

Translation, Transposition, Rewriting: Shen Congwen's »Gazing at Rainbows« and Pu Songling's »Qingfeng«, »Fengxian«

Amira Katz-Goehr

*Preklad, transpozícia, prepisovanie: Shen Congwenova poviedka »Pozorovanie dúb«
a Pu Songlingove poviedky »Qingfeng« a »Fengxian«*

Resumé Názov článku napovedá, čo je jeho cieľom—ukázanie spojenia medzi dvoma časovo vzdialenými autormi, Pu Songlingom (18.–19. stor.) a Shen Congwenom (20. stor.). Autorka porovnáva príbehy týchto dvoch autorov a jej literárna analýza ukazuje, aký môže byť medzi nimi vzťah.

Abstract The title says what this essay hopes to do, showing a connection between two far apart writers—Pu Songling (17th/18th c.) and Shen Congwen (20th c.). I play their stories side by side so as to follow the ways they possibly relate.

Keywords China, Literature, Qing dynasty, 20th c., Translation, Transposition, 'Rewriting' · Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640–1715), »Qingfeng« 青鳳, »Fengxian« 鳳仙 · Shen Congwen 沈從文 (1902–1988), »Kanhong lu« 看虹錄 (1940/43).

This feeling: does it have to wait be memory?
This moment as it comes: already lost as in trance.

Li Shangyin (ca 813–858)¹

I came here not to write, but to be mad.
Robert Walser (1878–1956)²

1 »The Inlaid Lute«, in *Chinese Poetry. Major Modes and Genres*, ed. & tr. by Yip Wai-lim, (Berkeley, CA [etc.]: University of California Press, 1976), 293.

2 Quoted from Reto Sorg, »In the Penal Colony. Afterword«, in Elfriede Jelinek, *Her Not All Her*,

In Shen Congwen's story »Gazing at Rainbows«³ (»Kan hong lu«⁴) the narrator himself declares he is writing—not just in general terms of 'inspiration', but 'in fact'—a *Liaozhai*⁵ story. What could he have meant by this connecting himself to one who came before? If I could answer this, might what he did shed light on what could be regarded as aspects of translation—transposition, rewriting or modeling? Are in fact such concepts part of what we conceive of as translating?

The somewhat perplexing mention in my title of two of Pu Songling's stories, named after their heroines Qingfeng and Fengxian, is obviously not haphazard. It reflects a real story—one can say: a mini-detective story—behind Shen Congwen's »Kanhong lu«.

I shall not deal here in detail with the complicated background of Shen Congwen's story, which involves a lost text (possibly only in manuscript form), written in 1941, and its rewritten version published in the Guilin journal *New Literature* (*Xin wenxue* 新文學) in 1943. The story was published once again in 1944(?) as part of a collection of three of Shen Congwen's works under the name *Gazing at Rainbows and Plucking Stars* (*Kanhong zhaixing lu* 看虹摘星錄), but is not extant in this form.⁶ To complicate things even more, we also have two

tr. by Damion Searls (London; Paris: Sylph Editions. Center for Writers & Translator, The American University of Paris, 2012), 34.

3 Shen Congwen, »Gazing at Rainbows«, tr. by Jeffrey C. Kinkley, in Shen Congwen, *Imperfect Paradise* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 463–481.

4 »Kanhong lu« 看虹錄 [written in July 1941; rewritten in March 1943], first published in *Xin wenxue* no 1 (Guilin, 15 July 1943); in *Shen Congwen quanji* 沈從文全集 [Complete Works], 36 vols. plus appendix vol., ed. by Zhang Zhaohe 張兆和 & al. (Taiyuan: Beiyue wenyi chubanshe, 2002), 10: 327–342.

5 Pu Songling's collection of Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio, *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 (first printed in 1766).

6 According to Jeffrey C. Kinkley in his *Imperfect Paradise*, »Gazing at Rainbows«, »Kanhong lu« was written in July 1941 and revised in March 1943; according to his list of Shen Congwen's works at the end of his earlier *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), »Gazing at Rainbows« and »Zhaixing lu« 摘星錄 [Record on Plucking Stars] were both published in 1940, but are not extant. According to Shen Congwen's Complete Works the (non-extant) original »Kan hong lu« and »Zhaixing lu« were published in 1943. The text of »Kan hong lu« in the Complete Works is identical with the Guilin version in the journal *New Literature*.

Dating is most broadly discussed by Pei Chunfang 裴春芳 in »Hongying xingguang huoke zheng—Shen Congwen sishi niandai xiaoshuo de aiyu neihan fawei« 虹影星光或可証——沈從

English translations of the story, of which one—that of Jin Di 金隄 (1921–2008) and Robert Payne (1911–1983)⁷—is possibly based on the original lost text (or manuscript) of 1941, and the other of Jeffrey Kinkley, which is a translation of the 1943 version. The only evidence of (the original) »Kanhong lu« until 1992, when it surfaced in the old journal *New Literature* was the printed English translation of Jin Di and Payne.

Apart from various essays dealing with the story's obscure genealogy⁸, much of the scholarly work written about it, focuses on its autobiographical fibre. Following the many rumours about Shen Congwen's circumstances while in Kunming during the 1940s, and the harsh attacks (among others by Guo Moruo⁹) aimed at the story as an erotic, even pornographic piece, scholars keep looking for its biographical implications, mainly interested in the identity of the story's female protagonist, supposed to be one of Shen Congwen's lovers.¹⁰

»Kanhong lu« is an experimental story, one of only three or so written by Shen Congwen in the early 1940s and not attempted again.¹¹ It is a story combi-

文四十年代小說的愛欲內涵發微 [Reflected Rainbows and Light of Stars as a Possible Testimony—The Unfolding of Allusions to Sexual Desire in Shen Congwen Stories from the 1940s], *Shi yue* 十月 2/2009. May 1944 is given by Pei Chunfang as the date of publication of the collection *Kanhong zhaixing lu* which probably comprised 3 stories »Kanhong lu«, »Zhaixing lu« and »Meng yu xianshi« 夢與現實 [Dream and Reality] (does not appear in the Complete Works), as well as the essay »Kanhong zhaixing lu houji« 看虹摘星錄後記 [Afterword to Accounts of Gazing at Rainbows and Plucking Stars].

7 »The Rainbow«, in *The Chinese Earth. Stories by Shen Ts'ung-wen*, tr. by Ching Ti [Jin Di 金隄] and Robert Payne [1947] (rev. ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 177–189.

8. See Pei Chunfang for extensive discussion.

9 Guo Moruo 郭沫若, »Chi fandong wenyi« 斥反動文藝 [Denouncing Reactionary Art; 1948], in *Guo Moruo quanji · wenxue bian* 郭沫若全集·文學編 [Complete Works · Literature Section], 17 vols. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981–89), 16: 288–299.

10 »Gazing at Rainbows« and »Record on Plucking Stars« were not published in Shen Congwen's Collected Works (*Shen Congwen wenji* 沈從文文集) of 1983, probably due to their actual disappearance or else, perhaps because they were made to disappear as part of an editorial board's or personal decision. Also, the fact that Shen Congwen did not show the story to his wife, Zhang Zhaohe (1910–2003), is repeatedly brought up in arguing the story's autobiographical character.

