

THE THIRD SHORE

大海的第三岸

ALSO EDITED BY YANG LIAN AND W.N. HERBERT

Jade Ladder (Bloodaxe Books 2010)

ALSO EDITED BY YANG LIAN

Sailor's Home (Shearsman Books 2006)

THE THIRD SHORE

大海的第三岸

CHINESE & ENGLISH-LANGUAGE POETS
IN MUTUAL TRANSLATION

中英诗人互译诗选

EDITED BY
YANG LIAN & W.N. HERBERT

主编 杨炼 威廉·赫伯特

SHEARSMAN BOOKS
&
EAST CHINA NORMAL UNIVERSITY PRESS

First published in the United Kingdom in 2013 by
Shearsman Books Ltd
50 Westons Hill Drive
Emersons Green
BRISTOL
BS16 7DF

www.shearsman.com

and in the People's Republic of China by
East China Normal University Press
3663 North Zhongshan Road
Shanghai 200062

ISBN 978-1-84861-309-6 (UK)
ISBN 978-1-84861-338-6 (PRC)

All translations are copyright
© the specified translators, 2013.

“大海的第三岸” copyright © Yang Lian, 2013.

‘On the Rising Beach. Translation as Metaphor’
copyright © W.N. Herbert, 2013

The original poems in this volume, both Chinese and English, remain in the copyright of their authors and are copyright © 2013, except where listed otherwise in the Acknowledgements. Full details of the sources of the original English poems, and the permissions to reprint them, where applicable, may be found in the Acknowledgements on pages 228-229.

All rights reserved.

目录 CONTENTS

	Yang Lian: The Third Shore	11
17	序言1 大海的第三岸——杨炼	
	W.N. Herbert: On the Rising Beach. Translation as Metaphor	21
31	序言2 高高升起的海滩：翻译之为隐喻——威廉·赫伯特	

中诗英译 CHINESE INTO ENGLISH

	姜涛 / Jiang Tao	
40	空军一号 / Air Force One [AS]	41
	冷霜 / Leng Shuang	
42	小夜曲 / Serenade [EG]	43
	唐晓渡 / Tang Xiaodu	
44	五月的蔷薇 / May Rose [AD]	45
46	镜 / Mirror [WNH]	47
46	叫出你的名字 / I cry out your name [WNH]	47
48	无题 / Untitled [WNH]	49
50	无题（之三） / Part 3 of an untitled poem [FS]	51
	王小妮 / Wang Xiaoni	
52	一块布的背叛 / Betraying Cloth [PP]	53
54	台风四首 / Four Typhoon Poems [PP]	55
58	在威尔士（选二） / <i>from</i> Wales in June [PP]	59
60	月光白得很 / White Moon [PP]	61

西川 / Xi Chuan

62	巨兽 / Monster [AD]	63
64	我奶奶 / My Grandma [WNH]	65
64	奶奶 / Grandma [WNH]	65
66	佩玲 / Pei Ling [WNH]	67
68	皮肤颂 / Ode to Skin [PP]	69
70	题王希孟青绿山水长卷《千里江山图》 / After Wang Ximeng's Blue and Green Horizontal Landscape Scroll, A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains' [AS]	71

萧开愚 / Xiao Kaiyu

72	留赠拉斐尔 / A Gift of Words for Raffael Keller [GS]	73
74	一次抵制 / One Resistance [GS]	75
76	山坡 / Hillside [PP]	77

严力 / Yan Li

78	中国抽屉 / The Chinese Drawers [AS]	79
80	输掉了 / Lost [WNH]	81

杨炼 / Yang Lian

82	个人地理学 / Personal Geography [AD]	83
84	鬼魂奏鸣曲 / Ghost Sonatas [PP]	85
88	饕餮之问 / Questions about the Demon Taotie [PP]	89
90	一粒葵花籽的否定句 / A Sunflower Seed's Lines of Negation [WNH]	91
92	散步者 / Stroller [WNH]	93
94	紫郁金香：慢板的一夜 / A Night in the Purple Tulip Palace (Adagio) [WNH]	95
96	蝴蝶——纳博科夫 / Butterfly – Nabokov [JW]	97
98	蝴蝶——柏林 / Butterfly – Berlin [JW]	99

杨小滨 / Yang Xiaobin

100	目的论 / Teleology [JG]	101
102	裸露 / Nude [JG]	103
104	景色与情节 / The Setting and the Plot [JG]	105
106	离题的情歌 / Love Song Gone Awry [JG]	107
108	信件, 面包, 书签 / Three Short Poems [JG]	109

于坚 / Yu Jian

112	在西部荒野中看见火车 / Watching a Train in the Western Wilderness [WNH]	113
-----	--	-----

臧棣 / Zang Di

114	自我表现协会 / The Self-Expression Association [ME]	115
116	生活是怎么炼成的丛书 / How Life is Smelted [NA]	117
118	牵线人丛书 / A Puppeteer [NA]	119

翟永明 / Zhai Yongming

120	菊花灯笼漂过来 / The chrysanthemum lantern is floating over me [PP]	121
122	第六月 / Jingan Village, June [PP]	123
124	唐朝书生 / Scholars of the Tang Dynasty [SO]	125

张炜 / Zhang Wei

126	松林 / Pine Forest [PC]	127
-----	-----------------------	-----

周瓛 / Zhou Zan

128	慢 / Slowness [WNH]	129
128	无名湖 / Nameless Lake [WNH]	129
130	灰喜鹊 / Jay [PP]	131

