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Octavio Paz on Literary Translation and Yang Lian's Poems on Poetry

Translation is very difficult — no text as difficult
than writing so-called original texts — but it is
not impossible ... connotative meanings can be
preserved if the poet-translator successfully
reproduces the verbal situation, the poetic context,
into which they are mounted. (Paz 156)

The quotation above is from "Translation: Literature and Letters," an essay by the Mexican writer Octavio Paz, Nobel laureate of 1990.¹ In it Paz provides many useful insights which are pertinent for deliberations on the matter of literary translation. Although the positive value of literary translation for breaking down the barriers created by the existence of diverse languages is nowadays generally acknowledged, literary translators today still encounter sometimes condescending attacks by critics, and in some cases by the writers themselves.

In the case of Chinese literature from the People's Republic of China (PRC) which has attracted international attention over the past decade, criticism has been directed both at the original works and at the translations to an extent not experienced in the case of other world literatures. The criticisms can be linked to China's recent political and historical circumstances but they do impinge critically on evaluations of modern Chinese literature and raise the question of what constitutes modern Chinese literature. Such issues will be addressed as part of the following discussion, but let us look first at the meaning and processes of poetry (i.e., literature in its most dense form) and the meaning of translation.

The following paragraphs will refer to a number of observations contained in the text of Paz's "Translation: Literature and Letters." This strategy has been adopted to provide a perspective which is unaligned to the norm of "ghettoistic" preconceptions afflicting modern Chinese literature, both at the locations of its creation and at the locations where it is read, either in the original language or

¹ This is the revised version of a paper entitled "On Literary Translation with Special Reference to the Poetry and Poetics of Yang Lian," presented at a Workshop on the Translation of Chinese Literature and sponsored by the Key Centre for Asian Studies, held at the University of Queensland, 26-27 September 1994.

in translation. What is emphasized here is that both the phenomena of literary creation and its translation are not location specific, that Chinese literature is not unique and exempt from the considerations raised by Paz. Paz's text is used here to provide an impartial foil for viewing some poems on poetry by the Chinese poet Yang Lian (b. 1936).

Paz maintains that translation is possible. For him the claim that poetry cannot be translated is wrong, for "many of the best poems in every Western language are translations and many of those translations were written by great poets" (155). Although he regards poetry as "a fabric of connotations ... woven of echoes, reflections, and the interaction of sound with meaning" is untranslatable, that while it is possible to translate the denotative meanings of a text its connotative meanings cannot be translated. This conflicts with Paz's conviction that poetry is universal and he suggests that this might be owing to "their inordinate attachment to verbal matter," or to their having "become ensnared in the trap of subjectivity" (155).

While declaring the universality of literature, and particularly poetry, Paz states that the "landscape" or emotional state of literary creation is startling and terrifying, for "surrounded by words on all sides we feel intimidated by the distressing bewilderment of living among names and not among things, the bewilderment of even having a name" (155). These are precisely the thoughts which permeate Yang Lian's poems on poetry, many of which are to be found in the collections *Crocodile* (Yang 1990) and *Yi*,² although nowhere does he enunciate these thoughts as lucidly as Paz. For Yang Lian, poetry has as its source the Great Unity or the cosmos. The implication is therefore that the poet must achieve that state of solitude in which oneness with the cosmos pertains: the poet must seek to eliminate names, i.e., achieve the pure state of being without names. The resulting poetry must then by definition possess universality for its source is the cosmos, where there are no names. It is the poet's task to verbalize or to give names to the chaos of the cosmos of which the poet is a part. The intensity of the emotions of confusion and bewilderment can be perceived in the poems presented in later paragraphs as Yang Lian grapples with his instinct and all-consuming passion to express himself in poetry. These notions closely approximate Paz's "landscape" of poetic creation which

... in turn is a creation, the metaphor of a nation or of an individual — a verbal topography that communicates fully, that translates fully. Phrases form a chain of mountains, and the mountains are the characters, the ideograms of a civilization. But not

only is the interaction between echoes and words overwhelming; it holds an inescapable threat. The moment comes when, surrounded by words on all sides we feel intimidated by the distressing bewilderment of living among names and not among things, the bewilderment of even having a name...