11 In addition to the mentioned stories, Shen Congwen published in the same year (1943) two other works which read like 'accompanying' essays in a similar vein »Shuiyun« 水雲 [Water and Clouds] and the Afterword to Accounts of Gazing at Rainbows and Plucking Stars mentioned

ning in its fabric ‘fiction’, ‘autobiography’ and ‘non-fictional’ ruminations on the essence of creative writing and reading and their sources.

Again, my interest in »Kanhong lu« lies in the relation between it and Pu Songling’s story or stories, directly referred to at the end of Shen Congwen’s story: It concludes with a short paragraph suggesting that the I-narrator is writing either of Pu Songling’s two stories, »Qingfeng«¹² (in the 1943 version) or »Fengxian«¹³ (in Jin Di and Payne’s translation, with no original text to verify it).

First, Kinkley’s translation of this very Pu Songling-y paragraph¹⁴:

To my surprise it is ten at night again. The moonlight is bright and clear as it floods the veranda. So I open the door, to let the moonlight in. It is as if someone has quietly followed the moonlight into my room and, standing behind me, asked, »Why do you torment yourself so? What is it for?« My eyes moisten as I force a smile, but I do not turn around¹⁵: »*I am writing about Qingfeng*¹⁶, the character in Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio. *I want to bring her back with my pen.*« [emphasis mine]¹⁷

Jin Di and Payne’s translation is different and mentions Pu Songling’s »Fengxian«:

But now it is again ten o’clock at night, clear moonlight, the veranda is flooded with the moon. I open the door and let the moon in. Then there seems to be someone who, following the moonlight, enters the room and stands behind me: »Why do you torment yourself? What do you mean by these symbols of life?«¹⁸ I force a smile. My eyes grow wet with tears. »*I am writing the story of Fenghsien, the fox-goddess who entered*

above.

12 »Qingfeng«, in Pu Songling, *Liaozhai zhiyi huijiao huizhu huiping ben* 聊齋誌異會校會注會評本 [The »Liaozhai zhiyi« with Compiled Commentaries on Textual Criticism, Annotations and Critical Commentaries], 3 vols., ed. by Zhang Youhe 張友鶴 (Taipei: Liren shuju, 1991), 1: 112–118.

13 »Fengxian« 鳳仙, *ibid.*, 3: 1177–1184 (*juan* 9).

14 Moon, curtains, someone enters the room following the moonlight, tormenting oneself—reminiscent yet of another of Pu Songling’s stories: »Fengyang shiren« 鳳陽士人 [The Scholar of Fengyang], *ibid.*, 2: 187–190.

15 The preceding phrase does not appear in Jin Di and Payne’s version.

16 我在寫青鳳 —note the added word ‘about’ which is not necessarily indicated in the Chinese: ‘I am writing Qingfeng’.

17 »Gazing at Rainbows«, in *Imperfect Paradise*, 481.

18 A more elaborate line than in our Chinese text.

*a mirror and came to life again because her lover was faithful. I want to revive her through my pen [emphasis mine].*¹⁹

And the Chinese original, basis of Kinkley's translation, and most likely different from that of Jin Di's:

居然又到了晚上十點鐘。月光清瑩，樓廊間滿是月光。因此把門打開，放月光進到房中來。似乎有個人隨同月光輕輕的進到房中，站在我身後邊，“為什麼這樣自苦？究竟算什麼？”我勉強笑，眼睛濕了，並不回過頭去，“我在寫青鳳，聊齋上那個青鳳，要她在我筆下復活。”²⁰

Following Shen Congwen's pronouncement, I shall try to show in what way the traces of the older stories—not only their flavor and atmosphere, but also a 'modernized' set of structural features—associate in my mind to a 'translational transposition', to a kind of a self-imposed model in a capacity somewhat similar to an original text to its translation.

Although »Kanhong lu« is marked with allusions to classical writings, references to various books and cultural objects, the narrator's remark at the end of the last section (the third)—which is a tortured (and some might say somewhat 'overstated', perhaps detrimental to the story's overall 'feel') self-analysis of the writer's life and writing procedures—is rather striking and comes as a surprise (as so many of Shen Congwen's endings do). It does deserve some attention.

»Kanhong lu« consists of three sections: The first, a short prologue describes the author-narrator returning home from »another place«. He is gradually drawn by memory and imagination, recollecting the experience he has gone through the previous evening. Finding himself in a vast silent place he was attracted by a distinct fragrance of plum blossoms to a courtyard and a little room. Recollecting melts strangely but naturally into 'reality' in the second section. As if in a movie, the story pans in on a simple but elegantly furnished room, fragrant with perfume, a fire blazing in the stove—the whole creating an otherworldly atmosphere. The I-narrator of the frame story (sections one and three), now »visitor« (Kinkley's translation for *keren* 客人), is »wholly lost in a fantastically solitary state«, when the »mistress of the room« (*zhuren* 主人) quietly steals in, her image is appearing in the great mirror opposite the stove. He gazes over the detail of her green silk dress, her beautifully formed legs clad in fine stockings,

19 »The Rainbow«, in *The Chinese Earth*, 189.

20 *Shen Congwen quanji*, 10: 341–342.

her perfect feet. Not unlike a *Liaozhai* beauty, »Her face is white; her eyebrows are long; there is the warm breath of spring in her smile [...]. Her fingers are soft and slender. As they ruffle her hair, the smiling face tilts to the side, breaking the silence in her guest's mind.« The erotically charged conversation between »visitor« and »mistress of the room« is followed by his handing her a story he had written. She reads, he gazes. Writing, reading and the 'actual' scene and characters unify in what is the artistic knot or the core of the story. The third section finds the writer in his own room ruminating on his experience, on the process of writing, and yes, on what is formulated in the story's subtitle as *The Shape of One Person's Life* (»Shengming de yizhong xingshi« 生命的一種形式).

For all its obsessive and erotic character, »Kanhong lu« is a story about writing (and reading) fiction. The visitor's (inner) story presented to the mistress of the room, as we go on reading, is a tale of hunting a doe in a snowstorm. The tale, in the visitor-narrator's own words is (not unlike a *Liaozhai* tale) »fantastic and baroque«, »absurd yet romantic«, its writing »dazzling without being serious [...]. It's like a children's story, for only little children could believe in the reality of it, and only they could appreciate all the things it speaks of, in a spirit that goes beyond words like *reality* and *fiction* and partakes of the tragic and happy feelings of the characters.«²¹

Already at this point one wonders as to the relation between the I-narrator of the first section and the visitor-narrator of the second section, who is an active participant both in his hunting tale and in his capacity of companion in the sensuous scene in the room. The tale presented to the mistress by this doubly-active narrator must be rather different from its paraphrase (offered to her by the visitor) so as to be fittingly defined as a 'children's story'.

