6 Translating Theory

Bei Dao, Pasternak, and Russian Formalism

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Abstract

This essay asserts the generally neglected importance of poetic theory in the study and practice of translation and of comparative and world literature, as a crucial complement to the overwhelming focus on the form/content binary. Theory not only travels but translates as well, as the essay argues through a case study of how Russian Formalism found its way into Bei Dao's translations of Boris Pasternak.

Keywords: Chinese poetry, translation, Bei Dao, Pasternak, Russian Formalism, literary theory

We often think about the challenge of translating poetry in terms of form and content.¹ Should one attempt to preserve the semantic content of, say, a Chinese poem in English translation, or should one attempt to replicate formal devices such as rhyme, rhythm, and wordplay? This form/content binary also inflects discussions of literature on a global scale. Franco Moretti (2000) has influentially argued that the story of modern literature is largely one of foreign, primarily European forms – such as the novel – inflected by local content, be it Chinese or West African. Jahan Ramazani likewise draws on the form/content binary in his taxonomy of the permutations of the foreign and the local in contemporary poetry: foreign form and local content, foreign form and foreign content, local form and foreign content, and local form and local content (2016, 122). Ramazani's taxonomy is finer-grained

¹ This essay is a substantially reworked version of my article “The Elephant in the Room: Theory in World Literature” (2018). I am grateful to the editors of *Orbis Litterarum* for their permission to reuse material from that article here.

than Moretti's, but he admits that even this variegated account of "local-global enmeshments" has its limitations, since "most poems will fit into several of these slots at once, and no amount of long-distance squinting can accurately reduce them to one or the other" (123).

Such accounts of global modernism and world poetry have done much to capture the complex negotiations between form and content in cross-cultural literary exchange and globalization. However, they neglect a third category that profoundly shapes how poets and their translators conceive of and negotiate between form and content: theory. I want to suggest that we would do well to consider translations between literary theory and practice alongside translations of literary texts from one language to another, and that doing so will enrich and alter our theories of both translation and comparative and world literature. We need, in other words, to attend not only to the transnational travels of form and content in literary texts and in their translation, but also to the equally important and contested movements of ideas about – for instance – what constitutes form and content in the first place.

Like form and content, theory travels. Literary-theoretical concepts and terms are arguably the key conduit through which foreign poetic forms and content have been assimilated and adapted over the modernist and contemporary period, from Symbolism to Conceptualism. Contemporary writers frequently engage literary and aesthetic theory in developing their own modes of negotiating form and content. They borrow forms (the haiku, the sonnet, the novel) and content (words, translated phrases, stories) from other places and times, but they also borrow and adapt ideas about the nature of form, its relation to content, and the relation of literature to the world.

The failure to address such uses, translations, and adaptations of theory constitutes a blind spot at the center of current attempts to understand the global travels of poetry. The oversight seems almost inexplicable when we consider how fundamentally theory-driven modern poetry has been. The text by T. S. Eliot that has had the most influence on poetry globally is arguably not *The Waste Land* or *Four Quartets*, but "Tradition and the Individual Talent."² Ezra Pound's poetics theories (from Imagism to Vorticism and beyond) and Charles Olson's "Projective Verse" – especially that

2 On the translation and influence of Eliot's essay in China, see Liu Yan 2006. On Caribbean poets' response to Eliot's conception of tradition, see Pollard 2004; and Matthew Hart's chapter "Tradition and the Postcolonial Talent" (2010, 106-141). On the influence of Eliot's account of tradition on modern Arab poetry, see Al-Musawi 2002 and Ranjan Ghosh, who notes how "modern Arab poets ... were deeply influenced by [Eliot's] notion of tradition, intertextuality and mythic method of poetry-writing" (2017, 171n31).

essay's famous slogan, borrowed from Robert Creeley, "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT" – have shaped and reshaped how poets relate form to content.³ Not only was Language writing at least as influential as a theory as it was as a practice; Language writers such as Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman, and Barrett Watten drew extensively on other literary theories, especially Russian Formalist theory (Edmond 2012, 72-94). In many of their poems, Language writers describe local US content in forms of their own invention. These poems might look like combinations of local form and local content, but the poets' conception of how form and content relate depends fundamentally on foreign theory (cf. Weinberger 1996).

As this last example suggests, the movement of theory, like poetic forms, has not been unidirectional from the West to the Rest but involves a complex global history of cross-cultural exchange among many theoretical traditions.⁴ It has been argued, for instance, that the poetic theory of Imagism was not a Western export but the product of a dialogue between Noguchi Yonejirō and Ezra Pound, and that their "agreement on imagism constituted an interpenetrating relationship of Japanese poetics and Western intentions in early modernism" (Hakutani 1992, 68).

