

CLT

CHINESE LITERATURE TODAY

Special Double Issue

Mo Yan

2012 Nobel Prize in Literature

Su Tong

2009 Man Asian Literary Prize

Poetry in a 2nd Language

Chinese
↻
English ↻

New poetry by
Yu Jian, Qiu Xiaolong,
and featured scholar
Wai-lim Yip

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 1 & 2

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Chinese Cinema

From Blockbuster to the Rise of the New Documentary

autobiography, the structure is episodic and repetitive, and one has the sense that much is included because it is or could be real, not because it is needed. Nor are the characters satisfying. This is especially true of the men, who are dreary, ugly, and horny, except when they are handsome, treacherous, and horny. That may reflect the experience of a vulnerable young woman in Shenzhen, and be some little revenge for the cardboard female characters who populate the writing of many male authors, but on balance the sheer constancy of unwise sexual decision-making and its foreseeable consequences is tedious and dispiriting; no wonder an English subtitle was tacked on: "Life Goes On" (and on . . . and on. . .). The amount of space given to the protagonist Xiaohong's bust would put even Mo Yan to shame, and there is far too much of "he touched her breast and she began to moan incessantly." So what? Surely we don't need to translate to be titillated.

We may be taken inside abortion hospitals, but we are never inside anyone's head, and so the merits of the book must be found in the realistic description of young single women's lives where propositions in every hair salon, karaoke bar, and hotel are the norm. At one point, when the protagonist's pregnant friend has received five hundred yuan from her married lover to cover the cost of an abortion, the protagonist berates her friend for her unworldliness—if the lover had given her five thousand yuan, that would show he really cared for her. This, too, is telling about relationships and reproduction in contemporary China, but, like everything else, the episode occurs and is passed over without a trace of introspection or irony.

Ten years have passed since the Chinese publication of *Northern Girls*. Now *Death Fugue*, a more recent novel by the same author, is also slated for English publication. Clearly Sheng has the material to produce interesting work; it is to be hoped that she has developed her style and her plotting in the last decade.

On a final note: Penguin's efforts to bring Chinese literature and China-related English writing to Western readers is to

Writerly Self-Knowledge, or When Authors Confess

Book reviews put books on our radar screen. Through judicious summaries and reviews of new fictions and scholarly studies, we gain insight into a vast field of knowledge to which we may otherwise be denied access due to all kinds of limitations, including our linguistic repertoire, the limited time we have in our life, channels of distribution, and even censorship. Over the past three years, *Chinese Literature Today* has introduced numerous translated works of Chinese literature and scholarly books in both English and Chinese to English readers through book reviews.

However, the writing of book reviews is often a thankless task in an underappreciated genre. Readers may appreciate a sneak peek into an exciting new book, but more often than not the only person who would read the review closely and cross check its references with the book in question is the book's author. The author does not usually have any opportunity to elaborate on his or her writing process. When an author is invited to talk about the new book in interviews, the focus is usually on the ideas of the book rather than the process of writing it.

CLT is pleased to launch a new feature in this issue that will enhance the book review section and heighten our appreciation and understanding of the works that appear within these covers. What does it entail to become an author in the fullest sense of the word? How does an author construct a study of literature or build worlds in which imagination flies? These are the questions we shall examine. We will invite authors to reflect upon their own writing processes: how they found inspiration, why and how they revised what they wrote, what the book means to them.

It is a privilege to know how others know themselves, because self-knowledge is an integral part of one's worldview and ability to understand others. While book reviews are common in journals and other outlets, they rarely give readers access to the authors' writing processes. In contrast to imaginative literature, the audio-visual medium of film and the increasingly popular new technologies for viewing it have provided—for better or for worse—far more editorialized behind the scenes access to directorial, dramaturgical, and performative decisions and processes. Though popular with viewers, these heavily editorialized "special features," commentary, or footage that accompany feature films or press interviews with authors, can sometimes guide the author and audience along a pre-determined trajectory. This new section of CLT stands in stark contrast to such tactics, inviting authors to examine their own writing processes and promoting candid reflections on the unique challenges and rewards of writing.

In this issue, I have invited Sabina Knight to discuss the extraordinary story behind her new book, *Chinese Literature: A Very Short Introduction*. She takes us through what motivated her in the first place, how she proposed the project to Oxford University Press, who her imagined readers are, and the big questions she and her book posed and the answers she found along the way. Enjoy! —Alexa Alice Joubin

Vermont Studio Center Fellowships for Chinese Poets & Translators

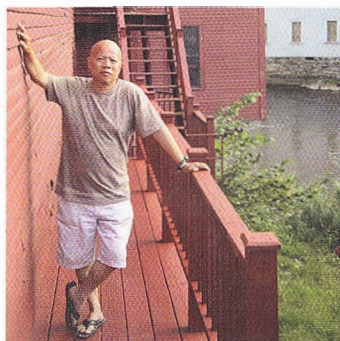


WANG PING

Applications for the
VSC Chinese Poetry & Translation
Residency Program,
supported by the Henry Luce Foundation,
will be accepted beginning March 1, 2014

Application deadline: April 1, 2014
www.vermontstudiocenter.org/apply

All poets & translators working
within the Chinese language are eligible;
Fellows receive a 4-week joint residency
at the Vermont Studio Center.



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