ground and emotional nexus from which the first poem sprang. Here, we might say, is where the hidden seed of the poem resides, its source and occasion, beyond or above, beneath or behind language. When the poet/translator breathes in the air of imagined sensation before naming, he or she has a far greater chance to bring a translation to life. Perhaps, despite the risks of cross-cultural misreading, this is also what gives access to the greater universalities, those human truths and constancies that dissolve the borders between individuals, nations, and epochs.

In an age engrossed with its excesses, with the haphazard, the absurd, the overblown, the self-promoting, when prolixity and prosaicism in poetry shoulder their way forward, compression and judicious weighing of language may seem in decline. Yet more than a few poets and translators are still drawn to these virtues, if not so severe as the faces and images of ancient Greece, or even the poetry of ancient China. In our work as editors at Pangolin House and earlier, including translation, design, and selection of English language poems to present bilingually, Diana and I both lean toward the resonant strength of economy. As my old Iowa Writers' Workshop teacher, the eminent American poet and French translator Donald Justice wrote: “I indulge myself / In rich refusals. / Nothing suffices. // I hone myself to / This edge. Asleep, I / Am a horizon” (Justice 1981, 39).

Earlier in his Preface, Wordsworth declared “the most valuable object in writing [...] (is) the great and universal passions of men [...] the entire world of nature before me” (Wordsworth 1802, par. 22). If there's a tension between faith in a shared human condition and concern that cross-cultural transparency may be illusory, sometimes a

trap, this leaves us with interesting questions. How far, for instance, can we trust our ability to recreate a poem within that sensate, primarily pre-lingual place where we imagine the original, re-seeing, re-feeling its essences? Once language begins to arrive, how do we negotiate a balance between what we sense in the source and what we assemble, especially within the fraught, often unspoken but deeply internalized literary expectations of the target language, and that language's own limitations? The most useful answers for practitioners seem anything but theoretical, being mostly *ad hoc*.

Despite the pitfalls of cross-cultural misreading, the greater truth is simply that with skill, sensitivity, and a bit of luck, much poetry can be translated *as poetry*. Some people build snug careers claiming we are too fractured, too colonized or colonizing, too distant from each other linguistically and culturally to communicate with any real understanding. Some are still professionally invested in the formerly popular notion that language itself is only a hopeless labyrinth of mirrors. In the wider world, especially current politics, such fragmentation divides us from each other, all the easier to distract and subjugate. We might well ask who or what benefits from these divisions. I recently came across something the Canadian/American activist Naomi Klein wrote about our present political crisis: "Trump," she says, "is the embodiment of our splintered attention spans." She added that an essential component of unity in resistance is retaining a belief in knowing and retelling complex stories, keeping faith with narrative. Is this not the work of a shared literature, a shared poetry? Good translation, line by line, word by word, counters the disempowering myth of atomized incommunicability.

Consider, if you will, Dante's metaphor of the innermost ring of the innermost hell, where the damned, locked waist-deep in ice, suffer alone—mute, isolate, twisted into strange shapes, incapable of touching others.

Those who came before us sometimes left not only accurate but prescient accounts from which we may learn, unless we are too arrogant, or beguiled by the glittering, self-obsessed present. With your indulgence I once more offer Wordsworth, again from his *Preface*, speaking of poetry's language:

[...] these passions and thoughts and feelings are the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men. And with what are they connected? Undoubtedly with our moral sentiments and animal sensations, and with the causes which excite these; with the operations of the elements, and the appearances of the visible universe; with storm and sunshine, with the revolutions of the seasons, with cold and heat, with loss of friends and kindred, with injuries and resentments, gratitude and hope, with fear and sorrow. These, and the like, are the sensations and objects which the Poet describes, as they are the sensations of other men, and the objects which interest them. The Poet thinks and feels in the spirit of human passions. How, then, can his language differ in any material degree from that of all other men who feel vividly and see clearly? (Wordsworth 1802, par. 21)

