Selected Poems and Essays by Wen Yiduo

Wen Yiduo
Red Candle

In tears of wax the candle melts
— Li Shangyin (813-858)

Red candle!
So red a candle!
Ah, poet,
Pour out your heart
And let us see which is brighter.

Red candle,
Who made your wax — gave you form?
Who lit the fire — kindled the soul?
Why must your wax burn away
Before you can give light?
Here is some mistake;
Some contradiction, strife!

Red candle,
There is no mistake;
Your light must come from “burning,”
This is Nature’s way.

Red candle,
Being made, burn!
Burn on and on
Till men's dreams are destroyed by your flame,
Till men's blood seethes in your flame;
And save their souls,
Break down their prison walls!

Red candle,
The day that your heart's fire gives light
Your tears start flowing.

Red candle,
The craftsman who made you
Made you for burning.
Now that you are burning,
Why shed bitter tears?
Ah, I can guess,
The cruel wind has meddled with your light,
When your flame wavers
You shed tears of anguish.

Red candle,
Weep! Weep on!
Let your wealth of wax
Flow, unstinted, out to men,
To grow flowers of comfort,
To bear fruit of joy.

Red candle,
Red Candle

With each tear shed you lose heart,
Disheartenment and tears are your fruit,
The creation of life your cause.

Red candle,
Never mind the harvest — till the soil!

Translated by Gladys Yang
Snow

Night has scattered countless furry flowers from heaven,
Woven them into a big feathery cloak,
And gently wrapped the weary world
From head to toe,
Adding a shroud on the corpse.

She buries the fish-scaled roofs,
But not the thin threads of blue smoke rising from atop.
Ah! The twisting threads of blue smoke!
As a poet's ascending soul,
After filtering through its own body,
Goes straight toward heaven.

The strutting wind and frost batter the earth;
In the forest the shivering masses, after long battles,
At last see her white feathery cloak,
And yell together with glee;
"Peace has come; our struggle has succeeded!
Isn't this the white flag of night's surrender?"

Translated by Gloria Rogers
February Hut

Facing a screen of faint mountains and clear waters,
Perched on the edge of chessboard rice paddies,
A tile-roofed hut that watches the movements on the chessboard
Is clutched in the fist of little knolls:

A square pond asleep under the willows;
Clever swallows — singing,
They found this spot, of all places, to listen to the echo
From the water's face to correct their own tunes.

Swallows! Did you heard that spell of cold rain last night?
A message from the west wind urges you to go home.
After this year, will it still be you
Who make annual return next year and the year after?
Ah, your little explosive sounds
Burst with what irrepressible ancient sorrows!
Pitiful birds, whom are you trying to tell?
Don't you know that this heart is also broken?

Translated by Catherine Yi-yu Cho Woo
Retrospection

Nine-year life at Qinghua —
When I look back —
Within miles of desert under an autumnal night,
Appears like a firefly;
The more you look at it, the brighter it gets.
All around is darkness, confusing, unfathomable, bleak.
This was spring’s end when red fades but green prospers:
Now by the lotus pond —
Under the heavy silence pressing on the water
The surface could not even make wrinkles —
Complete dead quietude!
Suddenly the spirit of silence retreated,
The mirror shattered,
All began to breathe.
Look! The sun's smiling flames — a spear of golden light,
Filtering through the leaves,
Fell on my forehead.
Now Xihe(1) has put a crown on me,
I am the king of the entire universe!

Translated by Gloria Rogers

(1) The charioteer of the sun.

Retrospection

九年底清华底生活.
回头一看——
是秋夜里一片沙漠,
却露着一颗萤火,
越迈进光明.
四围是迷茫莫测的黄昏黑暗.
这是红绿绿娇的黄昏时节;
如今到了荷池——
寂静底重量正压著池水
连面皮也皱不动——
一片死静！
忽地里静灵退了，
镜子碎了，
个个都踏气了。
看！太阳底笑脸——道金光，
滤过树髵，洒在我额上，
如今椰和著我加冕了，
我是全宇宙底王！
Rotten Fruit

My rotten flesh has long been gnawed at by black bugs.
Lying on the cold and prickly moss,
I might as well let the rot set in deeper
Until it penetrates my armor
And breaks open my prison.
My pent-up soul will then,
Wearing a pea-green vest,
Jump out with a smile.

