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Four Poems by Shu Cai

Translated by Lin Hsiang-Chen, Qi Lintao and Zhao Zengtao

Led by Ouyang Yu

In early July 2012, Chinese poet Shu Cai came to Melbourne for the first time, to attend the second annual Monash University Literary Translation Winter School & Festival. Over the course of a week, three students – two from the Mainland China and one from Taiwan – selected and translated three poems by Shu Cai.

Our agreed approach was to first listen to an explanation of the poems by Shu Cai and to look at the finer linguistic points of the text before the participants embarked on their own translations. The second step was for participants to present their translations, sharing the results with each other, making comments or suggestions, and hearing comments or suggestions from Shu Cai and the workshop leader. Finally, after another round of revisions, more suggestions, comments and corrections were made. Following are some of the examples that show how the participants dealt with specific details in their translations.

One poem, selected for translation by Lin Hsiang-Chen, is titled 《去来》, which, if literally translated, is “Go Come”, and, in Shu Cai’s style of twisted meaning and rearrangement of words to bring out new meanings, is intentional. Lin rendered it as “Come and Go” which we all thought worked in English. In the case of another Shu Cai poem, titled 《这枯瘦肉身》, Qi Lintao rendered the title first as “This Vulgar Body of Mine” before he further revised it as “The Vulgar Body of Mine” after an exchange of ideas with others. As for the poem translated by Zhao Zengtao, one line, “心门可是锁着的”, is translated as “But the door of Heart is locked”. On closer examination, “Heart” could be further revised as “heart”.

All in all, the Winter School provided an excellent opportunity for the participants to work among themselves with the assistance of a poet and a translator.

去来 Come and Go

Translated by HSIANG-CHEN LIN

去哪里过夜？
去大觉寺

Where are you going to spend the night?
To the Great Awakening Temple

来这里干吗？
来大觉寺

Why do you come here?
To the Great Awakening Temple

大觉寺无门
自然也无进出

There is no gate at Great Awakening Temple
So come in and go out as you like

大觉寺有门
自然也有石榴

There is a gate at Great Awakening Temple
So naturally guava trees are living there

还没有来
怎么就去了？

How can I come if you have already left there?
How can you know if I haven't even said it?

还没有说
怎么就懂了？

When our talk goes deep
The night gradually gone away

说话说到深处
夜渐渐就去了

When you get to the bottom of something
The answer comes by itself for sure

问题问个究竟
答案真的来了

Argue what argue? Debate in what ways?
Debate what debate? Argue about what?

去哪里去？
来何处来？

Circle around the Stupa three times
Come and go, come and go, come and go

争什么争？
论如何论？

Left side goes left foot with 'Go-Buddha' Ruqu
Right side goes right foot with 'Come-Buddha'
Tathagata

绕舍利塔三匝
去来去来去来

Despite all the comings and goings
The Great Awakening Temple, is not yet, awakened.

左脚比如去
右脚比如来

任你去又来
大觉寺不觉

这枯瘦肉身 The Vulgar Body of Mine

Translated by QI LINTAO

我该拿这枯瘦肉身
怎么办呢？

What should I do with
this vulgar body of mine?

答案或决定权
似乎都不在我手中。

Neither the answer nor the decision
seems to be resting in my hands.

手心空寂，如这秋风
一吹，掌纹能不颤动？

Empty and solitary is my hand-heart, like the wind in
autumn,
once blown, can the palm-lines not tremble?

太阳出来一晒，
落叶们都服服帖帖。

As soon as the sun emerges and shines,
the fallen leaves would be reduced to submission.

牵挂这尘世，只欠
一位母亲的温暖——

All the reason for my lingering in this dust-world, is
the dream for the warmth from a mother, which,

比火焰低调，比爱绵长，
挽留这枯瘦肉身。

less flaunt than flame yet larger than love,
retains this vulgar body of mine.

任你逃到哪里，房屋
仍把你囚于四墙。

Wherever you run, the room
still traps you in the jail of its walls.

只好看天，漫不经心，
天色可由不得你。

I end up having to look at the sky, casually,
but the colours of the sky are not your choice.

