



Across wor(l)ds

# Ouyang Yu's transcultural journey in self-translation

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# Ouyang Yu's transcultural journey in self-translation

Simona Gallo

Professeure associée au département de langues, littératures, cultures et médiations de l'université de Milan (Italie), ses recherches s'articulent autour de la littérature chinoise contemporaine, avec une perspective traductologique et culturelle. Autrice de plusieurs articles sur la traduction culturelle et l'autotraduction dans la poésie sinophone, en 2020, elle a publié une monographie consacrée aux essais théoriques et critiques de Gao Xingjian.

As a Chinese-Australian poet who straddles the frontier between two identities, Ouyang Yu 歐陽昱 (born in 1955), generates works that portray the interliminal space of the difference, as well as the movement to transcend that difference. His bilingual poetry collection *Ziyi ji* 自譯集/*Self-translation* (2012) represents his own manifesto of a hybrid cultural identity and witnesses how the subject tries to “juggle two traditions” (Grutman 2001, 17) by translating himself. By reading *Ziyi ji* 自譯集/*Self-translation* (2012), this paper attempts to describe Ouyang's strategies of re-creating his voice within and through lyrical writing.

**Keywords:** Sinophone poetry, bilingualism, self-translation, hybridity, Ouyang Yu

Les œuvres du poète sino-australien Ouyang Yu 歐陽昱 (né en 1955) dépeignent un espace de l'entre-deux identitaire, traversé par l'aspiration de dépasser l'écart qui sépare les deux identités. Son recueil de poésie bilingue *Ziyi ji* 自譯集/*Self-translation* (2012) constitue un manifeste d'une hybridation, à la fois linguistique et culturelle, et c'est aussi un témoignage d'un sujet qui tente de « jongler entre deux traditions » (Grutman 2001, 17) en se traduisant lui-même. En observant *Ziyi ji* 自譯集/*Self-translation* (2012), cet article cherche à interroger les stratégies adoptées par l'auteur pour (re)créer sa voix au moyen des œuvres lyriques bilingues.

**Mots clés :** Poésie sinophone, bilinguisme, autotraduction, hybridité, Ouyang Yu

我曾經有兩隻舌頭  
一隻中文一隻英文  
我曾經有兩顆心臟  
一個東方一個西方  
而如今我無所有  
唯有再度去流亡

I used to have two tongues  
one Chinese and the other English  
I used to have two hearts  
one east and the other west  
but I have nothing left now  
only this instinct to wander again  
(Ouyang Yu, *Erdu paoliu* 二度  
漂流/“Second Drifting”)

## For a dialogic (re)imagination

2 Self-translation can mirror an unsettled life between, and across, identities, and such tension may result in a constant self-differentiation, a *modus vivendi* exemplified by a hybrid and polyphonic aesthetic production.

If translation “serves as a way of continuing to write and to shape language creatively, [and] can act as a regenerative force”,<sup>1</sup> self-translation demands a “dialogic (re)imagination” of worlds through words, an idea which echoes that of Bakhtin’s dialogism. Kristeva, formulating the concept of intertextuality, later wrote that Bakhtin intended the dialogue not only as the language assumed by the subject, but also as the writing in which we read the other.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, if in self-translation, “the empathic author-translator relationship produces a new text with its own artistic value”,<sup>3</sup> it must be acknowledged that the process and the product of this practice is marked by what Genette<sup>4</sup> referred to as “transtextuality”, whereby meanings, in the semiotic process of cultural and textual signification, are redistributed. Therefore, self-translation, along with dialogism and the textual transcendence of texts,<sup>5</sup> evokes

1. Susan BASSNETT, “Writing and translating”, in Susan BASSNETT and Peter BUSH (ed.), *The Translator as a Writer*, London and New York, Continuum, 2006, p. 179.

2. Julia KRISTEVA, *Semeiotiké. Ricerche per una semanalisi*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1978, p. 123.

3. Emine Bogenç DEMIREL, Jean-Yves LE DISEZ, Emilia DI MARTINO, Fabio REGATTIN and Winibert SEGERS, “Introduction”, in Micaela CORDISCO, Emilia DI MARTINO, Emine Bogenç DEMIREL, Jean-Yves LE DISEZ, Fabio REGATTIN and Winibert SEGERS (ed.), *Exploring Creativity in Translation across Cultures/ Créativité et traduction à travers les cultures*, Rome, Aracne, 2017, p. 25.

4. Gérard GENETTE, *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree*, Lincoln, London, University of Nebraska Press, 1997 [1982].