Translated by Gloria Rogers
Confession

I don't deceive you, I am no poet,
Though I adore the integrity of the white gem,
The green pine, the vast sea,
The setting sun on the crow's back
And the dusk woven with the wings of bats.
You know I love heroes and towering peaks,
A national flag fluttering in the wind,
Chrysanthemums from tender yellow to antique bronze
Remember that my food is a pot of bitter tea!

But will it scare you to know that other me?
Whose fly-like thoughts crawl in the garbage can.

Translated by Catherine Yi-yu Cho Woo
Perhaps
—a funeral song

Perhaps you are really too tired from crying;
Perhaps, perhaps you need a little sleep.
Then, tell the owl not to cough,
Frogs not to croak, bats not to fly:

Let the bright sun not fall on your eyes,
The clear breeze not brush your brows;
Let no one wake you.
Holding this umbrella of pine shade,
I shall guard your sleep.

Perhaps you can hear earthworms turning the soil,
Little grass roots sucking water;
Perhaps the music of these sounds you can hear,
Far prettier than man’s cursing.

Then keep your eyes shut tightly;
I'll let you sleep, let you sleep.
Gently I'll cover you with yellow earth
And tell the paper money to slowly drift.

Translated by Catherine Yi-yu Cho Woo
The Stagnant Ditch

This is a ditch of hopeless, stagnant water
No breeze can ruffle;
Better-throw in more junk and scrap,
Pour in slops and garbage.

Brass may take on an emerald patina,
Tin cans may rust in a pattern of peach petals;
Let scum weave a gauzy veil over the whole
And bacteria generate evening clouds.

Let the stagnant water ferment, become green wine,
Flecked with white foam like pearls;
The sniggering of small pearls makes large pearls
To be bitten and broken by bibulous mosquitoes.

Thus such a ditch of hopeless, stagnant water
May boast a certain novelty;
And if lonely frogs break the silence,
To all intents the stagnant water is singing.
The Stagnant Ditch

This is a ditch of hopeless, stagnant water; This, beyond doubt, is no abode of Beauty; Better let the Demon of Ugliness plough it up And see what he can make of it.

Translated by Gladys Yang
Quiet Night.

This lamplight, these light-blanced four walls,
This kindly table and chairs, intimate like friends,
This scent of old books wafting over
This genial teacup as stainless as a virgin;
The baby sucking contentedly at its mother's breast,
The snores that announce the good health of my son...
This is the mysterious quiet night, this perfect peace,
Songs of thanks quiver in my throat.
But these songs soon turn to curses.
Oh, quiet night, I cannot accept your bribes.
Why should I treasure your walled-in square foot of calm?
My world is infinitely wider.
Since the four walls cannot shut out the sound of war,
How can you stop the beats of my heart?
Better that my mouth be filled with sand and mud
Than to sing the joy and pain of the self;
Better let the moles dig holes in your head,
Let the vermin feed on your flesh and blood
Than to survive for only a cup of wine, a book of verse;
Or for an evening of quiet ease brought by time,
Unable to hear the moans and groans of our neighbors,
Unable to see the trembling shadows of widows and orphans,
Quiet Night

The convulsions in the battle trenches, the crazed biting their sickbeds,
And all the tragedies ground out under the millstone of existence.
Bliss! I cannot accept your bribes now!
My world is not confined within this walled-in space.
Listen, there goes another round of artillery,
Another roar of Death.
Oh quiet night! How you stop my pounding heart from beating!

Translated by Julia Lin
One Concept

You, an eternal mystery, a beautiful myth,
You persistently question. You, a flash of golden light,
An intimate meaning, a burst of flame,
An elusive cry from afar . . . Oh, what are you?
I don't doubt; I trust the law of causality.
I know the ocean is ever true to its spray,
Since it is the cadence, then don't blame the song.
Ah, you untamable spirit; you have overcome me.
You have vanquished me. You the resplendent rainbow—
The memories of over 5,000 years, please don't move!
All I ask now is how to hold you tightly . . .
You, so barbaric, yet so utterly beautiful!