Paz goes on to quote Lorca: "Amid the reeds and the late afternoon, how strange that I am named Federico!" (157) noting that Lorca's experience is universal and that Lorca would have been similarly perplexed had he been called "Tom, Jean, or Chuang Tzu." To lose one's name is like losing one's shadow and to be only our name is to be reduced to being a shadow. However,

the absence of any correlation between things and their names is doubly intolerable: either the meanings evaporate or the things vanish. A world of pure meanings is as inhospitable as a world of things without meanings — without names. It is language that makes the world habitable. The instant of perplexity at the oddness of being called Federico or So Ji is immediately followed by the invention of another name, a name that is, in a way, a translation of the first: the metaphor or metonym that, without saying it, says it. (157)

"Translation: Literature and Letters" was originally published as a chapter in *Traducción y Literalidad* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1971). Some of Paz's writings were known to young PRC writers of the early 1980s, and certainly to Yang Lian. The extent of accessibility to Paz's writings in China at the time remains to be documented, as does the extent of Paz's own immersion in traditional Chinese, Japanese and Indian literature and philosophy and the manifestations of such influences on his poetic vision and poetry. Nevertheless, interpretations of the creative act and poetics evident in the writings of Paz and Yang Lian bear startling similarities, the complexities of which lie beyond the scope of the present investigation (I have explored some of these issues in Lee 1995).

The cycle of thirty six-line poems entitled *Crocodile*, written in Australia in 1989, documents the traumatic experience of poetic creation as experienced by Yang Lian. The sixty-four poems of *Yi*, written in China 1985-89 and revised for publication in New Zealand during 1990, allude to the sensation of savage monsters tearing at him, but it was only during his first visit to Australia (1988-89), after seeing crocodiles in the Northern Territory, that these monsters were given a name. The selection of poems below from *Crocodile* (Yang 1990, 85-101) indicate that his ponderings on the creative act had begun to crystallize. These poems may be regarded as Yang Lian's attempt to describe his interpretation of poetry and the emotions he experiences in the process of writing poetry:

- 2 Discussions of *Yi* and translations of some of the 64 poems of the collection have been published in Lee (1990, 1993a and 1993b). The 64 poems are divided into four books: *The Untrammelled Man Speaks*, *In Symmetry With Death*, *Living in Seclusion*, and *The Descent*. Yang Lian considers each of the four books as a complete poem and the four books of *Yi* together as a single complete poem.

7

The crocodile's nostrils shut like a word
ignoring you
floating and sinking on the page of blank paper

despairing you call for help
and with long submerged words
sink into crocodile waters

13

Sitting alone deep at night
many crocodiles steal onto the bank
like intangible poems

crawling between fingers
under masses of grass and leaves
unknowingly you are eaten

14

Your being is planned at conception
and as the first word grabs and kills you
your birth is induced

pale body growing with the cold
you ponder the world in a line of poetry
then comes authentic death

15

Your hand with the pen is gashed
as if seized by a crocodile
pouncing on the sun

then soundlessly dropping
the pen is seized by words
but the crocodile's belly still rages with hunger

16

One word considers you at length
more silently
than a lurking crocodile

throat soft and warm
this black tunnel
sees you deleted from the world

21

You curse that the days abandon you
but this word erects four high walls
time too makes a lonely escape

the loneliness is surrounded by you
you hear the sound of curses
transmitted in the pervading deathly quiet

José Ortega y Gasset has pointed out that languages are "anachronistic instruments" and that when people speak they are "hostages to the past" (108). It is worth reflecting on the function of language in poetry, if one subscribes (as do Paz and Yang Lian) to the notion that poetry is the verbalization of the poet's perceptions of reality, i.e., that poetic creation is the translation of the poet's emotional responses into language. Yang Lian is acutely aware of the tyrannical force of language and he comments cynically on the imprisoning walls of the "square" ideograms of the Chinese script. In writing he is conscious of his own relentless grappling with words to extricate himself from the demeaning existence of being a "hostage to the past." Note for example how this is achieved through his daring experiments in language and imagery in the poems cited above.

