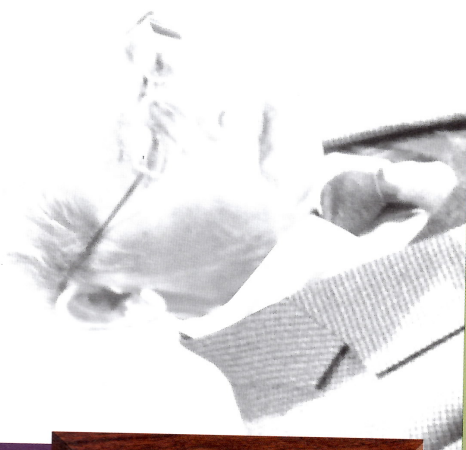


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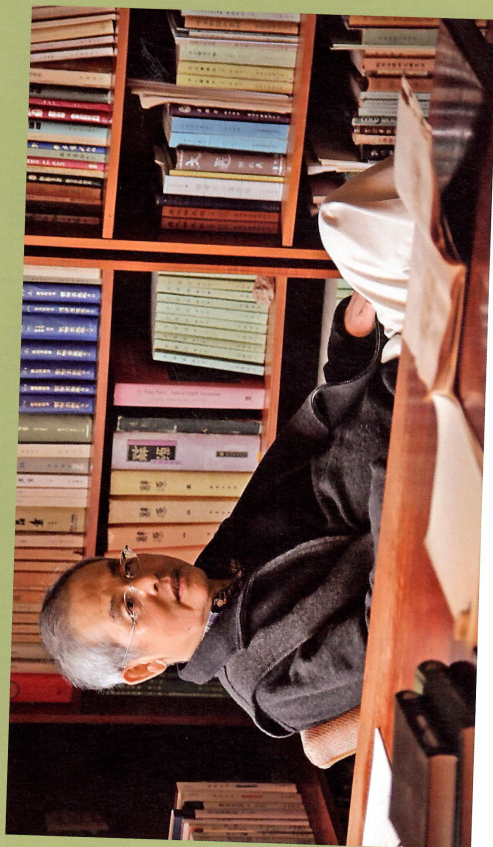
Newman Prize for
Chinese Literature
YANG MU



Yang Mu

THE NEWMAN PRIZE FOR CHINESE LITERATURE is awarded biennially in recognition of outstanding achievement in prose or poetry that best captures the human condition, and is conferred solely on the basis of literary merit. Any living author writing in Chinese (residing anywhere) is eligible. The Prize consists of \$10,000 and a medallion, and may serve to crown a lifetime's achievement or to direct attention to a developing body of work. An international jury of distinguished experts both nominates the candidates and selects the winner based on a transparent voting process. The first winner of the Newman Prize was Mo Yan (2009), followed by Han Shaogong (2011), and most recently Yang Mu (2013). Hosted by the University of Oklahoma's Institute for US-China Issues, the Newman Prize is the only award given to Chinese literature outside China and Taiwan. It seeks to promote US-China understanding through a celebration of our common humanity. Founded by Institute Director Peter Gries, the Newman Prize honors Harold J. and Ruth Newman, whose support enabled the creation of OU's Institute for US-China Issues. The Newmans have also been long-term supporters of the Asia Society, endowing a program there entitled "The Soul of Asia."

楊牧



YANG MU WAS BORN IN 1940 in the small coastal city of Hualien in east Taiwan as Ching-hsien Wang 王清獻. He received his BA in English from Tunghai University in Taiwan, his MFA from the University of Iowa, and his PhD in comparative literature from the University of California at Berkeley. He has taught at many universities in North America, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, but he spent most of his academic career at the University of Washington, Seattle. He has also served in important administrative positions, including the founding dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the National Dong Hwa University in his hometown of Hualien and the founding director of the Institute of Literature and Philosophy at Academia Sinica, the premiere national research institution in Taiwan. He currently holds an endowed chair at Dong Hwa.

Yang Mu has been writing poetry continuously for sixty years. The longevity of his career is matched by his extraordinary creativity, which has exerted a transformative influence on Taiwanese poetry in general from the 1950s to the present. His poetry assimilates the best that the Chinese and the Western traditions have to offer, deftly blending classicism and surrealism, romanticism and modernism. His poetry may be lyrical or dramatic, contemplative or defiant, elegiac or erotic. In an age when poetry is indisputably considered to be minority literature, Yang Mu enjoys enduring popularity among readers of several generations. His accomplishments beyond the realm of poetry are demonstrable in prose, literary criticism, scholarship on classical Chinese poetry, comparative literature, and editing, as well as the translation of poetry.

Yang Mu has been married to Ying-ying Hsia for thirty-five years; they have a son, Bruce. The couple now lives in Taiwan most of the year, dividing their time between Hualien and Taipei.

The Newman Prize for Chinese Literature

Nomination Statement for Yang Mu

Michelle Yeh 奚密

In nominating the Taiwanese poet Yang Mu for the 2013 Newman Prize for Chinese Literature, Michelle Yeh argues that his poetry is a blending of innovation and craft, of cosmopolitanism and classical and modern Chinese poetics, which creates "a versatility and profundity that is unparalleled among Chinese poets today." Yeh points to his work as "dense, lyrical, and charged with a diction that runs the spectrum from the colloquial to the archaic, a syntax that is supple and complex, and a tone that ranges from playfulness to passion, and to despair." While Yang Mu has spent most of his teaching career in the US, his poetry remains firmly rooted in his native Chinese language, a language he has attuned to the depth and breadth of his transpacific life.

Today, the poetry of modern Taiwan is well known for its avant-garde, modernist cosmopolitanism, gracefully combining influences from the best international writing with a reverence for the legacy of classical Chinese poetry. The lyricism and artistic exuberance in contemporary Taiwanese poetry feels at once mature and youthful, deeply rooted and newly born. This distinctly energetic poetic arena, which arose following decades of war and repression, was not inevitable. On the contrary, the confidence and independence shown by present-day writers was hard-won and had to be invented within the scope of modern Taiwan. As a member of the first generation of postwar writers, Yang Mu 楊牧, who was born in 1940, understood that modern Taiwanese poetry was possible, that it could look forward rather than nostalgically backward, could stand on its own rather than languishing in the shadows of history, and could take advantage of newfound access to the world to establish fertile ground for a renewal of language and literature.



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cism in the early twentieth century. Yang Mu learned from Xu the potential for expressive phrasing and musicality, yet contemplated time and memory in a Keatsian way. However, it would be simplistic to label Yang Mu "traditional" or "romantic." His early work was also modernist in its formal experiments. Together, these three strains provided the foundation for a career of exceptional originality: "In my youthful gallop, you were the wind full in my face" (from "Xing shi weiwei de xiangdao" 星是惟一的前導 ["The Star Is the Only Guide," 1956]).

Yang Mu's poetry underwent dramatic development in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is nothing short of amazing that his maturation as a poet took place while he was pursuing a PhD in comparative literature at the University of California, Berkeley, after receiving an MFA from the University of Iowa. Immersion in Chinese and Western classics—from *Shijing* 詩經 (*The Book of Odes*) and *Chuci* 楚辭 (*Songs of the South*) to *Beowulf*, Dante, Milton, and Rilke—did not turn the poet into a pedantic scholar but rather deepened and sharpened his poetic vision. Yang Mu became fully transcultural in his experiments with subjects and styles. For example, "Yanling jizi guajian" 延陵季子掛劍 ("Jizi of Yanling Hangs Up His Sword") and "Wusuyue zuqu" 武宿夜曲 ("King Wu's Night Encampment: A Suite"), draw on ancient Chinese history to offer new perspectives on Confucianism. "Jinji de youxi" 禁忌的遊戲 ("Forbidden Games," 1976), a suite of four poems inspired by Federico García Lorca, uses the motif of music to intimate the permanence of art in contrast to the impermanence of love: "Try to remember / the great concern in Granada / try to remember your language and pain / green winds and green horses, your / language and happiness—your occasional happiness..." Music, with its organic structure and abstract—therefore, amoral—nature, is a recurrent motif in the work of Yang Mu.