5. *Ibid.*

“bridging”, a twofold concept which portrays both the interliminal space of the difference and the movement to transcend that difference. Thus, the author who becomes a translating, and a translated, subject wanders back and forth *across* this space, while performing his poetic transformation.

That is the case with Ouyang Yu 歐陽昱 (born in 1955), the contemporary Chinese-Australian poet who was born in Hangzhou and who is now based between Melbourne and Shanghai.<sup>6</sup> Ouyang is an accomplished artist who straddles the border between two identities, and, in fact, he now divides his time in China, as a scholar and Professor,<sup>7</sup> and in Australia, as a writer and translator. His “in-betweenness”<sup>8</sup> also results in a transcultural<sup>9</sup> aesthetic, a realm where the individual creatively gives voice to a polyphonic self, in other words, “a complex web of tensions produced its multilingual dialogue within itself”.<sup>10</sup>

In this respect, Ouyang’s bilingual poetry collection *Ziyi ji* 自譯集/*Self-translation*<sup>11</sup> represents his own manifesto of a hybrid cultural identity (*hunza wenhua shenfen* 混雜文化身份). The collection,<sup>12</sup> which first appeared in 2012 in a digital version published by an Australian editor, consists of ninety-six poems, originally written in Chinese and then rendered into English. *Ziyi ji* 自譯集/*Self-translation* appears particularly interesting for several reasons. Firstly, it is a bilingual text, an unusual form which minimizes the risk of marginalizing the original—in a mere chronological sense—and grants the second

6. Ouyang Yu is one of the many intellectuals who in the nineties migrated in the West, namely in Australia, like the internationally acclaimed writer Sang Ye, and is currently a member of the Aust-China Writers Association 澳大利亞華人作家 (website of the association: <https://www.aucnln.com/>). Nowadays, the vividness of the community of Sinophone writers in Australia is revealed by the growing number of its affiliated, from a multi-generational context, and by the conspicuous variety of its literary production, in both Chinese and English.

7. At Wuhan University, from 2005 to 2008, and at Shanghai University of International Business and Economics since 2012.

8. Homi BHABHA, “Culture’s In-Between”, in Paul DU GAY and Stuart HALL (ed.), *Questions of Cultural “Identity”*, London, Sage Publications, 1996, pp. 53-60.

9. Agreeing that transculturality is “the formation of multifaceted, fluid identities resulting from diverse cultural encounters” Irene GILSENAN NORDIN, Julie HANSEN and Carmen ZAMORANO LLENA, “Introduction: Conceptualizing Transculturality in Literature”, in Irene GILSENAN NORDIN, Julie HANSEN and Carmen ZAMORANO LLENA (ed.), *Transcultural Identities in Contemporary Literature*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, coll. “Cross/cultures”, no. 167, 2013, p. ix.

10. Aurelia KLIMKIEWICZ, “Self-translation as broken narrativity: Towards an understanding of the self’s multilingual dialogue”, in Anthony CORDINGLEY (ed.), *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture*, London, New York, Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 189.

11. OUYANG Yu, *Ziyi ji* 自譯集/*Self-Translation*, Melbourne, Transit Lounge Publishing, 2012.

12. For which Ouyang Yu was shortlisted for Translation Prize in the New South Wales Premier’s Literary Awards, in 2013.

version the dignity of a “new original”.<sup>13</sup> The writer, then, makes a claim for a hermeneutic view of translation as the primary form of a creative act. Accordingly, the bilingual text implies an egalitarian relationship between the two languages. Secondly, it represents a creative translanguaging practice, as the collection embodies the cultivation of a polyphonic and transcultural self in the poet’s journey across languages, as a resistance to monologism.

Hence, this paper aims at observing the dialogic (re)imagination through self-translation, from a double perspective. Primarily, by making the assumption that the Chinese and the English versions of the poems collected in *Ziyi ji* 自譯集/*Self-translation* are linked by a strong transtextual relationship, a stereoscopic reading allows us to perceive the prismatic refraction of thoughts. Then, a second focus placed on the verses characterized by bilingual creativity, whereby the presence of the *other* language may be intended as a symbol of migration or exile, as well as an attempt to extend the communicative potential of a language.

## The author in-between

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Ouyang Yu is a prolific and versatile writer, who has authored more than one hundred books in both Chinese, his mother tongue, and in English, his second language. In 1996, he co-founded the only Chinese literary journal in Australia, *Yuanxiang* 原鄉/*Otherland*,<sup>14</sup> and by that time his literary career began, when his first English-language lyrical collection appeared.<sup>15</sup> Since then, he has been working in a variety of fields and genres, as a critic, scholar, translator, essayist, novelist and poet.<sup>16</sup> His literary work has appeared regularly in most major Australian and many overseas literary journals, and he is now a prizewinning, translator,

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13. Rainier GRUTMAN, “A sociological glance at self-translation and self-translators”, in Anthony CORDINGLEY (ed.), *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture*, London, New York, Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 75.