While less explicit than the poems of *Crocodile*, in the third and fourth books of *Yi*, "Living in Seclusion" and "The Descent," Yang Lian's awareness of the constraints of language is interwoven into other aspects in his perceptions of reality. The very conception and framework of *Yi* seeks to deconstruct traditional translations of reality into language and hence to transcend the confining walls of language which imprison civilized man. *Yi* takes its cue from the *Book of Changes*. The trigrams and the more complex hexagrams of the *Book of Changes* represent primitive man's depiction of nature, i.e., the surrounding environment, of which he is an integral part.

In Yang Lian's essay "About *Yi*," he argues that over the ages people who annotated the *Book of Changes* had distorted the original meaning of this ancient shamanistic book to suit their own religious or philosophical viewpoints, so that what were originally scattered and fragmented divinational signs had over the years been linked up to form some teaching of a later time. The *Book of Changes* surpasses the later distortions precisely because it is "ineffable" in its primitivity and simplicity. Moreover, its trigrams formed from the Yin (female) and the Yang (male) principles, and the hexagrams formed from the trigrams, do not intend to transmit some "Theory of Changes." The *Book of Changes* simply depict the environment inhabited by the Chinese people of ancient times, its changes and mankind's increasingly complex observations of these. For Yang Lian, inherent in this explanation, is the poetic sense of the *Book of Changes*, for

it imposes no restrictions and refers to direct perceptions (Yang 1994, 187-202).³ The selection of poems below from *Yi* demonstrates something of the scope of Yang Lian's experimentation with the poetic form and language as he strives to recreate his reality in language.

Marsh 7

People living in language Are transformations of silence

Bird Verb Mud Noun Flower Adjective
Water Adverb Rocks and Starry sky Interrogative
Weaving Girl's tiny voice shimmering like silk
Chats with the great sun Reciting a text unfurled by the wind

An unlined garment stored away With funeral rites
Or thunder softly call me War like a whale on fire
Darkness Number words Red beards on corn cobs
Emotives Each word in its own inner room mute and speechless

Mouths eating in front of mouths without ears hearing
How do inscriptions on bronze vessels rust somewhere else
Sink into the earth Letting drowsy snakes drink their fill of this pool of old blood
Words and sentences in isolation weightier than moonlight
Moonlight buried alive Fettered by the world goes mad

Someone is born Someone dies Someone calls me and I wither or soar
The vast land is exposed what need for omens
Who has trained locusts What is chastity

Bone cutting silence Can't be duplicated
Unless it speaks Primitive tongue rips out the glow of arrogance
Old and destitute last word
My name Empty word Stops and gradually grows cold (1994, 131-32)

Thunder 1

Now The heavenly-endowed hand
Buried deep in the great land
Hand of the setting sun over ears of blue wheat
In the earth's warm blood
Weeping
Starts to write of the anonymous world

Agitated by the light of seven candles seas open out
Breathe seasons of wild grasses transmitting brushfires
Pursue a swallow intent on a virgin destiny
Always returning here again
Always Heaven and mankind meeting for the first time
Hand of the first star inlaid in the forehead of darkness
Slowly descends
Crumples my soul into paper
Crumpling more Jute and bamboo leaves split
Hazy footprints

Gusts of wild wind sweep the high plains
Sun reeking of blood Head swathed in hymns
Moon trussed halfway up the mountain a tambourine frantically striking
Who Obliterates countless histories and returns unto my body
For steeds galloped into battle
Dusk is an expanse of green stables
Whose voice shouts in the wilderness