Translated by Julia Lin
Discovery

I've come, I shout, bursting out in tears of woe,
"This is not my China — Oh, no! No!"
I've come because I heard your summoning cry.
Riding on the wind of time, raising a torch high,
I came. I knew not this to be unwarranted ecstasy.
A nightmare I found. You? How could this be!
This is terror, a bad dream over the brim of an abyss,
But not you, not what my heart continues to miss!
I ask heaven, ask the winds of all directions.
I ask (my fist pounding the naked chest of the earth)
But there is no answer. In tears I call and call you
Until my heart leaps out — ah, here you are!

Translated by Kai-yu Hsu
One Sentence

There is one sentence that can light fire,
Or, when spoken, bring dire disasters.
Don't think that for five thousand years nobody has said it.
How can you be sure of a volcano's silence?
Perhaps one day, as if possessed by a spirit,
Suddenly out of the blue sky a thunder
Will explode:
"This is our China!"

How am I to say this today?
You may not believe that "the iron tree will bloom."
But there is one sentence you must hear!
Wait till the volcano can no longer be quiet,
Don't tremble, or shake your head, or stamp your feet,
Just wait till out of the blue sky a thunder
Will explode:
"This is our China!"

Translated by Kai-yu Hsu
The Deserted Village

Where did they go? How has it come to pass?
On stoves squat frogs, in ladies' lilies bloom;
Tables and chairs float in fields and water ponds;
Rope-bridges of spiderwebs span room on room.
Coffins are wedged in doorways, rocks block windows;
A sight of strange gloom that rends my heart.
Scythe lies rusting away in dust,
Fishing nets, abandoned, rot in ash-piles.
Heavens, even such a village cannot retain them,
Where roses forever smile, and lily leaves grow as big as umbrellas;
Where rice sprouts are so slender, the lake so green,
The sky so blue, and the birds' songs so like dew-pearls.
Who made the sprouts green and the flowers red?
Whose sweat and blood is it that is blended in the soil?
Those who have gone left so resolutely, unhesitatingly.

荒 村

“……往准安梁園鎮一百八十里之距離，
已完全斷絕人煙。汽車道兩旁之村落，所有居民，逃過一空。農民之家具木器，均以絳相連，
沉于附近水塘稻田中，以避火焚。門窗俱无，中
以棺材或石堆塞。一至夜間，则灯火全无。婦
火尽等覓食野間，亦無人看守。而向有玫瑰芍
药競相隔自開。新出稻秧，翠綠宜人。草木无
知，其斯之謂也?”
——民国十六年五月十九日《新闻报》

他们都上哪里去了？怎么
虾蟇蹲在瓶上，水裡里开白莲；
桌椅板凳在田里埋里飘着；
蜘蛛的网络从东屋往西屋穿？
门框里嵌棺材，窗棂里镶石块！
这景象是多么古怪多么惨！
镰刀让它锈着快锈成了泥，
抛着整个的鱼网在灰堆里烂。
天呀！这样的村庄都留不住他们！
玫瑰开不完，荷叶长成了伞；
秧针这样尖，湖水这样绿。
天这样长，鸟声到得珠样圆。
这秧是怎样绿的，花儿谁叫红的？
这泥里和着谁的血，谁的汗？
What was their grievance, their secret wish?
Now, somebody must tell them: "Here the hogs
Roam the streets, ducks waddle among the pigs,
Roosters trample on the peony, and cows browse on vegetable patches."
Tell them: "The sun is down, yet the cattle are still on the hills.
Their black silhouettes pause on the ridge, waiting,
While the mountains around, like dragons and tigers,
Close in on them. They glance about and shiver.
Bowing their heads, too frightened to look again."
This, too, you must tell them: "These beasts recall days of old
When evening chill approached and poplars trembled in the wind,
They only needed to call once from the hilltop.
Though the trails were steep, their masters would help them,
And accompanying them home there would be the scent of hay.
As they think thus, their tears fall.
And they huddle together, jowl against jowl."
Go, tell their masters, tell them.
Tell them everything, do not hide anything.
Ask them to return! Ask them to return!
Ask them why they do not care for their own cattle.
Don't they know that these beasts are like children?
Poor creatures, so pitiful, so frightened.
Hey, where are you, messenger?
Hurry now, tell them — tell Old Wang the Third,
Tell the Eldest Zhou and all his eight brothers,
Tell all the farm hands living around the Linhuai Gate,
Tell also that red-faced blacksmith Old Li,
Tell Old Woman Huang and all the village women,
Tell them all these things, one by one.
Tell them to come back, come back!
My heart is torn by this sight of gloom.
Heavens, such a village cannot retain these people,
Such a paradise on earth without a man!

