

# Luminosity of Earthy Desires

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With my translation of Wei's poem, I take the position of a poet-translator as described in "The Critic as Translator." I wanted to create sublime, new art from one medium to another by using the original as a framework rather than as a set of instructional blueprints. Thus, to make my translation truly novel I created a musical composition, and by doing so, the poem can be universally understood which I think is more important than maintaining the untranslatable foreignness, for the meaning and emotions conveyed by the poem should be what is valued before all else. I want any audience to be able to feel the emotion and be able to listen no matter their backgrounds or understanding of Chinese literature and thus an instrumental composition is a perfect medium. I

believe that each person will have a valid, unique understanding based on their own experiences, and this creation of a variety of personal thoughts and meaning is what I find fascinating in art. My translation will have my own interpretation, emotion and ideas since I am not creating an academic translation but a new enjoyable piece of art. To best listen to my composition you should listen to it isolated, then listen to it side by side with a translation of the poem in a language you understand and a traditional accompanying painting to the poem to get a multiple perspectives .

The original deer park does not tell a traditional western story; with no subject or character to progress, the literal poem instead provides an ambiguous, abstract description of nature, and just like nature and it's all encompassing flow without the regard for humans or subjects. I tried to maintain this feeling of ethereal nature, a feeling of something deeper than human desires yet maintains the simplicity of the original. To be faithful to the original, in my opinion, is to understand the emotional core, the message but still tell and transform its presentation, body or medium. My composition mirrors each line of the poems, but I took it as a slight deviation where I have 4 bars for each line instead of the 5 characters used by Wei. I did this to create a perfect square in the composition so there are four lines/sections and 4 bars in each to create this symmetry. To translate

Wei's Poem to my composition, I analyzed the original poem with Roland Barthes' semiotic theory of connotation and denotation: denotation is the literal meaning being signified, but within works, connotations exist as the second meaning signified by the denotation within a cultural context. So, let me establish the cultural context in which Deer Park was written and how this shows up in my interpretation. We know that Wei was a devout follower of Buddhism and pursued enlightenment through the abandonment of earthly desires, reclusing to nature from his high position in the royal court and enjoying the simple pleasures of nature. With our understanding of Wei, we can dive deeper into the meaning of the original and how I interpreted it to my translation.

Now looking at the character by character translation, the first line of the poem is about a lone mountain so solitude that no human voice can not be heard. With the cultural context of Wei, we see that the connotation is that of Buddhist meditation, since temples are usually found up in the mountains as a physical manifestation of being closer to heaven, the absence of human voices represents the rejection of earthly desires, being far from society and one with nature.

**“Empty” “mountain(s)” “(negative)” “to see” “person”**

To match this sense of isolation, I have the four bars representing this line to be solemn cords of a violin that

alternate harmoniously to give a sense of loneliness just get louder as it transitions to the second line.

Here is the second line of Wei's poem translated character by character:

**“But” “to hear” “people” “words” “sound/to echo”**

Denotatively, this literal interpretation makes no sense, there are no people but are echoes of people's voices? But using the denotation as a signifier for a culturing meaning makes my interpretation this: echoes do not come from a place right next to us, but reverberate, bouncing through space to get to us, thus these voices must be far yet reach us in echoes and since we established that there are no people near us, the voices are of the gods as one approaches enlightenment from above the clouds reaching the mountain just echoing and not entirely clear. To show this my next four bars in the composition have a choir singing quarter notes to represent these echoes from the heavens while the violin builds up until there is an massive uproar of drums, voices and the violin that transitions to the third line:

**“To return” “bright(ness)” “to enter” “deep” “forest”**

Here the brightness/ light that enters the deep forest. This brightness is the enlightenment that meditation has brought clearing the darkness of his mind now hearing the gods clearly. The use of “to return” is paralleling

Wei's own return to isolation, reclusion and hiding from public life. Thus the short, echoing male voices I used before were replaced by this a female voice, representing the clear, enlightened light/voice of the gods, for the rest of the composition (the reason for a female voice will become apparent in the next line) while a drum plays to represent his steps as he leaves his earthly desires. The fourth and last line:

**“To return” “to shine” “green” “moss” “above”**

Here the literal translation is that the returning light makes the green moss grow, but again my connotative interpretation uses Wei's Buddhist ideals so that this light (representing enlightenment) causes the moss (life) to flourish, so for one to flourish one must meditate, reach this enlightenment and then you will grow and truly live through nature. Thus you can see when my final 4 bars are of female voices singing these beautiful chords to highlight this tranquil enlightenment and the motherly nature of growth and nurturing of the moss. Without understanding Chinese culture or Wang Wei, one will not understand my interpretation as stated above, but the themes, notes and beats will still match the denotative and literal translation of the poem. I have tried to keep the composition simple yet profound just as the original. As an overview, my composition takes on a connotative understanding of Wei's poems, interpreting them as a subject-less (or a personal) accession to the

heavens through meditations in the mountains, allowing to hear the voices of the gods and becoming enlightened to cast away the dark forest of human desires and allows nature (the moss) and yourself to grow and flourish.