The woman is required to read it slowly:

»It is your story [says the woman], so I must read it slowly.«

»Yes, this is fiction. It can be understood only if read slowly.«

»You mean because it's too deep or because I'm too stupid?«

»Neither. I mean that the language is too obscure—not in accord with ordinary usage. Surely you're aware that all thought and behavior not in accord with custom run the risk of being seen as very dangerous, as leading to anarchy!«

21 »Gazing at Rainbows«, 469.—“我在寫小說。情感荒唐而誇飾，文字艷佚而不庄。寫一個荒唐而又浪漫的故事，獨自在大雪中獵鹿，簡直是奇蹟，居然就捉住了一隻鹿。正好像一篇童話，因为只有小孩子想信這是可能的一件真實事情，且將超越真實和虛飾這類名詞，去欣賞故事中所提及的一切，分享那個故事中人物的悲歡心境。” (*Shen Congwen quanji*, 10: 332).

»Fine. Let me see if I can discover something in this work.«²²

“我看你寫的故事，要慢慢的看。”

“是的，這是一個故事，要慢慢的看，才看得懂。”

“你意思是說，因為故事寫得太深——還是我為人太笨？”

“都不是。我意思是文字寫得太晦，和一般習慣不大相合。你知道，大凡一種和習慣不大相合的思想行為，有時還被人看成十分危險，會出亂子的！”

“好，我試一試看，能不能從這個作品發現一點什麼。”²³

Feng Zhenluan 馮鎮密 (1760–1830), one of *Liaozhai's* important commentators, suggests that if one reads the *Strange Tales* for the plot and not for the style, one is a fool. He too recommends a slow pace in reading:

A man eager to climb famous mountains must have the patience to follow a winding path [...]. A man eager to watch the moonlight must have the patience to wait until midnight. A man eager to see a beautiful woman must have the patience to let her finish her toilette. Reading requires patience too.

And then proposes among other things:

This book should be read as one reads the Book of Zhuangzi. The Zhuangzi is *wild and abstract*, the *Strange Tales* are *dense and detailed* and real. It is a series of *wild details and concrete abstractions* [emphasis mine].

[...]

This book should be read as one reads the *Epigrams* of the neo-Confucian philosophers. In the *Epigrams* the sense is pure; in the *Strange Tales* the sensibility is well tuned. Every time one thinks a situation weird, it is in fact very real and true to human nature. It contains both pure sense and pure sensibility.²⁴

The narrator-visitor's advice or warning (in »Kanhong lu«) as to reading his story slowly and carefully sounds rather like a proposed seduction. As it reads, it is indeed followed by the erotic tale of hunting of the doe, read by the woman, paraphrased by her visitor and discussed by the two of them. Stylistically, it risks

22 »Gazing at Rainbows«, 470.

23 *Shen Congwen quanji*, 10: 332

24 Quoted and translated by John Minford in his »Introduction« to Pu Songling, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* (London: Penguin Classics, 2006), xxvii. [1] 是書當以讀《莊子》之法讀之《莊子》倘儻，《聊齋》綿密。雖說鬼說狐，如華嚴樓閣，彈指即現；如未央富闕，實地造成。綿密實情恍也。/ [2]、是書當以讀程、朱語錄之法讀之。語錄理精，《聊齋》情當。凡事境奇怪，實情致周匝，合乎人意中所欲出，與先正不背在情理中也。(Feng Zhenluan, »Du Liaozhai zashuo« 讀聊齋雜說 [Various Remarks on Reading the »Liaozhai«], in *Liaozhai zhiyi bujijiao buizhu buiping ben*, 1: 9–18).

going over the top in the mode of the Song of Songs²⁵ (which is actually referred to later in the story²⁶). However, at the same time the tale and the scene embody, with a measure of self-irony, Shen Congwen's views on the procedure and sources of writing.

The woman starts reading, not without reservations. She gets to the point where the doe is hiding from the storm, yet unaware of the stalking hunter focusing on her feet:

»Your description is funny», the woman remarks, »for your imagining of the events is unreal. Beautiful, but not authentic.« He asks her to delay criticism until she reaches the end. She continues reading. The tale and the room, doe-mistress and hunter-visitor get more and more entangled:

Her smile gradually fades as she reads. He knows that she has reached a chapter describing another part of the doe's body and how human that soft and gentle creature is. The tenderness flowing from her gaze because of her new love is depicted even more touchingly and likened to human feeling.

She places the book on her knees, open to those pages, and heaves a gentle sigh. The visitor seems to have used writing to strip her legs of their stockings, leaving her feet white as the frost. She thinks she hears the visitor whisper, »Do not think it blasphemous; I like to look at them. Do not be angry, for I shall kiss them with my lips [...]. In short, I want to pass through all that the hunter has. It may be slightly foolish, slightly idiotic, but still I want to do it.«

Feeling that her position is not quite proper, she hastens to draw her feet back together and to pull down her hem...

(「請你看下去！看完后再批評。」)

看下去，笑容逐漸收斂了。他知道她已看到另一個篇章。描寫那母鹿身體另外一部分時，那溫柔獸物如何近于一個人。那母鹿因新的愛情從目光中流出的溫柔，更寫得如何生動而富有人性。

她把那幾頁文章擱到膝蓋上，輕輕吁了一口氣。好像腳上的一只襪子已被客人用文字解去，白足如霜。好像聽到客人低聲的說：「你不以為褻瀆，我喜歡看它，你不生氣，我還將用嘴唇去吻它〔……〕總之，我將一切照那個獵人行徑作去，雖然有點傻，有點痴，我還是要作去。」

她感覺地位不大妥當，赶忙把腳并攏一點，衣角拉下一點。²⁷

Looking at the story in some detail, I shall restart with its title and subtitle. »Gazing at Rainbows« makes us halt for a minute: a 'rainbow' is a potent

25 In which the deer repeatedly serves as a symbol of the male.

26 »Gazing at Rainbows«, 476: »In the *Song of Solomon* it is written...«.

27 »Gazing at Rainbows«, 472-473; *Shen Congwen quanji*, 10: 334-335.

symbolical image, but as it stands here attached to the verb ‘gazing’ (or ‘looking’), it turns into a somewhat unsettling trope. Rainbows are beautiful and inspirational, in Shen Congwen’s pantheistic terms they are ghost-like and even God-like, but of their nature they are also indistinct, elusive, promptly vanishing, ‘uncatchable’ like the story itself. ‘Gazing’ at them is an elevating, yet dispiriting experience. As for the subtitle, here a duration of *24 hours* is set for the description of ‘one person’s shape of a life’ (*yige ren ershisi dianzhongnei shengming de yizhong xingshi* 一個人二十四點鐘內生命的一種形式). Although the longer time span stands in contrast to the fleeting appearance of the rainbow, it is also limited when one looks at a ‘shape of life’ or in fact at Shen Congwen’s ambitious story. This Time framework is, moreover, persistently divided into smaller time units—hours and minutes. Both title and subtitle seem to hint at a particular way of groping or looking for something, an attempt at evanescent, as if non-committal observations, the one of a nebulous natural phenomenon and the other of a fragmented sequence of ‘plot’, dialogue and ruminations during a period of 24 hours.

