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## De – otherizing the Textual Other: Intertextual Semiotics and the Translation of Chinese Poetry

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### Subtext Otherized and Poetry Lost

The American poet laureate Robert Frost defines poetry as “that which is lost out of both prose and verse in translation” (Lathem 203). He has “no liking for translations” because “(T)he translator always ends up betraying the author” (Lathem 140). Indeed, as far as classical Chinese poetry is concerned, many pieces do get lost in the translation. What they lose is what makes them poetry. Once they are translated into the target text their identity tends to be jeopardized, distorted, or lost largely due to the translator’s ignorance of, or insensitivity to, the *intertextual semiotics* peculiar to that poetry. In classical Chinese poetics the primary purpose and function of poetry is *yan zhi* (literally, speaking intent; i. e., expressing one’s thoughts and emotions) and the major mode of poetic expression is *yu qing yu jing* or *jie jing shu qing* (literally, impregnating the scene with emotions, or expressing emotions through the scene; i. e., expressing one’s thoughts and emotions through descriptive scenes and/or imagery). Such poetics presupposes the symbiosis and synergism of two types of text in a classical Chinese poem: one consists of descriptive scenes and/or imagery, the other consists of discursive messages conveyed through descriptive scenes and/or imagery. The former can be termed the *surface text*, the latter the *subtext*, which is visible only to the mind’s eye of

the reader. The concept of the subtext can be defined in various ways.<sup>①</sup> In the particular context of classical Chinese poetry it can be used to refer to the hidden discursive text evocable from the seemingly objective, non-committal surface text. What Terry Eagleton explains of the subtext in the Western novel is one way to view such a textual phenomenon:

In reading *Sons and Lovers* with an eye to these aspects of the novel, we are constructing what may be called a "sub-text" for the work—a text which runs within it, visible at certain "symptomatic" points of ambiguity, evasion or overemphasis, and which we as readers are able to "write" even if the novel itself does not. All literary works contain one or more such sub-texts, and there is a sense in which they may be spoken of as the "unconscious" of the work itself (178).

As the textual other underlying the surface text of a work, the subtext can be "written" by the poet or the reader. In some poems it invites the reader to read the authorial intention or authorial unconscious encoded therein. In other poems it is left ambiguous or open-ended for the reader to explore its semiotic potential. The subtext and the surface text form the semiotic relationship between the signified and the signifier. Such a relationship is essentially intertextual, which gives rise to the intertextuality of the text.<sup>②</sup> Intertextuality informs and determines the signifying economy and dynamics of many texts, holding the key to a faithful translation of classical Chinese poetry. The translation of a classical Chinese poem necessarily involves the translation of intertextuality. Failing this the textual other from the source text will be "otherized" to fit the "round hole" of the target-text. Translation in terms of intertextuality and subtextuality can be called "intersemiotic translation," to borrow Roman Jakobson's term ("On Linguistic Aspects of Translation"145).

The relationship between the surface text and the subtext of a poetic work can be defined by analogy to painting. The English poet John Dryden compares translation to "a kind of drawing after the life." As he explains, 'Tis one thing to draw the outlines true, the features like, the proportions exact, the coloring itself perhaps tolerable; and another

er thing to make all these graceful, by the posture, the shadowings, and, chiefly, by the spirit which animates the whole ("On Translation" 23).

In terms of traditional Chinese art theory such a relationship is analogous to that between the *xing* (form) and *shen* (spirit) of a painterly subject. The Six Dynasties painter Gu Kaizhi (ca. 346 – 407) develops the formulation of *yi xing xie shen* (literally, depicting the spirit through the portrayal of appearance) with the connotation that the presentation of the inner spirit of a painterly subject cannot dispense with the depiction of its outward appearance. By the same token, there is no way to translate the subtext of a poetic work if the surface text is neglected or distorted. While Gu Kaizhi's principle of painting is applicable to the translation of classical Chinese poetry, the Chinese literati poetics that privileges spiritual resemblance over formal resemblance will pose a Catch – 22 for the translator if it is applied to translation. Su Shi (1037 – 1101), one of the leading literati of the Northern Song dynasty, thus writes in a poem: "Judging a painting in terms of formal resemblance, / Such understanding is close to a child's" (*Su Dongpo ji* I, 16: 63). It is a literati tenet that only by deemphasizing the formal resemblance of a painterly subject can its spiritual resemblance be achieved. Such a paradox, however, makes little practical sense in translation, since the subtext is to be expressed through the surface text, the two of which, like *yin* and *yang*, should always be kept in balance and harmony in the target text. The reason that Su Shi would deemphasize formal resemblance is to promote open – ended signification against closed signification in literary and artistic creation. As he writes in that same poem, "Composing a poem that means no more than itself, / Such a person certainly knows no poetry" (*Su Dongpo ji* I, 16: 63). Such a statement may well be interpreted as another literati tenet that a poem cannot be a poem without signifying beyond its surface text.