Since the 1970s, Yang Mu has also found in poetry a means of intervention in social and political reality. "Shier xingxiang lianxi qu" 十二星象練習曲 ("Etudes: The Twelve Heavenly Branches," 1970) is a dramatic monologue in which an American soldier serving in Vietnam addresses his lover at home, Louisa. Structured around two sets of astrologic signs, Chinese and Western, the sequence of twelve poems fuses sexual ecstasy with the despair of war: "North northwest and west, Louisa / you will scream / when you find me dead upon my victorious return / lying cold and stiff on your naked body." His "Youren wenwo gongli yu zhengyi de wenti" 有人問我公理與正義的問題 ("Someone Asks Me about Righteousness and Justice," 1986) touches on the sensitive issue of the tension between the native Taiwanese and the postwar émigrés from the mainland, as a result of the discriminatory policy of the ruling party. Yang's

2001 collection is in fact titled *Sheshi* 沙事 (*Intervention*). The opening poem, "Quezuo" 卻坐 ("The Vacated Seat," 1998), appropriates the medieval European tale of the knight in shining armor and the damsel in distress to reflect on socially engaged art. The verse ends on a soft syllable (a particle in Chinese), suggesting ambivalence and even skepticism.

There is no ambivalence or skepticism, however, when it comes to the identity of the poet. Through the poet's eyes, we see the majestic Central Range and the immense Pacific Ocean, reexamine the colonial history of Taiwan, and share his indignation toward social injustice as well as his sheer delight in children's natural curiosity. "Relanzhe cheng" 熱蘭遮城 ("Fort Zeelandia," 1975)—which is the seventeenth-century Dutch name for Tainan, the oldest city on the island—ponders the ambiguous relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. "Caotang" 草堂, 1973 critiques the government policy of the free-trade zone, where local women provided cheap labor for foreign-owned factories. The poet also looks to Ireland—above all, Yeats's Ireland—as a frame of reference for, and emblem of, Taiwan. While "Hangxiang Aierlan" 航向愛爾蘭 ("Sailing to Ireland," 1972) memorializes the 1916 Easter Rising, "Aierlan" 愛爾蘭 ("Ireland," 1972) laments the Bogside Massacre: "They came wearing raincoats / Blood and fatigue / Stars and superstition / They calculated the position / Of the tides at dawn. Actually love / Did not belong to them."

Yeats remains a shining role model for Yang Mu, who also must come to terms with the choice between political commitment and aesthetic detachment, between action and intervention through the medium of art. In recent decades, Yang Mu has identified with the Irish poet in yet another way: how to come to terms with the contradiction between physical decay and spiritual quest, between human mortality and immortal art. Remembering a little girl who tried to catch a butterfly so she could put it between the pages of a book, the poet looks to the future in "Xueyuan zhi shu" 學院之樹 ("Tree in the College," 1983): "By then we'll both be old— / without our dry, colorful clothes, we will have only an awakened soul / in the embrace of a book, close to words / living in the sympathy and wisdom that we seek."

Yang Mu is an innovator, a supreme craftsman. His deep engagement in world literature, cultures, and history has given his work a versatility and profundity that is unparalleled among Chinese poets today. He has created a language that is uniquely his own. It is dense, lyrical, and charged with a diction that runs the spectrum from the colloquial to the archaic, a syntax that is supple and complex, and a tone that ranges from playfulness to passion, and to despair, as in "Zhi tianshi" 致天使 ("To an Angel," 1993) "Angel, if you cannot, with your glorious,

sacred heart, / understand this brocade of words to be tears and blood / then I beg for mercy." He moves easily from the world of tangibles to the world of abstraction, with images rich and precise: "Solitude is an ancient beast / hiding in my jagged rock heart / A stripe on his back that changes color— / I know it's a protective device for his species" ("Gudu" 孤獨 ["Solitude"], 1976). His poetic vision may be summed up with these words from the preface to his 1995 collection: poetry is that which "passes through time—traversing its dimness, uncertainty, and fragmentation—gathers and stitches together all the transient moods and reticences . . . to make it last, lasting in an ever-renewed structure."

For more than half a century, Yang Mu has been a formative force and the most influential figure on Taiwan's poetry scene. He is widely read in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other sinophone communities in Asia and other parts of the world, and his readership is growing in mainland China. Individual volumes of Yang Mu's poetry have been translated into English, French, German, Japanese, and Swedish. Frank Stewart, founding editor of *Manoa: A Pacific Journal of International Writing*, states that "at a time when Chinese literature is blessed with an abundance of innovative poets, Yang Mu stands out as one of the most important." The German sinologist Tilman Spengler calls Yang Mu a *poeta doctus* and considers him "the greatest living Chinese poet." Göran Malmqvist, member of the Swedish Academy, published a Swedish translation of a hundred and sixteen of Yang Mu's poems in 2011; he is currently editing a comprehensive series of Yang Mu's poetry, lyrical prose, and literary criticism in English and German translations.

Ever since he was a teenager, Yang Mu has been a firm believer of the Keatsian maxim: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." Poetry is worth lifelong pursuit because it is true and eternal: "I believe in the quest and attainment of art / and music, I place them in / specific Time and Space, one by one / They burn and diffuse through eternity" ("Tu" 兔 ["Rabbits"], 1997). He has produced a body of work brilliant and impressive in its range: reticent, controlled, yet musical, adventuresome, and linguistically surprising line-by-line. The reader of Yang Mu's poems thinks with him, inside the poem and inside his mind and emotions—and emerges more aware of the world and what it means to be human.

Note:

Author's note: For a complete list of Yang Mu's creative work, see his website: yangmu.com.

Poetry is that which "passes through time—traversing its dimness, uncertainty, and fragmentation—gathers and stitches together all the transient moods and reticences . . . to make it last, lasting in an ever-renewed structure."

Yang Mu began publishing poetry at the age of sixteen, first in his high school journal and in the literary supplement to a local newspaper, and soon in the leading journals of experimental poetry, notably, *Xiandai shi* 現代詩 (*Modern Poetry*), *Lanxing* 藍星 (*Blue Star*), and *Chuang-shiji* 創世紀 (*Epoch*). From 1960 to 2013, he published fifteen volumes of original poetry, the bulk of which is collected in three tomes. Written under the penname Ye Shan 葉珊, Yang Mu's poetry in the 1950s and 1960s was distinguished by its deft fusion of Chinese lyricism, Western romanticism, and international modernism. While he took a deep interest in the avant-garde movements of Europe and America, he never blindly followed the trends but instead crafted a language evocative of classical Chinese poetry. He was equally inspired by English romanticism, especially by Keats, and by Xu Zhimo 徐志摩, the most accomplished Chinese disciple of romanti-

sanctions against them under a strict system of censorship. After the 1937 invasion of northern China by Japanese forces, the governor-general in Taipei barred all Taiwanese from publishing in the Chinese language, forcing them to begin writing in Japanese or else stop writing altogether. In the following decade, young Taiwanese published some outstanding avant-garde new-style poems, some of which succeeded in using language to seek the beauty and wonder of the new zeitgeist. These poets were in no way inferior either to their European, American, or Japanese contemporaries, or to writers of their generation on the Chinese mainland.

Following this thread, we can see that this historical legacy is one of the sources of modern poetry in Taiwan, and we are thus better able to grasp the various theories that developed out of that period and to explain why it was that within the first ten years after the war, the poetic voice of the Taiwanese suddenly fell silent. We can further understand why subsequent generations witnessed its rebirth in a much livelier and more forceful form. New generations of poets have applied themselves unflinchingly to this latent artistic spirit, opening it up further, wholeheartedly declaiming it to the world, and imbuing the ideas and techniques of Western modernism while also integrating the essence of traditional poetry. For the past half-century we've seen the way poets have created a place for themselves in the space between what is chosen and what is left behind. What they have embraced and what they have rejected is all in plain view. The features of traditional Chinese poetry and the style of Western literature have been transformed in our modern environment, and yet, throughout, the spirit and feeling of these works have cleaved to their portrayal of universal truths.