ENGLISH INTO CHINESE 英诗中译

Nick Admussen / 安敏轩

135	Road Trip / 驾车旅行 [臧棣译]	134
135	Medical Thriller / 医疗惊悚 [臧棣译]	134

Tony Barnstone / 托尼·巴恩斯通

137	Hair / 毛发 [明迪译]	136
137	Break Up with Him (A How-to Manual) / 跟他绝交 [明迪译]	136
139	Death / 死亡 [明迪译]	138
139	Worn / 旧 [臧棣译]	138

Breyten Breytenbach / 汴庭博

141	Departure / 启程 [杨炼译]	140
-----	----------------------	-----

Polly Clark / 波丽·克拉克

143	My Education at the Zoo / 我的动物园学历 [杨炼译]	142
145	Cheng Du Massage / 成都按摩 [翟永明译]	144
147	My Life, the Sea / 我的生活, 海 [翟永明译]	146
147	Beijing / 北京 [唐晓渡译]	146
149	Swan / 天鹅 [周瓚译]	148
151	Women / 女人 [周瓚译]	150
153	My Life With Horses / 与马共生 [周瓚译]	152

Jennifer Crawford / 简妮芬·克劳馥

155	A Tempo / 回旋 [杨炼译]	154
-----	--------------------	-----

Antony Dunn / 安东尼·邓恩

157	Flea Circus / 跳蚤马戏团 [周瓚译]	156
157	Lepidopterist / 蝴蝶专家 [杨炼译]	156
159	Unsaid / 未说的话 [唐晓渡译]	158

W.N. Herbert / 威廉·赫伯特

161	A Midsummer Light's Nighthouse / 仲夏灯之夜塔 [杨炼译]	160
163	Shields Vixen / 庇护雌狐 [周瓚译]	162
165	Tyne Tunnel / 泰恩河隧道 [周瓚译]	164
167	Forgive the Flies / 原谅苍蝇 [唐晓渡译]	166
167	Ghost / 鬼魂 [唐晓渡译]	166
169	Grandparents / 祖父母 [唐晓渡译]	168
169	Border Cow / 边界母牛 [唐晓渡译]	168
171	Slow Animals Crossing / 慢动物穿行 [杨炼译]	170
173	Santiniketan / 桑蒂尼科坦 [杨炼译]	172
175	A Difficult Horse / 一匹很难的马 [杨炼译]	174

Sean O'Brien / 肖恩·奥布莱恩

177	Cities / 城市 [西川译]	176
179	Europeans / 欧洲人 [西川译]	178
181	Tables and Chairs / 桌和椅 [杨炼译]	180
183	Another Country / 另一个国家 [杨炼译]	182

Pascale Petit / 帕斯卡尔·帕蒂

185	My Father's Body / 我父亲的身体 [周瓚译]	184
187	Self-Portrait with Fire Ants / 有火蚁的自画像 [周瓚译]	186
189	The Snake House / 蛇屋 [周瓚译]	188
189	The Strait-Jackets / 约束衣 [周瓚译]	188
191	Atlas Moth / 地图蛾 [杨炼 张炜译]	190
193	Unearthly Languages / 神奇的语言 [杨炼 张炜译]	192
195	The Mirror Orchid / 镜兰 [杨炼译]	194

Fiona Sampson / 菲奥娜·辛普森		
201	Common Prayer / 共同的祈祷 [唐晓渡译]	200
Arthur Sze / 施加彰		
209	The Negative / 底片 [西川译]	208
211	Horse Face / 马脸 [西川译]	210
211	Pig's Heaven Inn / 猪西天客栈 [杨炼译]	210
213	Looking Back on the Muckleshoot Reservation from Galisteo Street, Santa Fe / 从圣达菲市加利斯 泰欧街回望马柯舒特印第安保留地 [西川译]	212
215	The Moment of Creation / 混沌初开 [严力译]	214
George Szirtes / 乔治·塞尔特斯		
217	Water / 水 [杨炼译]	216
219	Madhouse / 疯人院 [杨炼译]	218
221	We love life whenever we can / 只要我们可以纵情地生活 [萧开愚译]	220
221	The Best of All Possible Worlds / 所有世界里最好的那个 [萧开愚译]	220
223	Some Sayings about the Snake / 关于蛇的一些谚语 [萧开愚译]	222
Joshua Weiner / 约书亚·维尔纳		
225	Found Letter / 寻回的信 [杨炼译]	224
227	Cricket / 蚰蚰 [杨炼译]	226
228	Acknowledgements	228
230	Index of Translators into English	230
230	Index of Translators into Chinese	230
231	Index of Poets	231

INTRODUCTION

The Third Shore: Poet to Poet Dialogic Translation An Anthology of Chinese & English Poetry

YANG LIAN

“Poetry is untranslatable”, says the cliché. Even people who are hardly specialists in the field can quote Robert Frost’s dictum, “Poetry is what gets lost in translation”, which is so widely known that it has even provided the title for a Hollywood movie. But on a superficial examination, is the truth of these assertions open to challenge? To go deeper, the facts are these: a translation is not the original text, nor need it attempt to duplicate the original. The translation of a poem must itself be a poem, and must be another *different* poem. It will be an alloy, jointly forged by the original poet and the poet-translator together. The more elegant and tightly-structured the original, the greater will be the demands on the translation, and the greater the difficulty of forging that alloy. “Untranslatable”? “Lost in translation”? It’s not that simple. We ought really to be asking how we translate poetry, how we might face the impossible—or even, how we might begin from what is impossible.