Translated by Kai-yu Hsu
Sins

The old man fell down with his load,
White apricots and red cherries scattered all over.
The old man got up muttering incessantly,
"I know my sins today!"
"Your hands are bleeding, old man. Look!"
"Oh, no! All crushed! Good cherries!"

"Old man, are you well?
Why are you staring at me without a word?"
"I know my sins today!
Early this morning my son kept hurrying me.
My son, still in bed, got mad;
He scolded me for not yet leaving the city."

"I knew it was getting late,
I didn't realize I overslept,
Now what am I going to do, going to do?
What will the whole family eat?"
The old man picks them up and lets them go;
White apricots and red cherries scattered all over.

Translated by Gloria Rogers
The Laundryman's Song

The most common trade for Chinese in the United States is laundering, hence Chinese students there are often asked: "Is your father a laundryman?"

(One piece, two pieces, three,
Mind you wash them white!
(Four, five, that's six in all,
Mind you iron them right!

Lavash clean all your handkerchiefs soaked with grief,
I wash white all your shirts black with crime;
All the grease of your greed, the grey ashes of lust,
All your family's filth, all its grime —
Give me to wash, give me to wash!

Oh, the money it reeks and the blood it smells rank.
Till your clothes are too filthy to wear.
All too soon the clean laundry is dirtied again,
But long-suffering Chinks — they don't care!
Bring me your wash! Bring me your wash!

If you say that a laundryman's job is low-class,
Are the low folk all Chinamen, pray?

English-Chinese

Chinese-English

现代文学系列

现代文学
The Laundryman's Song

Translated by Gladys Yang
The Metric Structure of Poetry

If the "theory of instinct for entertainment" can sufficiently explain the origin of the arts, we can very well compare the composing of poems to the playing of chess. A chess game cannot be played by abandoning rules. Similarly, poetry cannot abandon the metric frame. (By metric frame, I mean "form." The two words "metric frame" have lately acquired a bit of derogatory meaning. Yet a straight translation of "form" into "shape" or "pattern" is not appropriate either. Besides, if we think of form and rhythm as one entity, we may then feel the translation of form into metric frame no longer inappropriate.) Suppose you pick up the chessmen and scatter them around completely out of order, see if you can get any entertainment out of it! The fun of a chess game lies in winning with surprise moves within its rules. The delight in versification is the same. If poetry could be written without a metric frame, wouldn't it be easier to write poems than to play chess, a ball game or mahjong? It is no wonder nowadays that new poems shoot up more readily than bamboo shoots after a spring rain. I know there must be people who do not like to hear such talk. But Professor Bliss Perry's comments appear to be even more rigid. He says that

---

1. First appeared in the "Literary Supplement of Beijing Chengbao (Peking Morning News), May 13, 1926."
few poets would admit that they were indeed bound by forms and rules. They are willing to dance with shackles on. Furthermore, they are wearing the shackles made by other poets.

With such words out, I can certainly say that many will jump up and protest, "If that is poetry, I would rather quit writing. Would that be all right?" Honestly, I personally feel that it is quite all right for such people to quit writing poetry. Anyway, such a person is not prepared to wear shackles. Consequently, his poems will not attain any high level of achievement. Du Fu (712-770) had a word of experience well worth our reflection: "As I grow old, the more refined becomes my metric structure."

The revolutionaries of the poetic realm shout, "Return to nature!" In fact, they should know that the forms and rules of nature, though subtle like the spiders' threads or horses' hoof prints, are nevertheless discoverable. However, the forms and rules of nature by themselves are unsatisfactory more often than not: It is therefore necessary for art to provide a supplement. Accordingly, absolute realism means the bankruptcy of art. Oscar Wilde (1856-1900) says it very well, "The end of nature is the start of art." Nature is not all beauty. When nature is beautiful, it takes after art. The best way to prove the point is to use the art of sculpture as an example. We often praise the beauty of mountains and rivers, claiming that they are suitable to be brought into paintings. Indeed, the mountains and rivers regarded as being beautiful by the Chinese are measured against the standard of whether they look like Chinese landscape paintings. The perception of female beauty before the European Renaissance as evidenced by early paintings