The nearly four hundred years of development in Taiwan have given birth to this new poetry of ours, distinctly different from that found in other cultural locales, and always fresh and vital because its surroundings are in constant flux. Holding fast to a modernity that can't be erased, it refuses to let itself become mired in set responses. It is humanistic and cosmopolitan in a way that transcends nationalism; while it embraces nature, it also yearns for the epitome of abstract beauty. At times our modern poetry displays a fondness for tumultuous images of the old and new Taiwan. Yet it isn't afraid to make traditional China its cultural referent. Acknowledging enduring love and admiration, it uses traditional China as a foundation for literary creation, a foundation that has contributed to its written language, imagery, and allusions, thus guiding observations and the imagination.

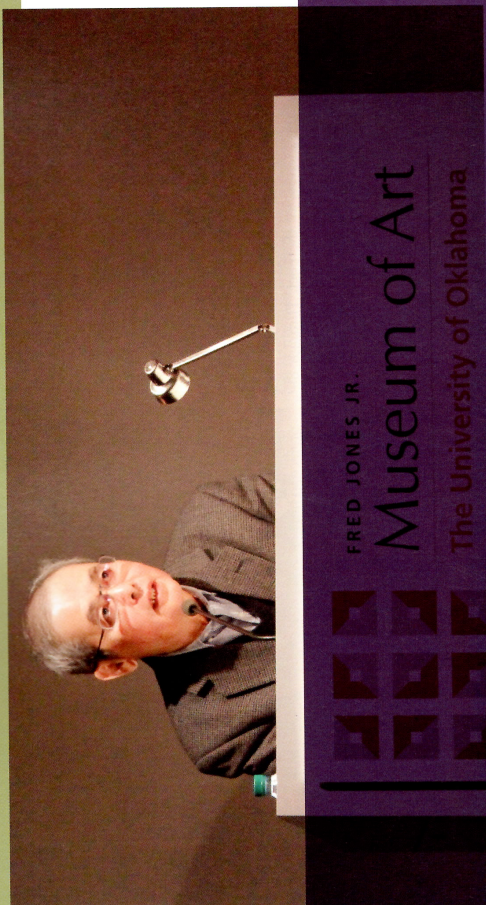
We use the Chinese written language, precisely, to create Taiwanese literature.

This, as we recall today, marks the significant beginnings of Taiwanese literature: political transitions, a typhoon, the strange big island, aboriginal peoples, European sailors, and poetry.

When we take a good look at what has and hasn't changed over the years, holding up the so-called Taiwanese style of the past sixty years alongside that of traditional China, we discover that—especially in terms of the way it has freely chosen among stylistic elements and incorporated a multitude of subjects—Taiwan's modern poetry has not only inherited and absorbed elements of China's tradition, it has also been able to extricate itself from China's turmoil, bypassing old customs, exercising choice, and affirming the positive. Whenever local culture guides our thinking and artistic creation, it strengthens itself through inclusiveness. All of this is connected to Taiwan's geography and history, as it has been for nearly four hundred years.

Local culture, when investigated as a literary source, may be narrow in scope, but when we focus on its wellsprings, accumulation, and transformations, we find we are able to follow the river back to its sources, to the time of Shen Guangwen. This was precisely the point at which poetic creation in the medium of the Chinese language made its debut in Taiwan. In 1680 Taiwan came under the control of the Manchu Qing dynasty, and over the next two hundred years the officials posted to Taiwan composed a great deal of poetry. These poems expressed the sense of disappointment and failure experienced by demoted and exiled officials, and it was characteristic of them to deride the landscape and insult local customs. It was only after the reign of the Qianlong emperor that one finally saw Taiwanese candidates for the imperial examinations traveling back and forth across the strait. It was they who, gradually and over time, came to write poetry in praise of Taiwan, which they saw as their home. Take, for example, a couplet from "Mooring at Luermen at Night" ("Luermen yebo" 鹿耳門夜泊), a poem by Chen Hui 陳輝, a student from Taiwan County: "Wavering, a traveler's thoughts, / In dreams of return he recalls his home" ("Yaoyao youzi yi / guimeng yijayuan" 搖搖游子意，歸夢憶家園).

During the period of Japanese rule, the study of poetry in Taiwan flourished. There were a total of sixty-six poetry societies scattered all over the island as far as Penghu whose members could chant poems together and encourage one another. At the same time there also appeared some talented and passionate young idealists who began writing New Poetry, and who voiced their resistance and criticism in colloquial Chinese (*baihua* 白話) free verse. Freely expressing what was in their hearts and laying bare their consciousness, they became a threat to the colonial authorities, who repeatedly took



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The Wellsprings of Poetry in Taiwan

Yang Mu 楊牧

Translated by Andrea Lingenfelter

In his acceptance of the 2013 Newman Prize for Chinese Literature, poet Yang Mu offers a detailed and passionate portrait of the poetry written in Taiwan from its first contact with mainland China over four hundred years ago, on through years of refinement leading up to the present. Yang Mu argues that this history has endowed the tradition with a unique power and beauty.

One day, less than ten years after the fall of the Ming dynasty, a loyalist who had once served in the Ming emperor Yongli's 永曆 court was navigating the coast of the South China Sea when a typhoon overtook his ship. The vessel was blown around the strait for some time, but after the storm passed, this wayfarer realized that he had made landfall on an island. The island was Taiwan. A small portion of the southern tip of it had been effectively colonized by the Dutch since 1624, who controlled it from their castles Zeelandia and Sakam.

The name of the castaway was Shen Guangwen 沈光文. The year was around 1654.

Once on Taiwan, Shen lived in obscurity for many years until the Chinese military leader and Ming loyalist Koxinga (Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功) seized it from the Dutch colonists in 1662. Koxinga discovered Shen Guangwen's identity, and Shen was then free to conduct classes in the villages, teaching youngsters, both Chinese and aboriginal, to read. He would also offer medicinal herbs to the sick who came for his help. Shen continued to write poetry steadfastly through old age, and, unlike in many other cases, most of his work has survived war and natural catastrophe into the modern age. In fact, a voluminous collection of his work is still in print: the latest edition was published in Taipei by the Ningbo Club in 1977, based on a previous edition prepared by the famous scholar Quan Zuwang 全祖望 in the eighteenth century. *The Collected Works (Shen Guangwen shiji xintan* 沈光文事蹟新探) is comprised of "Typographical Notes on Taiwan" ("Taiwan yutu kao" 台灣輿圖考), "Miscellaneous Flora" ("Caomu zaji" 草木雜記), "Living in Exile" ("Luyu kao" 流寓考), "Rhapsody on Taiwan" ("Taiwan fu" 台灣賦), and a variety of prose essays plus several *juan* 卷 ("sheaves") of poetry.

form is an integral part of that. If form weren't crucial, we could go through life paraphrasing great works of literature and save ourselves the trouble of reading.

MacBeth: Unintended fatal consequences ensue when power couple murders husband's boss.

This is an extreme example, but paraphrasing poetry is equally reductionistic.

In this first interaction with the poem, a translator questions the poem about its meaning: What does this line say? What does that sentence say? What does that word mean? That last question sounds simple, but it can be quite complex, as this example from the opening lines of "Symbol" ("Xiangzheng" 象徵) illustrates.

After my car crosses that long bridge
I nod

車過大橋
我點頭

Readers who know Chinese will see that the first line of the original poem consists of only four words, which could be transcribed as "Car crosses big bridge," but translation demands more of us than literal transcription. Right off the bat, English requires the addition of extra words, in this case articles to modify "car" (*che* 車) and "bridge" (*qiao* 橋), which can't sit alone and unadorned and still sound natural in English. My first version of the opening lines read:

A car crosses a bridge

車過大橋

To compensate for the added words, I left out a word: "big" (*da* 大). The original line is short (four characters and four syllables long), and I suspected that the adjective's main function was rhythmic. This impression turned out to be mistaken.

Author and Translator

When Yang Mu reviewed the first draft of my translation of his poem "Symbol," his response was illuminating:

What I try to say is that the car I drive has now just crossed a certain bridge in the foothills of County Hualien. The bridge is kind of grand or stately to me, and that's why I say "大橋" [*daqiao*, meaning "big bridge"].