Name discarded by dreams Forgotten by blood
Name I share with grit and sand
Strolling through a multitude of heads White flowering bushes
Centuries amassing like clouds prostrate in readiness for the arrival of a body

Each bird Plummet
Into its own centre
Sinks into a storm
Sinks into a word again sees the living and the dead
Sinks into a drop of water So that trees can be heard and oceans can be heard
Under the stone vault of the stars
This hollow hand reeking of gunpowder smoke
In the loneliness turns even blacker
Turns into God's hand scouring the myriad things
From death is born the course of mountain ranges
From death is born the course of rivers
Anonymous world scanned by a poem
Sun in the depths of the great land invisibly scooped out
A pool of water Shadows noisily overflow
A fire starts to burn in the small Hell of my entrails
Daybreak's words Darkness' rocks
People arriving at the vortex of the Last Day
Write music as naive as God's (143-45)

Thunder 3

Now I who have been sentenced with Heaven's punishment
Am tormented in a web of blood and flesh
Thunderbolts trample trees Fall into a clock
From within me seize hold of me

3 "About *Yi*" is discussed in detail in Lee 1990, 1993a,b. Of the poems cited here from *Yi*, "Marsh 7" and "Thunder 1" have been published in translation in Lee, 1993b; "Thunder 3" and "Thunder 5" are presented here for the first time in English.

Beat me

In the deathly silence heaps of living corpses
 Like a herd of small animals not caring who it is who saves them
 Sunflower stance of burning bones
 Golden tongues Oblivious to flowers or birds
 Agony of wings pulled back and lopped off
 They have never owned the sky

Except for a patch of dull blue under the skin
 Like a dirty myth aborted thousands of years ago
 Forever imprisoned in the months and years
 Forever An empty glove regulating spring hearts
 Time itself is punishment From within carving Chiselling

I who have forgotten my background

I who will finally be partitioned by Death

Bullet holes roam my body Crows and the setting sun

Like imperceptible wounds quietly ooze blood

Like mountains Water Clouds Sea Wind

Each minute becomes unfamiliar

Then whose history Hidden in my chest is born

All illegitimate children Hate a white placenta

Then whose death Is offered up in my hands

Rock behind the eye sockets of the carved image

Mocks the clumsy imitator

Even when silent Language grows old

Even when solitary Rebellious horizons rise

Besieging me from deep within From a mirror

Fragmented silvery vision of stars

Life Copying

Death's likeness

Continually sinking A small heap of undecided words and sentences hanging
 suspended

Submerged light Rising into the air cuts the crystal speck of a bird in flight

Flickering dark shadows teach eyes to read the world

Cold in rocks Winter in blood and flesh Green in trees

In my breathing is the sound of galvanized iron sheets being polished

While tormented thus

A terrible seed is seen in the womb of the myriad things

Turning death into a gentle event

Fragrant Dirge like a human mouth

Already singing

We are only lingering notes dispersing (154-56)