没有诗人承认他们真正给诗格套上了。他们乐意戴这脚镣跳舞，并且要戴上个诗人的脚镣。"

这一段话传出来，我又断定许多人会跳起来，喊着“就算它是诗，我不做了行不行?”老实说，我自己的意思以为这种人不作诗也可以，反正他不打算来戴脚镣，他的诗也就做不到怎样高明的地方去。杜工部有一句经验语很值得我们揣摩的“老去厮于诗律细”。

诗国里的革命家喊道“返回自然!”其实他们要知道自然界的诗格，虽然有些像蛛丝马迹，但是依然可以找得出来。不过自然界的诗格不圆润的时候多，所以必须艺术来补充它。这样讲来，绝对的写实主义便是艺术的破产。“自然的终点便是艺术的起点，”王尔德说得很对。自然并不尽是美的。自然中有美的时候，是自然类似艺术的时候。最好拿造型艺术来证明这一点。我们常常称赞美的山水，讲它可以入画。的确中国人认为美的山水，是以像不像中国的山水画做标准的。欧洲文艺复兴以前所认为女性的美，从当时的绘画里可以证明，同现代女性
was entirely different from the modern perception. But modern perception complies with female beauty as exhibited in Greek sculptures. This is because the unearthing of Greek sculptures brought about the Renaissance. Ever since the Renaissance, all artistic renderings of female beauty utilize Greek sculptures as models. Consequently, the concept of female beauty has been changed among the Europeans. I have found a similar view in a poem by Zhao Oubei:

The verisimilitude of a landscape in a basin pot where green hills meet,
Wedging into the empyrean, stone shoots dot the river bend.
Even Nature's artisan loves to turn out new modes,
Contrarily making the real mountains imitate the artificial ones.

This is outright speaking of nature imitating art. Of course, nature is never absolutely without beauty. We can discover beautiful objects in nature. But those are occasional. Occasionally, we discover something like poetic cadences and rhythms in daily language. Some then would go so far as to say that daily language is poetry. They would thus destroy the poetic cadences and rhythms and demand that poetry become the same as daily language. This is truly a suicidal policy for poetry. (Notice that I am not against the use of the vernacular in composing poems.) Besides, I believe that the vernacular and dialectal languages occupy a piece of very fertile land in our realm of new poetry. We shall wait for the future to carefully discuss the reasons. Our present concern is merely that...
the vernacular and dialects can be used to compose poems. The word "compose" implies clearly that the vernacular and dialectal languages have to undergo scrutiny and tempering before being turned into poetry. The capability of poetry to raise feelings lies completely in rhythms and cadences that are metric frames. In Shakespeare's plays, when the emotions rise to passionate heights, these feelings are accompanied by use of rhymes. Goethe utilized a similar method in composing his Faust. He even mentions this in a letter to Schiller! Han Yu (768-824) commented, "When it comes to restricted rhyme schemes, one should not slacken to those forms. Because of difficulties, dexterity emerges. The more hazardous the more spectacular..." From this angle, I suspect that the more prowess a writer has, the more he is going to dance to his heart's fill and dance better with shackles on. Only those who do not know what poetry is would feel the bondage of metric frames. For those who do not know how to write a poem, metric frames become hindrances to expression. To true writers, metric frames are the cutting edges in expression.

There are also those who uphold the banner of romanticism when they attack metric frames. To such people, I have only to point out one fact: When they talk about so-called romanticism as they do now, they are really acknowledging the fact that they are not sincerely interested in creating art and literature. Because, in light of their work, they have basically ceased to pay attention to art and literature per se. Their goal is merely to reveal themselves. The narcissist youths, each and everyone of them, all consider that there can never be anything more perfect than their own moral be-

"做"字便说明了土白须要一番锻炼选择的工作，然后才能成诗。诗的所以能激发起感，完全在它的节奏，节奏便是格律。莎士比亚的诗剧里往往遇见情绪紧张到万份的时候，便用的语来描写。欧福作《浮士德》也曾用同类的手段，在他致席勒的信里并且提到了这一层。韩昌黎“得窄的则不复外饰，而因难见巧，愈险愈奇……”这样看来，恐怕越有魄力的作家，越是要跳着脚便跳舞才跳得痛快，跳得好。只有不会跳舞的才怪脚踏破事，只有不会作诗的才觉得格律的束缚。对于不会作诗的，格律是表现的障碍物，对于一个作家，格律便成了表现的器具。