Walter Benjamin was a critic of surpassing insight. He called translation “The Third Language”, because a translation is neither the same as the original, nor the same as the normal foreign-language of other texts, for it is something unique, something set apart from either, just as bronze forged from copper and tin overcomes the brittleness of copper and the softness of tin to become both hard and pliable, as if it has become a new element—and that allowed the great artists of the 2nd millennium BC Shang dynasty to cast their magnificent masterworks in bronze. To take a more realistic figure of speech, translation is not felling trees, but planting them: felled trees hauled to another site are dead, and will remain so, but a tree-planter is a kind of diver, who dives from leaf-tips through veins and trunk to roots back down to the source of a work of art, and from that experience of the moment of creation, brings back a total understanding of the work’s structure, then grows the tree of the translation in another tongue. These two different trees sharing a single root are not, of course, identical, but they are living likenesses of each other. “The Third Language” appears to say this: the vast ocean of poetry has more than two shores, for it has a third one too. The dialogue—positive, benign, virtuous—between poet and translator, in that it allows the essential elements of both languages to be stripped bare, is the optimum formula for the reinvention of both. This is a chemical reaction that is beautiful, miraculous, tortuous and circuitous, and no-one who has not witnessed it can understand the wonder of it. Hence, the eyes of the

famous presenter of a BBC literature show widened in surprise when I said that there is both loss and gain in poetry translation.

There is a proud tradition of Chinese poetry in English, and it extends to the two extremes of Arthur Waley's graceful fluency and Ezra Pound's conceptual originality. The 7th–10th century Tang poems that Waley translated are universally acknowledged to be beautiful English poems, with their carefully structured metres, rhythms, and forms, the very image of poems from the hand of a native English speaker. Perhaps the daunting nature of the formal difficulties involved gave him a tendency to avoid the challenge of “fighting on two fronts”, and he was at his happiest translating the gratuitously fluent verse of Bai Juyi and other poets like him. In direct contrast, the great poet Pound's interests were precisely focussed on the abstruse nature of linguistics itself. Out of the structure of Chinese characters, he created his concept of the image, emphasising the use of specific, concrete images to embody thought, and so at one fell swoop he changed the whole face of English poetry. While Rilke was still waxing lyrical in German over non-specific images like *The Angel* and *The Rose*, T.S. Eliot had already broken through to

When the evening is spread out against the sky
(like a patient etherized upon a table)

Though they could not have known it, these two great masters, Waley and Pound, had opened the door to interaction between Chinese and English in today's globalised context. Chinese and English—one with an unbroken 3,000 years of creative transformation from within, and the other, the international medium of exchange, spread across almost the entire surface of the earth. (And who, on the streets of Beijing today, can leave another without uttering *Bye-bye*?) Now, the ideological significance of the interaction between Chinese and English has far surpassed the significance of either language alone: by making apparent the plight of the world we all live in, it has inspired all of us to find our own answers to the predicament we are in. This dialogue between time and space, arising from collision, conjecture and convergence, is the very being of 21st-century humanity.

The title of this preface, *The Third Shore of the Sea*, aims to point out the two levels on which poetry probes the deep sea: firstly, the poems as concrete objects; secondly, their prototypes—the life of a human rooted in a spiritual predicament. In 21st century China, tossed by storm after storm, there isn't even calm water to be had, far less any port. More than that, though, in this world of enforced global profiteering, cynicism and frivolity, what culture is still untarnished, the elegance of its days still intact? Any poem in any language is a deep-sea explorer penetrating its own vast ocean with the quivering probe of language, registering every sea-floor earthquake with its

remote-sensing telemetry. If poets translate each other's work, this dialogic translation is the gentle piercing of that probe's point. "Dialogic translation" is a very general term here, allowing as it does for more than the classical one-on-one that 'poet to poet' might seem to imply, and including in its purview every possibility of encounters between Chinese and English. It is this broader sense of "one-on-one" that more exactly accords with its basic meaning. The precious trees sharing a single root spring from Life turning back to Life to let humans return to a radical understanding of each other. So this book is no mere jejune tale of cultural sightseeing, but rather the outcome of a community that was destined to come into being. So poetry, by opening this up and giving feedback to its creators, becomes worthy of the rank and title of "The Unique Mother Tongue".

The work selected for this anthology represents a brief summary of several years of poetic exchange between Chinese and English: in 2004, poets met for the first time to co-translate at the Wansongpu Academy in Shandong Province; in 2005, the dialogic translation was held at the Cove Park artists' retreat in Scotland; in 2006, the ZhongKun Poetry Foundation organised a trip into the Pamir Mountains in Central Asia, which gave the poets more chances to explore both the idea and the project; in 2007, the translation dialogue was organised by Huangshan District in Anhui Province (I still remember a delightful moment when the Nigerian poet Odia Omeifun and I compared the musicality of African oral literatures with the tones of the Chinese language); in 2008 the Yellow Mountain Poetry Festival took place in both Wales and London—this was the world's first-ever Chinese-English poetry festival, and English-speaking poets came from the UK, the USA, New Zealand and Nigeria, showing how English writing has been transformed by contact with different cultures. The most significant activity since then has been from 2008 to 2012, when I and the Scottish poet W.N. Herbert entered into an alliance with the doyen of contemporary Chinese poetry in English translation, Brian Holton, and the Chinese literary critic Qin Xiaoyu, to produce *Jade Ladder*, an anthology of contemporary Chinese poetry in English. *Jade Ladder* runs to almost 400 pages, and in its choice of original poems, its overall structure, and even in the worked fullness of its translations, it is an "Extreme Book". Through the poetry it presents, it opens up, layer by layer, China's present reality, thought and culture. The book is in six parts, each corresponding to one poetic form:

LYRIC POEMS: directly instituting a dialogue with China's most important poetic tradition;

NARRATIVE POEMS: confronting the greatest weakness of Chinese poetry;

NEO-CLASSICAL POEMS: formalist, and proud of it;

SEQUENCES: a profound statement of how structure completes thought;

EXPERIMENTAL POEMS: conceptual art in Chinese characters;

LONG POEMS: the penetration of every ocean current from the sea-floor of linguistics, upward to a panoramic view of current tempests and storms.

Jade Ladder may be thought of as a mind-map of China through the last thirty years, or, as Fiona Sampson, editor of *Poetry Review*, the UK's premier poetry journal, put it when commending the Yellow Mountain Poetry Festival in an e-mail to me, "Every detail is built on a profound understanding of poetry". This base of detailed understanding is what has allowed dialogic translation to happen over the last few years. I have called this series of steadily deepening activities the Art & Thought Project. Without it, the great and rapidly-changing book of China would be impossible to open, let alone understand. Poetry gives us a form with which to handle life. We can slip in and taste our partner's ocean via translation, to see more clearly where we stand. And, oh, how happy we are in the bodies of flying fish, as we stir up the waves of both oceans!

No need to be shy about it: when poets translate poetry there are both strengths and weaknesses. Very few poets can be dignified with the title of "translator" because, and there is no way to avoid saying this, our foreign-language skills are limited. But, and this is a point to note, our strength is in our lightning-quick grasp and profound comprehension of any poetry whatever. This resembles another proposition of mine, that poetry is "a tower built from the top downward". This profound comprehension pours down and awakens every organ in the poet's body, opening it up to language. A string of MUSTs: harsh and exacting reading, merciless interrogation, recreated sorrows and joys. An infinite number of WHYs: why is this structure needed, why is this rhythm needed? How are meaning and form interacting? The poet, used to flying along on his bicycle and choosing any route he pleases, has now become an engine driver, destined to collide with every rock on the rails! Our work is the opposite of the cute posing that most people imagine, as it actually involves a lot of dull, unthinking effort. Two poets, with sometimes an interpreter added for the express delivery of language, go head to head and eyeball to eyeball, notebooks in hand, terrified lest the slightest nuance is missed. In what sense is this "reading"? It's clearly an operating theatre, where image after image, line after line, the flesh and the bones of a dissected poem are exposed, until, with a puff of magic, we bring it back to life again! What does it feel like to detonate a poem? What is its historical background, its literary inheritance, its cultural challenge? The right of explication is now out of the creator's hands, because this invasive probing

of dialogic translation is no less professional than the author's own. Anyone who tries to hide behind the excuse that "poetry is untranslatable", or who hides behind the images and plays dumb, will not escape this microscope. The two key words here are PROFOUND and PROFESSIONAL—note the euphony here—and for both the translator and the poet being translated they bring an equal test. To see your own work subject to the scrutiny of another—how can that not be significant? Does evaluation smash it into smithereens? Or does one ocean go surging into the other? The results of these tests are really interesting too: the fewer the ideas in the original, the easier will translation be. Any translator can arbitrarily cook something up from a heap of raw material, and it is often the case that the translation has more flavour than the original, but on the other hand, an original whose form and connotation are crafted with precision will have the translator racking his or her brains, caught between conflicting priorities, and more often than not feeling he or she is not up to the task at all. To take an example of my own, the very intelligent Pascale Petit grabbed my attention when she said, "Only you could translate *Mirror Orchid*", but it wasn't until I got my hands on it that I saw what she meant: the long lines reminiscent of Saint-John Perse, the gorgeous and complex images with their intriguing mixture of tension and release, and all controlled by the dexterity and rigour of English grammar—these unerringly show up the Achilles heel of the free and unfixed grammar of Chinese. Take this line, for example—

the fossil-flowers with stone petals and sulphur stems

here, the F and S sounds are entwined in euphony, like two rattlesnakes. In response to this, all I could do in Chinese was

huashi hua you shihua ban

Sean O'Brien's acerbic political poem 'Another Country' is given an exquisite beauty and delicacy by the use of strict rhyme, and I wasn't going to be beaten at that game. In George Szirtes' 'Water', the AB rhyme scheme and the many caesuras are so meticulously and systematically intertwined that the translated text must mark and shadow every one of these moves from beginning to end. His 'Madhouse' is another beauty: in it, a poet of Jewish extraction unexpectedly uses the German word *Gesundheit* to comic effect. Good lord, what was I to do with that? Then the penny dropped, and I used the kind of broken Chinese the Imperial Japanese Army used in WWII.