We agreed that the English phrase "big bridge" lacked the weight and presence he wanted to express, and we exchanged emails about how best to render *da* 大 in this particular line. The goal was to convey the significance the bridge has for the speaker. The specificity could be conveyed with the article "that," but finding the right adjective was more difficult: "Stately" and "grand" sounded overly formal; "big" and "large" were too plain and lacked resonance. Yang Mu told me that the experience of crossing the bridge into Hualien is meaningful and represents to him a passage from one realm to another. He mentioned that the bridge was also rather long, and in the end we settled on "long." While it's a simple word, it suggests distance and a journey between two points. The second line, "I nod" (*wu dianitou* 我點頭), allows us to infer that the speaker nods after the car has crossed the bridge, and after hearing from Yang Mu, I changed the line to reflect that.

Speakers of Chinese (of all levels) may be chuckling to themselves at this point. After all, *da* 大 is a word that students of Chinese learn in their first months. This example demonstrates that deceptively simple words can be just as subtle or challenging to translate as any others, and sometimes even more so.

"Imagine a Symbol in a Dream" Translating Yang Mu

Andrea Lingenfelter

What, exactly, is a translation? Literary translator Andrea Lingenfelter likens it to a series of conversations between the translator and the original text, and between its author, its editors, and its eventual readers. Beyond these smaller conversations we can see a wider one taking shape between two different literary traditions and languages. Yet unlike conversations, which can be undertaken without much preparation or effort, Lingenfelter suggests that literary translation should also be considered a form of criticism—one that is written in the same genre as the original upon which it stands as a rigorous interpretation.

There are many ways to think about translation.

A translation is the thing itself, the novel or poem or play you can hold in your hands. It is also the process that brought the novel or play into being; in this case, the transformation of Chinese poems into English ones—a process of reading, analysis, internalization, and creation. We can also view this process as a series of conversations: between translator and text, translator and author, and translator and editor, in addition to the ongoing conversations that each of these engages in with the literary traditions of both the source and target languages. This is something I came to recognize during my translation of nineteen poems by Yang Mu 楊牧 for a book of translations of Yang Mu's poetry being overseen and edited by Michelle Yeh and Göran Malmqvist.

In addition to discussing drafts with the poet himself via email, I worked with Drs. Yeh and Malmqvist, both of whom are learned editors and scholars of Chinese poetry and experienced translators themselves. Their questions about my translations and our queries to Yang Mu prompted me to revisit and reflect on choices I'd made in the course of the work, and to explain the thinking that went into my choices. I would like to share some of these insights here, along with other discoveries I made in the course of reading and then composing English versions of these poems. Not only are Yang Mu's poems filled with metaphors for their own poetics, at times his imagery creates metaphors that might stand for the process of translation itself.

Text and Translator

The conversation between translator and text is the first to be initiated, and it is never really finished. It begins with the first reading of the original poem, a reading experience that a translator seeks to recreate in a new language, in both content and form. Content includes literal (or surface) meaning, imagery, diction, tone, and subtext. Formal issues include rhythm, line length, line breaks, and stanza formatting. All of these have to be recognized and considered, consciously carried over, transformed, or left behind.

The first thing we encounter is the literal meaning of a poem. Every translation is accountable to what the words mean, but a literary translation can't stop there, because there's more to a work of literature than the surface meaning of the words. Literature is how we tell the story, how we relate the poetic moment, and

What the Text Tells Us: Enjambment

Afternoon of a Gladiolus

I think I'm nostalgic for moments like that
 Afternoon of a gladiolus. Perhaps it's lonely upstairs
 No voices there, I lean back into memories
 Maybe someone is in the courtyard putting away gardening tools
 When wind chimes sound, interrupting
 The dull bell that leans against the north wall
 By now the grape vine should extend to
 Those mossy steps over there
 Smoke floats in the air
 Right by the gnarled red pine, the thinnest faintest
 The neighbors are trying to build a fire in their fireplace
 So early in the season and they're already trying to use their
 Fireplace? This is what I'm thinking as I stand by the window
 Letting my eyes wander over the distance. On the desktop
 Scattered thoughts cover a stack of unfinished
 Drafts. I think I no longer remember
 The subject, but I keep trying to get a hold on
 What sort of moment the style belongs to

劍蘭的午後

我想我是懷念著那種時刻
 劍蘭的午後。或者樓上寂寞
 沒有人聲，我斜靠記憶坐
 或者有人在院子裡收拾交鋒的工具
 偶爾風鈴響，打斷
 倚北牆上淡淡的鐘
 葡萄藤應該延伸到
 長苔蘚的石階那一邊了
 也就是赤銅松那邊，空氣裡
 漂著細微薄的煙
 鄰人在試用他們的壁爐---
 時間還早他們就試他們的
 壁爐？這樣想像我站在窗前
 朝遠處隨意看。桌子上
 打散的思想覆蓋一疊未完成的
 草稿。我想我是不記得它的
 主題了，但依稀揣摩
 風格屬於那種時刻

In much traditional poetry, including that of China, lines break at the ends of sentences or phrases. This reinforces the idea that each line is a complete thought. In departing from this convention, many modern poets use enjambment, the practice of breaking a line mid-phrase, in order to amplify meanings, enliven rhythm, or create surprising twists. Yang Mu is no exception. A straightforward example appears at the juncture of lines five and six of "Afternoon of a Gladiolus":

When wind chimes sound, interrupting
 The dull bell by the north wall

偶爾風鈴響，打斷
 倚北牆上淡淡的鐘

The line break follows the word "interrupting" (*daduàn* 打斷), with the rhythmic and spatial interruption of the pause at line's end and the blank space after "interrupting," enacting the auditory interruption of wind chimes.

Elsewhere, enjambment yields surprises:

By now the grape vine should extend to
 Those mossy steps over there

葡萄藤應該延伸到
 長苔蘚的石階那一邊了

The first line suggests the passage of time, telling us that the grape vines have been growing, until they have reached . . . where? The break after "extend to" leaves the vines reaching, and we have to wait until the next line to learn the answer, which in this case is the speaker's surmise. The entire scene is filtered through the speaker—as readers, our experience depends on his. He is our way of knowing, our window into the world of the poem.

Other intriguing suspensions come up in this passage:

. . . on the desktop
 Scattered thoughts cover a stack of unfinished
 Drafts. I think I no longer remember
 The subject . . .

.....桌子上
 打散的思想覆蓋一疊未完成的
 草稿。我想我是不記得它的
 主題了.....

The break after "unfinished" leaves us wondering, in the instant before our eyes drop down to the next line, what is unfinished. The possibilities are endless, and the line invites us to ponder many kinds of incompletion—the day, some autumnal task, a life. No sooner is this thought completed and quickly followed up by our apprehension that it is a stack of unfinished manuscripts the speaker contemplates, than he injects another instance of uncertainty and indeterminacy into the poem:

I think I no longer remember
 The subject . . .

.....我想我是不記得它的
 主題了.....

The open-ended phrase in the first line amplifies the sense of things unfinished and of things falling apart in the earlier phrase "unfinished" (*wei wancheng* 未完成的). The second line tells us what the speaker has forgotten: the subject he was writing about. When the author leaves us hanging at the end of that line, we as readers also experience the sense of blankness that comes when trying to summon a thought back to mind. Knowledge arrives by way of the senses, but it is fragmented. Experience becomes a process of trying to remember.

As the grammar and syntax of English and Chinese are in harmony in the above lines, a translation can easily preserve the sequence of words and images of the original without disturbing Yang Mu's expressive line breaks. Elsewhere, however, Chinese and English syntax may be at odds. When sentence structure doesn't map easily from one language to the other, a translator may be forced to choose between the literal, transcribed meaning and the original sequence of images and enjambment.

Precisely this situation confronted me in the course of translating "Since You Went Away" ("Zi jun zhi chu yi" 自君之出矣). Yang Mu, with his fluid and flexible syntax, is particularly adept at using enjambment to take his poems to unexpected places. Because enjambment can be so central to the experience of reading Yang Mu's poetry, I took special care to preserve his enjambments wherever possible. Another translator might approach this issue differently, but my choices were guided by my reading of this poem, in which sequence and enjambment trumped grammar and syntax. Poetry, which is inherently less linear than prose, invites multiple readings. What's more, an elliptical poet like Yang Mu beckons us to read through and around the syntax at certain junctures.