14. Bilingual since 2000, which he has continued to run as editor. Interestingly, the title echoes the dichotomic perspective on migration/resettlement, since *Yuanxiang* 原鄉 means “homeland”.

15. Originally written in English, *Moon Over Melbourne and Other Poems*, appeared in 1995, expresses the frustrations felt by the Tiananmen generation who moved to Australia but felt dejected. The poet’s deliberate use of an offensive language emphasizes the anger aroused by sense of alienation and displacement. Kam LOUIE, “Returnee Scholars: Ouyang Yu, the Displaced Poet and the Sea Turtle”, *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2006, p. 5. His first book of Chinese-language poetry, *Mo'erben zhi xia* 墨尔本之下, appeared in 1998 in Chongqing (China).

16. His first novel *The Eastern Slope Chronicle*, published in 2002, and the 2007 collection of essays *Bias: Offensively Chinese-Australian* are among Ouyang’s most renowned English-language works which tackle the subject of the bitter disappointment with Australia, and the dejected return to the motherland.

novelist and poet in both China and Australia.<sup>17</sup> However, his literary success has not come without cost.

As with many other Chinese artists and intellectuals, Ouyang decided to leave his motherland and to move to the West after the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. Before he left, he completed a master's degree in Australian and English Literature at the East China Normal University in Shanghai, where he had earlier graduated with a degree in English and American Literature. Then, two years later, in 1991, Ouyang moved to Melbourne to undertake a doctorate at La Trobe University, where he researched the portraits of "Otherness" and Chinese migration in Australian fiction. He has devoted many works to the narratives of identity forged by migration and bilingualism, as well as to the complex dynamics of intersubjectivity, and still reflects on the sense of frustration felt by the Chinese who are rejected by the native community. The disenchantment with reality, produced by the kind of social, cultural, and intellectual marginalization he personally experienced in the extraterritoriality, convinced him to reconsider China and the West:

What has happened is perhaps no more than a changed state of mind and a changed perception of freedom. After twenty years, one becomes disillusioned about the kind of freedom once earnestly sought and disaffected with the possibilities available to intellectual migrants in a Western democracy. [...]

When writing in their own chosen language, Mandarin Chinese, is not supported and when they have little access to publication and no likelihood of ever being awarded a grant or a literary prize, there is little incentive. What is worse is the fact that since they are Chinese, albeit Australian citizens, they cannot go anywhere without being recognized as such and discriminated against as such.<sup>18</sup>

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17. For a list of the awards conferred to the writer, see the authoritative database about Australian literature led by the University of Queensland Austlit (<https://www.austlit.edu.au/austlit/page/A19154>). Worth of notice is also that in 2011 Ouyang Yu was recently nominated one of the Top 10 most influential writers of Chinese origin in the Chinese diaspora, and in 2018 one of the Top 10 avant-garde poets for China. 18. OUYANG Yu, "Twenty-Three Years in Migration, 1989-2012: A Writer's View and Review", in Julia KUEHN, Kam LOUIE, and David M. POMFRET (ed.), *Diasporic Chineseness after the Rise of China Communities and Cultural Production*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 2013, p. 35. This extract emblemizes the poet's disquiet and frustration for a sense of loss and refusal. Meanwhile, it foreshadows his "obsession with Australia", to paraphrase C.T. Hsia's proverbial "obsession with China", which bears the ambivalent perception of the quest for recognition and defiance towards "his Otherland", also disclosed by other comments quoted here. Unfortunately, this topic cannot be further addressed in this study, but will be treated more extensively in the second stage of the present research.

According to the author, the obstruction to a full acceptance of the hybrid identity is still symbolically marked by the dilemma of literary awards and editorial censorship,<sup>19</sup> driven by a market which welcomes exoticism, in place of multiculturalism. As an engaged critic, Ouyang discerns that:

To be considered a Chinese Australian artist is dangerously convenient. You may forever hover around the edge of the centre, giving the mistaken impression that you are part of the centre.<sup>20</sup>

Feeling pigeonholed and dismissed by an Orientalist cultural milieu,<sup>21</sup> in Saidian terms, the writer chose to figuratively and concretely retrace his steps. In 2005, he took up a three-year contract (on a half-year basis) at Wuhan University as a Professor of Australian Studies. In so doing, he chose a path of “in-betweenness”, of bridging the motherland and the “Otherland”. Yet, neither of the two countries feels like home, but instead produce a deeply felt sense of displacement, ascribable to their faults and failures.<sup>22</sup>

Henceforth, acknowledging that “Freedom [...] must travel on a third road”,<sup>23</sup> Ouyang has framed his own “Third Space”, to quote Edward Soja,<sup>24</sup> where his hyphenated identity may find expression.