The majority of poets involved in dialogic translation are in their thirties, forties and mid-fifties, so, because of their age, they are self-aware users of language, well supplied with experience of life, mature in their thought

and creative powers. More important, though, is the globalised context (or predicament?) of our own personal experience; the profound level of exchange this makes possible is not just important, but indispensable. For as long as humans have made poetry, poets have been aware of one thing: *there is only one sea*, and you either dive in and swim deeper into it, or you simply don't get wet. Dialogic translation implies mutual assessment: with reference to so many multi-faceted cultural systems, can a poet's creative work still be "valid"? The steamroller of globalisation is flattening all the previous supports for communities: ethnicities, nations, cultures, languages, ideologies—even the dividing line between East and West—until all that is left is

A man taking the road shoulder to shoulder with the universe¹

Yet this road is not solely one that leads toward the outside world, because it is even more an inward one, for, in the final analysis, all the burden of the world falls on the shoulders of the individual. And this is the true significance of dialogic translation: as we weigh each and every word, sharing layer after layer of meaning, then here, in the deep places of every culture our own personal powers are interrogated. This focus on the Third Language makes manifest the Third Shore of the sea, transcending the limits of geography, as well as the narrow limits of culture-bound psychologies, and exemplifying the common course of our shared humanity. Now, is The Third Shore of the sea excavated from the sea-floor, and simultaneously surveying us from the heavens? I have described the ecology of the internet as like the ocean, with culture the boat, and poetry the ballast in its hold. Poetry keeps the boat stable, preventing it from rolling and yawing or drifting with the current. On the ocean's Third Shore all you need is to think a poem is good for it to become your own. Any volunteer, through writing, translation, criticism, reading, even a beginner whose first lessons have touched on translation, can land here, right on The Third Shore of the Sea.

IT/IS/IN/SIDE/US

An unbroken and forever unfolding shoreline that transcends time and space is even now weaving a worldwide web of co-translating poets. Here is the genuine, the magnificent Art & Thought Project. Faced with that, this anthology of dialogic translation into Chinese and English is only a first attempt, only a beginning.

Translated by Brian Holton

¹ From my own unpublished 'Narrative Poem'

ON THE RISING BEACH: TRANSLATION AS A METAPHOR

W.N. Herbert

1

The Argentinian novelist, Andrés Neuman, had occasion to remark at a literary festival I recently attended in Cardiff, “Reading poetry is itself a kind of translation.” This idea, that poetry is a medium which brings us all into the realm of the translator, is both challenging and suggestive. It implies that an act of decipherment lies at the heart of the pleasure of poetry, and also that a degree of ability to interpret may be as universal as the poetic act itself.

This anthology began eight years ago with a similar principle—that poets were sufficiently intrigued by the expressive modes and strategies of other poets to find a way of leaping the language barrier in search of greater understanding of each other’s practice. The hope was that direct dialogue could lead to meaningful acts of translation, a deeper understanding of both our skills and their cultural relativism, and, ideally, publishable works in the target language.

Practically speaking, this impulse manifested itself in a trip by some UK poets to meet with Chinese writers and work on translations of each other’s work in Beijing and the Wansongpu Writers’ Centre in Shandong Province, then a return trip by the Chinese writers to Cove Park in the west of Scotland. The originating figures were, on the Chinese side, Yang Lian and Tang Xiaodu, together with Xi Chuan, Zhai Yongming, Zhang Wei and Zhou Zan. On the British side, Polly Clark and Julian Forrester organized, and Polly, myself, Antony Dunn and Pascale Petit took part.

On those two trips, translation went on in parallel, with the writers working both from Chinese into English, and from English into Chinese. It was a dialogue in several senses of the word, in that not only were we learning about each other’s poetry and its cultural and formal background through the act of translation, but that act was itself dialogic, “Poet to Poet”, as Polly called it.

This was only the first of a series of exchanges, called, variously, the Pamirs, Yellow Mountain and Yangzhou festivals. These included readings and discussions as well as translations, and involved many other writers both British, Chinese, American, Nigerian, and from New Zealand. But at the heart of each of these exchanges was a pair of writers sitting down together and learning about each other’s writing and the principles behind it through the act of translation.

Several names recurred, while others joined us, including, on the English-speaking side, Murray Edmond, Forrest Gander, Robert Minhinnick, Sean O'Brien, Oda Ofeimun, Fiona Sampson, Arthur Sze, George Szirtes, Eliot Weinberger and C.D. Wright. Other Chinese writers taking part included Duo Duo, Hu Xudong, Mang Ke, Ouyang Jianghe, Wang Xaoni, Xiao Kaiyou, Yan Li, Yang Xiaobin, Yu Jian, Zang Di and Zhang Er. Not everyone translated, and not all the translations were successful, but the strong impulse to engage in dialogue about poetry drove us all.

These are distinguished names, and both the dialogues and the translation processes were so stimulating, it was inevitable that, eventually, we would think of publishing some of the results. Yang Lian and I had already collaborated on *Jade Ladder* (Bloodaxe Books, 2012), a comprehensive selection of translations into English of key poems from the last thirty years of Chinese poetry, the idea for which had arisen as a direct result of these festivals and exchanges.

But we were always aware, firstly, that the translation process had gone in both directions, and, secondly, that a large anthology like *Jade Ladder* could not focus exclusively on that process. So we decided that a second, independent book was necessary: one that included English to Chinese translations alongside Chinese to English, and one that gathered its work primarily from the Poet to Poet translation method.

That method had of course evolved over the years, not least because its application had spread. Yang Lian and other Chinese writers worked with Japanese and other poetries. Polly and Julian developed a similar project with Arab and Israeli writers; and I found myself translating from a number of other languages including Bulgarian, Farsi, Lithuanian, Somali and Turkish.

Poet to Poet changed my practice as a writer and, as an academic, became my main research area. I began travelling to translate, engaging with other organisations like Aberystwyth's Literatures Across Frontiers, Edinburgh's Scottish Poetry Library, and the London-based Poetry Translation Centre; and with other co-translators like Linda France, Richard Gwyn, Martin Orwin and Zöe Skoulding.