The feeling evoked throughout the story is of a search, of hunting for something. »Kanhong lu« is jerky and elusive—a story in perpetual motion which both prompts and undermines the search and hunt. The main images are those of movement and unsteadiness—the rainbow, deer, galloping horses printed on the fluttering curtains, flames blazing in the stove. Fragmented scenes—descriptions, action, dialogue, musings—keep replacing each other. Bipolar adjectives—warm and cold, dark and bright, heavy and light—constantly and quickly transform one into the other. Although only two characters are involved, personal pronouns are not fixed but change according to situation and function. The style is abrupt, consisting of reserved statements, truncated sentences, toing and froing, even contradictory, declarations. Still, the most unsettling element in the story is that of Time—it shifts chaotically and is unpredictable, sometimes un-followable.

The sensation of quest permeating the story is not just a vague ‘feeling’—the word for ‘catching’, ‘arresting’, ‘holding’ (*zhuozhu* 捉住) surfaces several times in the text, and although the compound is more frequently used for ‘physically getting hold of things’, it is crucially employed in the story also in its abstract meaning. *Zhuozhu* appears most dramatically in the main part of the second section, when the I-narrator-visitor hands the woman his tale. *Zhuozhu* is used twice in one sentence—once for physically holding the doe’s legs, and once for mentally grasping the beautiful image. The doe, needless to say, is an animal of

beauty, quick, alert and agile; it is the target of man's hunt and widely employed as an anthropomorphic poetic image.

After reading for a while, the woman becomes doubtful of her visitor's tale, or else apprehensive and (similarly to doe) feeling trapped herself. She stops reading and asks the tale's author to tell her how he *really* captured the doe. He concedes and starts paraphrasing his story:

»Fine, let us warm ourselves by the fire and I'll tell you... Heaven knows what I was feeling as I stalked her [the doe]. As my fingers stroked the smooth down on her feet, I wondered, *Had I taken [zhuozhu]* a pulsing, living doe in my hand, or *captured [zhuozhu]* an image of beauty, using the most delicate mental tendrils of my Life? I wanted so much to know, but I was not allowed to...«²⁸

Jin Di and Payne in their translation use here the word »touching« for *zhuozhu*:

»[...] When my fingers touched the smooth fur of her feet, I wondered whether I was *touching* a living doe or only [*touching*] an image of perfect beauty.«²⁹

“好，我們好好烤火，來說那個故事……我當時傍近了它，天知道我的心是個什麼情形。我手指撫摸到它那腳上光滑的皮毛，我想，我是用手捉住了一只活生生的鹿，還是用生命中最纖細的神經捉住了一個美的印象？亟想知道，可決不許我知道。”³⁰

The paraphrasing author-visitor *cum* doe's stalker and hunter in his tale is meant to tell her the 'real' (in fact, uncatchable) story, but it seems he himself (and who is he?) is wandering from 'reality' to 'imagination', from 'Life' to 'Writing'. His ruminations on 'capturing' or 'touching' (*zhuozhu*) of animal and image lead him to consider the use of traditional imagery:

I thought of how the ancients once described the beauty of a woman's fingers. Like catkins, spring shallots, or jade-green bamboo—spartan or luxuriant, such descriptions are ridiculous.³¹

He finds the imagery nonsensical and irrelevant and goes on with his own obsessive, erotic language (further enhanced by the woman sitting in front of him). Still, he deliberates the old literary tropes and therewith hints at the design of his own procedures. Although dismissive of the traditional imagery for his

28 »Gazing at Rainbows«, in *Imperfect Paradise*, 474.

29 »The Rainbow«, in *The Chinese Earth*, 185.

30 *Shen Congwen quanji*, 10: 335–336.

31 »I thought...« etc.—But when and where did he indulge in these thoughts? In the midst of their charged encounter, while telling an erotic tale? And he goes on: »One who has never seen the maternal tenderness in the clear, liquid eyes of a doe will puzzle over why my lips lingered so long a time upon her eyes.«

own purposes (or generally for contemporary writing), Shen Congwen does write »in the context of«, or better say, »against« his 'model'—a *Liaozhai* tale. In view of what I take as his 'intention', he does not abandon his older sources.

Now, by and by the description of the interaction between hunter and doe gets out of control, then, subsides for a while and then again: »I looked into her eyes: "What shall we do?" I wanted to take my answer from her tender gaze. I thought I heard her say, "I am in your power."« The listening woman then reacts as if on the narrator's terms—she talks about the doe, but her impulsive, nervy response presses the actual situation closer: »"No, never, not a chance. She [the doe] must have wanted to escape—far, far away..."« Their negotiation continues, coming to another climax as the narrator tells of his stroking the doe's heart³². Here the woman rebels, »"Wholly impossible!"«, a radical response which can't be but self-referential. And he—author-narrator-protagonist appositely reverts to the mode of his ongoing stumbling search:

»Perhaps, if you put it that way; it could never happen. For she was but a deer! But as for people—for instance—oh, God, let us not go on. I have already said too much.«

They fall silent for a moment.³³

“是的，要照你那麼說話，決不會有。因為那是一只鹿！至於一個人呢，比如說——唉，上帝，不說好了。我話已經說得太多了。”

相互沉默了一會兒。³⁴

And now to the concluding paragraphs of the [doe's] inner tale. Note the leaps from abstract 'life and art' ruminations to 'mundane' details, and also mentions of Time, confusion of personal pronouns, bipolar adjectives, and allusions:

»Aren't you too warm? You are still wearing too many clothes.« And as *the visitor* speaks, he does something with her.^[35] And *he* recalls something, something *very abstract* [emphasis mine]. A poet said it, if not a madman: »*Poetry sets Life ablaze, as does fire. As it burns through, it leaves but a figment of blue flame and a pile of ashes.*«

32 In Jin Di and Payne's translation: »[...] and instead of words I spoke with my hands and my lips, caressing her, calming her. Then I began to hear her sighing...« »The Rainbow«, in *The Chinese Earth*, 185).

33 »Gazing at Rainbows«, in *Imperfect Paradise*, 475.—Funnily, he has to reiterate here the difference animal/human so as to make the borderline clear; they both seem to get lost in the 'confusion' on the way to the erotic climax. Noteworthy is also the difference between this muddle and the narrator's interaction with the doe which is wordless but well comprehended (so typical of Shen Congwen's 'countryman's' writings).

34 *Shen Congwen quanji*, 10: 337.

35 Typical Shen Congwen—most dramatic events happen in half a sentence.

Twenty minutes later the visitor softly asks her, »Aren't you *cold*? Haven't you something to throw across your shoulders?« while pulling a delicate mouse-gray shawl from a pile of silk clothing. He puts it over her. »That pattern on the window curtains is peculiar. It always seems *to me* to be in *motion*.« In fact, the colored horses on the curtains already seem to *him* completely *still*.

Stirring the stove fire, the *mistress of the room* gently tells him: »I am still thinking of that doe. Why didn't she flee *a while back*, when she had a chance? It must have been fate.« *She* seems almost to be excusing or consoling herself [now the woman in place of the doe], for the event now belongs to *the past*. »*Silence* continues to envelop this room with its *orange lamplight and raging fire*.«³⁶

Scene, tale and pondering get totally confused.