又有一种打着浪漫主义的旗帜来向格律下攻击令的人。对于这种人，我只要告诉他们一件事。如果他们要是现在这样的讲什么浪漫主义，就等于承认他们没有创造文艺的诚意。因为，照他们的成绩看来，他们压根儿就没有注重到文艺的本身，他们目的只在披露他们自己的原形。顾影自怜的青年们一个个都以为自身的人格是再美没有的，只要把这个赤裸裸的
ings. If they can present all of their moral selves nakedly, they will then score a great success in art and literature. Haven't you heard of their daily chanting of "self expression?" Indeed, they have only known the raw materials of art and literature. They have failed to recognize the essential tools to change raw materials into art and literature. It is only accidental that they use written words as tools for expression. Their most satisfying task is to expose the "self." It is to let the world know that "I" myself am also a talented, versatile, feeling and sensitive youth. And in the mirror of art and literature, there is the reflection of one's dashing self. There are also a few drops of sentimental tears. My, oh my! What an interesting thing that is! How romantic! That's right, what they call romanticism is exactly being romantic on this particular point. There is absolutely nothing to do with artistic or literary schools. Since the concerns of these people are not with art and literature, it is entirely unrealistic to expect them to write poetry according to metric frames. Because of the restrictions of metric frames, they can no longer write poetry. Wouldn't that be like losing their inclination for "narcissist self appreciation?" Strictly speaking, it is all right to regard such pseudo-romantic works as monkey shows or kaleidoscopic displays, but they should never be regarded as poetry. It is therefore pointless to talk about metric frames with them. Let them raise objections to forms and rules. There is no longer any value in debating.

In the above, we have mentioned that metric frames mean "forms." Can there still be art without "form?" In the above, we have also mentioned that metric frames are actually cadences and rhythms. In regard to this, we can understand all the more the importance of forms to poets.
portance of metric frames. Essays have relatively simple cadences and rhythms, but there can never be true poems without developed cadences and rhythms. Basically poetry has never departed from metric frames or cadences and rhythms. These are fundamental principles that no one has ever doubted. But nowadays whatever fundamental principles there are to be proven in order to be established, isn’t it so? But why is this all happening? Does everyone believe that poetry can function without metric frames? Perhaps there is a spirit of “anarchism,” perhaps there is a fascination for the fashionable, perhaps there is the disposition to be lazy, perhaps there is the psychology of trying to hide shortcomings, and so on. I don’t really know.

We have, in the above, lightly touched upon why poetry should not get rid of metric frames. Now it is the time to analyze the nature of metric frames. On the surface, metric frames can be discussed under two aspects: firstly, pertaining to the visual and, secondly, pertaining to the auditory. In fact, these two aspects should not be discussed separately because they are correlated every bit of the way. For example, the metric frames relating to the visual aspect include the symmetry of beats and the balance of lines. Those relating to the auditory aspect include forms, metres, even and oblique tones, and rhymes. Yet without forms, there will be no symmetry of beats; without metres, there can be no balance of the lines.