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19. For instance, the poet explains that his first novel was rejected dozens of times before getting accepted for publication, and that the same occurred for many other works. He discussed this topic in his article “Twenty-Three Years in Migration, 1989-2012: A Writer’s View and Review”, *op. cit.*

20. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

21. As Louie underscores, as many other writers based in Australia and other Anglophone countries, Ouyang Yu felt that the host country has treated him coldly, and reacted with occasional outbursts of cultural chauvinism. Thus, he has inherited the refusal to accept being undervalued, and reacts aggressively. Kam LOUIE, “Angry Chinamen: Finding Masculinity in Australia and China”, *Comparative Literature: East & West*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2008, pp. 34-49. Nicholas Birns indeed defines Ouyang Yu as “perhaps the most indecorous writer currently at work today”. Nicholas BIRNS, “Diaspora Beyond Millenium: Brian Castro and Ouyang Yu”, in Robert A. LEE (ed.), *China Fictions/English Language. Literary Essays in Diaspora, Memory, Story*, Amsterdam, New York, Rodopi, 2008, p. 194.

22. OUYANG Yu, “Twenty-Three Years in Migration, 1989-2012: A Writer’s View and Review”, *op. cit.*

23. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

24. Edward W. SOJA, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Cambridge, Blackwell, 1996. Soja explains p. 50 that “the concept of Thirdspace provides a different kind of thinking about the meaning and significance of space and those related concepts that compose and comprise the inherent spatiality of human life: place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory, and geography. First of all, Thirdspace is a metaphor for the necessity to keep the consciousness of and the theorizing on the spatiality radically open. [...] In its broadest sense, it is a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances and meanings.” Thus, the scholar formulates a porous concept that “encompasses a multiplicity of perspectives”, referring to a space characterized by the border-crossing, where the individual can produce a counternarrative, and

Self-translation and bilingual creativity indeed enact this hybridity, by concurrently epitomizing a life dwelt between the interstices of two dominant cultures, and the attempt to cross cultural and linguistic boundaries. *Ziyi ji* 自譯集/*Self-translation* stands as an unsettling testament of a transcultural self, and lyrically displays the aporia of a perpetual displacement.<sup>25</sup>

## Echoing the Other: transtextual readings

The ninety-six poems collected in *Ziyi ji* 自譯集/*Self-translation* are connected by a strong transtextual relationship. It may be useful to underline that, from a quantitative perspective, the English versions tend to retain the same number of stanzas and lines with a similar structure, except for those poems where Ouyang creatively transforms the visuals. Moreover, symmetry is often achieved on the rhythmic, syntactic, and lexical levels.

Beginning a closer reading of the poems, a meaningful trait may be observed from a semantic and cultural perspective, where an echo of the “Other” seems to bridge the material gap. Thus, self-translation liberates the verse from its foreignness and relocates it in a more familiar environment. This occurs in poems such as *Molei he* 墨累河/“The Murray River”,<sup>26</sup> and *Liufangzhe de ge* 流放者的歌/“Song for an Exile in Australia”, as well as in *Huanghun* 黃昏/“Dusk in a Wuhan Suburb”, and *Huanghun* 黃昏/“Dusk in Shanghai”. In the first poem listed above, the location, the Murray River, is explicitly mentioned in the original version’s title as well. Worthy of note, however, is that in the English titles of the other three poems the poet feels the need to clarify the location where the scene is depicted. In fact, in the third and fourth poems mentioned above, the inclusion of Wuhan and Shanghai in the English titles may appear arbitrary to the Chinese reader, considering that no specific reference to these two oriental

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in which the subjectivity can acknowledge its otherness, through what he calls the “thirthing-as-Othering” (*id.*).

25. Ouyang Yu is apparently the only Sinophone poet in Australia who has published self-translated works, but one among the several contemporary Sinophone self-translators in the world, together with the Taiwanese poet Yu Guangzhong 余光中, the Chinese-American poet and novelist Ha Jin 哈金, and the multifaceted artist, naturalized French citizen and Nobel laureate Gao Xingjian 高行健. For an overview on the paradigms of self-translation in the Sinophone world, see Simona GALLO, “Attraversare il wen 文: quattro traiettorie autotraduttive nella letteratura sinofona”, in Fabio REGATTIN (ed.), *Autotraduzione. Pratiche, teorie, storie / Autotraduction. Pratiques, théories, histoires*, Città di castello (PG), I Libri di Emil, coll. “Universitariae”, no. 39, 2020, pp. 93-116.