Generally speaking, the text of a poem, or of a work from any other genres of literature, is culture – bound. This is especially the case with the subtext, which is always inscribed with the values and

significance of its own culture, permitting no “otherization” in the translation. In a sense, the various concepts in traditional Chinese poetics such as *yun wai zhi zhi* (literally, resonance beyond tone), *qing jing jiao rong* (literally, the fusion of emotion with scene), *shi zhong you hua* (literally, painting in poetry), *yi jing* or *jing jie* (roughly, realm of artistic ideation), and *qi yun* (literally, spiritual resonance) all bear the unique hallmarks of Chinese culture, each of which can be interpreted to define a particular type of subtext. Even certain devices in versification such as *shi yan*, or the “verse eye,” is capable of playing a strategic role in shaping the subtext of a poem or serving as a semiotic bridge between the surface text and the subtext. Also, the viscosity of certain Chinese characters can contribute to the formation of a subtext in a poem, as Chinese poets often tap the visual potential of written characters to enhance the aesthetic value and signifying capacity of a verbal text.

The intertextual semiotics of classical Chinese poetry poses a challenge to its translators from all cultures (including Chinese culture) to rethink their roles and strategies constantly. Nowadays *traduttore, traditore* (translator, traitor) is almost a cliché. New metaphors are used to define the translator's role. Umberto Eco compares the translator to a street customer: “The job of translation is a trial – and – error process, very similar to what happens in an Oriental bazaar when you're buying a carpet. The merchant asks 100, you offer 10, and after an hour of bargaining you agree on 50” (“A Rose by Any Other Name,” *The Washington Post*). Tony Barnstone assigns the translator the role of a fictional doctor, who, “(L)ike Mary Shelley's Promethean doctor,” “does an autopsy on the poem to see what made it tick, sew its parts together with pieces stolen from other poetic graves, and tries to charge it back to life” (“Translation: The Art of Possibility” lxx). Neither the seller – buyer relationship nor the doctor – patient relationship adequately define the role of the translator. As a matter of fact, the translator plays the double role of the servant and the master: a servant of the source text and the target text, the surface text and the subtext; a master of the source language and the target language, the

source poetics and the target poetics.<sup>③</sup> The lack of chemistry or resonance, be it spiritual, aesthetic, and semiotic, between the author and the translator is often the death of translation. As Yves Bonnefoy explains, "If a work does not compel us, it is untranslatable" ("Translating Poetry" 192).

### Traitor or Servant – Master

A translator as both a good servant and a good master is too good to be real though it is always every translator's ideal. It is certainly the ideal pursued by such accomplished poet – translators as Ezra Pound, Kenneth Rexroth, David Young, and Octavio Paz. None of the four has the Chinese language but all of them know something about traditional Chinese poetics. In their respective efforts to keep alive the true spirit of Chinese poetry they all face the common task of managing intertextuality and subtextuality in the target text. On the one hand, they each have developed their own strategies for reconciling the surface text with the subtext in the translation despite the cultural barrier and particularly the language barrier. On the other, their lack of an in – depth knowledge in Chinese poetics makes it difficult for them to fully comprehend the intertextual semiotics of classical Chinese poetry.