“不熱嗎？我知道你衣還穿得太多。”客人問時隨即為作了些事。也想起了些事，什么都近于抽象。

不是詩人說的就是瘋子說的。“詩和火同樣使生命會燃燒起來的。燃燒后，便將只剩下一個藍焰的影子，一堆灰。”

二十分鐘后客人低聲的詢問，“覺得冷嗎？披上你那個……”并從一堆絲質物中，把那個細鼠灰披肩放到肩上去，“窗簾上那個圖案古怪，我總覺得它在動。”事實上，他已覺得窗簾上花馬完全沉靜了。主人一面攪動爐火，一面輕輕的說，“我想起那只鹿，先前一時怎么不逃走？真是命運。”說的話有點近于解嘲，因為事情已經成為過去了。³⁷

And right after that, »The next day, the mistress sits alone beside the stove and reads a letter...«.

The next day's letter again demands careful reading. Allusions, references to older texts and works of art (Song of Songs, Chinese ceramics, Yuan painting) are inextricably interwoven with memories and images of the beauty of last night's affair. Still, we are reminded that the author Shen Congwen is involved in writing a story, while 'anachronistically' sending the woman a letter, once again an act of writing inserted into the story written after (or before...) the event: »I'd like you to look at that Yuan dynasty landscape painting«, he writes to her describing in a few lines the painting³⁸ and his own desire to live in its landscape, but in fact, in her body's landscape. And immediately thereafter:

36 »Gazing at Rainbows«, in *Imperfect Paradise*, 475-476. Style and atmosphere here, to my ears, insinuate a rewrite of older stories, of writing against a model, in search of wording true to the writer and his modern mode of writing.

37 *Shen Congwen quanji*, 10: 337.

38 »... a lush, thick mat of fine down between the hillocks and the depressions, triangular in shape, neat and fine, curly and soft, twisting and tangling, like clouds and silk. The most wondrous

»It seems that I was given an image carved neither of bronze nor of jade, yet it was precious and noble and infinitely rare. The wonder of this sculpture still surprises me...«³⁹

我仿佛還見過一個雕刻，材料非銅非玉，但覺珍貴華麗，希有少見。

The woman herself has finally—if she wasn't originally so—turned one with artistic images, turned into an image (in a letter).

»Kanhong lu«, a story where characters are transformed and where reading, writing and 'reality' push one into the other, is described by its narrator (as mentioned before) in terms characteristic of a Pu Songling tale—it is a story that tries to catch something beyond the distinction of 'reality' and 'fiction'.

At this point I will revert to its counterpart—the *Liaozhai* tale ascribed here the function of the new story's 'model'. »Kanhong lu«'s doe/mistress-machination of the literary imagination is not that a distant relative of *Liaozhai*'s supernaturally transformed fox/maidens. Notwithstanding Shen Congwen's reservations as to the use of traditional devices in contemporary literature, he does write his own story against the background of the older text. While Pu Songling composes his tales provided with his precursors, the *zhiguai* 志怪 and *chuanqi* 傳奇 genres of the strange (and primarily their inherent supernatural transformations), Shen Congwen barred from these, employs a modern 'transformational' scheme with what seems to be a similar intent. Not only do we find at the end of the inner tale ('the hunt') a confusion of doe and woman (and hunter-visitor), but we are presented with a whole array of uncertain, unsettling twists which contribute to the narrative's ambiguities and unease. These twists and turns undermine any coherences to be taken for granted when following the story's tortured path to literary accomplishment.

In our search for a possible relationship of the works of the two writers, I shall look now in some detail (following the 'spirit' of our texts...) neither at

concealed scenery I had ever seen in my life. I would happily stay there a lifetime, secluded among its delights.« (»Gazing at Rainbows«, in *Imperfect Paradise*, 476).

[.....] 小阜平岡間有秀草叢生，作三角形，整齊而細柔，縈迴迂徐，如云如絲，為我一生所僅見風景幽秀地方。我樂意終此一生，在這個處所隱居。全集。(Shen Congwen *quanji*, 10: 338).

39 »The Rainbow«, in *The Chinese Earth*, 186. Wording somewhat different from our original in *Shen Congwen quanji*, 10: 338.

»Qingfeng« nor at »Fengxian«, but at a Pu Songling tale of my own choice—»A Fox Dream« (»Humeng« 虎夢).⁴⁰ Similarly to the stories referred to in »Kanhong lu«, »Humeng« too is a maiden-fox transformational tale.

Might Shen Congwen himself have confused in his mind the two stories when rewriting his second version of 1943? Most likely not, or did he? Be it as it may, since I do not wish here to force the two writers' stories into a tight comparison, nor to detect some direct inspiration of the old on the new, I take the liberty to proceed with my own choice in order to examine the nature of Shen Congwen's alleged transposition, both in 'spirit' and as carried out by means of more concrete compositional elements. This presumably does not go against the evasive quality of »Kanhong lu« and its genealogy; it might on the other hand hint at the nature of the adaptation aspired by its writer.

I associate here »Humeng«—also a story steeped in eroticism—to Shen Congwen's story for various reasons. First and foremost, for its author's mulling on the acts of reading and writing, here by the way the protagonists living out and 'discussing' the work actually being written, or as if more precisely, the work to be written. Like our modern story it is set within a frame story written in the first person, performed by no other than the author himself, Pu Songling. Moreover, the second protagonist of the frame story—a reader and acquaintance of Pu Songling's—will become the principal character through the story-proper. »Humeng« is, as mentioned by Judith T. Zeitlin in her *Historian of the Strange*,⁴¹ the only explicitly self-referential tale in the *Liaozhai* collection (of some 500 stories) and the only one that presents itself as written specifically in response to a previous *Liaozhai* tale.

The tale's protagonist, Bi Yi'an 畢怡庵,⁴² is introduced as a personal friend of Pu Songling and as the nephew of his employer, Bi Jiyou 畢際有 (1623–1693). He is an avid reader of Pu Songling's tales, and obsessed with—whom if not »Qingfeng«, the heroine mentioned at the end of »Kanhong lu« (version 1943). It starts with a scene of Bi Yi'an's reading:

Now whenever Bi [Yi'an] read my [i.e. the author/narrator's, Pu Songling] Biography of Qingfeng⁴³, his heart always went out to her and he regretted that he couldn't

40 *Liaozhai zhiyi huijiao huizhu huiping ben*, 2: 618–622 (*juan* 5).

41 Judith T. Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange. Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 174. I have adopted in the following some aspects of her analysis of this story.

