

3rd Prize (LT)

SHAN Muxuan

Bachelor's Degree in Linguistics and Translation

黃鳥歌

Song of The Orioles

翩翩黃鳥

A couple of orioles delightfully fly,

雌雄相依

On each other they whole-heartedly rely.

念我之獨

Seeing myself now a lonely shadow,

誰其與歸

Who'll flutter her wings to solace my sorrow?

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Commentary

The poem 《黃鳥歌》 is a beautiful piece very similar to the poems in 《詩經》 [Book of Poetry] which has the characteristics of Chinese traditional poetry: implicative and succinct. The author uses the "Xing 興" technique, not talking about his sorrow directly, but first writes about the orioles, which is actually about himself. In only 16 Chinese characters, light grief is expressed subtly. In the process of translation, the most difficult word for me should be "歸". It made me think of the famous love letter saying: “陌上花開，可緩緩歸矣”， whose sentiment of “歸” is similar to the one in 《黃鳥歌》. Wikipedia translated it as "Whom shall I go with?", which I think is not very suitable. The word "go" has some randomness and cannot reveal the emotions behind “歸”, that is, companionship and mutual understanding. Adding a “home” or adopting “return” can be better, but still, it seems like a simple act and not that poetic. So later I ventured to substitute the whole sentence “Who shall flutter her wings to solace my sorrow?”. This new sentence also solves the problem of the word "雌雄". Literally translating it into "male and female" is crude, but not mentioning it cannot imply that the poem is about the melancholy of love. By using the metaphor, an oriole, to describe the beauty the author misses, the hint can be made up to some extent. Indeed, such a translation violates the requirements of "Faithfulness 信", but in my opinion, when translating poetry, translators can be not that precise. On the principle of pursuing beauty, we can be bold and innovative appropriately, striving to show the rich connotation in the concise Chinese poetry through a foreign language. In the final version of my translation, the rhyme scheme is AABB and there are 12 syllables for each line, which is the method inspired by a book of Tang poem translations by Yang Jihe. I hope through this process, the original beauty in sound can be reflected.