More than half a century ago Hsieh Wen Tung published an article under the title "English Translation of Chinese Poetry" in *Criterion*, a quarterly literary review edited by T. S. Eliot. While being relentlessly critical of some translators of Chinese poetry Hsieh expresses a high opinion of Ezra Pound's translation. As he explains, "The one translator who makes no such concessions to the reader as to substitute explication for implication or insert extraneous information into the poem is Mr. Ezra Pound" (421). Hsieh illustrates his point with Pound's translation of the Tang dynasty poet Li Bai's (701 – 762) poem "Ascending Phoenix Terrace in Jingling":

The City of Choan [Pound's version of the title]

The phoenix are at play on their terrace./ The phoenix are

gone, the river flows on alone./Flowers and grass/ Cover over  
the dark path/ where lay the dynastic house of the Go./The  
bright cloths and bright caps of Shin/ Are now the base of old  
hills./ The Three Mountains fall through the far heaven,/ The  
isle of White Heron/ splits the two streams apart./ Now the high  
clouds cover the sun/ And I cannot see Choan afar/ And I am sad  
(Hsieh 422).

According to Hsieh, Pound's version is "at once good poetry and faithful translation" (422). "For what he lacked in lingual access, however, Mr. Pound almost made up in an astonishing interpretative acumen, by which he often penetrated through the veil of an alien text to the significant features of the original: tone, poetic intention and verbal felicity" (423). Whether or not Pound is truly appreciative of the intertextual semiotics of classical Chinese poetry remains debatable;<sup>④</sup> and his faithfulness to the Chinese source text is also problematic, partly due to the influence of Fenollosa's notes. Nevertheless, in Hsieh's eye Pound certainly sees through the surface text to reach the subtext in translating Li Bai's poem, i. e., the poet's frustration at failing to win the imperial court's appreciation. Hsieh's view is supported by Hugh Kenner who points out that "Pound's reiterated advice to translators" is "to convey the energized pattern and let go the words (150). In Pound's own words, "Don't bother about the WORDS [sic], translate the MEANING [sic]" (Kenner 150). Apparently, Pound would sacrifice the surface text for the benefit of the subtext in the translation, and this makes him a translator in the Chinese literati style.

In "The City of Choan" the two "And"s in the last two lines are added to the target text by Pound, which reinforce the expression of sorrow, thus helping translate the subtext. It is worth noting that this pair of "And"s figures more importantly in his translation of another poem by Li Bai entitled "Jewel [i. e., Marble] Stairs' Grievance":

The jewelled steps are already quite white with dew,/ It is

so late that the dew soaks my gauze stockings, / And I let down the crystal curtain / And watch the moon through the clear autumn (*Selected Poems of Ezra Pound* 55). / To this poem, Pound adds the following note of interpretation: / Jewel stairs, therefore a palace. Grievance, therefore there is something to complain of. Gauze stockings, therefore a court lady, not a servant who complains. Clear autumn, therefore he has no excuse on account of weather. Also she has come early, for the dew has not merely whitened the stairs, but has soaked her stockings. The poem is especially prized because she utters no direct reproach (*Selected Poems of Ezra Pound* 55).

Throughout this poem, not a single word is directly associated with the theme of grievance, which is suggested only by the title. Despite that the subtext of grievance is made conspicuous by its absence from the surface text, allowing the reader to overhear the inner sighs from the persona. The dew – soaked stockings conjure up the image of a solitary woman in sorrowful tears. The persona's mood is also evoked through the subtle signification of the character *que* (form word suggesting a seemingly casual transition in the persona's action in this poem) which, according to Sun Yiqiu, helps convey the spirit of this poem (*Tang shi jian shang ci dian* 244). As a *xu zi* (literally, empty character, i. e., form word) *que* introduces the persona's two actions of letting down the curtain and watching the moon. It also associates the scene of anxious waiting with the scene of tearful moon – watching. In classical Chinese poetry certain “empty characters” such as *que* play various subtle roles in the signifying economy of the subtext. “Empty” as they are, these characters are actually pregnant with subtextual messages. In the context of this poem, *que* signifies the persona's helplessness and hopelessness, making sorrow and grievance echo back and forth between her two actions. It suggests that once back to her chamber the persona shuns the moon (which is associated with the notions of union and reunion) by letting down the curtain. Once the curtain is down, however, she can do nothing to dispel her



sorrow and solitude but watch the moon through the curtain (*Tang shi jian shang ci dian* 244).