42 His name, however, is not absolutely identified by scholars.

43 *Liaozhai zhiyi huijiao huizhu huiping ben*, 1 (*juan* 1): 112–118.

meet her even once. So he sat upstairs [in the villa of his uncle], lost in deep contemplation and longing for her.⁴⁴

畢每讀《青鳳傳》，心輒向往，恨不一遇。因於樓上攝想凝思，既而歸齋，日已寢暮。⁴⁵

Bi Yi'an, the reader and protagonist dozes off into a dream, in which he is introduced to a maiden-fox and marries her. Then, in another dream, dreamt while dreaming, he is taken by his new bride to a celebratory banquet to meet her sisters. After a long description of the events at the banquet, Bi Yi'an is asked to leave, goes home and finally wakes up. He now realizes it all had been a dream. However, he (and more so the reader) is still unsure:

And yet, he was still intoxicated, and the smell of wine was still strong. He thought this extraordinary. That evening the fox-maiden came to him asking, »So you didn't die of drunkenness last night?«⁴⁶

〔女送出村，使畢自歸。瞥然醒寤，竟是夢景；〕而鼻口醺醺，酒氣猶濃，異之。至暮，女來，曰：“昨宵未醉死耶？”⁴⁷

And the reader wonders whether he is dreaming again—the third dream in a dream, while trying in his mind to establish some reassuring this-worldly order. But then, the reader is mysteriously swayed (as so often with Pu Songling's tales), ready as if unaware to accept the maiden 'as she is'—in her transformed human form—oblivious of her foxy nature, or at least foregoing the clear-cut boundaries between (fox) spirit and human (and therewith other boundaries separating the supernatural from natural, dreamy from awake, imaginary from real).

Bi Yi'an himself tries to make 'order' in his mind:

»I suspected it was a dream«, he says.

The girl smiled. »My sisters took cover in dream because they feared you were a wild carouser. Actually, it was no dream.«

44 Tr. by Judith T. Zeitlin, in her *Historian of the Strange*, 175.— It is of interest to note here the interaction in both stories between the reader and the object of her/his reading. Bi's obsession with Qingfeng occurs on the borderline of reading (the actual story), falling asleep and dreaming. The woman reader in »Kan hong lu«, gets gradually drawn and attracted to the author-protagonist (hunter of the inner tale) through reading his story and through the interventions of her author-visitor, talking to her and gazing at her, as well as filling in on the story he presents to her. Dreaming and waking characterizes the former; imagination and 'reality' the latter.

45 *Liaozhai zhiyi huijiao huizhu huiping ben*, 2 (juan 5): 618.

46 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, 178.

47 *Liaozhai zhiyi huijiao huizhu huiping ben*, 2 (juan 5): 621.

畢言：「方疑是夢。」女曰：「姊妹怖君狂譟，故託之夢，實非夢也。」⁴⁸

Even in the nebulous regions Bi Yi'an and the reader find themselves, this is no minor affair: a human (although only a literary figure) is given an explanation as to 'reality' by a fox spirit, referring both to the worldly act of carousing and to the less distinct operations of dreams—her sisters »take cover in dream« (*sic*).

When later in the story Bi Yi'an is indiscreet about their affair, disclosing something of it to his friends (in a dream?), the fox-maiden is angered and her visits gradually dwindle,⁴⁹ until, *after many years*, she comes one last time and announces their inevitable separation (she and her sisters are appointed by the Queen of the West as emissaries of flowers and birds⁵⁰).

Reading further into the couple's exchanges on their last sorrowful tryst, here too we find the subject of fiction writing directly tackled. And we read:

She [the maiden-fox] sat dispiritedly for quite some time and then asked:

»How do you think I compare with Qingfeng?«

»You probably surpass her«, he replied.

»I was ashamed that I fell short of her. You and Liaozhai [Pu Songling's scholarly soubriquet] have a literary friendship. If you would be so kind as to trouble him to write a short biography of me, then *one thousand years hence* there may still be one who loves and remembers me as you do.«⁵¹

悵然良久，曰：“君視我孰如青鳳？”曰：“殆過之。”曰：“我自慚弗如。然聊齋與君文字交，請煩作小傳，未必千載下無愛憶如君者。”⁵²

48 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, 178; *Liaozhai zhiyi huijiao huizhu huiping ben*, 2 (*juan* 5): 621.

49 A well familiar (humanly) psychological characteristic attributed to spirits: they tend to disappear when their human 'partners' become too inquisitive, suspicious or not fully accepting them as they are. For other such examples, see *Liaozhai's* Linen Scarf (»Gejin« 葛巾) and Yellow Pride (»Huangying« 黃英).

50 Yet another layer—the mythical, surfacing within the dream.

51 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, 180.

52 *Liaozhai zhiyi huijiao huizhu huiping ben*, 2 (*juan* 5): 621.

A fox-spirit, object of dream of a 'real', i.e. a literary figure, comparing herself to a literary character in yet another tale, pleading to become one herself so as to be immortalized by generations of readers to come. And in fact, having already been written of while pleading.

As far as Time is concerned, the only safe fact is that we are still reading the tale—the frame-story corresponding to the story's introduction, ends as following:

On the nineteenth day of the first month, in the twenty-first year of Kangxi's reign [1683], Master Bi and I stayed together in [his family's] Spacious Hall, and he told me this strange tale in detail. I said: »Liaozhai's pen and ink would be glorified by such a vixen«, and so I recorded it.«

康熙二十一年臘月十九日，畢子與余抵足綽然堂，細述其異。余曰：“有狐若此，則聊齋之筆墨有光榮矣。”遂志之。⁵³

The blurred zone of reality and imagination formed into fiction in both stories is supported by the interaction of particular features—changing states of mind, intense mental activities (imagining, contemplating, fantasizing, dreaming), spurts of emotion and literary 'flights' (to other texts and art objects). Scenes—active or meditative—are brief, replacing each other rapidly. Time elapses almost unrealistically, hovering from narrated time to 'time' perceived by characters. Protagonists and personal pronouns are frequently transformed, as are objects. Allusions and associations are interspersed in events, instilling the feel that reality and fiction are interwoven into one.

I shall revert here to just two quotations of flights of the imagination, the one in the world of the strange—in *A Fox Dream*, where things are alarmingly befuddled; the other from the fiery literary outbursts of Shen Congwen. In my mind, the quotations associate the two stories, and not only for their heightened tone brought on by liquor and its erotic vessels:

First, a quotation from »Humeng«, telling of Bi's wondrous drunken feast with his newly wedded fox-maiden and her sisters. Nothing here is as it seems:

Bi [Yi'an] excused himself on the grounds that he could drink no more. The Second Lady then produced a rouge box a little larger than a pellet into which she poured out the wine and toasted him: »Since you can drink no more, just have this one for sentiment's sake«. It looked to Bi as though it could be drained in one sip, but he

53 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, 180; *Liaozhai zhiyi bujiao buizhu buiping ben*, 2 (*juan* 5): 621–622.

took a hundred sips, and it was still never empty. The girl by his side exchanged the box for a tiny lotus cup, saying: »Don't let yourself be tricked by that wicked woman!« She placed the box on the table and it turned out to be a huge basin... Bi took the cup and instantly emptied it into his mouth. In his grasp it felt silky and soft. He looked again, and it was no glass but a silk slipper padded and decorated with marvelous skill.«

畢辭不勝酒。二娘出一口脂合子，大於彈丸，酌曰：“既不勝酒，聊以示意。”畢視之，一吸可盡；接吸百口，更無乾時。女在傍以小蓮杯易合子去，曰：“勿為奸人所弄。”置合案上，則一巨鉢……畢持杯向口立盡。把之膩軟；審之，非杯，乃羅襪一鉤，襯飾工絕。⁵⁴

And next, a paragraph from »Kanhong lu«, part of the visitor's letter to the mistress of the room, trying to encapsulate the experience of the night before in an intoxicated style of its own, at this point inspired by and quoting from the Song of Songs:

»[...] I still feel as if I am dreaming, my heart and body floating in air. It is as if I were still kissing your eyes and your heart.^[55] In this dream you are everything... All words lose their power here, for poetry is but an inferior decoration for the springtime of Life.«

And he continues:

In the *Song of Solomon* it is written: »Thy navel is like a round goblet, which wanteth not liquor.« I touched it for the first time, fearing not that I might become drunk.

