

Surrejoinder

The kind of deconstruction Magliola practices in his remarks is what he calls, after Derrida, an “affirmative” and contemporary kind of deconstruction. He performs — and “performs” is perhaps too weak a word — a linguistic operation on the text. I suppose it can be taken as a radical extension of what Derrida in his earlier writings called a “decentering” of the text. In fact so much effort and verbal skill is spent in deconstructing my text(s) alone that Yip ought to feel pleased that his gaping logocentrism has been sown up again. At any rate, it has very little to do with the destructive criticism of Chuang Tzu (and Nietzsche as well; I still retain some loyalty to comparative literature) which I take as my model. Chuang Tzu rejects the conventional values of words (ugly/beautiful), deliberately and shockingly employing them to mean the opposite of what they ordinarily mean in order to demonstrate their essential meaninglessness. In my review, I was trying to do something (weakly) similar in calling Yip’s writing and translation ugly, a remark which has provoked more misunderstanding than thought about language, Chinese, deconstructive, or otherwise. I used irony and sarcasm (the strategies both Chuang Tzu and Nietzsche use in their destructions of the dialectical machine) to deflate what I take to be Yip’s naive belief in a “creative-decreative dialectic” which holds that objects exist apart from language in the first place. To me Wang Wei’s flowers are an impossibility; they blossom only in language, and perhaps only in translation. The Italians have a witty saying (rhetorically it’s a chiasmus, the figure of deconstruction itself) that translations are like spouses: a beautiful translation is apt to be unfaithful, and a faithful translation is apt to be ugly. Hence Yip’s insistence in his letter on faithfulness to the original is “ugly” to me in another sense entirely.

It was also in this spirit that I ironically referred to Wang Wei’s line about the lotus blossoms “slipping” Professor Yip’s mind, and getting lost in translation (a new line and a new mind, forgetfulness, *aletheia*, translation as robbery-truth in the text of Heidegger — I think all of these connections are there to be made in my review) not to disparage him as a scholar — obviously he has a familiarity with Chinese poetry that I can never hope to have — but only to point out what I take to be ethnocentric traps in his texts.

Deconstruction from the *outside* of the western metaphysical enclosure? Yes, that is what I was groping towards, and not towards the standard of deconstruction espoused by Magliola.

So I wonder how he can claim that I used rhetoric to *identify* Yip's translation with Robinson's? It seems to me that, as we reconstruct the implied statements behind my irony, Robinson and Yip have two very different readings of the poem. I happen to think that Robinson's is "freer" and more "deconstructive," and I encourage my reader to think this with me, but that is all I see happening in the textual underground. If this is synthesizing, then so be it.

Actually, it is Professor Magliola who is synthesizing (he says so, so why not believe him) because he has conflated two very different texts of mine into one, into sameness. On page 2, for example, he says that in my original review I accuse Yip of borrowing inconsistently from the early *and* late Heidegger. Not so. I never used the word inconsistent. What I was objecting to was the hodgepodge of western theory, of *Hegel* and the *later* Heidegger appropriating (without Yip's seeing any apparent effect) a poem written in the Chinese language. I pointed out the violence of linguistic appropriation in the early Heidegger merely to indicate why I think Yip prefers the later Heidegger — it's easier using these texts of Heidegger to make the kind of argument he has always "consistently" made, namely, that Chinese Taoist-inspired poets use linguistic strategies that can present "objects in their purest form uncontaminated by intellect or subjectivity" (Yip, *Ezra Pound's Cathay* p. 25). I had no interest in "decentering" his project or in playing with his texts affirmatively à la Magliola. It was only when Yip insisted in his letter that he has a *center* for his project of East-West comparative poetics that I felt compelled to examine syntactically the crucial paragraph. Yet it is this analysis which Magliola takes as the gist of my objection to Yip's project, conflating my two texts, making me into a deconstructor blind to my own will to consistency. Apparently Professor Magliola is so intently literal a reader that he cannot be bothered with the little dance of relocation my "sunny sarcasm" requires (all knowing is solar, is active interpretation; there is no such thing as passive lunar contemplation of an object — these metaphors play in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "On the Immaculate Perception"). No, I have to be harboring a latent organicism in demanding that the whole poem of Wang Wei be discussed (actually I referred to the Chinese *context*, by which I mean the intertextual dimension of the text in its tradition, that which is to be taken with the text).

And so I am painted black in his white mythology, Professor Yip accuses me of turning white into black, and only Lao Tzu, it seems, knows how to know the white while keeping to the role of the black (*Tao Te Ching* ch. 28).

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