Scholars of literature are, of course, aware of the important role played by "traveling theory" (Said 1983). But despite this awareness, theory still constitutes something of an elephant in the room in the study of literary translation and comparative and world literature. We all know of its importance, but we tend at times to strategically ignore it because its role upsets the clear distinction between our theorizing and the literary or translation practices that our theories are meant to describe. Asserting this clear distinction – and, coincidentally, picking the same animal I have just mobilized, but for a different argument – Roman Jakobson objected to the appointment of Vladimir Nabokov at Harvard, claiming you wouldn't put an elephant in charge of a zoo (Boyd 1991, 303). But Jakobson's analogy is false: in literature, there exists no such clear line between what is being studied and who is doing the studying. Jakobson's Russian Formalist colleague Victor Shklovsky also wrote prose fiction that exemplifies many of the literary devices his theory describes. In *Third Factory* (Третья фабрика),

3 Olson 1997, 240. See, for example, the claim that the theories of Pound, Eliot, and T. E. Hulme are "largely responsible for shaping the modernism we have inherited" (Beasley 2007). For examples of the key role played by Olson's manifesto in New Zealand poetry as both an influence and a touchstone for polemical debate, see, inter alia, Curnow 1982; Manhire 1987; Rapatahuna 2015; Horrocks 2016, 46-49; Sturm 2017, 556-559.

4 On the need for more scholarly recognition of non-Western literary theory, see Krishnaswamy 2010.

for instance, Shklovsky deploys the device of “making strange” – *ostranenie* *остранение*, a neologism that would travel from Russian into other languages – which he saw as a defining characteristic of art, in describing his son’s first impression of a horse: “he thought it was doing four legs and a long nose just for fun” (1926, 13). Literary theory here does not simply describe practice; it shapes it.

The concept of world literature is likewise not just a theoretical framework for understanding the global interactions that constitute modern and contemporary literatures; it is also a concept that has played a key role in shaping literary practice. World literature is both a theoretical framework for thinking beyond a single language, nation, or region and, at times, an evaluative term: an aspirational ideal, a strategic label, or even a compositional method used by writers seeking recognition and cultural capital within an unequal literary, economic, and geopolitical world system (L. Liu 1995, 188; Lovell 2006; Edmond 2012, 95-124). Mindful of how such inequality has shaped their discipline, today’s scholars of world and comparative literature have generally become less concerned with comparing and evaluating the literatures of the world (Melas 2007). They have instead turned to examine, for example, the uses to which a literary work is put as it travels beyond the borders of one language or nation (Damrosch 2003), or how these cross-border literary exchanges reflect and contest the unequal distribution of power in our modern world system (Moretti 2000; Casanova 2004).

Similarly, translation theory, since the time of Itamar Even-Zohar’s “Polysystem Theory” (1979), has turned from evaluation to description: from examining the rights and wrongs of a translation – in the traditional sense of accuracy – to attempting to understand how, why, and for what purposes texts are translated (Bassnett 2014, 8-9). However, in moving from prescription to description, scholars of both translation theory and comparative or world literature risk losing sight of the role of theory itself in the translation and adaptation of literary texts, techniques, and ideas across languages and cultural and historical contexts.

Modern Chinese literary history might offer a corrective to this blind spot because it presents a striking example of the “function of theory” as a “mediating factor” in translingual literary exchanges that are reducible neither to “foreign impact nor to ... indigenous tradition” (L. Liu 1995, 184, 186, xix). The Chinese adaptation of Western theory in the Republican period, for example, has been widely recognized as playing a key role in the development and interpretation of modern Chinese literature (e.g. McDougall 1971; Gálik 1980; L. Liu 1995). Lu Xun’s 鲁迅 foundational text of modern Chinese literature (and invocation of Gogol) “Diary of a Madman” (狂人

日記) appeared in the same issue of *New Youth* (新青年) in which Hu Shi 胡適 published an essay on the short story as the fiction genre best suited to the age. And from his early engagements with Kant's aesthetic theory onwards, Lu Xun's adaptation of foreign theory developed alongside and shaped his literary practice. The theoretical idea of world literature itself has exerted a powerful influence on the development of modern Chinese literature from the 1920s and 1930s through to its more recent history (Lovell 2006; L. Liu 1995; Edmond 2012, 95-124).

Scholars of modern Chinese literature have often focused on the strategic use or creative adaptation of Western literary theory to respond to Western cultural hegemony – to insist, for instance, on the importance of Chinese literature by asserting that China has Romanticism, modernism, postmodernism, or world literature too – and to score points in local literary and political disputes (Wang 1986/1987; Chen 2002; L. Liu 1995; Saussy 2001; Zhang 1992). But such uses of theory are evident not just in literary and political polemics but also in the practice of literature and of literary translation. Xu Zhimo 徐志摩, for example, deployed a theory of translation derived from the *Zhuangzi* (莊子) in his translation and interpretation of Baudelaire (Saussy 2006). And the practice of translating poetry in China today continues to be inseparable from polemics about the theory and practice of writing and translating poetry, as Joanna Krenz illustrates elsewhere in this volume. Such moments where theory shapes translation and literary practice are commonplace but insufficiently explored in translation theory or in theories of world and comparative literature.

In this essay, I will illustrate the role of theory in the writing and translation of contemporary poetry by exploring the cross-cultural adaptation of aesthetic theories in the work of one influential poet-translator: the use of Russian Formalist theory in the work of Bei Dao 北島. Bei Dao's use of Russian Formalist theory is evident in his translations of Russian poets such as Boris Pasternak, in his discussion of his own and other Chinese translations, and in the poetry he wrote in response to Pasternak's and in emulation of its techniques. Bei Dao's adaptation of the form and content of Pasternak's poetry comes filtered through Jakobson's and Shklovsky's theories of how form and content relate. In developing his own implicit theory for writing and translating poetry, he adapts Shklovsky's concept of "making strange" and Jakobson's account of "poetic function," of language's axes of selection and combination, and of the related tropes of metaphor and metonymy. Bei Dao doesn't just adopt these theories but conflates and transforms them into an account of the poles of commonness and strangeness in poetic language.