*

For the second half of this essay, selecting a poem to address in fine detail can be problematic. Having translated many contemporary Chinese-language poets from both the mainland and Hong Kong, we decided to draw on our recent bilingual anthology *Crossing the Harbour: Ten Contemporary Hong Kong Poets* (Shi and O’Connell 2017). In building it, Diana and I deliberated how to arrange the sequence of poets. Doing so by age seemed no solution at all, and even then arose the issue of placing youngest or eldest first. Ranking by relative “importance” would court disaster, and anyway impose a singularly false and absurd standard on ten individual poets, each an incomparable individual. In the end, we organized by initial letter of family name in Roman alphabetical sequence, a sufficiently exterior and impersonal measure to be evenhanded. Within each poet’s section there was yet the question of the poems’ order. Naturally we wished to entice readers by opening with poems which seemed particularly strong in both original Chinese and English translation. Once this was arranged, along with overall order of poets, it happened that the very first poem in the anthology became Cao Shuying’s 曹疏影 “I Often Read, Early Mornings,” which translation had first appeared in the summer 2013 issue of *Pangolin House*. We were

pleased, as this poem carries a wholly modern, international rhythm and sensibility, yet is still subtly redolent of classical Chinese poetry. The poem seemed also unafraid to trust its imagistic impulses, especially at the close. It is therefore what we've chosen to discuss here.

我常在清晨閱讀……

- 我常在清晨閱讀探入人心的文本
 因為有一整天的慾望等著我
 它們張大口，站在睡眠惺忪的我面前
 一邊把我還在留戀著的夢境像舊睡衣一樣褪去
 5 剝去，哦那江流中的鮮百合
 我在心之淵潭，刺入一根根輝煌的探針
 通天入地，我攀援它們度過水內水外遊戲著的日影
 光影窸窣，我纏嬉它於水與空氣的觸面
 滑膩。水泡。眩光。我向上和向下望去
 10 都是重重世界的深潭。一晃，又心清得只剩下影子
 而夜晚，睡前，我通常在床上閱讀遊記
 帶著對這個世界的極度渴望，帶著與它脫離的痛苦
 欣然入夢，在它的蕊間無限沉落
 度過許多個許多個傷口，我的雪橇犬在一粒冰裏
 15 我的冰在氣喘吁吁的銀河間

I OFTEN READ, EARLY MORNINGS

- I often read, early mornings, words to sound one's heart,
 for the whole day's desires await me,
 mouths wide open, posed before my bleary face
 while I peel my dreams off reluctantly as an old nightgown.
 5 O in that river stream fresh lilies.
 Into the heart's deep pool I plunge the bright needles, one after another
 joining heaven and earth. I cling to them,
 drawing sun and shadow into the water and out,
 the dappled light rustling, braiding liquid with air.
 10 Creamy bubbles. Giddy light. Everywhere I look
 deep wells of a layered world. A flash,
 and again my heart clears to mere shadows.
 In bed each night, I read travel books,

bearing my deep thirst for this world, bearing the pang of leaving it,
 15 slipping agreeably asleep, tumbling forever through its pistils,
 passing countless wounds. A frost grain's my sled dog,
 a wheezing galaxy my ice.

With few exceptions, the line citations throughout the remainder of this essay are those of the original Chinese. When quoting source text, italicized pinyin appears first, followed by Chinese characters, then, unless unnecessary, parenthesized literal English.

The first half of this discussion suggests both original poet and translator may inhabit a “primal,” compositionally prelingual zone, a Wordsworthian locus in which each experiences and begins naming the sensual and concrete terms of a poem. We acknowledge that some might believe such practice encourages loose translational license rather than faithful rendering of the original. But of course the spectrum of poetry translation is wide, from stiff, desiccated literalism to finely accurate and rich evocation—the best kind of faithfulness—to plainly excessive personal stylization. (Though even the latter may sometimes have appeal, in the manner of Robert Lowell's *Imitations*.) Some translators who are poets themselves may well assume that at certain points in the creative process, the primary poet dwelt as they do in similar prelingual zones. Though the dictional possibilities in the target language may be wide or narrow, a good translator will also consider how the original poet, if a native speaker in the target language, might choose to express such thoughts, sensations, and feelings. Would he or she select awkward syntax, unevocative words or phrases, tin-eared rhythm? For the translator, did the poet do so in the original? While there are cases where a perverse or cacophonously unrefined manner might be deliberate, we believe most poets write as effectively and movingly as their talent and craft permit. However, many may have rather different notions of what's effective or moving.