Text-Translator-Editors-Author-Translator

Since You Went Away

Imagine a symbol in a dream
Bringing unbidden and unexpected joy, fine rain
Sprinkling newly sprouted melons, and then oblique sunlight
Shining on the rapt window where they grow taller day by day
In their sparse arrangement, supported by thin bamboo stakes and spooling ever upwards
Maybe given to a passionate woman who explains it all, a string of profound thoughts
Or perhaps empty glances gathered in clear autumn waters
Seeing through the layers and repetitions of classical biology
The full moon wastes away, while indoors
Stands a long-neglected loom

自君之出矣

虛擬一種象徵為了夢中
不期而遇且驚喜，小雨
輕灑發芽的瓜苗，然後太陽傾斜
照到它在出神的窗口寥落為擺設
逐日抽長，歇靠一節細竹竿盤旋上升
且交給多情的婦人解析，思維深刻
或者，空洞的眼色積著一泓秋水
透視反覆，重疊的古典生物學
滿月在消瘦，室內供著
一架曠日不理的殘機

After completing drafts of all nineteen poems that seemed finished enough to show someone, I sent them off to the editors. Soon, Goran Malmqvist wrote back with many questions and suggestions, and thus began a deep conversation between editors and translator. While my choices are always conscious, presenting a detailed account of my thinking helps clarify my ideas.

"Since You Went Away" came back with questions about the poem's opening lines and the last line. The opening was perplexing: how did I interpret the phrase *welle mengzhong* 為了夢中 (literally, "because of ..." or "for the sake of [something] inside of a dream")? What had happened to *welle* 為了 ("because of")? Since my version strayed from the surface meaning, it was on me to explain myself.

I began by explaining that I understood the beginning line and a half as one thought:

xuni yizhong xiangzheng welle mengzhong

buqi er yu qie jingxi

虛擬一種象徵為了夢中
不期而遇且驚喜

The prose equivalent of this passage might go something like: "Imagine a symbol that brings unbidden and unexpected joy to a dream," or "a symbol that brings unbidden and unexpected joy for a dream." However, if I translate the passage that way, then the line would have to be broken in a different spot, and a different set of images would come to the fore as the poem's opening. The way I parsed the lines, the first line has a strong set of images and ideas: "imagine," "symbol," and "dream." A more literal translation, which would transpose the whole thing into an English sentence structure, would move "dream" to the second line. I felt that the impact of preserving the combination of images in the first line outweighed the nuance lost by eliding the *welle* 為了. The symbol ends up in the dream in both versions, but with a stronger and in some regards more faithful opening if the original grouping of images remains in the first line.

The second line, after the enjambment, contains a surprise, *buqi er yu qie jingxi* 不期而遇且驚喜—that "unbidden and unexpected joy"—and, as an enjambment it is a surprise. The words tell and the form embodies a surprise.

In sum, I chose to leave out the nuance of *welle* 為了 in order to preserve the progression of ideas and images—the symbol and the dream in line one, which we're invited to imagine; and then the answer that arrives after the suspension of the line break, an unexpected joy. I felt the order of the ideas and the progression to be as important a part of the experience of reading this poem as was the semantic content of *welle* 為了, which is why I let go of some of the surface meaning to come up with:

Imagine a symbol in a dream
Bringing unbidden and unexpected joy

I was unable to think of a way to bring both aspects of the poem into my translation, so I chose one over the other.

After this preliminary discussion, we sent the drafts to Yang Mu and asked him how he felt about these liberties. His response was very positive, so we kept the poem as it was.

Traditions: Dynamic Exchanges

Yang Mu himself has long been engaged in a conversation with the Chinese and Western literary traditions. The small sample of his work that I translated had abundant examples of poems that refer back to classical Chinese poems ("Ziye Extemporizes in Song" ("Ziye tuge" 子夜歌); "Variations on a Traveler's Heart" ("Kexin bianzou" 客心變奏); and "Since You Went Away"), and they also recall Western traditions ("Sonnets on the Book of Changes" ("Yi shishang" 易十四行), a collection that explores an ancient Chinese theme in a Western form). Because some of Yang Mu's poems are deeply embedded in classical Chinese poetry, the past and the subtext it brings to the poem may guide translation choices.

My learned editors had such contexts in mind when they asked me about choices I made in my translation of the final couplet:

The full moon wastes away, while indoors
Stands a long-neglected loom

滿月在消瘦，室內供著
一架曠日不理的殘機

Why had I not translated *can* 殘 ("broken," "damaged")? Because of subtext and intertextuality.

"Since You Went Away" is a good example of how subtext might nudge a translator towards certain word choices. The title is taken from a line in an old yuefu poem, "Chamber Longings" ("Shi si" 室思) by the Han dynasty poet Xu Gan 徐幹 (170-217), which became the template for many later poems incorporating the phrase "since you went away." Yang Mu alludes to one of the better known poems inspired by Xu's original, this one written by the Tang dynasty poet, Zhang Jiuqing 張九齡 (678-740). When Zhang wrote "Composition after 'Since You Went Away,'" ("Fude 'Zi jun zhi chu yi'" 賦得 "自君之出矣") he was joining a conversation with Xu's poem that had been ongoing for five centuries already:

Composition after "Since You Went Away"

Since you went away,
I haven't tended my broken loom,
Missing you is like the full moon
Night after night its clear rays diminish

賦得自君之出矣

自君之出矣
不復理殘機
思君如滿月
夜夜減清輝

The title announces the connection with the earlier works, and the "passionate and beautiful" woman reminds us of the lonely woman in the earlier poems. The concluding couplet is where the relationship is highlighted:

The full moon wastes away, while indoors
Stands a long-neglected loom

滿月消瘦，室內供著
一架曠日不理的殘機

The full moon, the interior, and the loom—they are "wasted," "broken," "incomplete." Why, then, did I translate the phrase as "abandoned"? The original poem and its numerous classical homages all belong to the "abandoned woman" theme (*qiyuan* 閨怨). Readers of the poem in Chinese will know that the poem is the lament of an abandoned woman; but what of English-language readers who have no knowledge of the original text or its tradition? The context of loneliness and abandonment are part and parcel of the experience of reading the poem in the original. From the sense of "waste," I moved to "discarded," and from there to "abandoned." In Zhang's poem, the woman has neglected her loom, and her neglect of the loom (women's handwork) echoes her lover's neglect of her. Chinese readers know this; my translation seeks to bring this context to readers of English.

Yang Mu's engagement with Zhang Jiuqing's poem points me toward readings that will provide context for any readers who are unfamiliar with traditional Chinese poetry, imparting some evidence of the resonances experienced by readers who do know the tradition. These considerations led me to translate, or read, the earlier poem into Yang Mu's variation, bringing in the theme of the abandoned woman, already pointed to by Yang Mu with the traditional trope of wasting away as an effect of and metaphor for sadness. To continue that theme, the full moon "wastes away," and "the damaged loom left untended for so many days" becomes "a long-neglected loom."

From Source to Destination: A Winding Course

A good translation is grounded in rigorous study and analysis. As Howard Goldblatt once remarked to me in an interview, the translator is the best reader a writer will ever have. Nobody else reads as carefully or closely.

While a balance of logic and creativity is needed for scholarship or art, the literary translator is uniquely tied to both in equal measure. The analysis becomes implicit in the translation, as are the biases and proclivities of the translator.

I am not the first translator to say that every translation is a reading, an interpretation. Not only do I affirm this, I will take it one step farther. Literary translation is also a form of literary criticism—interactive, aesthetically engaged, and subjective (either openly or covertly, but subjective all the same). Unlike other forms of literary criticism, which tend to be written in prose, literary translation is expressed in the genre of the work being considered.

