

The Poet Bilingual: Xiao Yi

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Editorial Note:

This section presents two original bilingual poems by Xiao Yi. Chinese and English versions are published as paired texts. The English poems are not line-by-line translations but authorized poetic counterparts. Pagination and ordering are identical for print and online editions.

Commentator

Dr. Zhang Guangkui, Professor of English Literature, Shenzhen University.

Selected Poems

English Version:

Tianjin Diary ¹

How to approach you? After falling from clouds,
begin imagining—a different life,
imagining subtle differences between dao (the Way) and road.

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In the end, we stray from our original intent,
the marked destination grows distant,
like once-hotly debated smog becoming routine.

Thus we chatter, complaining of tired lives,
blaming mundane reality.

Rows of Western-style houses unfold at night,
peeking through curtains at their private lives,
buying a jianbing to take home, returning
to that tense pillow, carefully brewing
a parched night. Yes, the North we inhabit,
where experience freezes and cracks.

By the Hai River, watching a drop's voyage,
things lack green or freshness. Areas paved
with dark awns turn gray-brown eyes,
erasing all the boundless.

Wandering or imagining, flashing neon hums
before the senior apartments, not far from Times Square,
ingredients airlifted from Chengdu—a flavor's
drifting journey, tested by bamboo tongues.

Shuttling between foreign lands and home,
when a postcard is replicated, affection spreads,
air suddenly turns melancholy.

Playing with history in old photos, on a dialect island,
winds from all directions bloom calm, exquisite flowers.

Those hardships will be deleted, becoming
simple ease carved in distant memory—
like a casual topic encountered unexpectedly.

Days are hard, even barren, yet we endure together.

Pain always outweighs fatigue.

Chinese Version:

天津日记

该要如何去接近你？从云层跌落以后，
开始想象，一种迥异的生活，
想象在道与路之间，还有某些细微的差异。

最后的我们远离初衷，标记的终点愈来愈远，
就像曾经被热议的雾霾，成为一种日常。

于是我们絮叨着，诉说彼此厌倦了的生活，
抱怨平庸的现实。

一排排洋楼次第展开，
趁着夜幕窥探他们的私人生活，
捎一套煎饼果子回家，重新回到
那片紧绷的枕头上，精心熬制一场干涩的夜。
是的，我们身处的北国，

经验凝固又龟裂。
在海河边，观看一滴水的航行，
事物匮乏绿意，或者新鲜，那些被乌色芒铺满的地域，
化身灰褐色的眼，湮灭所有的漫无边际。

游离或想象，闪烁的霓虹开始哼唱，
在老年公寓前，不远处的时代广场，
成都空运过来的食材，一段漂移的历程，
需要用竹木的舌苔来检验。

辗转在异域和故乡，当一枚明信片被复制，
情意开始绵延，空气突然忧郁。

在老照片里玩味历史，在方言的孤岛上，
四面风吹开平静精致的花。
那些沧桑终将被删刈，成为刻在久远里的
简单与从容——像是不经意的谈资。

日子艰难，甚至略显贫瘠，然而我们共同度过。

所谓疼痛，总是高于疲累。

Commentary

“Tianjin Diary” demonstrates Xiao Yi’s extraordinary skill in constructing bilingual poetic landscapes. Both the English and Chinese versions capture a rich urban and emotional panorama, from city streets and rivers to domestic life, blending memory, observation, and reflection. The English version preserves the lyrical precision, rhythm, and narrative flow, while the Chinese original maintains its subtle nuances and local textures. The poem excels at transforming everyday objects into vessels of nostalgia and contemplation. This dual presentation highlights the poet’s ability to bridge linguistic and cultural sensibilities, making the poem vivid, immersive, and emotionally resonant.

English Version:

Escape²

When trees are transplanted,

peach blossoms are sold cheap.

You praise fresh soil as mother,

hang mother's portrait on the wall,

living in imagination.

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Thinking always lulls one to sleep.

Survival requires learning a skill—

a girl's hair dyed crimson red.

Seeing traffic flow, seeing dazzling colors,

clutching a memory's loyalty,

this fish begins to swim upstream.

The closer to home,

the deeper the chill in the marrow.

To stay behind, or

to flee under starry night.

This night the sky is bright,

this moment strangely dim.

Chinese Version:

出逃

树木移栽的时候，

桃花会被贱卖。

你把新鲜的土壤歌颂成母亲，

把母亲的相片挂在墙上，

活在想象之中。

思考总是催人入眠。

生存需要学习一种技艺——

女孩儿的头发烫染成猩红。

看见车水马龙，看见姹紫嫣红，

怀揣记忆的忠贞，这条鱼开始逆行。

离家越近，

骨髓越凉。

留下还是出逃，

趁着星夜逃离。

这个夜晚星空闪亮，

此刻异常黯淡。

Commentary

“Escape” is a poem of visceral immediacy and emotional intensity. Xiao Yi conveys the tension of fleeing, the pull of home, and the bodily experience of cold and displacement. The English version mirrors the Chinese original’s rhythm, imagery, and emotional force, capturing the urgent, almost cinematic pacing. The poem’s vivid symbols—red peach blossoms, crimson hair, starry nights—are highly charged and tactile in both languages. This bilingual presentation demonstrates the poet’s ability to retain emotional resonance across languages, making the work accessible yet deeply affecting in either version.