

I-chih CHEN 陳義芝

LETTER FROM THE SEASIDE
海邊的信*

translated by Chris Wen-Chao Li 李文肇

He gazes unto the distance
The bright rays of the midday sun dance upon the foamy waves
Fish leap midair in the nude, the radio
Warns of yet another tropical storm in the wake of the tempest just subsided
This — a lonely retreat at the beach house

Bay windows dressed in airy curtains resembling the flowing gown of a
lady-in-waiting —
Tracing her neckline to her soft, smooth shoulders
Following her curves to her abdominal mound
Heated passion fanned by the wind, even the eyelids break into a sweat
How odd to find under the scorching sun the watery allure of woman

He turns to his laptop and types on the keyboard
A poem — strung together from countless correspondences
Like random imprints left by bare feet on the beach
Like the wail of the seasonal wind
Echoing over endless desert dunes

Viewing the ocean from a different angle he spies
The rays of the afternoon sun stroking the wind's slender waist
With the ocean leaning against the wind the wind leaning against the sun and the sun
leaning against the clear blue skies
The world is a book tilted at an angle
And the words of his poem slide into the sea

His verse having fallen overboard, how to pick up the pieces he does not know
Each cherished letter rides a wave into the distance
Each wave then quickly washes ashore a letter from afar
Letters clamoring with the echo of the ocean surf, words drenched in a loneliness that
does not wash off
The poem morphs into the sea — sun, surf and all

He labors on with his unfinished sentences
Which end up as wave after wave of foamy surf lapping on his inbox;
Finally the sea transforms from peacock blue to Prussian blue
A lady in a beach hat turns his way
To reveal her shapely forehead and vaguely her unfathomable
Blue eyes — as the mellow sunset illuminates the curve of her bare back

* From the Literary Supplement of *China Times* (中國時報人間副刊), October 17, 2004.

At that instant the dusk and the night melt effortlessly into his verse
The ocean surf raises a thousand hands to wave toward the shore
Slowly sea and sky come together — slowly sky presses against sea sea presses
against sky
Until little remains save the hills in the backdrop surviving in translation by the
sprawling lights
Little survives except for the snake so extolled by D.H. Lawrence
Goddess Kuan-yin incarnate, no doubt — the snake swims into his now invisible
poem

I-chih CHEN 陳義芝

LAMENT
哀歌[†]

translated by Chris Wen-Chao Li 李文肇

late autumn
desolate
night
the constant
barrage
of distant bells
lapping unto the river flow

a presence
in a dark room
floating
in the desolate
river
sobbing
a muted sob

suddenly
dawn
dried leaves
slice through
like cold flashing blades
and the dream
is no more

[†] From *Kataka Typical Buddha Quarterly* (新原人季刊), Summer 2004.

I-chih CHEN 陳義芝

HEMCOMING

歸來[‡]

translated by Chris Wen-Chao Li 李文肇

Was it the wind or was it someone
asking, How have you been?
As night dawns, sitting there watching the bridge's reflection cast across the river,
a sliver of moonlight dashing across your neck,
then suddenly the scent of bellapple mixed with sweet sugarcane.
Fine, I said. That was no wind,
but a voice deep from the heart.

How have you been? Then no answer
coming from you or me.
At the water's edge also,
the din of summer had died down,
a glimmer of light shining through; the leaves were wavering, swayed by the wind,
which shut the door behind it. As if the corridors were spying;
like an elevator which waits for no one.

I'm fine if you are
and you're fine if I am,
whether or not the seasons show mercy,
as storms come and go,
flooding the back alleys to alert level,
whether it's cherries bright red or lips turned cold,
memories of you will forever toss and turn, dancing between those shimmering white
folds.

No one's quite like you
and no one's quite like me.
Pages torn from the calendar each day tell of another year gone by:
your glamorous face wet-brushed by the drizzle of weather overcast,
our daily exchanges set against the bright clouds of sunny skies,
fingers combing through the warmth of your body,
frazzled hair dancing to your playful breathing.