26. Which in the first four verses reads: “在一幅地圖上我曾讀到過你的名字/它給我一種沉重而黑暗的感覺/我看著你的細壽扭曲的身子/與名字是那樣不符”, rendered with “I have read your name on a Chinese map/which leaves on me a heavy, murky impression/but your tortuous, thin features in my eyes/ are so different from your Chinese name”. OUYANG Yu, *Ziyi ji* 自譯集/*Self-Translation*, *op. cit.*

cities is made in the Chinese version. This strategy evokes both the poems' self-standing nature and their double reading.

The transtextual relationship is further corroborated by a complementarity between the Chinese and the English versions when one seems to live in the Other. This remarkable phenomenon is evident in poems such as *Wuti* 无题/“No Title”:<sup>27</sup>

**無題**

當英語潮水般湧來之時  
我已失去了記憶  
五千年的結構一夜崩潰  
我的舌頭如陰莖一樣僵直  
一片悠久的空白  
如大腦如這國家。  
我的眼睛飛越澳洲  
在夢中含糊地低語  
那是原始人的嘟囔  
那是現代人的夢囈  
在百科全書的叢林中穿行  
群蟻的文學使人窒息  
我已經不會說國家  
更不會說髒扭的政治  
我很快連父母兄弟  
也都一併忘記  
唉, 這無邊無際的英語  
那鋪天蓋地的感覺  
在全世界幾十億人中  
只剩下我一個自己

**No Title**

When the English language comes flooding in  
I've lost my memory  
The 5,000-year-old structure collapses overnight  
As my tongue straightens like a penis  
In a time-honoured blankness  
Like the brains, like this country  
My eyes are flying over Australia  
Murmuring, confusedly, in a dream  
It's the mumbling of the primitive  
It's the dream-talking of the modern  
Walking through the encyclopaedic bush  
One is stifled by the literature of swarming ants  
I'm no longer able to pronounce the word 'nation'  
And even less able to talk about the twisted politics

27. OUYANG Yu, *Ziyi ji* 自譯集/*Self-Translation*, *op. cit.*

Pretty soon, I'll forget my parents  
 And brothers altogether  
 Alas, in this boundless English  
 That sensation of heaven and earth being swept  
 I am left alone with myself  
 Amidst billions of the people in the world

The enduring restlessness of the distressed bilingual self is manifest in the Chinese verse and in the English one, self-translated in Australia. The spiritual exile bequeaths a sense of barrenness pervading the distressed mind, reflected in the body. Interestingly, the mother tongue and the motherland are never mentioned but replaced by allusions (*wuqian nian de jiegou* 五千年的結構/“The 5,000-year-old structure” and *zhe guojia* 這國家/“this country”), while *Yungyu* 英語/“English” and *Aozhou* 澳洲/“Australia” appear in both versions. Self (“this country”) and Other (*zhe wubianwuji de Yingyu* 這無邊無際的英語/“this boundless English”) coexist within the lines of the poem as well as inside the poet, who portrays his own in-betweenness and non-belonging. The lack of metaphorical distance between the two, again, allows a double reading of the work: in Chinese, the poet feels dissociated from his homeland, whereas in English he wanders and becomes lost.

“Doubleness” is indeed an essential feature of the nomadic poet, who transposes his meditations on the displacement into a lyrical dimension. In *Yong ju yixiang* 永居異鄉/“Permanently Resident in an Alien Country” the plurality of meanings conferred to the “here and now” recurs:

我和我的故鄉<sup>28</sup>  
 備在電視上見面  
 而我未來的家園  
 是漂浮在空中的城堡  
 我沒有自己的土地  
 [...]

my old country and me  
 we see each other on tv  
 and my future home is  
 but a castle floating in air  
 I have no land of my own  
 [...]

28. The use of the word *guxiang* 故鄉, rendered with “my old country”, is worth of note. In its literal meaning, *guxiang* is “the former village”, and by extension it represents the homeland, namely China. As Louie reminds us, thus, the identification of this term with the concept of nation, in its metaphysical nature, was developed throughout the twentieth century in China. Kam LOUIE, “Returnee Scholars: Ouyang Yu, the Displaced Poet and the Sea Turtle”, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

This type of ambivalence results in a circular interpretation of the lines, or better, in a transtextual reading which reveals the poet's hyphenated identity. Self-translation, as a dialogic (re)imagination, plays then the part of a creative reconciliation of decentred thoughts.