Bei Dao not only uses Russian Formalism to conceptualize form, content, and their relation; he also develops Russian Formalist ideas into an implicit theory of translation and cross-cultural comparison. His work connects translation and comparison to the metaphoric and metonymic poles of similarity and contiguity, and to the interplay of commonness and strangeness. This implicit poetics of comparison offers a way to reconcile the tension in current theories of comparative and world literature between what one might term *metonymic* comparison, based on non-hierarchical “circulation” or on “relational” or “spatial” connection (e.g. Friedman 2012; Shih 2013; Melas 2007), and *metaphoric* comparison: the enumeration of similarities, as found in the taxonomies of scholars such as Moretti and Ramazani. The poetic figures of metaphor and metonymy lie unrecognized at the heart of much theorizing about world literature, just as theory is the unrecognized third term that shapes the relationships between the local and the foreign and between content and form in the globalized exchanges that produce the poetics of today’s world.

Recognizing the role of theory in literature’s global travels implies new ways of understanding not only translation and comparative and world literature, but also the relationship between theory and practice. Bei Dao adapts and develops poetic theories that undermine the form/content and local/foreign dichotomies that still plague discussions of translation and comparative and world literature. His example also suggests that poetic texts and translations provide not just objects for analysis, data that our theories must explain; they also offer theoretical insights into translation and world literature. In developing our theories of literature and translation, therefore, we should seek not only to describe but also to learn from the role theory plays in the writing, translation, and global circulation of poetry.

Strange and common

In 1985, Bei Dao received a submission for the journal of poetry in translation that he was co-editing, *International Poetry World* (國際詩壇). The submission included a handful of poems by Pasternak in Chinese translation (Bei Dao 2005, 265-266). Bei Dao would later write about the powerful impression these poems made on him, echoing his account of reading modern poetry in Chinese translation during the Cultural Revolution, when, in his words, translation remained “practically the only medium for the transformation of literature and literary style” (1993, 60).

The importance of these translations of modernist literature to Bei Dao and other poets of his generation has already been shown (Edmond 2012, 19-20). As Bei Dao's response to Pasternak's translations also illustrates, however, the cross-cultural adaptation of literary theory had an equally significant impact. In an essay on Pasternak, Bei Dao filters his encounter with the Russian poet through Russian Formalist literary theory, especially the work of Jakobson and Shklovsky. Early in the essay, Bei Dao cites Pasternak's poem "February" (Февраль) as an example of what Jakobson terms "poetic function" (in quoting from Bei Dao here and below, I offer English approximations of his Chinese translations of Pasternak, rather than translating directly from the Russian text):

The correspondences in the first stanza between "ink" and "mud," "bitter crying" and "rumbling noise" are precisely the result of the vertical alignment of Jakobson's aforementioned axis of combination, which reveals the difficult process of writing. The second and subsequent stanzas drive further steps forward; leaving the city, they return to nature. From the "white-beaked crows" that resemble "burnt pears" to the "dry sorrow," from the "puddles" to "the fundus of the eye," the emotions and scenery mix, and the sadness comes from this mixing. The beginning of the final stanza mentions the thaw, whose "blackness" distantly echoes the "ink" and "mud" of the poem's opening lines; the "wind ploughed by shrieks" is the "eye of the poem," hinting at a penetrating pain.

第一段“墨水”與“泥濘”、“痛哭”與“轟響”的對應，正是我們提到過的雅各布森關於組合軸的那種縱向性的對位效果，展現了寫作艱難的過程。第二三段進一步推進，遠離城市回歸自然，從“焦梨”般的“白嘴鴉”到“枯愁”，從“水窪”到“眼底”，情景交融，悲從中來。最後一段開端提到解凍，“黑色”和開篇的“墨水”與“泥濘”遙相呼應，“風被尖叫聲犁過”是“詩眼”，暗示銳利的痛苦。

(Bei Dao 2005, 267)

Bei Dao here recalls his reference to Jakobson's definition of poetic function earlier in his collection of essays (2005, 75): "*The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination*. Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence" (Jakobson 1987, 71). In other words, for Jakobson, poetic function is the combining of words linked by similarity, be it similarity in sound (e.g. rhyme) or meaning (as in metaphor). In "February," for example, Pasternak takes

various things that share a common liquid quality – “ink,” tears (“cry”), “slush,” and “puddles” – and places them in a “sequence.”

In his essay, Bei Dao implicitly connects the role of poetic function in Pasternak’s “February” to the process of translation. The essay presents four Chinese versions of Pasternak’s poem in translations by Fei Ye 菲野, Gu Yunpu 顧蘊璞, Mao Xinren 毛新仁, and Bei Dao himself. Thus he emphasizes the “principle of equivalence”: the “selection” that a translator must make in finding a word in one language for a word in another. That is, he transforms Jakobson’s poetic principle from a mode of poetic composition into an implicit justification of his presentation of multiple translations of the same poem in their entirety. Jakobson says language becomes poetic when the similarity principle becomes the driver of the word combinations in a given text and the conveyance of meaning is relegated to a secondary status. Redoubling Pasternak’s poetic language, Bei Dao promotes similarity “to the constitutive device of the sequence” by presenting four translations of the same text. He extends Pasternak’s chain of words and things linked by liquid to encompass the multiple possible Chinese renderings of these terms and of the poem as a whole.