Are a thousand and one nights sufficient
to tell the tales of nights a thousand and one?
Not unless we gaze nightly towards the sky's edge,
roll down the windows to the universe
and set every prayer candle ablaze.
Over the hills and through the woods, we've come back full circle,
the lights across the shore still flickering.

[‡] From the Literary Supplement of *United Daily News* (聯合報), February 16, 2006.

I-chih CHEN 陳義芝

THE COMING INTO BEING OF THIS EXISTENCE
這一生的發生[§]

translated by Chris Wen-Chao Li 李文肇

It all began in a cave,
at a cliff by a stream in a cave drifting with floral scents;
the fragrance of burning incense; in meditation a solitary individual
facing the deep blue sea;
a dark bird flies among the clouds, breaking through the mist;
a cave, carved stroke after stroke by dripping water, drop after drop sharp as lightning.

It all began with zero —
zero: call it a solitary individual embracing a solitary cave,
a cave carved out by the pounding surf,
guarded by the flight of eagles;
a cave the goddess Tara hinted will one day split open,
all starting from zero, from a solitary prayer mat.

One hundred and eight towering pagodas,
five hundred Arhats standing in wait;
the day finally arrives: a large boulder marks the location of the main hall;
monks and nuns trek up the mountain path on this arduous yet joyful pilgrimage,
all because of a solitary individual in meditation — this existence came into being
because of one individual.

It all started with a mantra,
a volume of scripture, a bodhi tree,
the melody of the wind chime and the clatter of prayer beads,
a benevolent gaze and a heart of gold is where it all began,
a dharma wheel sailing through the dark night —
Om Ma Ni Pad Mi Hom

The constellation of the big dipper comes into view as the cave splits open —
it all began in a past life of this hilltop
and meanders unto the next life of a mountain trail;
this existence came into being long before,
with a cave, a bodhisatva and the hum of mantras
back when the reality of this existence had not yet come into being.

AFTERWORD: On June 12, 2005 my wife and I paid a visit to the Venerable Dharma Master Hsin Tao at Wu Sheng Monastery on Ling Jiou Mountain. The master was kind enough to present my wife with a copy of his book *Ling Jiou Mountain and Beyond*. On the title page he wrote the words “the coming to being of this existence”, reminiscent of a line from esoteric Buddhist verse, a clue perhaps to the nature of karmic destiny. This poem is dedicated to Master Hsin Tao as a show of appreciation.

[§] From the Literary Supplement of *United Daily News* (聯合報), August 4, 2005.

中文原文

海邊的信**

陳義芝

他的眼光望向遠方
日午的陽光一片片白花花在海上逃竄
游魚裸身跳躍著，收音機廣播
輕颱剛過另一中颱又已形成
海邊的小屋寂寞的假期

紗帘在落地窗前飄搖仕女的披肩長裙
頸線之下柔滑的肩膀以及
身體小腹的斜坡
風吹得人躁熱，眼皮都出汗了
大喇喇的陽光裡實在不該再有一團水光的女人

低下頭，他在筆記電腦的鍵盤上打首詩
由一封封的信串成的——
像裸足踩出深深淺淺的腳印在海灘
也像天風唱的蒼涼的歌
起伏在無盡的沙漠

稍稍偏移一下看海的角度他發現
午後的陽光還在風的小蠻腰刮削
海斜靠著風風斜靠著陽光陽光斜靠著藍藍的天
整個世界變成一部傾斜之書
他的詩句全滑落到海裡了

他不知道怎麼收拾剛寫的掉進海裡的詩
一股浪一封信連綿到遠方
一封信一股浪很快地又從天邊回傳至眼前
裝滿潮音的信裝滿寂寞沖刷不掉的字
海成了飛湧浪花的詩

他繼續寫未完成的句子
在捲成一捲一捲潮浪的電子信箱

** 原載於民國九十三年十月十五日《中國時報》人間副刊。

在終於從孔雀藍變成普魯士藍的海岸
一位戴遮陽帽的仕女側轉身
露出美麗的額頭看不清卻似深不可測的
藍色眼睛，黃昏斜照一條光背的曲線

那瞬間他的詩也融入夜
潮浪伸出一千隻手回向岸上招
天與海慢慢在靠近，慢慢地天壓住海海壓住天
除了燈火翻譯的山之外再沒有別的什麼了
除了勞倫斯詠歎的蛇之外再沒有別的什麼了
想必是觀音...蛇游進他看不見的詩裡了

