

2nd Price (LT)

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Master of Arts in Language Studies
(Pedagogical Linguistics stream)

黃鳥歌

Yellowbird Song

翩翩黃鳥

Light light the yellowbirds in flight,

雌雄相依

She has he side by side.

念我之獨

What a lonely soul am I!

誰其與歸

Whom could I be accompanied by?

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Commentary

In my translation, I particularly focus on the emotion of the poem. Reading it over and over again, I have been overwhelmed with the loneliness and melancholy in the poem. To me, the poet is no longer a superior and powerful king but a poor and lonely husband waiting for his beloved wife to return. Then I find his way of expressing emotions is actually direct and plain (明白如话), so I try to stick to this plain style as well. The first two lines vividly depict two fluttering yellowbirds. At first I had been struggling with which verbs to use for “翩翩” and “相依”, because I viewed the whole picture as more dynamic. Meanwhile, I found the word “light” suits the birds quite well. Indeed, there are other accurate verbs such as “flit”, “flutter” and etc. But these verbs already contain the manner of flying, i.e., lightly or quickly, and thus they will be redundant when used with “light”. And I felt the yellowbirds’ 轻快之感 would more or less be weakened by using verbs. So I turned to use the reduplication of adjectives to amplify the lightness and pleasantness of yellowbirds and to correspond with “翩翩”. Likewise, merely using a verb for “依” will risk a loss of the poet’s feeling for the yellowbirds. At this point, he does not care about how the yellow birds lean on each other. Instead, what comes to his mind is 黄鸟之不如兮. Emperor as he is, he does envy the birds keeping each other company at this moment. I therefore stress this point and his feelings for the two birds. “念我之独, 谁其与归” is the spontaneous outburst of the poet’s emotion. So here I used both exclamatory and interrogative sentences to more directly show his overwhelming loneliness and the strong contrast with the yellowbirds. And I chose the verb “accompany” since verbs have stronger expressive effect than other parts of speech. Frankly speaking, I have done the whole translation more intuitively, by rereading and feeling the poem with heart, and try to think and express from the poet’s perspective. Yet this is exactly how I understand this poem and poet. He is a sentimental poet. I am a sentimental translator.