The word *sliakot’* слякоть ‘slush’, for instance, becomes three different kinds of muddy slush, *nining* 泥凜 ‘mud’, *xini* 稀泥 ‘watery mud’, and *nijiang* 泥漿 ‘slurry’, enhancing the watery mixing of concepts and words that the poem describes and enacts. This semantic rhyme partially makes up for the loss of Pasternak’s sonic rhyme of *sliakot’* with *plakat’* плакать ‘weep’, a rhyme preserved only in Gu Yunpu’s translation, where the sound of *xini* slant-rhymes with *kuqi* 哭泣 ‘weep’. Bei Dao associates Jakobson’s poetic function with the way poetry and translation can cause terms to mix and interrelate: “the emotions and scenery mix, and the sadness comes from this mixing.” In the process, Bei Dao makes translation and poetry synonymous: the mixing of terms and the parallelism of rhyme and rhythm in poetry match similar acts of interlingual – and, in the case of the four translations, intralingual – repetition and parallelism in translation.

In his discussion of Pasternak’s poem “Marburg,” Bei Dao associates such mixing with Shklovsky’s device of “making strange” – in Chinese, 陌生化:

The third stanza of the poem is the most brilliant: “The flagstones grew hot, and the street’s brow was dark. / From under eyelids cobblestones coldly / Glowered at the sky, and the wind like a boatman / rowed the lindens. All these were symbols.” Still and moving, angry and harmonious, hard and soft – all mixed together. Poetry needs both the “strange” and the “common.” The so-called “strange” is what Russian Formalism termed

“making strange,” and the “common,” in my understanding, refers to poetic reason. For example, “cobblestones coldly / Glowered at the sky, and the wind like a boatman / rowed the lindens”: these two images are both “strange” and “common”; they are truly a stroke of genius.

其中第三段最精彩：“鋪路石發燙，街的額頭鰲黑。／眼瞼下鵝卵石冷漠地／怒視天空，風像船夫／劃過椴樹林。一切都是象徵。”靜與動、憤怒與和諧、堅硬與柔軟都融合在一起。詩歌中既要講“奇”，又要講“通”。所謂“奇”，就是俄國形式主義所說的“陌生化”；而“通”，按我的理解，則是一種詩意的合理性。比如“鵝卵石冷漠地／怒視天空，風像船夫／劃過椴樹林”這兩組意象既“奇”又“通”，真可謂神來之筆。

(Bei Dao 2005, 281)

Bei Dao here cites the following stanza from “Marburg”:

Плитняк раскалялся, и улицы лоб
 Был смугл, и на небо глядел исподлобья
 Булыжник, и ветер, как лодочник, греб
 По липам. И все это были подоби́я.

(Pasternak 1985, 1:70)

The flagstones grew hot, and the street's brow
 Was swarthy, from under the brow cobblestones peered
 At the sky, and the wind, like a boatman, rowed
 The lindens. And all these were resemblances.

(Pasternak 2003; amended)⁵

In his commentary on the stanza, Bei Dao celebrates Pasternak's ability to mix things together based on “resemblances” (подобья), or what Jakobson termed “equivalence.” It is these resemblances that enable congruence with reality (cobblestones really do face the sky; wind really does make the trees move as it itself moves, just as oars move and are moved by the water) at the same time as enabling surrealism (the faces of the cobblestones have eyes that “peer”). Of course, not all these strange parallels survive translation: the rhyme of *ispodlob'ia* исподлобья ‘from under the brow’ with *podob'ia* подоби́я ‘resemblances’ finds sonic resemblances between the words, and between a human face and a street. This wordplay is difficult to convey in translation. It is conveyed neither

5 The English translations of “Marburg” here are adapted from Pasternak 2003.

in the English translation above nor in the Chinese translation that Bei Dao offers: 一切都是象徵 ‘all these were symbols’. Here, the Chinese reflects neither the wordplay of the source text nor the possibility that similarity is founded not only on symbolic or visual representation (metaphoric likeness) but also on the resemblance or closeness of the sounds of different words.

Instead of translating the form or content of Pasternak’s resemblances, Bei Dao translates and connects Jakobson’s and Shklovsky’s theories to explain and redeploy the mixing of words and images that characterizes Pasternak’s poetic practice. He describes Pasternak’s mixing of the common and the strange in a way that recalls not just Shklovsky’s concept of making strange but also Jakobson’s demonstration of how Pasternak produces an “expression far from common” out of the very metonymical connections that the poet insisted gave his work a more realistic quality (Jakobson 1987, 307). This sense of realism or commonness – that poetry takes place “in collaboration with real life” (Pasternak 1985, 2: 208) – produces writing in which “all images are in some way potentially contiguous” (Jakobson 1987, 312). The strangeness comes through the displacement of the subject onto contiguous objects: in “Marburg,” Jakobson writes, “the principal characters in the action are flagstone, paving-stone, wind ... storm, sky, etc.” (1987, 313). Outside reality becomes a mirror of the self (307), a metonymic device that affirms an external real world – the everyday reality of the flagstones in Marburg – while at the same time distorting expected literary representations of that world. Bei Dao extends this process to translation, finding in the external world of another’s words a reflection of his own.