Translation is caught between two opposites, balanced on a thin thread, the tightrope drawn tautly between the objectivity of scholarship and unfettered creativity. The translator owns the poem, but she doesn't. He's faithful to the semantic meanings of the poem, except when he isn't. Translation takes place on the "acre of land between the salt water and the dry land." Some would say that such a place does not exist; but anyone who has grown up by a beach knows that such land indeed exists, if fleetingly and discontinuously, between each wave's advance and retreat—wet sand that lies open to the sky after a wave ebbs, only to be underwater again with the next wave. That space, intermittent but solid and real, is the space where translation resides.

Earlier in this essay, I alluded to the difficulty of translating Yang Mu's elliptical and fluid style. Michelle Yeh has described his syntax as "sinuous." His writing has a quality of winding its way from source to destination like a river with many bends. He presents a sequence of vistas through channels both broad and narrow. Each line is like a segment of that river. You take in the scene around you, and then you round the corner to discover that another fresh vista awaits you, one that might alter your understanding of what has gone before. The concluding lines of "Symbol" state it best:

Suddenly aware
The river threads through the plumed grasses of fall, haphazardly
Tracking the likeness of a kindred spirit

並且領悟
河水於深秋的芒草間，錯落
追蹤一宛然的神似

“Language Is Our Religion” An Interview with Yang Mu

Zhai Yueqin 翟月琴

Translated by Michelle Yeh

In his conversation with literary critic Zhai Yueqin, Yang Mu reflects on a wide range of key themes and ideas in his poetry, from his unique notions of time to specific landscapes—both real and imagined—before delving into his study of classical Chinese poetry, his career as a scholar, and how life presents us with a continual emergence of changes and transformations.

ZHAI YUEQIN: First of all, congratulations on being awarded the 2013 Newman Prize for Chinese Literature. Since the 1970s you have been honored with numerous prizes, such as the China Times Daily Literary Prize in Taiwan in 1970 and 1987; the Wu Sanlian Prize for Literature and Art in Taiwan in 1990; the National Literature and Art Award, which is the highest honor given by the government of Taiwan, awarded to you in 2000; and the Flower Traces Award for World Literature in Chinese, awarded to you in Malaysia in 2007; among others. These prizes recognize your outstanding accomplishment in poetry. I wonder how you see your own work.

YANG MU: When I turned seventy in 2010, the National Cheng Chi University [in Taiwan] held a conference devoted to my work. I was asked the same question. I divide my poetry into three periods: youth, middle age, and old age; they are equally important to me. It still amazes me that I can look at my own work as if looking at someone else's. Out of nothing a poet has created something.

ZY: You started writing in 1956 and published your poems in such leading journals as *Modern Poetry* (*Xiandai*

shi 現代詩), *Blue Star* (*Lanzing* 藍星), *Epoch* (*Chuangshiji* 創世紀), and *Wild Wind* (*Yefeng* 野風). Do you still remember what first moved you to write?

YM: In different periods in our lives, we respond to different stimuli. Literature happened to be my response of choice. I didn't know what literature was; I just found it interesting, that's all. I was in junior high when I started imitating—not any particular writers, but certain styles that were so beautiful they fascinated me. I wrote a book titled *Mountain Winds and Ocean Rains* (*Shanfeng haiyu* 山風海雨, 1987) [semi-autobiographical prose], which was later incorporated into *The Former Book of Qilai* (*Qilai qianshu* 奇萊前書, 2003). In it I describe the world I experienced as a child, and I engage in some self-analysis.

ZY: In “Tree in the College” (“Xueyuan zhi shu” 學院之樹, 1983), you reminisce about a scene in which a little girl catches a butterfly and puts it in the pages of a book. You write: “By then we'll both be old— / without our dry, colorful clothes, we still only have an awakened soul / in the embrace of a book, close to words / living in the wisdom and sympathy that we seek.” An eternal

Time passes, but literature remains. I have complete confidence in language.

quest of art—does it sum up your understanding of poetry?

YM: This interpretation comes close. In many places, especially in the afterwords to my books of poetry, I have mentioned time. It provides an orientation for my creative writing. What do I like about my work? What are the missteps? Time passes, but literature remains. I have complete confidence in language.

ZY: Speaking of time, childhood memory is worth cherishing. You once said: “The character of the child determines his demeanor and behavior as an adult. It molds his present and future, affects external circumstances, and even wittingly or unwittingly guides others to reflect on the moral compass.” Looking back on your childhood, what did it contribute to your writings?

YM: I think we all feel the same way about childhood. The only difference is that while others may have grown up in the city, I grew up in the countryside. I was born in the small town of Hualian, where I could see the mountains whenever I lifted my head. Qilai, Jade, and Xiugulan mountains—they looked so high that I thought no mountains in eastern China could compare. Even in summertime I could still see snow lingering on the mountaintops. Living in the foothills, I felt so close to the mountains' imposing magnificence. On the other side was the Pacific Ocean, just beyond the streets of Hualian. Whether I looked to the left or to the right, the view was spectacular. I could feel the power of nature. Of course there was also my imagination—about

Old China, its vastness, its people. I encouraged myself to write it down. In Western poetics, imagination is considered the impetus of all literary creation.

ZY: You have written extensively about your birthplace. Allow me to speculate. Hualian is such a constant presence because, like Mount Qilai, it represents the mother, a vehicle of meanings. It is a metaphor or symbol, political, aesthetic, and linguistic. Is that correct?

YM: Yes. Hualian is a symbol. There are many reasons why I write about it. For one, I have a firm grasp on my homeland, elaborating on its distinctness and enlarging it till it becomes more than a physical presence. I am not writing reportage literature, nor am I conducting research on Hualian. I am writing about the relationship between the land and the people, between the land and an individual.

ZY: In your mind, your homeland is in some ways related to Yeats's Ireland, as implied in your poems “Ireland” (“Aierlan” 愛爾蘭) and “Sailing to Ireland” (“Hangxiang Aierlan” 航向愛爾蘭). What is the connection between Hualian in real life and the Ireland that you have created and longed for?

YM: I've mentioned this in my writings many times, and there are more and more friends who share my view. Although Irish literature is written in English, no one would say that it comes from Britain but rather that it comes from Ireland. Besides, it has a history of more than a millennium. Ireland has an indigenous culture,

but most of its literature is written in English. This is a delicate point. The language in which I write is Chinese. Michelle Yeh has been referring to "modern poetry in Chinese" rather than "modern Chinese poetry." The truth is, I cannot create another language in which to write. Instead, I search for a language within the framework of Taiwan literature. How to use the Chinese language to represent Taiwan to readers is an objective of mine.

ZY: Graceful landscapes of Jiangnan—the region south of the Yangtze River—first appeared in your poetry in 1963. In "Brows in the Jiangnan Style" ("Jiangnan feng de shuangmei" 江南風的雙眉), amid images of wooden bridges and flying cascades, a tipsy "I" looks for an elegant pair of eyebrows. Have you been to Jiangnan? Where did your Jiangnan come from?

YM: It was imaginary. I had never been there. It wasn't until 1980 that I visited mainland China for the first time. I flew from the US to Hong Kong, where I changed planes and flew to Shanghai, and from there I landed in Beijing. Then I visited Xi'an, Chongqing, Chengdu, and Nanjing by train. Before that trip, it had all been my imagination. Actually, I had imagined other places too, such as Arabia, São Paulo, Afghanistan, and Spain. I have never been to any of these places, but I am too embarrassed to admit it. When young people write to me, I always say: it's more remarkable to depict a place you've never been to than a place you have been to. If you spent a week in Kyoto and write an essay titled "My Trip to Kyoto," that is easy. But if I've never been to Africa, the moon, or Aquarius, but what I write about these places appeals to readers, that's probably more remarkable than "My Trip to Kyoto." This is the stuff of which literature is made. A friend said to me, "You imagine so much about Mount Qilai. You are really trying, through repetition and highlighting, to express a certain poetic aura." I appreciate his insight.

ZY: All the cities that you visited on the mainland—what impressions did they make on you?