But both Yang Lian and myself never forgot that there was something unique about the translation process working between Chinese and English, something that informed all the other translation work we subsequently did.

The gap between the two languages and between the two cultures could not have seemed wider—English, obviously, is represented by an alphabetic system which encodes its linguistic and cultural history within its orthography, so that to read it is to reach back through etymology into layers of time.

Chinese, equally evidently, deploys thousands of characters which represent concepts and their interactions spatially through combinations of

pictograms and radicals. The same characters can be used by quite distinct languages and pronounced entirely differently, while retaining much the same meaning. This, together with the fact that characters were fixed at such an historically distant time—despite efforts made by the Communist Party to reform and simplify many key characters—means that they can seem almost timeless.

The gap between the two cultures is almost as marked: Western European thinking as exemplified by English and US culture continues to empiricise wherever it can no longer colonise, to be extroverted and individualist. This it does to almost the same extent that Chinese thought has traditionally focused on the phenomenal, while creating an enclosed and hierarchically ordered social system in which China is already a world, complete unto itself. Communism almost destroyed the infrastructure of that world-view while, fundamentally, it inherited the mind-set, translating it into a unique political and industrial complex, where the Party and capitalism are, oxymoronically, one and the same thing.

Chinese literature is at once far more ancient and extensive than literature in English, and far more isolated on the far side of postmodernity, unable to establish easily connections with writers from millennia back, poets everyone has memorized but whose lives seem unimaginably alien. Thanks to those unchanging characters, everyone can read the poetry of the Tang or Song dynasties, but no-one can be entirely certain how it was pronounced.

English literature, on the other hand, manifests its distinct periods through linguistic as well as cultural or formal evolution, regularly requiring itself to be translated into its latest manifestation. Somehow, that familiarity with mutability, with relative equivalences, and with the gaps in meaning that such familiarity both opens up and conceals, gave it a flexibility that seemed fit for the task.

Somehow, when we sat down together to translate—line by line, character by character—the series of gulfs I've just described, each as sheer as the other, caused something rich and paradoxical to happen. For one thing, to discuss the surface of the language was, necessarily, to discuss its depths. For another, English's focus on its music, its long engagement with different modes of metricality, connected with Chinese's love of pattern, and its patterning of centuries of allusion.

The historicising music of English met the conceptualism of the Chinese character, and English's concept of the poetic encountered Chinese's very distinct tonal music. Each culture was mature enough in a different enough way to match the other technically as well as to contrast teleologically. There was vigorous debate because there could be real exchange: something, we realized with increasing excitement, was at stake.

So what was the *Poet to Poet* method, and how has it evolved over the eight or so years encompassed by this anthology? How specifically did its processes lead to a change in emphasis in how we translated poetry in both directions?

Arguably, the method has its roots in a remark by Pound from *How To Read*, where he states in typically absolute fashion:

Another point miscomprehended by people who are clumsy at languages is that one does not need to learn a whole language in order to understand some one or some dozen poems. It is often enough to understand thoroughly the poem, and every one of the few dozen or few hundred words that compose it.

Poet to Poet translation, then, is one whereby a poet sets out to inform another poet of the full cultural significance of those “few dozen or few hundred words” from the dubious position of authority of having written them. Literary translation utilising this dialogic method was initially conducted without any preparatory literal or interlinear text, where there was a common language (almost always English).

Later it was also done between poet and poet with an accompanying interpreter, often a skilled translator or poet/translator in their own right. Sometimes, where the original poet could not be present, it was done between poet and translator. In this latter case, which clearly strains the original term, the translator tended—indeed needed—to be not only an expert in the field of literary translation, but also a close contact of the originating author, able to verify their responses through consultation.

In both the latter cases, literals tended to be used, giving rise to complications of their own, which I’ll return to later.

However, in all three cases the aim remains to create a publishable text through the dynamic dialogue between writers in source and target language. This changes normal translation procedures in several significant ways.

Firstly, and most importantly, the work is usually selected by the original author. This reverses the procedure, whereby the expert translator selects from the passive canon of a foreign poetry, and thereby it also inverts the hierarchy whereby the selection of the poem can be made according to assumed ease of translation, or for ideological or aesthetic “fit” with the target culture. Chinese has for a long time been subject to a series of orientalisng gestures which this method counters even though we understand it cannot entirely escape them.

This procedure has its hazards—a work may be discovered to be effectively untranslatable, or at any rate less effective in the target language. It often proves to be far harder to translate than either party realized at the

outset. But these dangers are outweighed by the benefit of discovering how the originating poet wants to be represented (assuming this was a factor in their selection process—it is still of course possible for the poet to select ‘easier’ pieces.)

Secondly, the active presence or accessibility of the originating poet allows for a more detailed, more informed and, arguably, more accurate picture of the poem to be constructed. It at least brings out into the open the amount of second guessing any translation process must be filled with, making explicit the degree to which the translator has to consider intention as much as meaning, gesture as much as tone—because the translator can simply ask the author. This is one of those areas that feels very different depending on whether you are the translator or the translated. It is as marvellous to be able just to ask, as it is challenging to have to answer.

Thirdly, the presence of a poet fluent in the target language can mean a high level of discussion about formal issues, with the result thereby achieving more of an agreed equivalence in metrical, imagistic and, where suitable, idiomatic finish. Effectively, the Poet to Poet method allows for a strong engagement with the issue of cultural translation on the level of craft.