Concerning the problems of forms, metres, even and oblique tones, rhymes and others the two articles on “The Metrics of the New Poetry” by Rao Mengkan that appeared in this issue of the
journal (the “Literary Supplement” of the Beiping Chenbao) have already provided detailed and precise discussions. However, he has only discussed them from the perspective of the auditory. As for the two problems concerning the visual, he has not yet discussed them. Of course, problems concerning the visual remain relatively secondary in importance. But in Chinese literature specifically, one should not ignore the visual aspect because our script is hieroglyphical. When we Chinese come to appreciate literature and art, at least half the impressions are transmitted through the eyes. Basically, literature is a form of art that occupies space and time. Although a written language may occupy space, it may not necessarily induce images. This is the failure of the European languages. The Chinese script possesses the possibility of inducing images. It is indeed a pity if we don’t take advantage of this quality. Accordingly the adoption of the Western method in dividing verse lines is of considerable significance. Whether the first Chinese poet who first used this technique did it deliberately or not, we should all be very grateful to him. Because of his discovery, we begin to understand that the power of poetry does not only flow from the beauty of music (beats), the beauty of painting (words), but also from the beauty of structure (the symmetry of beats and the balance of lines). Thus, the new poetry has enormously added to its power and range by adopting this technique. If anyone should ask what would be the special feature of the new poetry, we could answer that the ability to add to the existing structures of Chinese poetry, thereby enhancing its emotional appeal, is one of the special features of the new poetry.
Recently there seem to be quite a number of writers having doubts about the symmetry of beats and the balance of lines. They regard these as signs of restoring the ancient tradition. It is indeed unfortunate to be part of the ancients, especially to be the ancients of the Republic of China. How weird! Confucius nowadays has lost not only his title of “sage” or “master” but also his own name or courtesy name. Now people only refer to him as “Lao Er” the “Second Child.” Yet Jesus continues to be Jesus Christ and Socrates continues to be Socrates. It is all right for you to imitate sonnets. But you have to be doubly careful not to write poems like the ones in lù shì. It is completely beyond me what is so tedious about lù shì. Or why they are considered so lovely. Besides, is it possible to write colloquial poems exactly in the same way as lù shì? Furthermore, even if the beats are rendered symmetrical and the lines made evenly balanced, do they therefore count as lù shì?

Though lù shì does possess a special beauty connected with its visual form, it is constricted in its visual potential in comparison to the new poetry. lù shì has always been seen as the form of the new poetry are endless. This is the first difference between lù shì and new poems. In order to write lù shì, no matter what your subject matter is, or your conceived worlds are, you have to squeeze them into this rigid form. It seems that all men, women, and children have to wear the same style of clothing. But the forms of new poetry are to cut the dresses to suit the bodies. For instance, the forms “Song of Picking Lotus” can never be used to write “Prince Zhaojie to the Western Hinterland,” the form of “Railroad March” can never be used to depict “The Final Decision,”
and the form of "March 18th" can never be used to describe "Searching." Among these poems, can anyone find one where the content and the form or the spirit and the frame do not match? If so, I would very much like to hear his findings. I should like to ask whether one can find harmony of spirit and form in the mould of regulated poems? Or can it be found in free verse plucked out of thin air, with lines zigzagging as will and patched together in disorder without guidelines?

The metric frames of the regulated poems are not related to the contents. Yet the forms of the new poetry can be created according to the contents. This is the second difference between the two. The forms of regulated poems are prescribed by tradition whereas the forms of the new poetry can be constructed according to our imagination and the moment. This is the third difference. In the light of the three differences, we should be able to tell whether the forms of the new poetry are restoring the older creating the new, progressing or regressing.

Nowadays, there is a form with four lines to a stanza, with each line having an equal number of characters. This form seems to have been quite popular. Strikingly, the lines using this form appear as if they have been chopped off at the ends cleanly! Those who have been accustomed to seeing zigzagging lines of free verse feel particularly strange about this new form. What a tedious job it must be to cut the lines so evenly! They also assume that if it is so tedious to write poetry, wouldn't it completely destroy the inspiration of the poem? If inspiration is destroyed, where then can poetry be found? It is obvious that when inspiration is destroyed, poetry is

The metric frames of the regulated poems are not related to the contents. Yet the forms of the new poetry can be created according to the contents. This is the second difference between the two. The forms of regulated poems are prescribed by tradition whereas the forms of the new poetry can be constructed according to our imagination and the moment. This is the third difference. In the light of the three differences, we should be able to tell whether the forms of the new poetry are restoring the older creating the new, progressing or regressing.

Nowadays, there is a form with four lines to a stanza, with each line having an equal number of characters. This form seems to have been quite popular. Strikingly, the lines using this form appear as if they have been chopped off at the ends cleanly! Those who have been accustomed to seeing zigzagging lines of free verse feel particularly strange about this new form. What a tedious job it must be to cut the lines so evenly! They also assume that if it is so tedious to write poetry, wouldn't it completely destroy the inspiration of the poem? If inspiration is destroyed, where then can poetry be found? It is obvious that when inspiration is destroyed, poetry is

The metric frames of the regulated poems are not related to the contents. Yet the forms of the new poetry can be created according to the contents. This is the second difference between the two. The forms of regulated poems are prescribed by tradition whereas the forms of the new poetry can be constructed according to our imagination and the moment. This is the third difference. In the light of the three differences, we should be able to tell whether the forms of the new poetry are restoring the older creating the new, progressing or regressing.