We cannot know what degree of detail in this discussion may interest or stupefy this reader or that, so apologize if the remarks below seem self-evident, obvious, or tedious. Because Cao Shuying's poem translates more or less directly, this makes it easier to highlight choices or flexpoints along the way.

Regarding punctuation, I should mention that our renderings frequently include it in English, even if the original is unpunctuated,

or, as in this case, employs only occasional commas. While Chinese has its own means of pacing, English punctuation, especially in poetry, enables and often demands precise timing, affording words and phrases appropriately faster or slower presentation, with corresponding emphases, muting, setting off, relative digestibility, etc., all of which can deeply influence meaning and effect. Similar negotiations happen with line breaks—punctuative, functionally ambiguous, or dramatic—especially where endstopping or enjambement have potentially powerful results. Nonetheless, when reduced or omitted punctuation appear advantageous in translation, we are pleased to follow the original poet's lead. Finally, English syntax often differs from Chinese, sometimes requiring altered lineation. In this particular poem, our English adds two lines to the original's fifteen.

Thematically, some may see Cao Shuying's "I Often Read, Early Mornings" as a figure for the correspondence between reading and imagining, specifically the imagining that makes poetry. While that seems reasonable enough, we believe the poem goes even deeper, dramatizing the passage from sleep or dream toward a consciousness in which dreams still reverberate, followed by a return to sleep and its dreaming. All this carries broad, indeed primal significance. Water imagery here is central, finally transforming what was a mixed liquid during "daylight" consciousness into a solid iceplane, upon which the travel-loving speaker may journey far, even into galactic space. Readers may also observe how the vertical imagery of depth, present from l. 6, reaches its climax in l. 13 (l. 15 in English). There, descent down the lilies that first appear in l. 5 shifts abruptly in ll. 14–15 (ll. 16–17 in English) to the horizontality of sleep, recumbent in a bedlike dog sled, dreaming across a vast white expanse. It may be fair to say the poem's odyssey parallels the transitions from ordinary thought, through the half-dreaming realm of poetic imagination, to the unbounded kingdom of sleep itself. One is reminded of the opening line in Theodore Roethke's immortal villanelle "The Waking," another allusion to poetic process: "I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow" (Roethke 1954, 120).

The Chinese title is *wo chang zai qingchen yuedu* 我常在清晨閱讀……(I often in early morning read). A first rendering into more naturalized English, "I Often Read in the Early Morning," leads to

swift omission of the needless preposition “in.” With the simple addition of a comma, the final emerges as “I Often Read, Early Mornings.” Aside from the elimination of the original’s ellipsis, common in Chinese poems but often burdensome or heavy-handed in English, the inclusion of the comma has several good effects. It confers at once a more relaxed and intimate tone, a calm counterpoint to the coming ambush as the poem proceeds with accelerating intensity. The comma also permits, as noted, dropping the preposition “in” to compress the title. Pluralization of “Morning” suggests the poem’s setting is usual and tranquil, hardly the welter of imagery about to spill forth.