Bei Dao goes on to explain the effect of Pasternak’s metonymies in “Marburg” by paraphrasing Shklovsky’s account of how “making strange” avoids cliché and prolongs and deepens the reader’s experience:

Let’s now look at the seventh stanza: “As if playing the part of Romeo embracing the tragedy / I staggered through the town rehearsing you / carrying you all day, from head to feet / memorizing you till you rolled off the tongue.” Imagine oneself as a rehearsing actor, take the lover to be the script one is remembering by heart – and in a very concrete way: from head to feet. This really is the quality of “making strange,” avoiding cliché, of prolonging and deepening the reader’s experience.

再來看看第七段：“像扮演擁抱悲劇的羅米歐，/ 我蹣跚地穿過城市排練你 / 整天帶著你，從頭到腳 / 把你背得滾瓜爛熟。”把自己想

像成排練的演員，把情人當成台詞牢記在心，且非常具體化 – 從頭到腳。正是這種“陌生化”的效果，避免了陳詞濫調，延長並加深了讀者的閱讀體驗。

(Bei Dao 2005, 281-282)

In the stanza from “Marburg” that Bei Dao translates here, Pasternak uses an extended simile that is nevertheless metonymically connected to the subject who is also in the “provincial” town of Marburg:

В тот день всю тебя, от гребенок до ног,
Как трагик в провинции драму Шекспирову,
Носил я с собою и знал назубок,
Шатался по городу и репетировал.

(Pasternak 1985, 1:71)

On that day I carried you with me
And knew you by heart, from your combs to your feet,
Like a provincial actor knows a Shakespearean drama;
I wandered the city, rehearsing.

(Pasternak 2003; amended)

In replacing the object of desire with words (the beloved “you” becomes a script), Pasternak links his metaphor metonymically to the writing of the poem, an effect that is weakened in Bei Dao’s Chinese translation by the reference to the character Romeo, rather than the author Shakespeare. The link between script and poem in turn connects to Bei Dao’s recounting in the essay of his own visit to Marburg, during which his “aimless strolling through the streets” merges with that of Pasternak’s lyric subject who “wandered the city, rehearsing” (2005, 273). In this way, Bei Dao implies a link between Pasternak’s poem and his own embodying of Pasternak’s words in translation. This sense of embodiment is made more visceral by the poem’s conflation of speaking another’s words with literally carrying another person’s body. Bei Dao extends this conflation of script and body further in using the word 背, which I have translated here as “memorizing,” but which can also mean “back” or “carry on one’s back,” as in the back on which the lyric subject carries his beloved.

The strangeness of the metonymic link between script and actor matches the strange experience of repeating another’s words – whether in rehearsal or, in Bei Dao’s essay, drafting a translation. Such repetition affirms an experience common to two people and emphasizes the strangeness of

taking another's words as one's own. Here, Bei Dao's analysis of Pasternak through multiple translations serves a similar purpose. Where learning words by heart might make them lose their estranging novelty, Bei Dao's essay effectively counters this potential banality with the freshness produced through multiple translations of the same lines.

Shklovsky's "making strange" also provides Bei Dao with a means of cross-cultural comparison based on commonness and strangeness. He emphasizes the common commitment of Pasternak, Shklovsky, and himself to the poetics of strangeness in the face of communist regimes that attacked the autonomy of art. The reader's perceptual experience guarantees for Shklovsky in "Art as Device" (Искусство как прием) the autonomy of art. Later in his essay, Bei Dao quotes directly from Shklovsky's famous account of how "making strange" increases "the difficulty and length of perception, since the perceptual process in art is autonomous and must be prolonged" (Shklovsky 1929, 13; Bei Dao 2005, 293). He also notes Shklovsky's defense of art's autonomy after the Bolshevik revolution, when art came under increasing pressure to serve politics: "Shklovsky has a famous saying: 'Art has always been free of life. Its flag has never reflected the color of the flag that flies over the city fortress'" (Bei Dao 2005, 292; Shklovsky 1919). Bei Dao then explains the political attacks on Formalism and quotes from an essay written by Shklovsky in the 1960s:

But after Stalin came to power, literature's so-called independence no longer existed; all the flags had to be red. Shklovsky received severe criticism; he was forced in 1930 to write an essay eulogizing socialism and realism. Times changed, and Formalism was eventually rehabilitated. In a 1961 article, Shklovsky lamented his path: "Time slipped away, the sun rose more than ten thousand times, the spring and autumn passed forty times, and now in the West there are people who want to use my words to dispute the meaning of my flag flying above my city fortress."

