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Rong Rong's 圓規 in English Translation

CONNIE GUANG PAN
Central Queensland University

A poem is not merely a sequence of words, carefully structured and cleverly ordered. It has a personality; it feels as we do. Each poem has a distinctive character, temperament and outlook. Some poems are candid and open, others more reticent. Some are impulsive and reckless, others more evenly tempered.

Rong Rong's poems have been likened to those by the "Misty Poets" (朦朧詩人), a group of 20th century Chinese poets renowned for embracing realism and intentionally obscure writing styles. However, I find Rong Rong's work more animated, teeming with a child-like vivacity that interweaves through and enlivens the melancholic undertones. Rong Rong has an uncanny ability to capture the essence of everyday experiences and encounters.

Translating Rong Rong's poem was not merely an exercise of converting one set of words into an equivalent one. It required new words that would produce an equivalent personality, mood and aura, complete with the same slippery idiosyncrasies that only the most intimate of friends see. The translator must therefore not merely read and ponder the poem, but befriend it, listen to its stories, build trust in it and wait for it to confide in him or her. And, like the development of any friendship, the process is an unpredictable and potentially protracted one, often emotionally draining but invariably rewarding. It took ten minutes to read through Rong Rong's poem, but more than ten days to get to know it.

The best of friends celebrate your triumphs and share your disappointments – they laugh and cry with you. To convey the feelings contained in Rong Rong's poem, I had to first feel them myself; to truly feel them in all their ardency and anguish. I revelled in weightless bliss with my floral skirt floating in the wind. With that once-upon-a-time sentiment in mind, “有一天突然回到]从前” inspired the opening of a fairy tale, so I chose “the beginning”, although it might have been literally closer to “the past”. Later on, my forehead crumpled in silent frustration, cajoled into circling in perpetual incarceration. In this angst-ridden predicament, I chose the more active and damaging word, “turbulent” for “紊亂[的梦成了暗伤]”, although it might be more commonly understood as “disordered”.

In the end, did they find happiness, or at least some form of contented compromise? Did she convince him that commitment was both necessary and desirable, or merely entrap him by the unbearable weight of her affections? Only a few words divide forbearance from helplessness, devotion from defeated submission.

People remain enigmas; we cherish them all the same. So too, do poems, and we cherish them more for it.

圓規
作者榮榮

依赖 就是他是她的左脚而
她是他的右脚
就是一个围着另一个

就是想一直前行
有一天突然回到从前
呵 多么奢侈的从前

——两只恩爱的走兽
她的被风掀开的碎花裙
他细腻而微凉的指尖

但现实绝不会那么规则
当他们尽可能地圆满
当两个人好得像一个人

——夜晚开始变得冷清
紊乱的梦 成了暗伤
他想走得更远 而她在坚守

“我仿佛在原地打转……”
“难道开始就意味着结束？……”
一个句号在行程里被无数次藏匿

Compass
By Rong Rong
Translated by Connie Guang Pan

Dependency, as if he was her left foot
And she his right foot
As if one revolved around the other

As if moving forward
Then one day, all of a sudden, returning to
the beginning
Oh, what a lush beginning

– two tender creatures
Her wind-blown ruffled floral skirt
His elegant cool fingertips

But the reality is rarely so harmonious
When they try to achieve unison
When the two are as if one

– the nights begin to dull
Turbulent dreams produce invisible injuries
He walks a little farther and she stays still

“I seem to be circling in the same spot,
Could the start really equate to the
endpoint?”
A full stop obscured by countless orbits