In translating this poem Pound first personifies the stairs to show their empathy with the persona. He does so by twisting the original meaning of the title from “grievance at the marble stairs” to “the jewel stairs’ grievance.” He then makes the poem sound like a dramatic monologue by changing the implied third person narrator to the first person narrator. Furthermore, he substitutes two “And”’s for the “empty character” *que* that are assigned a comparable semiotic role in the target text. With the help of their forward position and alliteration the two English “empty” words function like a double sigh uttered silently and helplessly by the persona. They help weave the four scenes depicted respectively in the four lines into an objective correlative. It is here that Pound’s interpretive acumen, if any, manifests itself most eloquently, as he manages to reproduce both the surface meaning and subtextual meaning of the Chinese “empty character” in the target text.<sup>⑤</sup>

While translating Chinese poems Pound also attempts to define their signifying practice in his own terms. As he writes,

I have tried in a way to set forth a color – sense. I have said, as it were, “Such poets are pure red. . . pure green.” Knowledge of them is of as much use to a poet as the finding of good color is to a painter.

Undoubtedly pure color is to be found in Chinese poetry, when we begin to know enough about it; indeed, a shadow of this perfection is already at hand in translations. Liu Ch’e [Liu Che, 156 – 87 BC], Chu Yuan [Qu Yuan, ca. 340 – ca. 278 BC], Chia I [Jia Yi, 200 – 168 BC], and the great *vers libre* [Pound’s misconception of the Chinese poetic form] writers before the Petrarchan age of Li Po [Li Bai], are a treasury to which the next century may look for as great a stimulus as the renaissance had from the Greeks (*Literary Essays* 218).

Pound does not explain exactly what “color – sense” is and how it works in Chinese poetry. Judging by what he writes of Chinese poetry on another occasion, this notion seems to be associated with the notion of *phanopoeia* defined by him as “a casting of images upon the visual imagination” (*Literary Essays* 25). In his view, Chinese poets such as Li Bai attain “the known maximum of *phanopoeia*, due perhaps to the nature of their written ideograph” (*Literary Essays* 26 – 27). The association of Li Bai’s poetry with both the “color – sense” and *phanopoeia* reflects Pound’s perception of the signifying practice of classical Chinese poetry. Whether or not the two notions can be used to interpret the intertextual semiotics of classical Chinese poetry remains to be explored.

*Phanopeia* is one of the three terms adopted by Pound to define “three ‘kinds of poetry’” which indicate the different manners in which “the language is charged or energized;” the other two being *melopoeia* and *logopoeia* (*Literary Essays* 25). Significantly, Pound also defines *phanopeia* and *logopoeia* in the context of translation, and his theory in this respect may provide a clue to any potential link between these two notions and the intertextual semiotics of classical Chinese poetry. According to Pound, *phanopeia* can “be translated almost, or wholly, intact. When it is good enough, it is practically impossible for the translator to destroy it save by very crass bungling, and the neglect of perfectly well – known and formulative rules” (*Literary Essays* 25). Pound defines *logopoeia* as “the dance of the intellect among words,” which “employs words not only for their direct meaning, but it takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we expect to find with the word, its usual concomitants, of its known acceptances, and of ironical play” (*Literary Essays* 25). Unlike *phanopeia*, *logopoeia* “does not translate; though the attitude of mind it expresses may pass through a paraphrase. Or one might say, you can not translate it ‘locally,’ but having determined the original author’s state of mind, you may or may not be able to find a derivative or an equivalent” (*Literary Essays* 25). The definition and untranslatability of the Poundian *logopoeia* seems to suggest a textual phe-

nomenon comparable with that of the subtext in certain classical Chinese poems that defies a "local" translation.

While Pound relishes the so - called "color - sense" and *phanopeia* in classical Chinese poetry Young considers what he calls the "grid" in that poetry an obstacle to translation. According to him,

... a Chinese poem works like a kind of grid. Syntax moves along the line in one direction, while pleasing parallels and juxtapositions show up at right angles to that movement. When you try to duplicate this in English, you get an effect of stiff formality that disables the lyric voice of the poem (11).

Young goes further to point out the problem caused by such a "grid": "... the absence in Chinese of all that connective tissue of articles and prepositions makes the original grid airy and light, while its twin in English becomes musclebound and solemn" (12 - 13).