中文原文

哀歌^{††}

陳義芝

暮秋
無依傍的
夜
單調的
鐘響
一聲聲
拍擊流水

有人
在黑屋
無依傍的
河中
漂浮
失聲地
哭

天色乍明
枯葉
似冰涼的
白刃
略過
夜夢已
無蹤

^{††} 原載於民國九十三年《新原人季刊》夏季號。

中文原文

歸來^{**}

陳義芝

是風問還是人在問
你好不好？
夜來坐看跨岸的橋影
迅速落過妳脖頸的一抹月光
驀然聞到甘蔗香的蓮霧
我說好，不是風
是心底的聲音

你好不好？沒有答案
我問或是妳問都是一樣
一樣在水邊
夏日轟轟的聲音已沈寂
微光透過窗 枝葉因風而猶疑
帶上門，長廊在窺看
電梯不等人

你好就是我
我好也會是你
不管季節有情無
風如何來來去去
灌滿警示水深的巷弄
不管應桃紅了，或唇冷了
記憶總在白花花的縐摺裡翻湧

沒有人像你
也沒有人像我
當日曆一天天的換裝，一年又過
鮮麗的容顏用小陰的雨渲染
日常的語言用小晴的雲勾描
手指梳理發燙的身體
亂髮飄盪頑皮的呼吸

^{**} 原載於民國九十五年二月十六日《聯合報》副刊。

一千零一夜的故事
一千零一個晚上怎說的完
除非夜夜向蒼穹的盡頭張望
銀河的車窗全開著
祈願的香頭全部點燃
越過重山後我們又歸來
水岸的燈火仍搖晃著

中文原文

這一生的發生^{§§}

陳義芝

一切從一個山洞開始
從一座斷崖一行水跡一個花香漂浮的山洞
一個趺座的人一炷裊裊的香
面向一片蒼鬱的海
一隻飛在雲頂的黑鳥突破漫天的雨霧
一個山洞，露水一滴滴滴著閃電一刀刀鑿著

一切從零開始
零是孤單的一人包容孤單的一個山洞
海潮遙遙沖激的山洞
鷹首切切衛護的山洞
多羅觀音隱隱預示終將開啓的山洞
一切從零從一個蒲團開始

一百零八座塔一座座矗立山頭
五百尊羅漢一尊尊侍立塔旁
那一天終於來臨，一顆巨石標定大殿的位置
一群僧尼艱難而喜悅地走在朝山的路上
一切都因為一個趺坐的人
這一生的發生因一個人
從一句咒語開始
從一本經書一株菩提
一句簷馬的叮嚀一串佛珠的摩挲
一切從一顆悲心一雙垂眉的眼一具法輪
漫漫的黑夜也是慈航
唵嘛呢叭彌吽

北斗的方位於是顯現，山門打開
一切從一個山頭的前世開始
這一條山路的來生還未終了
這一生的發生是很久以前就發生的
很久以前從一個山洞一尊菩薩一群梵唄聲開始

^{§§} 原載於民國九十四年八月四日《聯合報》副刊。

很久以前這一生的發生還未發生

後記：2005年6月12日於福隆靈鷲山「無生道場」拜謁心道法師，師父持《靈鷲山外山》一書贈紅媛，扉頁手寫「這一生的發生」，似指人間因緣，如偈語。歸作此詩，獻給心道師父。

Chris Wen-Chao LI (李文肇) is a translator and theoretical linguist. He received his doctoral degree in General Linguistics and Comparative Philology from Oxford University, and is currently Associate Professor of Chinese Linguistics at San Francisco State University. His translations and scholarship have appeared in *Renditions*, *Target*, *Language and Communication*, and the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*.