When the fruit of the vineyard ripens, becomes plump and sturdy, this is a symbol that Life is ready to render up, to expand. If it is not picked, it will slowly wither.

我好像還是在做夢，身心都虛飄飄的。好依然吻到你的眼睛和你的心。在那個夢境裡，你是一切……一切文字在此都失去了他的性能，因為詩歌本來只能作為一等生命青春的裝飾。

所羅門王雅哥說：“我的妹子，我的鴿子，你臍圓如杯，永遠不缺少調和的酒。”

我第一次沾唇，並不擔心醉倒。

葡萄園的果子成熟時，飽滿而壯實，正象征生命待贈與，待擴張。不采摘它也會慢慢枯萎。⁵⁶

The deluding and fantastic machinations of the old *chuanqi* story are in fact not unfamiliar operations of the mind, as also revealed in Shen Congwen's erratic processes of memory and imagination. Grasping and describing the experiences

54 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, 214; *Liaozhai zhiyi bujiao buizhu huiping ben*, 2 (juan 5): 620.

55 Same wording as in describing the hunter's interaction with the doe in the inner tale.

56 »Gazing at Rainbows«, in *Imperfect Paradise*, 476; *Shen Congwen quanji*, 10: 337–338.

the characters go through or putting 'Life's' passion into words are not submitted to order and coherence. On the contrary, in either of the stories they depend on the struggle to circumvent them.

In »Humeng« (and the other maiden-fox stories) the elements of indistinctness are clearly drawn in strong lines, available to and legitimate in stories of the supernatural or strange; in »Kanhong lu«, a story written in 1943, they are given expression in a contemporary, more 'plausible' context, but to a similar effect. Despite of the story's obsessive quality, its 'wildness' is contained in a fabric where reservations go to and fro and things are continually renegotiated.

Furthermore and more specifically, in Shen Congwen's story we find literary ploys unavailable to the older genre and language, i.e. his obsessive reference to time, frequent indications of change of personal pronouns, modern punctuation (inner thoughts inserted into brackets, and abstract terms put in inverted commas), as well as a variety of words expressing likelihood and approximations reflecting uncertainty: *fangfu* 仿佛 (12 times), *haoxiang* 好像 (10 times), *xiande* 顯得, *xiangshi* 像是, *qiaru* 恰如, *jinyu* 近于. All contribute to the story's atmosphere of indistinctness.

In the context of what I believe is the intent of »Kanhong lu«, I should like here to draw particular attention, just in few words, to the temporal element repeatedly referred to above, which strikes one most at first reading the story, and which prominently relates in my mind to its antecedent maiden-fox stories.

Temporal terms are profusely used in both stories, wildly so with long lapses, in »Humeng« and more meticulously, with modern clock divisions, in »Kanhong lu«. Obviously we do not find in the latter the fabulous temporal leaps, passage of years, unproblematic mix-ups of past and future (generally characteristic of Pu Songling's stories), yet a similar feeling of being 'temporally deluded' prevails also in the modern story. The temporal uncertainty is intensified precisely through its pedantic, detailed citing of actual time. Time's supposed linearity, promising as it does a continuous fictional progression and a kind of order in the story's on-goings, turns to be unreliable right from the beginning. The story's subtitle presenting it as an 'account'⁵⁷ of 24 hours, its starting point at 11:00 o'clock, and the actual first words: 'One half hour ago'—arouse false expectations. What follows right after, shatters the illusion of a stable chronology.

The delusion of actual time and of a time sequence further enhances the feeling of a quest—the capturing of the moment depends on separate, frag-

57 *Lu* 錄 of the story's title and *jilu* 記錄 at the beginning of section three.

mented images which come and go (mainly go), on abstractions and on associations, but never follow straight lines.⁵⁸

»Kanhong lu«—a story of search, literally a hunt, poses itself very much as an attempt at “capturing” the moment, at recording in appropriate words the instant of experience, of madness, the moment which always seems to escape the author’s brush and vanish. The prevalent search for precise description, for authentically wording the written fabric, evolves through what reads as persistent hesitance, as an avoidance of straight pronouncements enmeshed in the uncertain framework of time and place.⁵⁹ This as if shunning of clarity, obsessive at times, veers towards some kind of a modern Daoist saying through negation and not saying. Shen Congwen is intent on writing, as it were, the ‘ultimate’ piece, and requires of himself to continually observe the process of writing itself. It is a relentless process of self-awareness and skepticism, for which the *Liaozhai* tales seem to present themselves as a suitable model. Shen Congwen attaches himself in his own way to what is quintessential to the tales of the strange—a stretching of the confines of what (delusively) appears to be regulated and coherent by an unrestrained, perpetual crossing of boundaries. The quest comes finally to some conclusion at the end of the story, as a »saddened and heartened«, »painful and enjoyable« search—these are the words of the author.

58 »Time accumulates experiences on the artist, as it does with all men«, writes Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): »By force of omissions and emphasis, of memory and forgetfulness, time combines some of those experiences and thus it elaborates the work of art.« Jorge Luis Borges, »Borges oral«, in *Obras completas*, 4 vols. (Barcelona: Emecé editores, 1989–96), 4: 170; quoted from Kristal Efraín, *Invisible Work. Borges and Translation* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002), 34.

59 ‘Place’ in the story is no less uncertain than the element of Time, and in spite of the inspired descriptions of the seductive room the visitor-narrator is drawn to, one is constantly suspicious as to his movements—has he ever left his own room? As we read at the beginning of the last section he is still reading his ‘strange book’ in the same location of the story’s opening, ruminating: »After reading this account, my eyes were dazzled, confused. This book became a blue flame, disappearing into emptiness. I stood once again beneath that old-fashioned arch; at some time, I know not when, I had left that ‘room’.« (»Gazing at Rainbows«, in *Imperfect Paradise*, 477–478).

Translation, transposition, rewriting? I prefer here to forego a discussion that might appear too theoretical,⁶⁰ and in danger of going against the ‘spirit’ of the stories dealt with in this essay. I will instead adhere to the authors’ conceptions of themselves and their writing in their own words. The paragraphs quoted below are taken respectively from Pu Songling’s short autobiographical sketch »Liaozhai zizhi« 聊齋自誌, and from the last section of Shen Congwen’s story »Gazing at Rainbows«.

The last section of »Kanhong lu« is a contemplative inner monologue, at times a rambling outpouring, which in its own way is also a ‘summarizing’ autobiographical sketch. Read in this way it reminds us of his predecessor’s introduction of the *Liaozhai zhiyi*’s tales.

