PENGUIN CLASSICS

POEMS OF THE LATE T'ANG

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ADVISORY EDITOR: BETTY RADICE

ANGUS CHARLES GRAHAM was born in 1919. He was Professor of Classical Chinese at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, from 1971 until his retirement in 1984. In 1981 he became a fellow of the British Academy. Among his publications are *Two Chinese Philosophers: Ch'eng Ming-tao and Ch'eng Yi-ch'uan* (1958), *The Book of Lieh Tzŭ* (1960), *The Problem of Value* (1961), *Poems of the Late T'ang* (1965), *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science* (1978), *Chuang-tzŭ: The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book of Chuang-tzŭ* (1981), *Reason and Spontaneity* (1985), and *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking* (1986). He died in 1991.

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Translated with an Introduction by

A. C. GRAHAM

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For Der Pao

Poetry presents the thing in order to convey the feeling. It should be precise about the thing and reticent about the feeling, for as soon as the mind responds and connects with the thing the feeling shows in the words; this is how poetry enters deeply into us. If the poet presents directly feelings which overwhelm him, and keeps nothing back to linger as an aftertaste, he stirs us superficially; he cannot start the hands and feet involuntarily waving and tapping in time, far less strengthen morality and refine culture, set heaven and earth in motion and call up the spirits!

Wei T'ai (eleventh century)

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Preface

This book owes much to conversations some years ago with James Liu, who introduced me to the poems of Li Shang-yin, to the possibility of applying post-Empsonian critical techniques to late T'ang poetry, and to the origins of the ninth-century manner in the last poems of Tu Fu. For several years I have been worrying everyone within reach who knows Chinese for advice on obscure points and criticisms of my draft versions, among others Dr Waley, Prof. David Hawkes, Jerome Ch'en, Ch'eng Hsi, D. C. Lau, and Mrs Katherine Whittaker. I should like to thank all of them for their patience, and also Douglas Hewitt, the first to give me the reactions of a reader who knows no Chinese.

Earlier drafts of some of these translations have been contributed to *The Review*, No. 9 (1963) and the *Anthology of Chinese Literature* edited by Cyril Birch (Grove Press, forthcoming).

My thanks are also due to Dr Waley and George Allen and Unwin Ltd for permission to quote from Arthur Waley's *Chinese Poems*; *Li Fu-jen* and part of *New Corn*; to Mr Ezra Pound for permission to quote his *Lui Ch'e*; and to the Houghton Mifflin Company for permission to quote *To the air*: '*The Fallen Leaves and the Plaintive Cicada*' from Amy Lowell's *Fir Flower Tablets*.

1965 A. C. G.

Additional Preface

In the discussion of the relation between Far Eastern poetry and the beginnings of English modernism on pp. 15–16 I

missed an interesting piece of information which has turned up since. I wrote that 'the Japanese influence goes back at least to 1909' (to the Eiffel Tower circle which included T. E. Hulme, F. S. Flint, Edward Storer, and afterwards Pound). Wallace Martin (in J. Howard Woolmer's *Catalogue of the Imagist Poets*, New York, 1966) has since explored the genesis of Imagism in the writings of the Eiffel Tower circle, in particular the *New Age* poetry reviews from 1908 onwards by Flint, who in the issue of 9 December 1909 praises Storer for 'aiming at a form of expression, like the Japanese, in which an image is the resonant heart of an exquisite moment'. These reviews confirm the impression that Flint, in spite of his own proneness to second-hand phrases, was one of the originators of the new approach to poetry, and the first to introduce it to the public. It turns out that his first review on 11 July 1908 (the earliest firmly dated document found by Martin) actually starts with a book of Japanese *tanka* in rhymed translations. He praises it enthusiastically at the expense of other books he is reviewing, objecting only to the traditional versification ('I could have wished that the poems in this book had been translated into little dropping rhythms, unrhymed'); and he quotes two *haikai* in free verse translations to show how the Japanese convey 'the suggestion, not the complete picture'. He proceeds directly to his first call for a new kind of poetry: 'To the poet who can catch and render, like these Japanese, the brief fragments of his soul's music, the future lies open.' He declares that 'the day of the lengthy poem is over – at least for this troubled age', and the poet 'must write, I think, like these Japanese, in snatches of song'.

1977 A. C. G.

The Translation of Chinese Poetry

The art of translating Chinese poetry is a by-product of the Imagist movement, first exhibited in Ezra Pound's *Cathay* (1915), Arthur Waley's *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* (1918), and Amy Lowell's *Fir Flower Tablets* (1921). Except for Waley, the unique instance of a sinologist who is also a poet, its best practitioners have always been poets or amateurs working on the draft versions of others. Its problems are in some respects peculiar; there is no language which gives a translator less cause to flatter himself that he has achieved a perfect re-creation, yet worthwhile partial successes are unexpectedly easy. Classical Chinese is a language of uninflected and generally monosyllabic words grammatically organized solely by word-order and the placing of particles. Its strength lies in its concreteness and conciseness, grammatical particles being rarer in literary prose than in speech and in verse than in prose. When a Chinese poet writes abstractly it is nearly impossible to make him interesting in English:

K'UANG	HENG	K'ANG	SU	KUNG-MING	PO
K'uang	Heng	write-frankly	memorial.	Success	slight
LIU	HSIANG	CH'UAN	CHING	HSIN-SHIH	WEI
Liu	Hsiang	transmit	classic.	Plan	miss.