## **Bilingual creativity: translingual dialogue**

Generally speaking, it is extremely hard to quantify the degree of creativity against perfect adherence achieved under the constraint of a censorious superego.<sup>29</sup> However, there is no doubt that translingual creativity inhabits the collection, and that “translingual” describes Ouyang Yu as a writer, since he creates texts in more than one language, one of which is not his primary one.<sup>30</sup>

In the collection, twelve poems are marked by bilingualism, meaning that Ouyang Yu transplants foreign terms into an artificial (linguistic) soil, thereby negotiating a subjective polyphony with an uprooted self. Hence, “translingualism” etymologically depicts the phenomenon of words moving and living across languages, in a cultural in-betweenness that even translation cannot solve. For instance, in poems such as “Life” and “The Rain”, the adoption of foreign terms such as “*yuan*” and “*wutong*”, which could have easily been replaced by their English counterparts, displaces the scene.

### **Life**

Only these few *yuan*<sup>31</sup> now  
To buy shorts for my boy a shirt for my wife  
And rice for meal a poison coil for mosquitoes  
And, yes, a cattail leaf fan and a sleeping mat  
Oh, I have to sell my life to buy it back again!

### **The Rain**

the leaves of the *wutong* tree<sup>32</sup> souging

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29. As underlined by Emine BOGENÇ DEMIREL, Jean-Yves LE DISEZ, Emilia DI MARTINO, Fabio REGATTIN and Winibert SEGERS, “Introduction”, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

30. According to Kellman's definition of literary translingualism. Steven G. KELLMAN, *The Translingual Imagination*, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 2000, p. ix.

31. The Chinese currency.

32. Better known as the Chinese parasol tree (*Firmiana simplex*), it is imbued with symbolism in literature, especially in classical poetry. For instance, given its legendary capacity to attract the Phoenix, which evokes the divine, the truth and the beauty, the *wutong tree* often emblemizes hope, luck, and happiness. Nonetheless, embedded in an autumnal scenery and combined with wind and rain, as in the verses above, it suggests separation, loneliness, and sorrow. To further explore the mosaic of meanings attributed to the *wutong* tree, see, for instance, GAO Weihong, “Lun gudian shici Zhong de ‘wutong’ yixiang 论古典诗词中的‘梧桐’意象”, *Henan Social Sciences*, vol. 13, no. 6, pp. 109-111, and YU Xiangshun, “Zhongguo wenxue de

the wind sound asleep in the green  
dripping, chirping  
one dimple after another on the water  
the umbrella slipping pit-pat by  
the leaves of the *wutong* tree sougling

As a perceptive writer, Ouyang Yu intentionally paints imageries which have splashes of exoticism. This alienating effect is even more impressive in the Chinese verse,<sup>33</sup> where the unexpected shift of writing systems bewilders the reader on a semantic and graphic level, as occurs in *Molei he* 墨累河/*The Murray River*, *Wo de zuguo* 我的祖國/*My Country*, *Tie di feixing* 贴地飞行/*Flying Close to the Earth* and in *Yihou* 以後/*In the Future*.

### 墨累河

[...]  
而我驅車經過Tailem Blend  
[...]  
墨累河  
在Mildura  
提供了一個游憩的去處  
[...]

### 我的祖國

這男友是一朝鮮人  
和她公共guestwork在日本  
[...]  
這一夜我多抽了幾支extra mild萬寶路<sup>34</sup>  
[...]

### 贴地飞行

[...]  
那种比SARS更能杀死的好毒  
每一个病人比任何时候都穿得更好  
[...]

### 以後

[...]  
誰也不喜歡誰

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wutong yixiang 中国文学中的梧桐意象”, *Journal of School of Chinese Language and Culture*, no. 4, 2005, pp. 91-100.

33. Ouyang's creative bilingual lyrical production is extensive, also self-published on his personal blog (<http://blog.sina.com.cn/u/1937516182>). His recent collection, *Flag of Permanent Defeat*, Waratah, Puncher & Wattmann, 2019, represents a fascinating example.

34. Significantly, the poet chooses the loanword *Wanbaolu* 萬寶路 to translate “Marlboro”.

就像查遍Facebook

[...]