Thunder 5

Now This wooden stake which impales me

Is the only country left to me

Wood hiding in sunlight, flowing water and the wings of birds
 On a white skull

Beached

World full of scraps of paper like resuscitated ashes

Reading the wind Line after line of lost writing

Sand at the furthest point of the brain fully exposed

Great pagoda Like a gazelle solitarily fleeing

From the sun which has set So departing from lizards and God

In a sky laden with rain

Turning into a drenched word

At night turning to water through countless wormholed names

Forever stealthily returning

Forever Skin written all over with light deep as an abyss

Experiencing death I squander countless non-deaths

Carved rocks gently slip into the moon

White marble days Touched by memories

Pure and radiant

All is blood Passion creates intense scenery

Each awakening obeys fresh warmth

This well consuming the great land Ancient mud

Drop by drop saturates a heart

On all rounded stars is sometimes grass and sometimes dream

All sink into my bones

Each day die Each day are born

Sky and the seas publicly use this colonized head of azure blue

So blue that time is indiscernible

Smashed by the battering on the reef Is eternal on the Last Day

Rigidly adhered to like a legend Worn out like an old saying

Hell is only an empty cave

Every name I have shouted out further than a thousand *li*

Occupies my hand Like red veins

On each execution day sword and axe kiss my head

White-haired noon talks in dream

On white skulls History is faintly outlined

Faintly in a line of poetry it floats at will

Each day drowning Each day from the grave looking askance at the world

This wooden stake which impales me

Feels forests reviving within my body

Learns to see Each instant

How drunken birds revive green shade on the tree

The sun transmigrating thousands of times

How it radiates light with the courage of darkness

Within a word springs gurgles anew

In soulless places Making the bones of corpses shake (164-66)

As mentioned above, Paz's comments on literature and translation were chosen to neutralize the ground of modern Chinese literature, too long fraught with political bias on various fronts. It is hoped that the cultural impartiality of a poet and critic such as Paz might encourage a more balanced assessment of the translation of modern Chinese literature. Even from the above brief comments and from the statements on poetry contained in the selection of Yang Lian's poems above, it is possible to discern strong correspondences in Paz's definitions. "Translation: Literature and Letters" outlines Paz's discussion of the essentials of poetry and poetic translation. His perceptions on these processes provide appropriate definitions for this discussion and are summarized here:

- 1) Every word holds a certain number of implicit meanings.
- 2) When a word is combined with others it makes up a phrase; one of those meanings is activated and becomes predominant.
- 3) The distinguishing feature of poetry is the preservation of plurality of meanings whereas in prose there tends to be a single meaning. Plurality of meaning is a general property of language but it is accentuated in poetry. Plurality also exists in prose but it is the circumstance which confirms the meaning in that prose.
- 4) Poetry radically transforms language.
- 5) Poetry is characterized by immobility of signs but mobility/ambiguity of meanings while prose is characterized by mobility of characters but fixed meanings. "Once we move into the terrain of poetry, we find the words have lost their mobility and their interchangeability. The meanings of a poem are multiple and changeable; the words of that poem are unique and irreplaceable. To change them would be to destroy the poem. Poetry is expressed in language, but it goes beyond language" (Paz 158-59).
- 6) "The poet, immersed in the movement of language, in constant verbal preoccupation, chooses a few words — or is chosen by them.⁴ As he combines them, he constructs his poem: a verbal object made of irreplaceable and immovable characters."
- 7) The translator's starting point is not the language in movement that is a poet's raw material, but the fixed language of the poem. It is a language congealed and yet living.
- 8) The translation procedure is the inverse of the poet's. It is not constructing an unalterable text from mobile characters; instead it is dismantling the elements of the text, freeing the signs into circulation and returning them to language.
- 9) In the first phase the translator is like the reader or critic. Each reading is a translation, and each criticism is an interpretation. Reading is translation within the language and criticism is a free version of the poem. For the critic, the poem is the starting point towards another text, his own. For the translator, in another language and with different characters, he must compose a poem analogous to the original.

10) In the second phase the translator's task is akin to the poet's. The essential difference is that the poet does not know where his poem will lead him but the translator knows that the completed effort must reproduce the poem before him (159).

Despite the many challenges for the translator in the modern age, Paz observes that contrary to expectation there has been the tendency to translate even more and that there are often translations of translations of translations but he states unequivocally:

Each text is unique ... no text can be completely original because language itself, in its very essence is already a translation — first from the non-verbal world, and then because each sign and each phrase is a translation of another phrase.... All texts are originals because each translation has its own distinctive character. Up to a point, each translation is a creation and thus constitutes a unique text. (154)

Translation is always a literary activity despite the increasing primacy of linguistics which has brought about a

tendency to deemphasize the decidedly literary nature of translation.... Just as literature is a specialized form of language, so translation is a specialized function of literature.... Translation is an exercise in which what is decisive, given the necessary language proficiency, whether it is the translator's initiative or a machine programmed by man or a living human being surrounded by dictionaries. (157-58)