Discounting the treatment of lines by certain translators of Chinese poems, Young proposes his solution to overcome the "grid" effect:

My own solution has been to admit that an English line is a different kind of unit and to treat the Chinese line like a stanza, breaking it up into smaller units of two or three lines. This allows me to preserve some of the parallelism while seeking a more supple and fluent movement. The grid effect, natural to one language and forced in the other, is gone, but the matched stanzas produce an effect that is somewhat equivalent in English without, I hope, sounding stilted. . . . (13 - 14).

Compared with Pound's tolerance towards the formal structure of Chinese poems, Young's attitude is more aggressive and adventurous. Armed with his anti - "grid" strategy, he experiments on restructuring the parallel syntax in Chinese poems such as Li Bai's "Taking Leave of a Friend." His version follows a near - literal translation of this poem:

Green hills lying across north of the city wall,/ White water  
flowing around the eastern city;/From this place once parted,/   
The lone tumbleweed journeys ten thousand miles./Floating  
clouds a traveler's thoughts,/ Setting sun a friend's emotions;/  
[We] wave to take leave here,/ [Our] horses neighing to  
depart./ Here at the city wall/ green mountains to the north/  
white water winding east/we part/ one tumbleweed / ten thou-  
sand miles to go/ high clouds/ wandering thought/ sunset/ old  
friendship/ you wave, moving off/ your horse/whinnies/ twice  
(58)

In Young's translation, all lines are uncapitalized (except the first one) and unpunctuated (except after the word "wave" in the last stanza). Such typographic manipulation creates a sense of spatial totality, which is reinforced phonetically by the ten /w/ consonants present in ten words in eight lines, and which in turn helps produce a sense of emotional totality. Furthermore, Young creates three new semantically parallel units through syntactic manipulation. He splits the fourth line of the original poem into a quasi-couplet (semantic but not formal), making "one" and "ten thousand" form an interlinear instead of intra-linear contrast. He then splits the fifth and sixth lines each into a haiku-like formation, which helps translate the semiotic as well as syntactic missing links between the two units in each line, which are otherwise untranslatable. Finally, Young breaks the last line into three linear units, which lends a visual emphasis to the horse's reaction at the moment of departure. While deconstructing the poem's formal structure to create "an effective poem in English" (Young 15) Young reconstructs its intertextuality to a certain extent without "otherizing" the subtext. Despite the linear deconstruction the emotion remains fused with the scene between the lines in the target text.

Young's anti-"grid" strategy is not always free from problems, however. His translation of the poem "Retreat in Mt. Zhongnan" by Li Bai's contemporary Wang Wei (700-761) fails to reconstruct the

subtext in the source text due to his failure to recognize its subtle presence. In this poem, the couplet "Walk to reach where the water ends, / Sit watching when clouds rise" turns the poet's pleasure trip into a spiritual journey to the Taoist ultimate reality. It reifies the equality and equilibrium of all things and the reconciliation and harmonization of oppositions in nature. The reader is made to view the complementary relationship between yin and yang through viewing nature.<sup>⑥</sup> As the linchpin holding together the signifying economy of the poem, this couplet requires delicate handling in the translation so that the poem's intertextuality and subtext will not be undermined. In his attempt to "rescue" the poet "from the often wooden and dogged versions of the scholars [i.e., scholar-translators]" (Young 11) Young botches the signification of this couplet, thus causing damage to the signifying economy of the poem as a whole:

I climb/ to the source of a stream/ and sit / to watch the rising mists (34). /

Young is not alone; the same problem occurs in the following translation:

I walk until the water ends, and sit / waiting for the hour when clouds rise (Barnstone, Barnstone, & Xu 3). /

### **Semiotic Licenses and Textual Integrity**

Nevertheless, for a dexterous translator linear restructuring of classical Chinese poems can still be used to advantage to help preserve the intertextuality and the subtext of the source text. A case in point is Rexroth's translation of the poem "Night at Anchor by Maple Bridge" by the Tang dynasty poet Zhang Ji (fl. ca. 756). The translator takes semiotic licenses with the syntax and imagery of the source text in an attempt to rewrite the subtext and keep the translation "true to the

spirit of the originals" (*One Hundred Poems from the Chinese*: "Introduction" XI). Rexroth's version follows a near – literal translation of Zhang Ji's poem:

The moon sets[, ] the crow caws[, ] frost fills the sky, / The river[side] maples[, ] the fishermen's fires[, ] [I] sleep in face of sorrow. / Outside the city of Suzhou [is] Han Shan [Cold Mountain] Monastery, / The midnight bell comes to the traveler's boat. / The moon sets. A crow caws. / Frost fills the sky. / Maple leaves fall on the river. / The fishermen's fires keep me awake. / From beyond Su Chou / The midnight bell on Cold Mountain / Reaches as far as my little boat / (*One Hundred More Poems from the Chinese Love and the Turning Year* 64).

In restructuring the lines of the original poem Rexroth first breaks the first line into two lines consisting of three sentential units. Such restructuring highlights each of the four imageries in that line to produce a montage – like effect. He then breaks the second line into two lines, of which the first one "Maple leaves fall on the river" forms a couplet with "Frost fills the sky." Such a couplet reifies the Taoist mode of contemplating nature by looking up and down. Finally, Rexroth breaks the last two lines into three linear (but not sentential) units, each of which contains a local imagery; Su Chou, Cold Mountain, little boat. All three imageries are unified through the midnight bell into a scenic whole bearing emotional undertones. It is worth noting that Rexroth changes the referent of the imagery "Cold Mountain" from monastery to mountain ("Cold Mountain" actually refers to the 7th or 8th century Chinese Buddhist poet – monk Han Shan; and the monastery was named after him). In so doing he cleverly exploits the semiotic potential of that imagery, which helps evoke a mood of sorrow along with other imageries. While this mood is made explicit in the original poem Rexroth's version makes it conspicuous by its absence from the surface text. In this case, it seems that his semiotic licenses serve to enrich the source subtext instead of "otherizing" it.

All semiotic licenses are not subtext – friendly, however. In some cases, they can undermine the signifying economy of the source text, as is in Rexroth's translation of Wang Wei's poem "Deer Enclosure." A near – literal translation of this poem is as follows:

Empty mountain, no man is seen, / Only heard are men's  
voices echoing; / The sunlight re – enters the deep wood, / Shin-  
ing again on the green moss. /

This poem epitomizes the poetics of *yun wai zhi zhi* (literary, resonance beyond tone) and *chao yi* (literary, transcendence) developed by the Tang dynasty poet Sikong Tu (837 – 908).<sup>⑦</sup> The signifying economy of this poem is built upon a number of imagery juxtapositions, which interact to signify beyond the surface text, creating an open – ended, plural subtext in the process. In Rexroth's version, Wang Wei the poet is not only westernized but also modernized:

Deep in the mountain wilderness / Where nobody ever comes /  
Only once in a great while / Something like the sound of a far off  
voice. / The low rays of the sun / Slip through the dark forest, /  
And gleam again on the shadowy moss (Weinberger & Paz 22). /

According to Eliot Weinberger, "Rexroth ignores what he presumably dislikes, or feels cannot be translated, in the original. The title is eliminated, and the philosophical empty mountain becomes the empirical mountain wilderness" (23). As he explains further to justify the translator's licenses:

Rexroth's great skill is apparent in three tiny gestures. In line 2, by using *comes* rather than the more obvious *goes* he has created an implicit narrator – observer (i. e., "comes here where I am") without using the first person. Second, he takes an utterly ordinary phrase, *once in a great while*, and lets us hear it, for the first time, as something lovely and onomatopoeic. And third,

Rexroth's *slip for Wang's enter* is perhaps too sensual—reminiscent of Sanskrit forest trysts—but it is irresistible (23).

Weinberger's endorsement of such licenses ignores the fact that Rexroth's implicit narrator – observer usurps the sense of impersonality, which is the hallmark of Wang Wei and the quintessential of the poem's signifying economy. In his eyes "... this is clearly the first poem of the group, able to stand by itself. It is the closest to the spirit, if not the better, of the original; the poem Wang might have written had he been born a 20th century American" (23). Weinberger's view is echoed by David Hinton who tries "to recreate Tu Fu's [712 – 770] poems as new systems of uncertainty" "(r)ather than resolving the uncertainties of the originals," "as the poems he might have written had he been writing in today's English" ("Introduction" xv). From the reader's perspective, however, we expect to read Wang Wei and Du Fu in translation as they are in their own times and true selves, not Wang Wei and Du Fu as anachronisms.