Shen Congwen’s language here moves by fits and starts and yet flows; all kinds of unordered thoughts emerge, but at the same time the detail of his immediate surroundings, his room form a counterpoint to these. In its

60 It will suffice here to mention the always vague, difficult-to-define concept: spirit of the text, which is to some the ‘essence’ of what has to be transmitted in a translation and the main qualifier of its merit. The ‘spirit of a text’ is sought after by a variety of those who ‘translate’—not only the ‘conventional’ translators, but those who adapt, transpose, re-write and re-invent transmissions which have something in common with translations. And the examples of these practitioners unversed in the languages of their original texts are well known: Ezra Pound (1885–1972), hailed by T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) as the inventor of ‘Chinese’ poetry, Martin Buber (1878–1965), who with a Chinese intermediary translated some 20 tales of the *Liaozhai zhiyi*, and Lin Shu 林紓 (1852–1924) who at the other end of the world translated into classical Chinese more than 150 European novels from languages of which he had no knowledge whatsoever. A step further are the inventors of ‘Chinese’ poetry and prose, like Victor Segalen (1878–1919), the sinophile who lived for many years in China, understood it in his own way and wrote ‘Chinese’ poetry in French, or else—the Hungarian Béla Balázs (i.e. Herbert Bauer, 1884–1949) who never set foot in China, but wrote ‘Chinese’ tales of the strange, inspired by Pu Songling’s *Liaozhai*... Such are examples not so distant from the transposition aspired to here by Shen Congwen, though in the same language (if classical and written modern Chinese are to be taken as the same). The ‘spirit’ and ‘essence’ of the text is conveyed through the transposition of specific and universal associations and allusions to Shen Congwen’s chosen text/s. It perhaps corresponds to Borges’ view of the spirit of the text that is transmitted in a *good translation* as the bundle of associations, which it brings up, and the literary heritage which exists at the actual moment of the translated text.

wandering associative style there is something that faintly echoes the content and intense, laconic classical mode of Pu Songling's »Liaozhai zizhi«. Such a questing, agitated yet pessimistic piece might well have led Shen to end his story where my essay begins, namely, with the reference to Pu Songling's writing of »Qingfeng« and »Fengxian«. It is not so much a borrowing for the writing of a nostalgic, erotic 'account' (*lu* 錄), but an experiment in writing about writing itself. In the way I read this section, Shen Congwen as if 'rolls' into Pu Songling, almost as a transformed spirit himself, in an attempt to reconstruct a 'vestige of his life' and his position as a writer. He does so in a new language, re-inventing that of his predecessor, who for his part had profusely alluded to and re-invented his brothers-in-spirit, those »in the green grove [...], at the dark frontier.«

First here, Pu Songling's words in his Introduction to the *Liaozhai*:

I am but the dim flame of the autumn firefly, with which goblins jockeyed for light; a cloud of swirling dust, jeered at by mountain ogres. Though I lack the talent of Gan Bao, I too am fond of 'seeking the spirits' [...]. My excitement quickens: this madness is indeed irrepressible, and so I continually give vent to my vast feelings and don't even forbid this folly. Won't I be laughed at by serious men? [...].

It's just that here it is the glimmering hour of midnight as I am about to trim my failing lamp. Outside my bleak studio the wind is sighing; inside my desk is cold as ice. Piecing together patches of fox fur to make a robe, I vainly fashion a sequel to *Records of the Underworld*. Draining my wine cup and grasping my brush, I complete the book of 'lonely anguish'. How sad it is that I must express myself like this!⁶¹

And the last lines, here in John Minford's translation, connecting Pu Songling to his dead brothers-in-spirit:

Alas! I am but
 A bird
 Trembling at the winter frost,
 Vainly seeking shelter in the tree;
 An insect
 Crying at the autumn moon,
 Feebly hugging the door for warmth.
 Those who know me
 Are in the green grove,

61 Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, 44.

They are
At the dark frontier.⁶²

松落落秋螢之火，魑魅爭光；逐逐野馬之塵，魍魎見笑。才非干寶，雅愛搜神；情類黃州，喜人談鬼……

遡飛逸興，狂固難辭；永托曠懷，痴且不諱。展如之人，得勿向我胡盧耶？……

獨是子夜熒熒，燈昏欲蕊；蕭齋瑟瑟，案冷疑冰。集腋為裘，妄續幽冥之錄；浮白載筆，竟成孤憤之書。寄托如此，亦足悲矣！嗟乎！驚霜寒雀，抱樹無溫；吊月秋蟲，偎欄自熱。知我者，其在青林黑塞間乎。⁶³

And Shen Congwen's words towards the end of »Gazing at Rainbows«:

Eleven thirty. Yellow light from a rapeseed oil lamp covers my black table and spreads through my tiny room. Wherever my eyes roam, I see books: some written two thousand years ago, others written thousands of miles away, some by myself, some by strangers of my own time...

I feel very tired, yet still I live in a fantastic realm that will go on and on. The end of the lamp wick has effloresced; a little blossom has opened up within the flame... my heart also seems to burn and rage. I know not why...

It is about five minutes before daybreak: I have dispelled all my 'past' and 'present' experiences and abstractions, giving up the power to analyze the meaning of their existence... My head is spinning; I have been driven to the brink of madness again by my quest to preserve these images in my memory, forms that are materially and spiritually perfect. Ultimately, the 'I' dissolves into the 'story'. I have already written five thousand words^[64] in the composition book that lies on my table. I know there is a place I can mail this little composition where others will consider it 'fiction' and try to ferret out the factual and the fictitious in it. But to me—just a vestige of Life, the remnants of a dream.⁶⁵

晚上十一點半，菜油燈一片黃光鋪在黑色臺面上，散在小小的房間中。試游目四矚，這裡那裡只是書，兩千年前人寫的，一萬里外人寫的，自己寫的，不相識同時人寫的……

我似乎很累，然而卻依然活在一種有繼續性的荒唐境界裡。

62 Minford, *Strange Tales*, xix.

63 »Liaozhai zizhi«, in *Liaozhai zhiyi bujiao buizhu huiping ben*, 1: 1-3.

64 An allusion, among others, to Bai Juyi's 白居易 (772-846), »Du Laozi« 讀老子 (Reading the Laozi), in *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 [Complete Tang Poems; 1705], *juan* 455, no 1; see »The Philosophers: Lao Tzu«, in *Chinese Poems*, tr. by Arthur Waley (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1946), 190.

65 »Gazing at Rainbows«, in *Imperfect Paradise*, 478-480.

燈頭上結了一朵小花，在火焰中開放的花朵。我心想，“到火息時，這花才會謝，正是一種生命的象徵。”我的心也似乎如焚如燒，不知道的是什麼事情……到天明前五點鐘左右，我已把一切“過去”和“當前”的經驗與抽象，都完全打散，再無從追究分析它的存在意義了……〔我從不用自己對於生命所理解的方式，凝結成為語言與形象，創造一個生命和靈魂新的範本，〕我腦子在旋轉，為保留在印象中的造形，物質和精神兩方面的完整造形，重新瘋狂起來。

到末了，“我”便消失在“故事”裡了。在桌上稿本內，已寫成了五千字。我知道這小東西寄到另外一處去，別人便把它當成“小說”，從故事中推究真偽。對於我呢，生命的殘餘，夢的殘餘而已。

And we ask—is he perhaps still writing his story?

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Department of Asian Studies