Quoting Arthur Waley's suggestion that translators "should make themselves invisible behind the texts and, if fully understood, the texts will speak for themselves," Paz maintains that poetic translation is a procedure analogous to poetic creation but one unfolding in the opposite direction (157-58). He further notes that the greatest creative periods of Western poetry have been preceded by or accompanied by intercrossings that have taken place in the form of imitation; at other times they have taken the form of translations. He suggests the strategy of viewing the history of European poetry "as a chronicle of the convergences of the various traditions that compose what is known as Western literature," acknowledging even the presence of Japanese *haiku* and the Chinese tradition in modern Western poetry. However, he queries the precision of the term "influences" used by critics, suggesting instead that Western literature be seen as "an integral whole in which the central protagonists are not national traditions but styles or trends, as no style or trend has ever been national. Styles have invariably been translinguistic.... Styles are coalescent and pass from one language to another; the works, each rooted in its own verbal soil are unique ... unique, but not isolated" (160). In histories of modern Chinese literature, the convergence of world literatures has been the topic of studies such as Chow, McDougall, and Lee 1973, although such studies have until recent times emphasized China as the recipient of Western influences. However, more recent

4 These notions are echoed by Yang Lian in poems 14, 15, and 16 of *Crocodile* (Yang 1990, 94-96).

studies by Marián Gálik since 1986 indicate a shift to considering a convergence of world literatures without the stigma associated with the use of the word "influence" which, as Paz suggests, is not appropriate.

The literary creation described above is premised on the freedom of expression of the writer. Such a tradition in China's modern literature was established in the May Fourth period (1915-19), a period when young Chinese intellectuals were for a short time united in extolling the intrinsic worth and value of the self and the individual following a decade and a half of intense reading in the literatures of the West. However this intellectual revolution which attributed central authority to the individual could not have been possible without the spread and growth of modern Chinese anarchist thinking which both borrowed from various strands of world anarchism and modernized traditional indigenous forms of anarchism. That there was the most dramatic and widespread flowering of Chinese anarchist thinking during the New Culture Movement of the May Fourth period testifies to this fact. Indeed the immense amounts of anarchist literature available in Chinese translation at the time, together with the writings of the Chinese anarchists themselves, appeared regularly in mainstream publications by 1919, indicating that certain elements of the anarchist ideal had become widely accepted in China. In fact the works of Kropotkin, Bakunin, Goldman, Tolstoy, Grave, Reclus, Louis Blanc, Malatesta were available in Chinese by 1919 and some editions published 5,000 copies (Dirlik 154-55).

Many of the younger generation of Chinese intellectuals, not only those who had embraced anarchism as a total philosophy, had internalized those elements of anarchist thinking which extolled the importance and value of the individual. These elements were familiar and found resonances in traditional Chinese culture in philosophical writings such as the *Zhuangzi* as well as in China's vast repository of literature (see studies such as by Chen; Yue; Lee 1985). However by this time the anarchist movement had already declined in the West and the younger generation of Chinese intellectuals who had become committed to the ideals of freedom and autonomy of the individual, and the affirmation of the self no longer acknowledged their anarchist sources. Nevertheless, the ground had been prepared for their embracing of Nietzsche's pronouncement "God is dead!" which symbolized the end of all authority external to the individual self. Embracing such values, Chinese creative writers moved to the vanguard as the heroes of the May Fourth Movement.⁵

5 See Vogel and Lee 1973. See also Gálik 1986, where the interliterary process of confrontation in Chinese literature during the period 1898-1979 is examined while discussing connections with ancient Greek literature and mythology, Russian, French, English, German, Norwegian, American, Japanese and Bengali literature; and the selections of articles in Gálik 1990.