These three positive elements allow for an almost unique moment of shared reflection for both originating poet and poet-translator. Many of the questions one is asked as part of this process are not those one asks oneself during composition. Indeed, some such questions may need to be avoided, deliberately or instinctively, in order for composition to take place.

Equally, for the translator, this process may oblige them to reflect upon aspects of their own creative habits and perspectives in a more exteriorized and critical light, to assess whether they are indeed fit for purpose. Both writers are, after all, often encountering the different cultural weight they attach to the same literary technique, mode, or sphere of reference.

This moment in which both parties achieve however partially a conscious perspective on their own poetic procedures and creativity may be seen as a kind of secondary effect of the translation process, but it is one with huge implications for the success of the project. Depending on each party’s ability briefly to escape their own milieu the dialogue mode of Poet to Poet allows, indeed causes, change to take place in their approach or practice, and the successful translation is often more dependent on the nature of this change than either party may have allowed.

To be able to let go of the poem or the practice is, effectively, not to impede transmission. This condition is the “third shore” to which we refer in our title, a place that cannot be completely governed by the poetic customs or cultural tides of either the original or the target languages.

The Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid, who often had to negotiate those treacherous crossings between the languages of the British Isles, referred to

a similar sanctuary at once of transition and translation when in his long poem, 'In Memoriam James Joyce', he welcomes Joyce "to our *aonach*", conflating two Gaelic words—one for a meeting place or fair, and another meaning a ridge or high place.

The third shore as a point of colloquy between poets and between poetries finds its corollary in his poem 'On a Raised Beach', where the shoreline has been literally lifted above the seashore by eons of geological change, and the stones stranded on this beach symbolise an "inopprobrious reality" the poet attempts to approach through language, deploying an extraordinary extended range of scientific vocabulary and Shetlandic Norse in an attempt to translate the stones into words:

This cat's cradle of life; this reality volatile yet undetermined;
This intense vibration in the stones
That makes them seem immobile to us...

This kind of intense encounter with what lies within the line, the metre, the image, the tone, the character or the word—with that which may well prove untranslatable—is the goal of the *Poet to Poet* method.

The very intensity of this dialogue, however, may sometimes contain within it the seeds of its own undoing. There is a temptation for the translated poet, reconsidering his or her own work, to use the translation to develop an idea explored through discussion, i.e. for the translation to become a means of revision. There is a similar temptation on the part of the translating poet to make sense of the poem according to their own instincts and principles, rather than having the patience to allow the meaning and style of the source text to emerge through discussion and redrafting.

This confusion of the fluidity of the draft translation with that of the compositional draft can lead to a kind of *folie à deux*, in which both poets do what they do best, composing, while believing they are acting in the best interests of the poem. This is why the dialogue is often better chaired by a translator who, like a marriage counsellor, can pull both parties back to the text at key moments. It is also why having more than one translating poet means they too can enter into dialogue about stylistic and interpretive issues in the target language, the results of which might be less individual, but they can also be more resistant to personal habit.

The ideal model for the *Poet to Poet* translation method as it has evolved might therefore be the quadrilogue, consisting of, firstly, the originating poet either present or accessible; secondly, the interpreting or intermediating poet/translator; and, thirdly and fourthly, two poets from the target language. Of course these four roles can be played by just two or three parties, but four allows for the greatest degree of engagement and objectivity.

What this evolutionary process has also given rise to is a more sophisticated understanding of the different roles played by different kinds of preparatory text. Originally, as stated above, there were none: two poets sat down together with a poem selected by the source language poet, and off they set. Gradually, the role of some form of literal translation in order to determine which poems to translate began to seem useful. But this brought its own dangers.

Literals are, naturally, never only that—a literal version of the poem, which enables work to begin. They tend to be, already, versions, often produced by writer-translators with strong aesthetic principles of their own, articulated or not, which mean they have made a series of decisions about how to produce the literal, which they then have to, but may not be in a position to, explain to the target language poet or poets. Therefore, a certain amount of this translation method—especially if the original author is not present or is not fluent in the target language—is spent assessing the literal rather than engaging with the original.

Authors of literals often feel they have already done the hard work because they have the source language expertise or know the original author well, and may have less grasp of the significance of the stage the target language poets are embarking on. It can be difficult to explain that, as is sometimes the case, their version may not be publishable in the target culture, and that an emphasis on dictionary definition or on loyalty to the author can reach a point where it becomes obstructive.

For this reason, poets working in this method often use the literal mainly to help selection, whereupon they embark on the creation of an interlinear—a word-for-word crib, preserving word order, listing synonyms, and noting cultural or stylistic issues as they arise. This construction of the interlinear is achieved specifically by a deconstruction of the literal, and directly engenders the dialogue discussed above.

3

I wrote in the introduction to *Jade Ladder* about my conviction, gained through working on that book, that translation is a fundamental aspect of any process of dialogue, not just those evidently about a transfer of meanings across languages. The transition from one era to another, from one class to another, from one gender to another, from a memory to the world-view of the present self, each involves us in a type of translation.

This is self-evidently a metaphoric use of the term “translation”, but we must always be alive to the metaphors through which we conceptualise such exchanges. Many of our metaphors for translation tend to contain hierarchical assumptions, from the gendered “mother tongue” to the idea that meaning can be “lost” as though it were baggage—or rather merchandise—

in transit. And yet there is a more fundamental sense in which translation is itself metaphoric, which has a direct bearing on the processes employed and the choices made by the poets gathered in this anthology.