The translanguaging creativity also stands as a disruptive strategy that may be understood as a yearning to surpass the univocity of monolingualism, and can be seen as a *mise en scène* of the poet's Third Space. For instance, in the English-language versions of *My Two Women/Wo de liangge nüren* 我的兩個女人 and *The Double Man/Shuang xing ren* 雙性人, two poems offering multifaceted reflections on identity, Ouyang adopts Chinese terms that need to be explained through paratextual references that “crucial signpost to regulate ‘the textual traffic into and out of a text’”.<sup>35</sup>

### **My Two Women**

[...]

My previous woman was called *hua*  
And my current woman was called *ao*  
For the sake of freedom  
Both can be abandoned  
Note: *hua*: China; *ao*: Australia

## **12**

### **The Double Man**

my name is  
a crystallisation of two cultures  
my surname is China  
my given name Australia  
if I translate that direct into English  
my surname becomes Australia  
my given name China  
I do not know what motherland means  
I possess two countries  
or else  
I possess neither  
my motherland is my past  
my motherland is my present  
my past motherland is my past  
my present motherland is my present  
when I go to China  
I say I'm returning to my home country  
when I go to Australia  
I say I'm returning to my home country  
wherever I go  
it is with a heart tinged in two colours  
although there is *han jian* in Chinese

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35. Clive SCOTT, “Translating the literary. Genetic criticism, text theory and poetry”, in Susan BASSNETT and Peter BUSH (ed.), *The Translator as a Writer*, London and New York, Continuum, 2006, p. 115.

there isn't *ao jian* in English  
I write in Chinese  
like Australians do in English  
our motherlands have one thing in common:  
they've both lost M  
I have nullified my home  
I have set up a home  
in two hundred years' time  
I shall be the father of the double man  
Note: *han jian*: Chinese traitor; *ao jian*: Australian traitor.

It is worth shining a light on the lines 28-31 of *Shuang xing ren* 雙性人, where resorting to using a mixed code restates the awareness of the Other:

雙性人  
[...]  
我用中文寫字  
就跟澳洲人用英文  
我們mother有個公共的特點  
那就是失去了M  
[...]

Therefore, the interpretative practice is not only based on the extra-referential content, but also on the process of signification.<sup>36</sup> The translanguing and multilingual creativity give voice to the dynamic and composite self, thus encouraging the poet, as well as the reader, to confront the Other.

Amidst this contest, self-translation turns into the practice of realizing a schizophrenic identity. In fact, if bilingualism condemns the author to live in-between, self-translation and bilingual creation act as a device to draw the author's own mirrored portrait. The last three poems of the collection (*Shuang* 雙/"Double"; *Wo de bei'ai* 我的悲哀/"My Sadness"; and *Liang tiao lu* 兩條路/"The Two Roads") exhibit the poet's playful attitude towards his languages, as a mimicry of his own self and his own Other. Among them, the latter poem best illustrates Ouyang Yu's aesthetic and ethical search for expressive freedom, in his Third Space. The last of the five stanzas<sup>37</sup> composing *Liang tiao lu* 兩條路, the first part of the poem, wavers between Chinese and English:

36. Paola BOHÓRQUEZ, "In-between Languages: Translingual Living and Writing in the United States", in Sherrow O. PINDER (ed.), *American Multicultural Studies. Diversity of Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Sexuality*, Los Angeles, Sage, 2013, p. 47.

37. In the first four stanzas, Chinese and English are interchanged, but translation is only displayed by the full reading of the two versions, so that the first Chinese stanza semantically corresponds to the first English one, the second English stanza fits with the second Chinese one, and so forth.

沒有taken的路其實已經taken  
已經taken過的, 不一定是必經的路  
你別無選擇, 你選擇很多  
[...]

The same pattern is applied to the last stanza of “The Two Roads”, which fits perfectly with its Chinese/English counterpart:

The road not 走has actually been 走了  
One 走了的, not necessarily the one one wants to take,  
You have no choice, you have many choices

Languages are (re)imagined, interwoven and embedded into one another, forging a thick transtextual and translanguing dialogue. It is not without merit that self-translation is considered to be the most creative expression of translation<sup>38</sup>.

## Conclusions

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When in 1968 Roland Barthes proclaimed the “death of the author”, along with an epistemological change, he also postulated the end of the author as a repository of truth and defined the liberty of the reader towards the text. Apparently, self-translation, “as a reinterpretation of the original and the creation of a new original”,<sup>39</sup> challenges the theorist’s notion of text and subverts his idea of the reader as the only actor entitled to signify. By enabling the writer to “recreate the original” with all the consequences that this entails,<sup>40</sup> self-translation asserts the sovereignty of the author over his own work.