但隨著斯大林大權在握後，文學所謂的自主性不復存在，所有的旗幟都必須是紅的。施克羅夫斯基受到嚴厲批判，不得不於1930年寫讚美社會主義現實主義的文章。時過境遷，形式主義終於得到平反。1961年，施克羅夫斯基在一篇文章感歎道：“光陰荏苒，太陽升起過一萬多次，四十個春秋過去了，現在西方有人想藉我的話來爭辯飄揚在我的城堡上我的那面旗幟的意義。”

(2005, 293)

Bei Dao not only identifies Pasternak with Shklovsky's device of "making strange"; here he also implicitly connects his encounter with Pasternak's poetry to his encounter with Shklovsky's theory in the mid-1980s and the corresponding effort at the time to free Chinese literature from narrow subservience to Communist Party politics. Bei Dao takes the date and Chinese translation of Shklovsky's quotations about his flag and the flag of art from Zhang Longxi's 張隆溪 *Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century Western Literary Theory* (二十世紀西方文論述評), published in Beijing in 1986, the year after Bei Dao first read Pasternak's poetry.⁶ The quotations from Shklovsky would likely have caught his eye, especially as they chimed with Karl Marx's emphasis on the many colors of art cited in the editorial to the first issue of the unofficial literary journal *Today* (今天), which Bei Dao founded together with his fellow poet Mang Ke 芒克 and the painter Huang Rui 黃銳 in 1978. The editorial quotes Marx's statement from "Comments on the Latest Prussian Censorship Instruction" (Bemerkungen über die neueste preußische Zensurinstruktion) that "there are no black flowers" and that likewise human culture should not be devoid of color and variety (*Jintian* bianjibu 1978, 1-2). Bei Dao uses this quotation knowingly and ironically to recall Mao Zedong's phrase "let a hundred flowers bloom," a call for artistic and intellectual diversity that was viciously curtailed by the Anti-Rightist campaign (Edmond 2012, 116). In citing Shklovsky's statements and alluding to these quotations from Marx and Mao, Bei Dao implies that he and Shklovsky share a desire for a multihued and autonomous art, and that their countries share the historical experience of art being forced to toe the political line. For Bei Dao, Shklovsky's theory of "making strange" becomes not just a way of reading literature but a means of identifying similar historical tensions between art and politics in China and Russia.

Two windows, one moon

In discussing the concluding stanzas of "Marburg," Bei Dao extends his use of Shklovsky's and Jakobson's accounts of poetic language to address the common experiences and perspectival differences that characterize translation and cross-cultural comparison:

6 The quotation actually comes from a brief essay dated 1958-1965 that introduces *Tales about Prose* (Повести о прозе; Shklovsky 1966, 1: 3-4).

The high tide of the poem is in its second part: this is the end of roaming and the beginning of waking up to reality. Without this part, “Marburg” is almost untenable. The first stanza of this part is transitional, that is, it is the point of linkage between inside and outside: “The mist from all directions opens its bundles / two windows hang one moon. / And melancholy will pass these books / lingering in a book on the sofa.” We only have to compare it to the first version to see what has happened: “the great mist takes our luggage and scatters it everywhere / in each of the two windows there exists a moon. / Worry like a traveler sweeps past each book / and together with the books is placed on the sofa” (Fei Ye’s translation). Whether it is a discrepancy in the translation or the result of an author’s revision, we cannot tell. We can only compare the “current situation.” In my view, “The mist from all directions opens its bundles / two windows hang one moon” is both “stranger” and “commoner” than the other; it is a more imaginary and broader thing. Firstly, the imagined mist must have a lot of bundles of clothing, but the two windows constitute the limits of concreteness, “unveiling” – in Heidegger’s words – the concealed: “two windows hang one moon.”

這首詩的高潮在第二部分，那是漫遊的終結與醒悟的開始，若無這部分，〈馬堡〉幾乎是不能成立的。其中的第一段是過渡，即內與外的連接點：“霧從四面八方打開它的包袱，／兩個窗口懸掛一個月亮。／而憂鬱將略過那些書／在沙發上的一本書中停留”。只要和初稿相比，我們就知道到底發生了什麼：“大霧把我們的行李袋散放各處，／在兩個窗口各存一個月。／憂愁像遊客在每本書上劃過／並和書本一起被放入沙發”。（菲野譯）至於是翻譯上的差異還是作者修改的結果，都無從判斷，我們只能比較“現狀”。依我看，“霧從四面八方打開它的包袱，／兩個窗口懸掛一個月亮”比另一版本更“奇”更“通”，有一種更虛幻更博大的東西。首先想想霧的包袱得有多大呀，而兩個窗口又構成具體的限制，“打開”，按海德格爾的話來說，即除去遮蔽——“兩個窗口懸掛一個月亮”。

(2005, 282)

Here, Bei Dao discusses the following quatrain:

Повсюду портпледы разложит туман,
И в обе оконницы вставят по месяцу.
Тоска пассажиркой скользнет по томам
И с книжкой на оттоманке поместится.

(Pasternak 1985, 1:71)

Everywhere the mist will unpack hold-alls,
 And they hang in both windows a moon a piece.
 Longing will slip like a passenger along the volumes
 And settle with a book on the ottoman.

(Pasternak 2003; amended)

In the Russian, Pasternak describes “a moon a piece” hung in “both windows.” Whereas the two windows resolve into one moon in Bei Dao’s translation and interpretation, there are two moons in Pasternak’s Russian text and in Fei Ye’s translation. Bei Dao sees the one moon in two windows as “stranger” and “commoner” in that it suggests the same thing exists in two places simultaneously but at the same time resolves this strangeness into the one common moon. This one moon can be seen from each window – just as we look up at the same moon from China, Russia, or anywhere else in the world.