Translators are often supposed to work in what might be described as a metonymic manner; that is, when seeking equivalences of language, form, image or cultural reference, it is often anticipated that they will seek contiguous ones—synonyms rather than antonyms, syllabics for numbers of characters, images drawn from the same field of reference, and cultural equivalences that appear to be as “close” as possible.

But it is as often the case that what is being sought are metaphoric equivalences—words, metrics, images, references, which are “like” the original, but don’t necessarily directly correspond. The likeness, as in metaphor, is made implicit by the act of creating a poem in the target language, rather than, say, writing an essay about the original poem. In a sense, the translation is itself a metaphor for the original. In I.A. Richards’ terms, the original is the tenor, and the translation is the vehicle.

This relationship is, I think, particularly clear when we look at translations between English and Chinese. The dynamic between pictogram and meaning in Chinese is often metonymic, for instance the character meaning fresh, 鲜 (*xiān* in pinyin), consists of an association made from contiguous elements—the characters for two fresh things, “fish” and “sheep” (鱼, *yú* and 羊, *yáng*).

By contrast, for the English speaker, “fresh” delivers its associations by dint of being an Old English monosyllable. That is, whether we are aware of its etymology or not, most English speakers register the directness of the sound and link it to its meaning in a way we might not so readily do with “neoteric” or “uncontaminated”. Synonyms in English come from different sources that we don’t always recognize as contiguous, and in fact can experience as contrasting.

When we think about the relation between 鲜 and “fresh” therefore, we are thinking metaphorically about how a spatial relationship between characters can resemble a meaning built up through complementary or contrasting linguistic roots, i.e. a temporal relationship. This is, I believe, what the poet Yu Jian meant when he said at a recent festival in Nanjing, “The Chinese character cannot be translated.” He didn’t mean that a kind of translation did not take place, but rather that translating Chinese makes us think laterally about equivalence itself.

To think of translation as a search for metaphors as much as a search for meanings is to note that *likeness* may be something subtly different from *similarity*. Twins can resemble each other exactly but have different natures, while two strangers can contrast in every way while recognizing—or at least agreeing—that they are in some way fundamentally alike.

Translation in this sense is a kind of leap of faith which we can only commit to if trust has been established between translated and translating poets: they must have faith in each other's judgement as poets beyond the limits of their grasp of each other's language and culture. *Poet to Poet* translation, then, is a relationship rather than an infallible method, one in which we hope to recognize and value likeness.

This recognition of likeness occurred again and again in the creation of this book, as poets in both languages acknowledged that each other's engagement with their culture's politics, history and prosody was not just similar to their own, or not just simplistically operating in parallel, but felt as though it were the same engagement. The evidence was as simple as finding you were as fascinated by your fellow poet's problematic or otherwise relationship with his or her canon as you were by your own, and indeed as he or she was by your own.

It was certainly the case that many of the poets from Britain responded strongly to the way in which Chinese writers were renegotiating their relationship with avant-garde techniques (often imported from US poetics) through a radical exploration of their classical heritage, in which, on the one hand, no simplistic direct link to that heritage was assumed to exist, nor, on the other, in the wake of the horrors of the Cultural Revolution, was an absolute break with that past considered either desirable or possible.

This was, some of us felt, not unlike the continued negotiation that had gone on throughout twentieth and twenty-first century poetry written in Britain and Ireland between what was interpreted as experimental and traditional poetics and poetics. Having as broad a variety of formal resources as theoretical approaches seemed to both sets of poets to be of something like the same importance.

This sense of shared values and of common commitment to a method of translation that places such emphasis on dialogue may, it is hoped, help to mitigate a final imposition that anthologies of this kind make upon their contents and contributors.

Our cultures do not have a detailed awareness of each other as contemporary entities, especially when it comes to the field of poetry. The temptation, therefore, especially for readers of English contemplating the vastness of Chinese culture, but also for Chinese readers considering the wide variety of Englishes from US to UK to Indian, Australian, and so on, is always to employ a sort of thinking by synecdoche, that rhetorical device whereby the part is held to stand for the whole. "I shall never read everything," we think, refusing to admit the thought even as it arises, "therefore, this poem shall represent this poet; this poet shall stand for that cultural movement; and this anthology shall be adequate for the entire medium of poetry in that language."

This anthology seeks to displace that act of substitution by moving in two directions at the one time. Each language presents to the reader a portrait of itself and a picture of the other as selected by that other. These two images simultaneously encourage comparison and contrast. They are in dialogue with each other exactly as the poets who translated each other were in dialogue. They in fact represent that process as much as they represent their respective cultures, and they suggest limitations: this type of anthology can only consist of that part of each culture which is prepared or practically able to enter into this kind of dialogue: there will be many who are not, or cannot do so.

This is the sort of limitation many writers will recognize as a great liberation: the technical restriction that obliges invention, and thereby enables you to escape from other, more doctrinaire constraints. We do not, I think, want to represent our cultures in quite so straightforward a manner as a synecdochic reading implies. Rather we wish to explore what we can do as writers and translators freed from this sort of representation into a zone where communication, with each other, with our own, and with each other's audience, is the key element. In that zone, if the quality of the original writing and of the translation is high enough, both writers and audiences will create their own understanding of our respective poetries, their links and contrasts, their evident particularity and their possible universality. They will, in effect, land upon the third shore.