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A Review of

The Lantern and the Night Moths
edited and translated by Yilin Wang 王艺霖

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When Isabella Wang writes that “Home [is] a euphemism for forgetting” in her essay “Memory Home Lane,” she invokes an all-too-familiar paradox for diasporic writers. How does one split their roots in two, between the “home” country and the adopted one? Between the language of one’s ancestors and of one’s peers? And how to enable this split without the pain of forgetting?

Yilin Wang’s [no relation] collection of translations and essays, *The Lantern and the Night Moths*, strikes a chord in each of these questions. Her translations of five Chinese poets—Qiu Jin 秋瑾, Zhang Qiaohui 张巧慧, Fei Ming 废名, Xiao Xi 小西, and Dai Wangshu 戴望舒—and accompanying essays consider the possibility that forgetting is not inevitable, far from it. Wang approaches her careful selection of poems as one would a close friend, recovering not only the words of the poems themselves, but the human spirit that permeates each. Her five essays, one touching on each poet, are moving and indicate a rich expertise and a profound emotional attachment.

The poems themselves manoeuvre between ephemeral and metaphysical themes with contemporary ease, so that a reader might mistake them for Wang’s own yearnings. “A mountain in between us, the distance so vast,” (5) writes Qiu Jin in “Púsāmán: To a Female Friend.” Reading this line, one becomes aware that Wang’s translations confront a dual mountain:

distance and time. And yet, the collection feels immediate and graspable, even to readers with no experience of diaspora, so that the mountain in Qiu's poem might be Wang's own, or ours.

Wang's careful selection of poems makes for a seamless reading experience. One is quick to notice how these poets interact through time, such as how Fei Ming's "nebulous, ephemeral world is a speck of the deeply cherishing heart. / the universe is a particle of indestructible dust floating in the air" (45) calls back quietly to Zhang's lines, "the ancestral land is a deity / and also, a useless decoration," (27) or to Qiu: "I have swept the dust of the world away" (9). And throughout these poems is an overarching ache for zhiyin 知音, a Chinese concept meaning "the one who can truly understand your songs," a "queerplatonic soulmate," (15) that Wang embodies through the very act of translation. But with no other poet is the zhiyin 知音 stronger than with Qiu, who herself seeks such a relationship: "When no one else shares my tune, what is the point of sighing? / To meet a kindred spirit who cherishes the same songs, I'd willingly die. / Sorrowfully I gaze towards my hometown, across misty waters" (7).

Qiu and Wang are connected by unique struggles for respect from the world they make themselves vulnerable to: both are queer poets that confront, in Wang's words, "the systemic, ongoing erasure of feminist writers within both Sinophone and Anglophone publishing." Indeed, where Qiu refused traditional "female" poetics in the Qīng dynasty, Wang confronted her own erasure (and Qiu's) when, in 2023, the British Museum's "China's Hidden Century" exhibit featured her translations of poetry by Qiu without permission, credit, or compensation. Wang's lawyer was preparing to file a lawsuit against the museum when, hours before the filing, the museum finally agreed to a settlement that included a public apology, named a "defining arts event of 2023" by *ARTnews*. Wang's essay, a letter to Qiu, ignites the discussion around the importance of translation and due recognition, but it's her personal experience that brings alive

the intergenerational discourse captured through these poems, whose words are, as in Dai's "Night Moths," "soaring across the steep mountains and passes of distant borderlands, / soaring across the far-apart longings of clouds and trees, / to soothe us" (93).

While these poems stand on their own, Wang's short essays offer beautiful meditations on translation, belonging, diaspora, and love. She explores personal vulnerabilities, queerness, and her own love of poetry through its power. But her writing also confronts the art of translation head on, mulling over words for which there is no literal counterpart. "I must find ways to render ambiguous and elusive phrases and ideas in English," (78) she writes before breaking open her process of translating Xiao Xi's "the ceaseless wind." Wang's revelations are welcome encounters in the translation genre, allowing the reader to feel a rare proximity to the work itself, and a fresh admiration for the words on the page, seeing exactly how a translator carries "entire worldviews across vast linguistic and cultural divides" (79).

Translation is first and foremost a bridge between languages, cultures, places, and people. It is itself a language in which we can discourse with the past, with the elsewhere. Wang's translations curate a space for kinship across distance and space to flourish, a kinship made available to all her readers, inviting them to take part in the dirty work. As she writes: "what is translation if not the gentle, rigorous art of embracing and pushing back against the constraints of language, in order to unsettle and to remake?" (58). One could easily read in these lines: translation is a euphemism for remembering.