While Rexroth tends to relocate Wang Wei's "Deer Enclosure" in a modern Western setting Octavio Paz chooses to enclose it in a Buddhist context. His first translation (1974) of this poem is as follows:

En la Ermita del Parque de los Venados/ No se ve gente en este monte./ Solo se oyen, lejos, voces./ Por los ramajes la luz rompe./ Tendida entre la yerba brilla verde (Weinberger & Paz 30). [In the Deer Park Hermitage. No people are seen on this mountain. / Only voices, far off, are heard. / Light breaks through the branches. / Spread among the grass it shines green.] (Weinberger & Paz 30)

Weinberger, who also discerns the shortcoming of the translation, appreciates Paz's licenses with the source text:

Paz drops empty from the first line; in the second, ... he makes the voices far off. His third line, though not strictly



literal, may be the most beautiful of all the versions: replacing the abstract *light enters the forest* with the concrete and dramatic *light breaks through the branches*—the light almost becoming the sudden illumination, *satori*, of Zen Buddhism. In the fourth line, the moss has become grass, no doubt because the Spanish word for moss, *musgo*, is unpleasantly squishy (33).

What is missing from these lovely third and fourth lines is the cyclical quality of the original. Wang begins both lines with to return: taking a specific time of day and transforming it into a moment, frozen in its recurrence, that becomes cosmic (33).

In his second translation (1978) Paz revises the last two lines, using “Western light” to reflect the Buddhist theme:

La luz poniente rompe entre las ramas./ En la yerba tendida  
brilla verde (Weinberger & Paz 33).

[... Western light breaks through the branches. / Spread  
over the grass it shines green.] (Weinberger & Paz 33)

Having read some Mahayana texts and a biography of Wang Wei, Paz decides that this is “a Buddhist nature poetry” and therefore presumes an association between Wang Wei’s setting sun and the Western Paradise (Weinberger & Paz 31). In a later version, he revises the last two lines even further; his “Western light” illuminating to zero in on the Buddhist Promised Land:

Bosque profundo. Luz poniente:/ alumbra el musgo y,  
verde, asciende (Weinberger & Paz 49). [... Western light; / it  
illuminates the moss and, green, rises.] (Weinberger & Paz  
49).

His revision is thus justified by his interpretation of the poem:

First, the western light *illuminates* the moss—in place of

reflecting it or shining on it—because the verb *illuminate* contains both the physical aspect of the phenomenon ... and the spiritual. Second: I say that the green reflection ascends or rises because I want to accentuate the spiritual character of the scene. The light of the western sun refers to the point of the horizon ruled by the Amida Buddha (Weinberger & Paz 50).

Despite his effort to expose “Deer Enclosure” to the Buddhist light, Paz oversimplifies the signifying economy of this poem, driving an otherwise open-ended, plural subtext, deer-like, into a signifying enclosure. In the original poem the subtext, like men’s voices, echoes back and forth in a signifying *mise en abyme*. In Paz’s version, however, we only hear Buddha’s single voice. In so doing he actually plays the role of the puzzle-solver rather than the translator at the cost of the textual other.

It is interesting to mention that whereas Young deconstructs the parallelism in Chinese poems Paz makes an effort to preserve it, though his effort does not necessarily help save the textual other. As he explains, In general, I have endeavored to retain the number of lines of each poem, not to scorn assonances and to respect, as much as possible, the parallelism. This last element is central to Chinese poetry, but neither Pound nor Waley gave it the attention it deserves. Nor do the other translators in English. It is a serious omission not only because parallelism is the nucleus of the best Chinese poets and philosophers: the *yin* and the *yang*. The unity that splits into duality to reunite and to divide again. I would add that parallelism links, however slightly, our own indigenous Mexican poetry with that of China (Weinberger & Paz 47).