The initial half of the opening line repeats the title, while the second half presents the next translational choicepoint. The original’s 8th and 9th characters, *tanru* 探入, translate as probing or exploring something either physically or abstractly deep. As this precedes the appearance of the poem’s dominant water motif, with depth frankly present or implied, the English verb “sound” came to mind, with its subtle implication that the depth to be “sounded” or measured is necessarily unknown, perhaps unknowable, as in the human heart. Interestingly, the etymology of “sound,” as a probe or index of depth, leads to the Old French *sonder*, from the noun *sonde* for “sounding line,” and perhaps the Old English *sond* for “sea” or “water.” English sometimes names a narrow gulf as a “sound.” For instance, the ocean estuary between New York City and neighboring Long Island is called Long Island Sound. A sound can also be a device, such as a marine depth sounder, to gauge depth, or even a medical instrument. In the absence of x-ray machines, military surgeons in earlier times probed wound channels with rod-like “sounds,” seeking bullets or shell fragments to remove. At any rate, the confluence of all these senses, particularly the water aspect, felt right. Indeed, they felt logically correct, or, forgive me, *sound*, yet another meaning of this flexible word.

Line 1’s *wenben* 文本, initially translated as “text,” appears dry and lifeless in English compared to the more palpably concrete “words.” A small syntactical/positional shift allows the “words” themselves to probe the heart, giving the line greater fluency and animation. True, this alters the original slightly, but I believe with far more gain than injury. If poetic composition is partly prelingual,

especially at the outset, every poet knows the words that first materialize from the interior, say the heart, soon attract others, these prompting further sensual or ideational imaginings. The poem thus advances toward what it will become, however unpredictably, propelled by conscious and unconscious energies as words float “upwards” toward the page or computer screen. Again, this seems part of the very process Wordsworth describes, a live oscillation between prelingual and lingual impulses, between tranquility and emotion. Readers may note that l. 1’s *wenben* is also the overture of the “text” metaphor, later to appear in l. 11’s *youji* 遊記 (travel notes).

Line 2 is quite direct translation, ll. 3 and 4 nearly so, if slightly compressed as in *tamen zhang da kou* 它們張大口 (they open big mouth) becoming “mouths wide open,” the pronoun *tamen* being unneeded in English. This allows the verb “open” in the literal original to become the swifter “open” as adjective. “Mouths wide open” already connotes sufficient size, hence *da* 大 (big) becomes effectively redundant in English, though Chinese expression requires the adjective. *Zhan zai* 站在 (standing in, on, or at) seems more alive in English as “posed,” while *shuiyan xingsong de* 睡眠惺忪的 (sleepy/drowsy eyes) carries more compactly and inclusively as “bleary face.” Thus the line becomes “mouths wide open, posed before my bleary face.”

For l. 4, otherwise fairly direct, I filched l. 5’s verb *boqu* 剝去 (peel/shuck off) to drive what became the main clause. *Tui qu* 褪去 (removing), the clause’s original driving verb, is rather bland and bloodless in English. Hence “while I peel my dreams off reluctantly as an old nightgown.” This small theft of “peel” permitted the properly spotlit isolation of line 5’s declarative *o na jiangliu zhong de xian baihe* 哦那江流中的鮮百合, rendered as “O in that river stream fresh lilies.” Here the English and Chinese word order are fortuitously the same, as sometimes happens in especially lyrical lines. The exclamatory appearance of these watery lilies would seem equally arresting to both Chinese and English readers, the sudden emotive burst sharply startling. For those familiar with Shakespeare, the long, white-throated lilies streaming in a river may also summon a vision of *Hamlet’s* drowned Ophelia. While I doubt this was intentional, for me the reference was immediate, an image at once poignantly mortal and exquisite.

Rendering the original's 6th line becomes slightly more complex, as the poet begins *wo zai xin zhi yuantan* 我在心之淵潭 (I am in heart's deep abyss/pond). Here, the Chinese phrase order is weaker in English than opening with the prepositional "Into the heart's deep pool," thus allowing the pronoun "I" to strengthen the independent clause "I plunge the bright needles." In English, "abyss" is too deep and melodramatic for the context, while "pond" too shallow and mild. The closed, short "o" of "pond," finished by the word's hard "d" also felt flat and unevocative. In the Chinese, *yuantan* 淵潭 bears a hint of mystery. So does the English "pool," while its open, double-voweled center flows easily into the liquid "l." Though the original's *ciru* 刺入 (stab/stick/thrust into) in the same line is clear enough, the water motif suggests "plunge" might be a more forceful English choice, particularly as it implies liquid depth.