This couplet, in which the poet contrasts his own failures with the successes of two ancient statesmen, can hardly be rendered into even tolerable English without considerable rephrasing:

> A disdained K'uang Heng, as a critic of policy.
> As promoter of learning, a Liu Hsiang who failed.

The element in poetry which travels best is of course concrete imagery; however little we may care for Goethe or

Pushkin in English, we react immediately to Lorca, and even feel ourselves qualified to judge whether he is a great poet or merely the manipulator of a firework display. Fortunately, most Chinese poetry is extremely concrete:

HU	CHIAO	YIN	PEI	FENG
Tartar	horn	tug	North	wind,
CHI	MEN	PAI	YÜ	SHUI (rhyme)
Thistle	Gate	white(r)	than	water.
T'IEN	HAN	CH'ING-HAI	TAO	
Sky	hold-in-mouth	Kokonor	road,	
CH'ENG	T'OU	YÜEH	CH'IEN	LI (rhyme)
Wall	top	moon	thousand	mile.

Various lucky accidents make it possible to translate such poetry more literally from Chinese than from Indo-European languages. Chinese and English word-order are similar although not identical. All poets except for a few experimenters confine the sentence within the couplet and generally within the line. Since the English line tends to have as many stresses as there are concrete words in the Chinese it is possible, as Waley was the first to notice, to render almost as literally in sprung verse as in prose. These features partly account for the greater success of poetic translation from Chinese than from Japanese, which has conjugation, a different order of words and of clauses, and sentences running over several lines, so that the translator, forced to proceed in another sequence, finds himself writing a drastically different poem. The English reader of a poem in Chinese constantly discovers that several lines have almost translated themselves, and after such a good start can hardly resist translating the whole:

A Tartar horn tugs at the North wind,
Thistle Gate shines whiter than the stream.
The sky swallows the road to Kokonor:
On the Great Wall, a thousand miles of moonlight.

As these lines illustrate, the ideal of perfect literalness is soon betrayed by concessions to idiomatic smoothness, rhythm, and immediate intelligibility. 'Swallow' is not quite the Chinese *han*. 'Water', unfortunately, clashes in sound with 'whiter', and is replaced by 'stream'. With some misgivings, since the only sacrosanct thing is the image, one strengthens '(is) white(r)' to 'shines whiter', partly to keep the verbal force of the Chinese adjective, which acts like an intransitive verb, and partly to show up the connexion with moonlight in the last line. The 'wall', which the poet did not need to identify, becomes 'the Great Wall'. In spite of the factors which sometimes make translation easier from Chinese than from Latin or French, it is hardly necessary to say that the meanings and associations of Chinese words differ much more from their apparent English equivalents than do words in Indo-European languages. Above all, fidelity to the image is impossible without a complete disregard of the verse forms of the original, some of which are as rigid and elaborate as the sonnet. Almost all Chinese poetry is rhymed, and most classical forms have lines with equal numbers of syllables, so that it is understandable that some translators still prefer to take liberties with the sense in order to impose iambics and rhyme. The sacrifice of strict form for the sake of content was first made possible by the doctrine that the essence of poetry is the Image, the exact presentation of which imposes an absolute rhythm out of accord with regular verse forms. It is this connexion with Imagism which already gives most Chinese translations a little of the period look of Chapman's or Pope's Homer, combining the visual precision, transitive drive, and emotional reticence common to Chinese and early modernist English poetry with a rhythmic freedom and naturalness of diction which belong to the latter alone.

It is well known that glimpses of Japanese and Chinese poetry contributed to the clarification of the Imagist ideal,

acting like the Japanese woodcut on Impressionism and African sculpture on Cubism. The Japanese influence goes back at least to 1909, when T. E. Hulme deserted his year-old Poets' Club for a circle of like-minded poets which included F. S. Flint.[1] Flint, who begins his miniature *History of Imagism*[2] with this circle, says that among other possibilities it discussed the replacement of traditional verse forms by 'pure *vers libre*; by the Japanese *tanka* and the *haikai*; we all wrote dozens of the latter as an amusement . . .', and that before joining he had already been advocating 'a poetry in *vers libre*, akin in spirit to the Japanese'. The French vogue for translating and imitating the three-line *haikai* (*hokku*), started by P. L. Couchoud in 1905,[3] was evidently among the Parisian influences active during this formative period. Pound's account in *Vorticism*[4] of the genesis of what he calls his '*hokku*-like sentence' *In a Station of the Metro* in 1912, the year in which he invented the name 'Les Imagistes', shows clearly both the Japanese inspiration of the verse and its importance in his own development. Interest shifted from Japan to China after 1913, when Pound received the manuscripts of Ernest Fenollosa, the American who introduced the classical art of Japan to a Western public previously familiar only with the woodcut. These included the *Essay on the Chinese Written Character*, from which Pound took his misconceptions about ideograms as well as a valuable theory of the key function of the transitive verb in poetic syntax, and the draft versions of Chinese poems[5] which he adapted in *Cathay* (keeping Fenollosa's Japanese transcriptions: his 'Rihaku' is Li Po).

1. Cf. E. R. Miner, *The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature* (Princeton, 1958). 2. *Egoist*, 1 May 1915.

3. Cf. W. L. Schwarz, *The Imaginative Interpretation of the Far East in Modern French Literature* (Paris, 1927), 159 ff.

4. *Fortnightly*, 1 September 1914.

5. For a specimen, see Lawrence W. Chisolm, *Fenellosa: the Far East and American Culture* (Yale, 1963), 251f.