Bei Dao’s translation of Pasternak’s line so that it describes one and the same moon seen through two windows implies a theoretical commitment to translatability – to the idea that we can encounter one and the same image through two languages – which his insistence on the success of his own translation only underscores. As Krenz notes in her chapter in this book, Bei Dao has become well known for his advocacy of the translatability of poetry, attacking, for instance, Wang Jiaxin’s 王家新 more cautious and estranging approach to translation. Bei Dao’s assertion that his translation of Pasternak’s image is both “commoner” and “stranger,” meanwhile, reflects his attempt, also noted by Krenz, to reconcile estranging and familiarizing approaches to translation and poetry.

When we look at the moon from two locations, do we notice the likeness of each of these two visions of the moon – or do we see them as one moon and so emphasize the metonymic connection that looking at the moon and hence being on the same world entail? Do we see two moons, two similar worlds, or one moon: one spatially (metonymically) connected world? Bei Dao’s appeal to Heidegger’s unveiling of the concealed offers both possibilities. Heidegger’s concept refers both to the revelation of truth, the world, and being and also, arguably, to the realization that “there are various possible worlds or possible understandings of being” (Withy 2017, 1497), an idea here represented by the multiple perspectives, or “windows,” on the moon. While Bei Dao’s translation seems to violate the meaning of Pasternak’s Russian text, it preserves Pasternak’s commitment to metonymy, a commitment that is actually embodied by the combination of both Fei Ye’s and Bei Dao’s translations. On the one hand, to see two moons, rather than one, is to refuse the associations of likeness and metaphor in favor of

an extreme subjectivism: what I see and what you see are never the same because our perspectives differ; nor is the moon the same when I view it through two different windows. On the other hand, in choosing to see one moon rather than two, we recognize that this one and the same moon is metonymically connected via the windows: there is no association by likeness but only association by spatial contiguity and coincidence – by metonymy and, since we only ever see one side of the moon, synecdoche.

The image of the moon or moons in two windows suggests the value of treating poems and translations not simply as objects for theoretical analysis but also as potential sources of new theoretical insights. The image might serve, for instance, as a figure for Bei Dao's adaptation of Russian literary theory to cross-cultural literary comparison, translation, and to his own approach to poetic language. For Bei Dao, Shklovsky's theory of "making strange" provides an imperative for poetic making *and* for his political struggle for the autonomy of art against a similarly oppressive communist regime. It connects two seemingly different poetic and political struggles – like the two moons – on the basis of their likeness.

At the same time, Bei Dao's cross-cultural comparison is metonymic, based on contiguity rather than resemblance (metaphoric). Bei Dao connects poetic strangeness and the autonomy of art through their coincidence in the theories of Shklovsky. He also implies a metonymic connection between Pasternak and himself by discussing the Russian writer's poem "Marburg" alongside his own visit to the German university town. Echoing a possible historical connection between "comparative astronomy" and comparative literature (Saussy 2016, 669-672), Bei Dao uses moon-gazing to emphasize that we each see – and so are metonymically connected to – the same things, but that we each see these things from different cultural, linguistic, geographic, and singularly individual locations.

Bei Dao makes these metonymic comparisons while drawing on a poet whose art, as Jakobson pointed out, is fundamentally metonymic, in whose work the person is dissolved into the things of the surrounding world: the actions of Pasternak's lyric subject are displaced onto the outside world of "flagstones," "cobblestones," and "mist." Hence, as Bei Dao notes, the house stands metonymically for the person within it and figures the interplay between the outer world and the inner world of the lyric subject, not unlike in Robert Frost's "Tree at My Window" (1951, 277-278). The house, in other words, is both a metonym for the person and a figure for Pasternak's use of metonymy to negotiate between inner feelings and the surrounding world.

Bei Dao conflates Shklovsky's and Jakobson's theories of artistic device and poetic function and transforms them into theories of the relationship

between inner and outer worlds, of cross-cultural comparison, and of translation, including his translation of Russian poetry and literary theory into Chinese. Pasternak offers the two windows as a figure for seeing through another's pair of eyes. The lyric subject's actions are displaced onto the mist and his eyes onto the apertures of the "windows," or *okonnitsy* оконницы, a word in Russian that has the same root as the old Slavonic word for "eye," *oko* око, which is archaic or poetic in modern Russian. Bei Dao extends this figure to cross-cultural interpretation and translation: the translator allows us to see a text through new eyes by interpreting or remaking that text in another language.

Bei Dao displaces his own poetics onto the words of another via a Russian theory of the relationship between poetic language and inner and outer worlds. He displaces, for instance, his own experience of the battle for the autonomy of art and the role of strangeness onto Shklovsky, Jakobson, and Pasternak, drawing a comparison that is both a likeness and a metonymy: a connection not just of shared experience but of the same words on the page and of a walk through the same city. Jakobson reveals that metonymy in Pasternak is a formal device for highlighting the contents of the diegetic world and displacing feeling and agency onto those contents; Bei Dao extends Jakobson's insight to translation. The poet-translator finds in Russian Formalist theory the poetic license to metonymically displace one's own feelings and writing onto the contents of another's words, and, simultaneously, to assert the strange metaphoric likeness of translation and cross-cultural comparison.