Line 6's probes or needles, *tanzhen* 探針 connecting heaven and earth, prompted a picture of knitting, especially since they act in tandem: *yi gen gen* 一根根 (one and another). Indeed, a litany of what's tied by these needles, both piercing and joining, runs through the complex passage of ll. 7-9: heaven and earth, sunlight and shadow, water and air—all "tangled" by the speaker to a creamy, bubbly, giddy froth. In l. 8's *chanxi* 纏嬉 (tangle/play), the left half of the first character 纏 denotes silk/thread while 嬉 means "to toy with," further informing the notion of a half-intentional joining. Yet the elements being connected or mixed, namely heaven and earth, felt weightier than the light sound of the English "knitting," even with its implied yarn. Although "braiding" is usually done with the fingers rather than needles, we settled on this term for the participle. We'd considered "splicing," as rope splices are made with a "fid," a short, pointed, pencil-like tool, but this word seemed less immediate, and again with a music lighter than the preferred heavy "b" and "d" of "braiding." The most astute and critical readers may fault such approximation, though most, amid the lines' roiling imagery, will glide past on the abstraction. Poets and translators know too well how sometimes one simply runs out of language.

As a point of interest, readers may discern a certain fruitful ambiguity in the sentence running from l. 7 to l. 9 of the translation. The initial clause is "I cling to them," but the line break and comma impose a slight delay or separation, repeated at the end of l. 8. This

enables l. 9's first clause, "the dappled light rustling" to share, though subtly, in the agency of the actual subject "I." While not violating the grammatical correctness of l. 7's "I" clause, "the dappled light" potentially assumes a double role. Primarily a "bystander" in a dependent clause, it can also be read as participant, itself "braiding liquid with air." That this smooth conflation happens within a passage of myriad, swirling imagery seems lucky, demonstrating how the effort of "playfully" jockeying phrases within a sentence or passage can bring unexpected and welcome results.

That all this takes place within a watery surround builds contrast and effective counterpoint between liquid and less liquid elements. Amidst the dizzying whirl, the voice of the speaker finds some measure of control, *wo xiang shang he xiang xia wang qu* 我向上和向下望去 (I toward up and toward down gaze), reclaiming perspective as she scans the dazzling moil, conscious yet partly unconscious. At the height of this arc, and on the cusp of peace, the speaker beholds *dou shi chongchong shijie de shentan* 都是重重世界的深潭 (all/everywhere is layers of world's deep pool/pond). This presents an achieved wisdom in the poem, seeing how all is layered or vertically differentiated, including consciousness. Though the image *shentan* 深潭 (deep pond/pool) arises once more, we chose not to repeat "pool," occurring previously in l. 6 of the English, instead selecting "well," which carries both water and mystery, but also greater depth than "pool." "Well" fosters too the notion of "source" from which a world and its phenomena might spring. Hence the English sentence became "Everywhere I look / deep wells of a layered world."

As aftermath, a last shuddering flash occurs in l. 10, *yi huang* 一晃 (one shake/flash) before the probed and probing heart once more finds composure—*xin qing* 心清 (heart cleared). The prior tumult of visions recedes, now *zhi shengxia yingzi* 只剩下影子 (only remain shadow). "Only" became "mere" in our English, echoing "clear," with the adjective of the original shifting to a more active verb. Hence "my heart clears to mere shadows." Though unintended rhyme can be infelicitous, we kept this as it came, the final "s" of "clears" sufficiently offsetting. We also pluralized "shadow."