The new literature of the period, written in the vernacular language, represented a break with the classical literary traditions of the past and a shift to the issues and concerns of the present, but more importantly it represented both a new awareness of the meaning of the creative act and the literary process as well as the beginnings of a maturing in the understanding of the literatures and concerns of other countries of the world.⁶ The May Fourth spirit, with its emphasis on the individual and the self, was consciously established as the tradition for China's modern literature.

Although it would not be difficult to substantiate the opinion that the masterpieces of Chinese literature of the past were pure expressions of the unfettered self, it was Western literature, philosophy and psychology which in this period provided the language and modern perspectives for theoretical discourses on literature. Creative literature was now acknowledged as possessing intrinsic worth and perceived as having an existence other than that of being a vehicle for transmitting some political teaching or ideology.⁷

However, territorial encroachments in China by foreign imperialist powers which escalated in the early years of the twentieth century and culminated in Japan's full-scale invasion in 1937 generated intense paranoia and fear of national annihilation amongst all Chinese intellectuals. The newly burgeoning modern literature of the May Fourth period was aborted as many writers for patriotic reasons consciously committed themselves to the dictates of political parties. The traumatic events in the history of the young Nationalist Republic conditioned writers to negate the "small self" of the individual for the sake of the "large self" of the nation. For the writer, the pinnacle of self-abnegation was reached during the decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) when Chinese writers were effectively silenced, and only propaganda literature for the party could be published. This was a period when the ideological control network of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had been firmly established and operating effectively, a period when intellectuals were relegated to the "stinking ninth category" of Chinese society.

The late-1970s saw a gradual decline in party control. With the CCP's endorsement of Deng Xiaoping's modernization policies and the opening of China to the West, the value of intellectuals for the modernization process was acknowledged. Despite periodic government clampdowns, e.g., the Anti Spiritual

6 Western literature was introduced to Chinese intellectuals from the beginning of the twentieth century through Chinese translations and through the reading of the works in the original or in translation by the vast numbers of young Chinese studying in Japan, France, Germany, England and the United States. See Chow and Gálik 1986.

7 See Liang Qichao's promotion of the political novel to argue the reform cause just a decade earlier, in works such as Lee 1974 and 1981. For the development of modern literary theory during the May Fourth period, see McDougall 1970 and Gálik 1969.

Pollution Campaign of 1983, the late-1970s and virtually the whole of the 1980s was a period of increasingly greater freedom of expression. On the literary scene links with the literature of the May Fourth period were re-established and, more importantly, massive publications of Western literature in translation gradually became available. The period also saw the dramatic re-emergence of a vigorous growth in Chinese literature. This new literature was no longer the lackey of the political propaganda machinery. Its young writers voraciously consumed Western literature even as the works were in the process of being translated; in the late 1970s and early 1980s these translations were often in the form of handwritten drafts which were passed around among students. The reading and rapid digestion of Western literature created an even greater lust for self-expression, producing the ebullience of the literature of the 1980s. The lust for self-expression in the context of the more relaxed period of government control in the 1980s allowed for the natural development of the student movement of 1989 which had been organized to commemorate both the 70th anniversary of the May Fourth Incident (1919) and the 10th anniversary of the Democracy Wall student movement during which these same demands for freedom of expression had been voiced, and suppressed (for details of the Democracy Wall student movement of 1978-79, see Goodman).

There is tragic irony in the repetition of history. The events of April-June 1989 coupled with the spectacular achievements in the gradual establishment of a market economy in the PRC have radically changed the very nature of Chinese literature. A recent newspaper article by Liu Xiaobo comments on the effects of the seductive power of consumerist capitalism on literature, as well as pouring derision on the Chinese intellectuals who since 1989, he claims, have been "rejected by the masses." Liu debunks the current attempt by intellectuals to drum up yet another craze to counteract the anti-culture crass materialism now prevalent in PRC China. He notes that Chinese intellectuals have indicted writers such as Wang Shuo and Jia Pingwa for pandering and contributing to moral decadence in society with their nihilism, sensationalism, and unabashed eroticism. While not endorsing the fact that such writers are apparently making substantial profits from their writings, Liu unequivocally states that they are at least doing what they want to do as individuals, unlike the intellectuals who are lackeys of the ruling authority and are merely bemoaning the fact that they have been rejected by the masses (21).