Bei Dao also deploys that poetic license in his own poetry. His poem "February" (二月), here cited in Clayton Eshleman and Lucas Klein's translation, clearly alludes to Pasternak's poem of the same name:

The night is rushing to perfection
I drift inside language
the musical instruments of death
are filled with ice

夜正趨於完美
我在語言中漂流
死亡的樂器
充滿了冰

who sings on the crevice
of days, water turns bitter
flames hemorrhage
pouncing like pumas to the stars
there must be form
for there to be dreams

誰在日子的裂縫上
歌唱, 水變苦
火焰失血
山貓般奔向星星
必有一種形式
才能做夢

in the chill of early morning
 a wide-awake bird
 gets closer to the truth
 while my poems and I
 sink as one

在早晨的寒冷中
 一隻覺醒的鳥
 更接近真理
 而我和我的詩
 一起下沉

February in books:
 certain movements certain shadows

書中的二月：
 某些動作與陰影

(Bei Dao 2011, 84-85)

Both “February” poems contain four stanzas; Pasternak’s poem has sixteen lines, Bei Dao’s seventeen. Bei Dao’s poem not only echoes the form of Pasternak’s poem, but comments on the importance of “form” and its relationship to content: “there must be form / for there to be dreams.” That is, the imaginative associations of the poem can only take place in and through a form: form and content are inextricable.

Drawing on Jakobson, Bei Dao makes the form/content dichotomy dissolve in metonymy. His “February” echoes various features of the content of Pasternak’s poem, including birds (compare Pasternak’s *тысячи грачей* ‘thousands of rooks’), watery imagery (“drift,” “ice,” “water”), the association of that watery imagery with uncontrollable emotion and pain (“hemorrhage,” “bitter”) and with noise (“musical instruments” and the implied sound of the bird), an emphasis on books and writing (“poems”), and the mixture of water with fire (“flames hemorrhage”; compare Pasternak’s *грохочущая слякоть / ... горит* ‘the rumbling slush / ... burns’). Other obvious echoes include the line “gets closer to the truth,” which echoes Pasternak’s *чем случайней, тем вернее* ‘the more by chance, the truer’ about verses that *Слагаются ... навзрыд* ‘sobbingly compose themselves’. In Bei Dao’s poem, the noisiness of truth is suggested not by violent sobbing but by the bird, which implicitly wakes the lyric subject from dreams in the early morning, and which metonymically represents that subject’s wakefulness. The bird also echoes the summertime nightingales that stand for the lyric subject’s sleepless night in Pasternak’s “Marburg,” which ends, like Bei Dao’s poem, with the early morning.

Bei Dao not only borrows some of his content from Pasternak; he also adapts Jakobson’s account of Pasternak’s metonymic, phenomenological technique, where the surrounding world embodies the subject’s feelings. The subject approaches the truth by attributing this approach metonymically to the surrounding world: to the bird who “gets closer to the truth.” The water

that turns bitter expresses the subject's bitterness. At the same time, Bei Dao's poem seems to adopt some extravagant similes and metaphors: "pouncing like pumas to the stars" and "the musical instruments of death." These appeals to likeness also remind us of the poetic emulation, or composition by analogy, that Bei Dao is undertaking.

The "shadows" in the last line, however, blend likeness (the silhouette or echo of the other poem) with metonymic adjacency, since shadows are "resemblances which must be in contiguity with that which they resemble" (Lock 1997, 336). Similarly, Bei Dao blends resemblance with metonymy in his reference to the poem that is his model. "February in books" might be better translated as "February in a book,"⁷ as it clearly refers, at least in part, to Pasternak's poem. Bei Dao not only emulates Pasternak's poem but brings it into the diegetic world of his own poem. The two poems, like the two moons, hang suspended each in their own linguistic and cultural frames, while simultaneously resolving into one.

In suggesting Pasternak's image of the moon or moons in two windows as a figure of translation and cross-cultural adaptation, I may seem to violate the distinction between my own critical or theoretical perspective and my object of analysis (Pasternak's poem and Bei Dao's essay and translation). I may seem, in other words, to blur the lines between theory and practice. But as I have been arguing, it is precisely the false dichotomy between theory and practice that inhibits a proper understanding of the interplay between the two in poetry and translation. Poetry and translation are not only shaped by literary and translation theory; they also often imply their own poetics or theories of translation.

As Bei Dao's use of Formalist theory illustrates, accounts of world literature and translation that operate within the form/content framework are likely to seek in vain for a better, more comprehensive understanding of how and why literature interacts across linguistic, cultural, and historical borders because they lack a crucial piece of the puzzle: the mediating role of theory. We need to think about the role of theory in translations between languages and cultural and historical contexts, but also and equally about the continuous translations that occur between the theory and practice of both literature and translation. It is not simply a question of putting the same content – the same moon – in a new formal frame or a new language, nor is it simply about recognizing how each new formal frame or language changes that content and produces another moon. Instead, we must recognize that poems and translations offer their own theoretical insights into the nature

7 David Hinton and Chen Yanbing have "february in the book" (*sic*, Bei Dao 1996, 19).

of form and content, the local and the foreign, and the relationships between them: they offer their own windows on the world.

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