Nowadays, there is a form with four lines to a stanza, with each line having an equal number of characters. This form seems to have been quite popular. Strikingly, the lines using this form appear as if they have been chopped off at the ends cleanly! Those who have been accustomed to seeing zigzagging lines of free verse feel particularly strange about this new form. What a tedious job it must be to cut the lines so evenly! They also assume that if it is so tedious to write poetry, wouldn't it completely destroy the inspiration of the poem? If inspiration is destroyed, where then can poetry be found? It is obvious that when inspiration is destroyed, poetry is
destroyed as well. Yet it is, in fact, not difficult to modify the words to achieve neat symmetry. Inspiration would never suffer a loss because of this symmetry. I have consulted a number of writers who are currently using neat alignments in their verse lines. They all attest to the validity of this point of view. They all acknowledge that if they have not written a certain poem well, the blame lies in their not having mastered the form. The form itself does not assume any responsibility. It would be to the best-interest of all that we cite two works for comparison: One uses unequal lengths in lines and the other, equal lengths. We shall see if symmetry or its lack in line structure has anything to do with the beauty or ungaunliness of cadences and rhythms:

I would, through the quiet mistiness, the pale ethereal floating gauze,
Listen attentively to rustling drizzle, on the eaves; beating against the sighs amidst the void wafted in from the remote distance;
Sense the white falling petals, one by one, lightly, lightly.)

说到这儿，门外忽然灯响，
老人的脸上也改了模样；
孩子们惊望着他的脸色，
他也惊望着炭火的红光。

(1) (So saying, suddenly there is the clinking of a lamp outside the door,
There is change in the face of the old man;
The children look at his face in awe,
He too gazes with alarm at the red glow of charcoal.)

Just which one is better in cadences and rhythms? Is it the one with the even lines? Or with the uneven lines? The even lines not only do not impede the cadences and rhythms but also help to harmonize them. There will again be people who do not accept such comments. Let us analyze the above examples to see if the even-ness of the lines and the symmetry of metrics are inextricably related:

孩子们/惊望着/他的/脸色
他也/惊望着/炭火的/红光
(The children look at his face in awe,
He too gazes with alarm at the red glow of charcoal.)

Each line here can be divided into four feet. Each line has two "three-character" feet and two "two character" feet. The sequence

(1) "If it is obviously impossible to reproduce in English the exact symmetry of characters in the verse of the original — translator.
of the feet varies irregularly. But there must be the total of two "three character" feet and two "two character" feet. Composed in such a way, the metrical beats will certainly be resonant. At the same time, the numbers of characters in each line tend to be even. Therefore the evenness of lines is a natural result of the symmetry of the metrical beats. Lines of absolutely symmetrical beats must have even number of characters. (On the other hand, even numbers of characters in lines do not necessarily guarantee the symmetry of metrics. It is because there is merely the evenness of the number of characters whereas no attention is given to the evenness of metrics. Such rigidity results in a lifeless, stone-faced, and forcibly inlaid frame. It is not the natural and symmetrical structure born out of the richness of meaning.)

Accordingly, the even number of characters in a line has a significant impact, because the exterior form is a manifestation of the inner spirit of a poem, whether there exists rhythm or not. If the reader still regards the above examples as insufficient, he can use the same approach to analyze my poem "Stagnant Ditch." Starting from the first line:

This is a ditch of hopeless, stagnant water

The poem is composed with each line having three "two character" feet and one "three character" foot. Thus each line has a similar number of characters. As a result, this poem has become my most satisfying experiment in poetic metrics. Since as of late, there
have been quite a few friends who have cast doubt on a neat and square formal arrangement suggestive of mahjong chips such as was used in "Stagnant Ditch." I have therefore taken this opportunity to explain it. I hope readers will notice that, in light of the above, we have found a new metrical form to explore. After the discovery of this metrical form, I can definitely predict that the new poetry will undoubtedly enter a period of new developments in metrical structure. At any rate, we should acknowledge that this represents a great wave in the history of the new poetry.

Whether the impact of this wave represents progress or going backwards will soon have a definite answer.

(Peking Morning News)

Translated by Raymond N. Tang