YM: I took the trip in 1980, so I don't remember much. It was a few years after the Cultural Revolution [1966–76]. All the friends I met, once our conversations went beyond casual, would recount their sad experiences of those years. Objectively speaking, many places in China were really beautiful. The most memorable place I visited was the West Lake. We stayed there overnight;

in the morning when we opened the window, it looked just like a painting. I thought to myself, how could there be such a beautiful place? At that time, it wasn't as open to the public and there were few visitors there. Boating on the lake felt like a luxury. In Shanghai we met [the veteran writer] Ba Jin 巴金. We chatted, but everyone was heavy-hearted because of the recent past. I had dreamed of writing about these places since I was a junior high student, and I saw them all on that trip. I was grateful, but I didn't write a single essay about them afterward.

I did write an essay in memory of my teacher Shih-hsiang Chen 陳世驥. A native of Hebei province, Professor Chen graduated from Peking University [in 1932] and passed away in Berkeley, California [in 1971]. The essay "The North" ("Beifang" 北方) commemorates him and incorporates my feelings about northern China. Another essay, "The South" ("Nanfang" 南方), commemorates Professor Hsu Fu-kuan 徐復觀 [1904–82], my teacher at Tunghai University in Taiwan, because he came from Hubei Province. As you can see, I have only written about China in a vague way. It's like going back to the childhood world of dreams; there's a flood of feelings.

ZY: "Wanderer," "guest in a foreign land," "man away from home," "traveler," "the exile"—these words stand out in your poetry. In "Experiencing Frost" ("Lishuang" 歷霜), you write: "Ingesting exile in life / Is like ingesting the autumn harvest from an old loquat tree." I wonder, what insight into life do you derive from your experience as a wanderer?

YM: Much of it is imagined or based on hearsay. "Experiencing Frost" was written in Kinmen, where I did my mandatory military service after I graduated from Tunghai University. In those days college graduates had to serve in the military for a year. By lottery I was assigned to the offshore island Kinmen. I was a "prep officer" and got to interact with real soldiers and officers. We became friends and talked a lot. Since there was no battle and very little to do, all I did was listen to their stories.

ZY: When you were a PhD student at the University of California, Berkeley, you studied classical Chinese literature with Professor Shih-hsiang Chen. During that time you wrote many poems on classical themes, such as "A Sequel to the Seven-Character Ancient-Style Poem 'Mountain Rock' by Han Yu" ("Xu Hanyu qiyuan gushi

shanshi" 續韓愈七言古詩《山石》), "Jizi of Yanling Hangs Up His Sword" ("Yanling jizi gujian" 延陵季子掛劍), "King Wu's Night Encampment: A Suite" ("Wu suye zuqu" 武宿夜組曲), and "Bring the Wine: Four Poems" ("Jiangjinju sishou" 將進酒四首). Can you talk about how Professor Chen inspired you, and what influence did your study of classical literature have on your writing?

YM: It exerted considerable influence on me. I enjoyed reading but had not yet made up my mind about becoming a scholar. It was Professor Chen who enlightened me and helped me come to the decision. At the time, almost all the students from Taiwan were working on modern literature, none on classical literature. A major reason I decided to study classical literature was that I didn't care for any of the modern literature—modern poetry, even modern fiction—that was being written at the time. While he was still in China, Professor Chen in 1936 coedited with Harold Acton [Chen's teacher at Peking University] the first anthology of modern Chinese poetry in English translation. He was good friends with [the poets] He Qifang 何其芳 and Bian Zhilin 卞之琳, his classmates at Peking University, but he seldom wrote poetry himself. He just wanted to help his poet-friends expand the influence of modern poetry. I told Professor Chen that I didn't want to write my dissertation on these poets, so he suggested that I study classical literature. As it happens, I had previously studied the history of ancient Chinese thought with Professor Hsu Fu-kuan. (Of the poems you mentioned, some are about ancient historical figures, some are based on my own stories. I combined them and redefined them.) I realized that if I decided to study modern literature I would be reluctant to learn from modern Chinese poets; I'd rather learn from Qu Yuan 屈原 and the Seven Poets of the Jian'an Period 建安七子 [196–220 BCE]. Therefore, I devoted myself to classical poetry.

ZY: In 1965 you read William Butler Yeats. Your identification with the Irish poet laid the foundation for the romantic strain of your writing. In an essay you distinguish four dimensions of Romanticism: "The first dimension is the capturing of the medieval mood and ambience; the second is the Wordsworthian embrace of nature in place of antiquities; the third is the Byronic spirit of exploration between heaven and earth; and the fourth is Shelley's challenge to authorities and his resistance against tyranny and violence."² Do these dimensions find their way into your own writing?

YM: I think so. I remind myself this is what Romanticism means. Once Michelle Yeh brought up the topic in our conversation. She says that Romanticism deserves our pity because it is so often misunderstood and maligned; people think being a Romantic is to be a Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 or Yu Dafu 郁達夫. Yeh majored in English literature in college and knows very well that Romanticism is more than that. My own conclusion is that Romanticism contains a sense of collective honor and social responsibility, a respect for simple and primitive societies. It exists even in modernity.

ZY: Nature and love are two major themes in Romanticism. In *The Completion of a Poem* (*Yishoushi de wancheng* 一首詩的完成), you say, "Sometimes we experience fear when we come face to face with nature exactly because we depend so much on its love, the way children rely on their parents for protection and support. Because we are keenly aware of that love, we are worried that we may lose it someday, that we may lose it for having committed an unforgivable sin."³ How do you understand the relationship between nature and love?

YM: You feel fearful when you walk into a forest at nightfall. Wordsworth wrote about a similar situation in a poem: how when he sails to the middle of a lake in a boat at dusk, he is frightened all of a sudden as the mountains come into sight, and he rows back to the shore hurriedly. Sometimes nature protects you, but sometimes it makes you feel guilty for your wrongdoings.

When we look at love and beauty from a different point of view, I think it opens up a new space for contemplation. I wrote a poem titled "Reading Eisenstein before the Dragon Boat Festival" ("lin duanwu du Eisenstein" 近端午讀 Eisenstein), in which I expressed the view that too much love and too much beauty could be harmful. The example given in the poem is *The Tale of the White Snake* (*Baishhe zhuan* 白蛇傳); Xu Xian [the male protagonist] offers Lady White Snake some Rabiagar wine [associated with the Dragon Boat Festival]. If she drinks it, she knows that her true identity will be exposed. But she loves Xu too much to say no to him, so she drinks the wine and turns into a snake. My conclusion is that even beauty may still be dangerous.

ZY: When you were a student at UC Berkeley, the Vietnam War was raging; Berkeley was at the center of the anti-war movement in the 1960s. You wrote a sequence titled "Etudes: The Twelve Earthly Branches"

“Shier xingxiang lianxi qu” 十二星象練習曲) about the war. Can you recall what it was like back then?

YM: Those students were dedicated and thoughtful; their response to the government was reasoned and eloquent. It had a major impact on me because I had never experienced a political movement before. At the time there was a UC policy that international students could not take part in protests because they came here to study, not to engage in politics. I could only watch from the sideline. Every day at noon I listened to other students taking turns speaking to the crowds. After a while I, too, believed that the war was totally unjustified. This view stayed with me when I went to teach at the University of Washington; I sustained a high level of sensitivity to politics.

I remember a good deal from those days. The year I arrived at Berkeley, the Cultural Revolution had just started in China. Everyday I read the newspapers and exchanged information with fellow students. It was strange that we could be so concerned about politics on the one hand and study so hard on the other. I had a classmate who was reading *Capital* by Marx at night and studying Ancient Greek during the day; in his sleep he always dreamed of both. The experience made me more aware of what was going on in the world: the Cultural Revolution in China, Sartre in France, the Red Army in Japan . . . Naturally, these things had an impact on my writing.

ZY: For a long time you've been labeled an “academic poet.” Besides poetry, you write prose and literary criticism, and you also translate English poetry. In your view, what is it that connects all of these activities? What is the impact of academic life on your creative writing?