Paz’s translation of Chinese poetry is influenced by Pound, though he “never found Pound’s theory of translating Chinese persuasive” (Weinberger & Paz 46). According to him, “though his [Pound’s] theories seemed unreliable, his practice not only convinced me but, literally, enchanted me” (Weinberger & Paz 46). Like Pound, Paz sometimes fails to re-create the subtext of a poem in the translation

when the intertextual semiotics of the source text is too intricate for him to comprehend. And this brings into question the seemingly desirable role of the poet – translator, which is often a paradoxical one. As Paz himself admits, In theory, only poets should translate poetry; in practice, poets are rarely good translators. They almost invariably use the foreign poem as a point of departure toward their own. A good translator moves in the opposite direction; his intended destination is a poem analogous although not identical to the original poem. He moves away from the poem only to follow it more closely (“Translation: Literature and Letters” 158).

As far as his translation of “Deer Enclosure” is concerned this seems to be a fitting assessment of himself. Only by fostering a semiotic awareness of intertextuality and subtextuality can the translator make the source text semiotically “at home” in the target text, wherein the textual other and the signifying economy as a whole will not be “otherized.” In his comments on Fenellosa, Pound, and the Chinese character, George Kennedy warns readers (including translators) against reading the poet’s mind in terms of their own:

Chinese poetry, like any other, is to be sung, chanted, whispered, recited, muttered. but not (God forbid!) to be deciphered. The association of ideas that results from the dissection of a given character may produce a poetic thought. But this is a new thought, and it may completely overshadow the thought that was in the mind of the writer (461).

Umberto Eco also knows better than to let the Buddhist moon strike a Romantic chord in him. As he writes, “If I read a haiku after having read some Zen Buddhist koans, I can perhaps understand why the simple mention of the moon high over the lake should give men emotions analogous to and yet different from those that an English romantic poet conveys to me” (“A Rose by Any Other Name,” *The Washington Post*).

For all our efforts toward an intertextual semiotics of translation

applicable to classical Chinese poetry the Tao of translation seems too shadowy and shapeless to reach. In classical Chinese poetry the subtext as the textual other is often antelope – like, hiding its trace from the hounds pursuit, whereas the translator is sometimes Sisyphus – like, laboring in vain to move it into the target text. Nevertheless, whether tracing the traceless antelope or laboring at the Sisyphean labor, for the dedicated translator it is always a labor of love.

#### Notes:

- ① For example, according to Shirley Staton, “In contemporary literary parlance, ‘sub – text’ refers to the hidden agenda underlying and subverting the apparent, literal text. Sub – texts occur when writers are either devious or not self – conscious enough about their basic values and assumptions” (10).
- ② It can also be defined as “the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position. Any signifying practice is a field in which various signifying systems undergo such a transposition” (Kristeva 15).
- ③ According to Franz Rosenzweig, “To translate is to serve two masters” (“The Impossibility and Necessity of Translation,” quoted by Willis Barnstone in *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1993), 83.
- ④ For example, Willis Barnstone observes that “Pound also managed to kill off the Tang poet Li Bai. By the time one sorts out Rihaku (Li Bai in Japanese), Fenollosa’s trot, and Pound’s own infusion, Li Bai is effectively dead, and Pound wins fame as the creator” (*The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* 106).
- ⑤ The character *que* is translated into “yet” in James Liu’s version in his *The Interlingual Critic: Interpreting Chinese Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982):  
On marble steps white dew grows. / Deep in the night, it soaks silk stockings. / Yet she lowers the crystal curtain— / Glittering—to gaze at the autumn moon (36).
- ⑥ For more discussions on the signification of this couplet, see Francois Cheng’s “Some Reflections on Chinese Poetic Language and Its Relation to Chinese Cosmology” in *The Vitality of the Lyric Voice: Shih Poetry from the Late Han to Tang* (Ed. Shuen – fu Lin & Stephen Owen. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1986), 43 – 44; and James Liu’s *The Interlingual Critic: Interpreting Chinese Poetry*, 97 – 98.

- ⑦ For a more detailed discussion on Sikong Tu's poetics of *yun wai zhi zhi* in relation to *chao yi*, see Da'an Pan's "Tracing the Traceless Antelope: Toward an Interartistic Semiotics of the Chinese Sister Arts" in *College Literature*, 23. 1, February 1996, 42 - 49.

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