With this in mind, several general observations emerge. In the first place, in Ouyang Yu’s experience, self-translation means sacrifice, anguish and loss.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, as many other self-translators, he presents his works as originals, thereby attempting to substantiate his “double” essence and unveiling a *surconscience linguistique* that symbolizes the multilingual writer:<sup>42</sup>

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38. As aptly pointed out by Julio-César SANTOYO, « On mirrors, dynamics & self-translations », in Anthony CORDINGLEY ed.), *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 30.

39. Anthony CORDINGLEY, “On mirrors, dynamics & self-translations”, in Anthony CORDINGLEY (ed.), *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture*, London, New York, Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 83.

40. Michaël OUSTINOFF, *Bilinguisme d’écriture et auto-traduction. Julien Green, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2001, p. 34.

41. “A Bilingual Force Moving in Between’: memories of a bilingual animal”, *Westerly*, vol. 61, no. 2, 2016, pp. 75-76.

42. *L’écrivain francophone à la croisée des langues : entretiens*, Paris, Karthala, 1997, p. 6. Discussing the role of the contemporary author who writes in a multilingual context, especially in Québec, Lise Gauvin introduces the aforementioned concept to refer to a special sensitivity to the language, that transforms language in a privileged locus of reflection, narrative, and conflict. My reference is obviously detached

在中国占主导地位的严复的“信达雅”理论，一放到自译中，就站不住脚了。作为原作者的译者，是不必对自己讲什么“信达雅”的。对他来说，就是“创”字当头，使翻译真正成为再创造。<sup>43</sup>

Yan Fu's theory of "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance",<sup>44</sup> which is dominant in China, once applied to self-translation becomes groundless. As a translator of the author's voice, one does not have to negotiate "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance". For a self-translator, it is the word "creation" that becomes preeminent and makes translation genuinely turn into a re-creation.<sup>45</sup>

Self-translation truly embodies a legitimization of the authorial power, namely the authority to draw on the artist's hyphenated self, a practice which traverses linguistic creativity.

It is important to note that poetry self-translation, which occupies a peculiar status in the domain of self-translation studies, as well as an open field of possibilities,<sup>46</sup> seems to represent the ideal medium to disclose an expository portrait of the exiled subject. Depiction, through poetry, appears more impressive than a narrative, yet without eschewing the intrinsic dynamic evolution of a migrant identity. Hence, if the seduction of translation lies in the chance to trace the Other in the self,<sup>47</sup> it may be said that the seduction of self-translation lies in the hermeneutic constitution of the multilingual self.

In this "second-degree writing"<sup>48</sup> that recodifies meanings and forms, the bilingual author negotiates the mimetic function within the ethics of translation with his creative needs: re-creations are prompted by the dilemma of the in-betweenness and shaped by the dialogic (re)imagination. In Ouyang's poetics, the interpenetration

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from the francophone context, but agrees with the fact that "Écrire devient alors un véritable 'acte de langage'." Lise GAUVIN, *Langagement. L'Écrivain et la langue au Québec*, Montréal, Boréal, 2000, p. 8.

43. OUYANG Yu, "Shuangyu rensheng 双语人生 (A bilingual life)", *Huawen wenxue* 华文学 (Literature in Chinese), 2018.

44. Yan Fu 嚴復 (1853-1921), a major figure in modern China, and the most influential translator and translation theorist, proposed the tripartite criterion of *xin, da, ya* 信达雅 in his preface of the translation of Huxleys' *Evolution and Ethics* (*Tiyan lun* 天演論), appeared in 1898. This dictum profoundly impressed a conspicuous number of Chinese scholars and exerted a great influence in the development of translation theory and practice in the twentieth century. Probably, in Ouyang's quotation, this phrase stands as an allegory of a solid and rigorous approach, rather than an actual reference to a specific technique.

45. My translation.

46. In Lusetti's words. Chiara LUSETTI, "I self-translation studies: panorama di una disciplina", in Gabriella CARTAGO and Jacopo FERRARI (ed.), *Momenti di storia dell'autotraduzione*, Milan, Edizioni Universitarie di Lettere Economica Diritto, 2018, p. 159.

47. Gayatri C. SPIVAK, "The Politics of Translation", in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside the Teaching Machine*, London/New York, Routledge, 1993, p. 179.

48. Gérard GENETTE, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, op. cit.

of languages and cultures results in transtextuality and translingualism, namely the perpetual wandering *across* worlds and between *la langue de la raison* and *la langue du cœur*.<sup>49</sup>

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49. Christian LAGARDE, “Des langues minorées aux ‘langues mineures’: autotraduction littéraire et sociolinguistique, une confrontation productive”, *Glottopol*, no. 25, 2015, pp. 2-13.

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