YM: Being an academic is my preferred profession, for I enjoy scholarly work. A former student of mine emailed me a few days ago to ask me a question about the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經). When I first came to the University of Washington at age thirty-two, I was writing my dissertation on this Confucian classic. A lot of my thinking then is still of interest to me. Life in academia may be petty sometimes, but it is still better than many other professions. Literary criticism is an integral part of my academic life, especially criticism of classical literature. When it comes to criticism of contemporary literature, I think all creative writers, researchers, and students should engage in it; they have an obligation to take part in the critical discourse. At my age, I express

my views whenever it is possible, but often I feel I have nothing to offer and avoid speaking out. Some people understand me, but some don't. By the same token, translation is a responsibility, too. Not everyone should do it, but if those who know foreign languages don't engage in translation, many literary works will not be accessible to readers. The process of translation poses a considerable challenge. It is a recreation: someone else creates something that looks like your work but then it is not yours. That is very interesting. I'd like to do more translation if time permits.

ZY: You once said, “It's not easy to change, but not changing means death. Change is a painful experience, but pain is part of the reality of life.”¹ Your poetry creates an expectation of change in the reader. Change embodies both your passion for art and your constant effort to capture ever-changing moments in the universe and in life. How has this consciousness evolved in your poetics? Or, to put it in another way, what is it that stimulates you to change? Is it the artistic freedom within constraints that you are seeking?

YM: If I didn't change, I wouldn't know how to write, since I don't want to repeat myself. I first said these words when I was in my twenties. When *Collected Prose of Ye Shan* was published [in 1966], I was twenty-five years old and had just come to America for graduate school. I vowed not to write the same kind of prose again. It's also true of poetry. If I were to repeat myself, I might as well go into another profession and do something else.

Notes:

¹ From the postscript to Yang Mu's 樹叢 Scale Insect (Julechong 介殼蟲) (Taipei: Hongfian Bookstore, 2006), 151.

² Ye Shan 叶珊. *Collected Prose of Ye Shan* (Ye Shan sanwen ji 葉珊散文集) (Taipei: Hongfian Bookstore, 1977), 223; Ye Shan was Yang Mu's pen name before 1972.

³ Yang Mu, *The Completion of a Poem* (Yishoushi de wancheng — 首詩的完成) (Taipei: Hongfian Bookstore, 1989), 16.

⁴ From the afterword to Yang Mu's book of prose *Tree Rings* (Nianlun 年輪) (Taipei: Hongfian Bookstore, 1976), 177.

Selected Poems

Yang Mu

抒情詩

「心事太多了反而就好像——」

鋼琴聲跌宕抒情：「好像甚麼都沒有。」我曾惶惶走過

起火的草原

記憶是飛舞的烈焰

燃燒我的翅膀，腐蝕

我璀璨的眼神，我的

憧憬，洞識

而我是那麼安穩地安於那平靜與虛無

寧可在你細細的顫抖在你寂寞的

十指下脆弱地向過去和未來沉沒

過去

和未來

現在我們將它關在門外

滿天稀薄的浮雲透過盛夏成一張涼席

如山谷當中的溪在叢生的水蘚邊緣

通行，如——辨認過的花

從小時候閉到現在，如正午

靜謐幽邃的寺廟廊廡

正對你紮好捆上的一支香

1993

Translated by Michelle Yeh and Frank Stewart

A Lyric

“When you have too much on your mind, it feels like—”

The piano's melody rises and descends: “feels like

There's nothing at all.” I hurriedly cross

A burning meadow

Memory is dancing flames

Scorching my ruined wings and dimming

My shining gaze, my

Hopes and good judgment

Yet I am so careless and at ease with peace and emptiness

I'd rather go silently, passively, under your exquisite trembling, your fingers

Reaching uncertainly for the future and the past

The past

And the future—

The present we shut outside the door

Thin high clouds shade the mid-summer, cooling its wide meadow

Like a stream at the bottom of a gorge meandering through

Ginger lilies and the other flowers I have named one by one

From childhood to this moment, blooming, or the inner corridor of a temple,

In the quiet embrace of noon's deep shadows

Suddenly in front of you a joss stick is being lit





松下

松下飲茶
紅藕的細葉
飄落白瓷盤上
有頃，組成一種圖案
繡在手帕邊緣的記號我早忘了
又縱橫浮起，現在
搖曳在水缸微涼的庭院裡

我個身辨認
不知道它象徵甚麼？
精緻、零亂，和諧 -
或許是虛擬寂寞的星座
鯨形的文牀，衣裳褶折的印子
手腕上依稀，婉約的皺紋
或許甚麼都不是

1996



蘇幕遮

星光遠在海岸線外，瘦削的
靈魂早已成型：在陌生場域
確定肉體曾經與你同溫，久久
相連的膚色總是互動閃爍

蘇幕半遮。傾斜的天竺菊
對著幽幽的香囊
我轉身看見海水在沙灘上來回
看你眉心潔白如月下停動的蝶

2005

Under the Pine

Drinking tea under the pine
Fine needles
Settle on a white porcelain plate
Presently they form the pattern
Of embroidered designs on a napkin's border long forgotten
Floating to the surface
Of a small pond beginning to cool in the courtyard

Bending over the water, I try to understand
The meaning of the designs
So exquisite, disorderly, harmonious . . .
Perhaps they are patterns of a lonely constellation
A broken trigram from the *Book of Changes*, the folds of a dress
A fine, barely visible wrinkle on her hand
Perhaps nothing at all

Translated by Michelle Yeh and Frank Stewart

聖·彼得堡

那是第二次革命前夕
我送行一些友人於暴風雨的舊驛
站在暗微的月台走廊看他們上車坐好
雨水斜飛著將我們隔離在
戲劇情節的兩端，憂鬱地堅忍
和即將馳向未知（包括死亡）
的速度。我單獨留下

於是我就繃然想起如何於
燥熱的圈子裡在這之前曾經與你遭遇
六葉的禮券有金甲蟲睡眠沉沉
多刺的果實在膨脹，陽光忽上
忽下交響著喜悅與悲傷，馬蹄敲過
那邊廣場，鴿子的翅膀拍動空氣
我看到你回頭看我在靡曼的顏色裡看你

時間像浪一樣燦爛發光
在我們驚覺的對望裡停止不前，啊時間
那未及表達的挫折了的愛曾經如何
凌厲的預卜十二年以後，當人們已經
重複了許多大而無當的事件，我們悄悄
靠近在議場裡並且細聲交談，斷續的珠子
在手心組合，關於別後，從前

那是時代已經晚到我們的城市即將
陷落的時代，失望的兵士隨不同的
旗幟和鼓樂在我胸膛裡進行了一場
小規模戰爭。晚上我輪流夢見騎士紋章
正教的經書，仕女們的髮飾，和農奴一個一個
黑暗的死魂靈。那個秋天你不告而別
將我單獨留下

1994

St. Petersburg

it was the eve before the second revolution—
I bid farewell to friends at the timeworn station as the storm roared
from the dusky platform I could see them board the train and take their seat
the rain came sideways and split me from them
two arcs of a story—with dismal persistence
my friends rushed toward the unknown, death
I stayed behind

bashfully, I recalled before
I came across you in a blazing garden where
gold beetles fell asleep in the shade of a six-leaved tree
thorny fruits swelled, and the sunshine
swayed like a symphony between delight and grief—a horse
clopped on the square, doves saluted the air—
you glanced back at me watching you among the colors of a vine

time was glistening like a teardrop
and ceased between our stunned glances—o time!
how our sort of love, unspoken and frustrated
foresaw wretchedly, twelve years later, after they had
repeated many a pompous affair, us sitting close
in a conference room, talking softly about your departure
and our past, broken beads being restrung in our hands

it was so late when the city was about to fall. the age
when disillusioned soldiers with disparate flag and
drum launched a skirmish in my mind
at night I took turns dreaming of cavalry badges
orthodox scripture, ornaments for maidens' hair,
the dark dead souls of ploughmen, one after another
that autumn you left without saying goodbye
I was left behind

Translated by Wenchi Li and Colin Brannnell

To the Tune: "Hidden Behind the Soochow Curtain"

Starlight far beyond the sea's horizon, a tenuous
Presence has taken shape: in a foreign land I am certain
That my body once warmed yours. Apart for so long
The colors of our skin once played seek-and-find together

The Soochow curtain half-closed, the slanting dahlia
Meeting a sachet's dark scent
Turning, I see the ocean waves advance and recede
See your white forehead like a fluttering butterfly under the moon

Translated by Michelle Yeh and Frank Stewart