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Rong Rong's 圓規 in English Translation

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This poem by Rong Rong was not difficult to render into English, given that the imagery evoked here – the compass, an instrument used for drawing circles, representing two lovers in unison – is not unfamiliar to readers of Western poetry. The Italian poet Giovanni Battista Guarini (1538–1612) for instance, wrote the following lines:

I am ever with you,
agitated, but fixed,
and if I steal my lesser part from you, I leave my greater.
I am like the compass,
Fixing one foot in you as in my center:
the other endures the circlings of fortune
but can by no means fail to circle around you

(Guss 74)

A better-known example comes from John Donne's (1573-1631) *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*. In this poem, the English poet declares that since the lovers' two souls are of one, like two legs of a compass, their temporary separation is simply an expansion of their love, where one foot will eventually come home:

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to airy thinness beat.
If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fixed root, makes no show
To move, but doth, if thí other do.
And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home

(Gardner 187-8, lines 25-32)

Here, Donne ends his poem without imagining a real afterlife for his lovers. For him, as long as one leg stays firm, the lover's reunion is as natural as the innocent movements of the heavenly spheres: "Thy firmness makes my circle just/ And makes me end, where I begun" (Gardner 187-8, lines 35-6).

The last two stanzas of Rong Rong's poem breaks away from Donne's idealism by drawing a realistic and painful closure to the compass metaphor. When love has faded, the balanced, symmetrical, and natural movements of a compass become nothing but a symbol of boundaries, rules, conformity, and repetition. Liberation can only be won if one dares to break away from the circular movement of a compass and starts anew.

Bibliography

Guss, Donald L. *John Donne, Petrarchist: Italianate Conceits and Love Theory in the Songs and Sonets*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1966.

Donne, John. "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning". Ed. Helen Gardner. *The New Oxford of English Verse 1250-1950*. London: Oxford University Press, 1975.

圓規

作者榮榮

依賴 就是他是她的左腳而
她是他的右腳
就是一個圍著另一個

就是想一直前行
有一天突然回到從前
呵 多麼奢侈的從前

——兩隻恩愛的走獸
她的被風掀開的碎花裙
他細膩而微涼的指尖

但現實絕不會那麼規則
當他們盡可能地圓滿
當兩個人好得像一個人

——夜晚開始變得冷清
紊亂的夢 成了暗傷
他想走得更遠 而她在堅守

“我仿佛在原地打轉……”
“難道開始就意味著結束？……”
一個句號在行程裡被無數次藏匿

Compass

By Rong Rong

Translated by Annie Luman Ren

Dependence is when he becomes her left
foot and she his right foot,
It is when one encompasses another

Wishing to travel forward like this until
one day, suddenly returning to the past
Oh How excessive the past was

—Two creatures in love
Her floral skirt uplifted by the wind
His soft and slightly cold finger tips

Yet reality never obeys any rules
When they formed a complete circle
When two people appeared to be one

—The night becomes desolate
Tangled dreams
turn into secret wounds,
He wants to venture farther
while she holds fast

“It is as if I am moving in a circle...”
“Is it true that the starting point also
signifies the end?...”
A full stop obscured within the journey over
and over again