走着出家的路，
走着回家的路……

Taking the road away from home,
taking the road back home...

我该拿什么来比喻
我与这枯瘦肉身的关系呢？

What can I use to describe the relationship
between this vulgar body of mine and myself?

一滴水？不。一片叶？
不。一朵云？也不！

A drop of water? No. A leaf?
No. A cloud? No!

也许只是一堆干柴，
落日未必能点燃它，

Possibly, only a bundle of dry wood,
which may not be lit by the setting sun,

但一个温暖的眼神，
没准就能让它烧起来，

but may be set alight by,
a warm looking.

烧成灰，烧成尘，
沿着树梢，飞天上去……

Burn to ashes, burn to dusts,
and fly over the treetop, high into the sky ...

酒杯空空如也 A Dry Liquor Cup

Translated by ZENGTAO ZHAO

酒啊酒在哪里拿酒来
杯中酒干了我们就各自回家
空空的大街会送你的
空空的天上你说除了星星还有什么
什么你说天上还有几位神仙
那准是一群摇摇晃晃的酒鬼
他们会醉倒在回家的路上
以为空空的大街就是家

Alas! wine and liquor,
where is the cup?
Fetch me more, I need more!
Dry the cup
and then go back home
individually,
Now the empty streets will see you off,
And in the empty skies any other things
besides the stars?
What?
fairies in the Heavenly Palace?
Must be a gang of swaying drunkards!
Falling down upon the streets on the
way back home,
And regarding the streets as their cosy
beds.

打开你的心 Open Your Heart

Translated by ZENGTAO ZHAO

打开你的心—
你想干什么？
心门可是锁着的，
你没有钥匙。
打开你的心—
凭什么打开它？
门本来就开着，
你想进来就进来呗。
打开你的心—
你是在念咒吗？
心是能打开的吗？
心急跳着问你。
首先它是心脏，
它是一个泵把血
输送给大脑和肢体。
什么你指的不是那颗心？
那你指的是哪一颗？
难道一个人有两颗心？
一颗红心两种准备？
打开你的心—
真打开你受得了吗？
万一里面关着东北虎呢？
万一里面什么都没有
只有一口呼吸怎么办？
打开你的心—
呵我明白了—
你是说竖起我的耳朵
你有心里话要跟我说？
我的心像一只碗，
我的心像一池水，
我的心像那月亮，
有时也像太白金星，
就在眼前就是看不见。
我的心我能听见，
我的心它在急跳，
我的心它像一只鸟，
我的心它像一阵风，
它早飞走了，
早飞进虚无之乡了。
打开你的心—
你别这么命令我好吗！
你命令你自己吧。
你打开你自己的心，
让我们瞧一瞧，
让我们听一听，

Open your heart—
What do you want?
But the door of Heart is locked,
And there are no keys for you.
Open your heart—
Why do you want to open it?
The door is always open.
Come in, if you want.
Open your heart—
Are you chanting a mantra?
Can the heart be opened?
Says my wildly beating heart.
First it is a heart,
A pump, propelling the blood
To brains and four limbs.
What! This is not the heart you refer to?
Then which one?
Does that mean one has two hearts?
Or “a red heart has to prepare for the
worst
and the best”?
Open your heart—
But could you bear it if the heart were
opened?
What if a northeast tiger were trapped in
it?
What if nothing were in it at all,
But a puff of breath?
Open your heart—
Oh, I see—
You want me to have my ears pricked,
And tell me your innermost thoughts.
My heart is like a bowl,
My heart is like a pond of water,
My heart is like the Moon,
And my heart is like the So White Gold
Star,

看它是红的还是黑的，
听它在跳动还是在瞌睡，
打开你的心——
心打开再缝上，
心就不完整了。

So close that I can't see it.
My heart, I can hear,
My heart, beating wildly,
My heart, is like a bird,
My heart, is like a blast of wind.
It has long flown away,
Flying into the Erewhon.
Open your heart——
Stop ordering me like that, OK?
Order yourself instead.