By the 1980s Chinese literature had begun to capture international audiences, first with the English translations of the poet Bei Dao by Bonnie S. McDougall (1983) and then the selections of writers in publications such as the Special Edition on Chinese Literature Today in the Hong Kong publication *Renditions: A Chinese-English Translation Magazine* 19-20 (1983). This trend has continued to increase with the international publishing world over the past decade demonstrating growing interest in translations of Chinese literature.

The events of Tiananmen, 4 June 1989, left a substantial diaspora of Chinese writers scattered in various parts of the world. Interestingly, the very fact that many of these writers have begun to publish mainly in Taiwan and Hong Kong as well as in Chinese language publications produced in their countries of residence, has contributed to an unprecedented global interest in contemporary Chinese literature, regardless of the location of the writer but highly dependent on the literary translator. At the same time there is now significant attention given to the Chinese literature produced outside the PRC.

The essays in Howard Goldblatt's collection, *Worlds Apart: Recent Chinese Writings and Its Audiences*, reflect the trend to include Chinese writers publishing outside the PRC and to place Chinese literature in a global context. Among the eminent contributors of this volume Joseph Lau is the most strident in his condemnation of the PRC-bias in past evaluations of modern Chinese literature. He attributes this bias to obsessive interest in political developments in the PRC by China scholars and sinologists. For example, he questions the validity as literature of Ye Wenfu's poem "General You Can't Do This!": the political importance of the poem has ensured its place in the history of modern Chinese literature and the poem "Night at the Xiang River" is a "re-affirmative litany for believers." In their evaluations of the PRC poets Bei Dao, Gu Cheng, and Shu Ting, Lau asks whether "scholars and critics are reading their works for their intrinsic literary merits or solely for their extrinsic connotations," rightly noting that an "obscure" writer in the PRC "could catapult to national fame (or infamy) overnight" if his or her writings were considered adequately seditious for coverage in the national media (13-24). He further suggests that the modern Chinese literary commonwealth should include writers from Hong Kong and Southeast Asia as well as America and Europe. In his evaluation of contemporary Chinese writers he ranks Acheng as the finest fiction writer in modern Chinese literature "during the last four decades," judging him against the best of Taiwan's writers (23-24). Crosman's conclusions in "Do Readers Make Meaning" (149-64) are verified by Lau in his critique of the extreme case of modern Chinese literature, where the literary judgement of readers has been dictated by factors beyond the "consideration of the aesthetics" (Lau 16-17).

However, Lau (like Paz) is of the firm conviction that art "transcends not only national but also ideological restrictions" (11).⁸ It is the "internal luminosity" of texts which endow them with value as literature. He argues that while written in two different languages and separated by several decades in time, Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" (1914) and the Taiwanese poet Ya Xian's "Abyss" (written in the 1950s) share the characteristics of a good

⁸ Lau attributes this conviction to his mentor Professor Horst Frenz of Indiana University and dedicates the article to him.

poem. What is crucial is not meaning but "how the language explores and penetrates" (11-13).

In pondering the timelessness of poetry Lau further affirms that "even divorced from context, the language alone generates enough interest on our part by its surrealist arrangement of the verbal 'icons.' The dense forest of symbols is highlighted by an internal luminosity that is the poet's technical brilliance" (13). Although Lau is referring to the reading of original texts, his statement nevertheless obliquely addresses the issue of appreciation by the uninitiated reader. Technically skilled translators of Chinese literature may therefore be encouraged. Provided that "internal luminosity" exists in the original text, and this internal luminosity is grasped in the translation, the reader will be able to enjoy and to appreciate the translated text.

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