At this point in the poem, any lull is brief, as the dream realm awaits, its theme triggered, fittingly enough, by travelers' accounts. Note that the passage of the entire day has been elided or metaphorized

by the whirling mix we've just left. The speaker now tells us *eryewan, shui qian, wo tongchang zai chuang shang yuedu youji* 而夜晚，睡前，我通常在床上閱讀遊記 (and/yet at night, before sleep, I often in bed read travel writing). This rendered simply as “In bed each night, I read travel books.” Closing the wakeful cycle of the poem while entertaining sleep's invitation, line 11 thus sets the stage for a segue from the conscious or mixed-conscious day world, perhaps a figure for the poet's labors through the waking hours, to the threshold of night's dreams. Though loath to abandon the multi-layered realm of consciousness—its objects, its feelings, its wounds and sufferings, all she embraces as a living poet of mind and body—she finally bids adieu in ll. 12-13: *daizhe dui zhe ge shijie de jidu kewang, daizhe yu ta tuoli de tongku* 帶著對這個世界的極度渴望，帶著與它脫離的痛苦 (with for this world extreme thirst/longing, with the from-it-separated pain), *xinran rumeng, zai ta de rui jian wuxian chenluo* 欣然入夢，在它的蕊間無限沉落 (agreeably/joyfully/readily enter dream, in its flower pistils infinitely sink and fall). Thus comes the descent down the fragrant throat of a drowning, beckoning lily, past its intimate, sexual pistils.

The verticality so present in the earlier imagery now turns on the fine pivot of l. 13's word *wuxian* 無限, meaning both temporally infinite and spatially boundless. Since the English for the next term, *chenluo* 沉落 (sinking/falling), may also be expressed as “tumbling,” and *wuxian* as “forever,” both time and space may be implied simultaneously, the English phrase compact as the Chinese. Hence “slipping agreeably asleep, tumbling forever through its pistils.” This farewell, as noted, falling past *xuduo ge xuduo ge shangkou* 許多個許多個傷口 (many many wounds), enacts a leavetaking of life's cuts and bruises, one's own and others', as the pale lily's throat leads to a white snowscape.

The pool and well of the earlier lines, deep and layered, are now, however profound, a plane of solid, supporting ice. Through a dimensional shift possible only in dreams, imagination, or the limitless transformations of the quantum world, an iota of frozen moisture becomes a powerful white Husky, strong enough to haul sled and speaker across a galactic expanse. Readers will note the speaker's carried not on her own two legs, but in the bed-like sled of sleep, drawn by the frostgrain/sled dog. In this image of muscular

force, I submit that we behold yet another incarnation of the elemental current that sweeps those lilies downriver.

Line 15's small but essential detail of *qichuan xuxu de* 氣喘吁吁的 (panting/breathing heavily), though evidently prompted by the dog, when rendered as “wheezing” in English achieves a dizzying, awestruck moment, in which we hear both the dog's panting and the immense, labored respiration of an enormous galaxy wheeling on its great axis. In either language, this offers the poem's breathtaking consummation, an apotheosis of the infinitesimal traversing the infinite.

Though we cannot know precisely what passed through the poet's full awareness at any point in composition, it hardly seems to matter. For me, the moment exemplifies how both personal and impersonal forces, through creative process, can unpredictably exceed whatever a poet's conscious mind brings to the encounter. To that extent, the poet becomes, however briefly, a conduit. For ancient Greeks and Romans seeking to name and understand this power, certain poets deemed prophetic or “vatic,” were called *vates*, voices through whom the gods themselves gave utterance. Whatever we call it now—chance, the subconscious, the archetypal—this capacity dwells in and around us. Readers of strong poetry, poets or not, hear it, feel it, and are moved. It reaches through our dreams and daily lives, through the human bandwidth we inhabit, whether our perceived existence be real, relative, or projective. Each effort of a poem's revision also invites its surpassing energy, making multiple resonance not only possible, but so often, happily inevitable. Within this vigor, as Wordsworth wrote, lies the transcendent universality of true art. Conveying the strengths and beauties of that transcendence through palpable, detailed, metaphoric incarnation of our world is the task of good poetry, no less the duty and rightful province of such poetry's translation.

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