



Guangdong College of
Industry & Commerce



Istituto Tecnico Commerciale "P. Boselli"
Savona



These notes are the result of an activity carried out by the 5th form of the Erica course and some classes of the Guangzhou College. The idea came out last March during a visit to China when both English teachers, Donatella Ferrari and Michael Yang, discovered that their students share an interest in poetry.

The two schools have been carrying out a cross-cultural project for three years with shared studies on topics related to: environment, tourism and poetry.

The basic idea was to give the students the opportunity to approach and appreciate the Chinese poetry using the English language and comparing English and Italian translations to the original texts. The study has been carried out in class, at home and the results were compared in a videoconference.

A second phase of this project could analyse English and then Italian poets translated in Chinese.

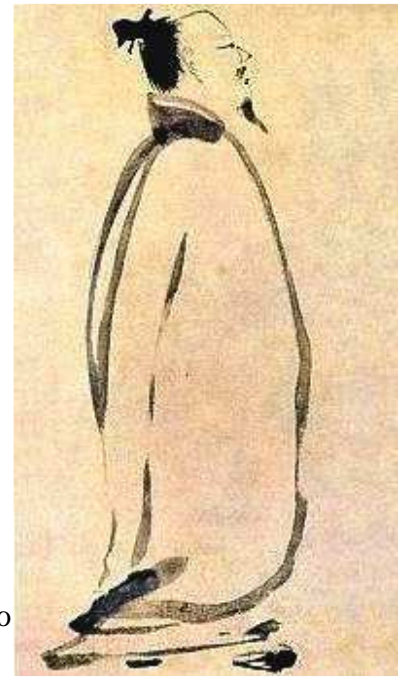
LI PO

Farewell to Secretary Shu-yun at the Hsieh Tiao Villa in Hsuan-Chou (Dire addio a zio Yun, bibliotecario di corte, sulla torre di Hsieh T'iao nello Hsuan-chou)

The meeting with the Chinese students was very interesting and instructive because I had the opportunity to understand many things about the poem by Li Po "Farewell to secretary Shu-yun at the Hsieh Tiao villa in Hsuan-Chou" that before I could not understand very well.

The Chinese students said that the English version is very different from the original in Chinese. They also said that this poem by Li Po gives a beautiful sense of freedom and is very autobiographical, because Li Po wrote about feelings and events that marked his life. I was very happy to know the ideas of Chinese students and I hope to have the possibility of another conference with them.

Saida Galatolo



Li Po recita una poesia, inchiostro su carta di Liang Kai (XIII sec)

I have analysed this Chinese poetry in English and Italian version and I was very impressed by the differences between the two translations.

For example The Italian version is more concise than English one, because the English poem is more poetic.

In both there is indirect speech, simple language and the two versions aren't divided into stanzas and the same happens in the Chinese original poem as I was told during the videoconference.

In my opinion the English version is more similar to the Chinese poem and is more modern than the Italian translation. I appreciate the description of the environment because Li Po talks about his personal experience and feelings. This poem is really personal and gives me a sense of freedom and peace of mind and tranquillity. I have appreciated this poem so much and what the poet wanted to transmit. I was so happy to have read the poems by Li Po because I was transmitted a sense of freedom and tranquillity.

I have decided to write below the English version that we have compared to the Italian one.

English version

Since yesterday had throw me and bolt,
Today has hurt my heart even more.
The autumn wildgeese have a long wing for escort
As I face them from this villa, drinking my wine.
The bones of great writers are your brushes, in the school of heaven,
And I am Lesser Hsieh growing up by your side.
We both are exalted to distant thought,
Aspiring to the sky and the bright moon.
But since water still flows, though we cut it with our swords,
And sorrow return, though we drown them with wine,
Since the world can in no way answer our craving,
I will loosen my hair tomorrow and take to a fishing-boat.

Italian version (by Leonardo Vittorio Arena)

Non posso oggi attaccarmi a ciò che ieri mostrò di rifiutarmi;
tormenti ed afflizioni, in quantità, son ciò che ora mi turba!
Un vento forte, lungo miglia e miglia, segue le oche selvatiche in autunno;
per tutto questo, adesso, cerchiamo di inebriarci qui,
nell'alta torre!
La tua fama è ben salda, coi tuoi scritti fatati;
i miei son sullo stile del giovane Hsueh, già chiaro ed elegante.
Noi due serbiamo in petto un grande, alto ideale:
salire al cielo blu, guardare sole e luna.
Se fendi quelle acque con la spada, esse rifluiranno ancor di più;
se invece bevi per scordare i dispiaceri, se ne presenteranno ancor di più.
Noi qui, nel nostro mondo, dovremmo allora trascurare la ragione –
e fare un giro in barca a remi, domani, in piena libertà.

I was satisfied with this conference because the Chinese students were able to answer clearly to all my questions about this poem and they were able to satisfy all my curiosities. I would like to talk again with them and I hope to be able to answer with clearness to all their questions .
Alessandra Bruno

TU FU

GAZING AT THE GREAT MOUNT (Guardando il Monte T'AI)

The start gives us the vision of the mount as an appearance, a connection between the human race and God, or better still the mount seems to be the God who observes the day and the life which elapses as a judge.

In fact when the clouds cover the eyes of the God Tai-tsung and the birds gives a signal of what connect us to the earth, the man, who is looking, becomes very quiet. But the man could only find harmony and peace when he will be able to go up and so rise in spirit. Afterwards, from the high he could see the obstacles and the problems of life.



The poet uses a simple language, and expresses the sense of unease of the earth.

Anna Frumento

English version

The Sacred Mount that stands,
A balk of green that hath no end,
Betwixt two lands!
Nature did fuse and blend
All mystic beauty there,
Where Dark and Light
Do dusk and dawn unite.
Gazing, soul-cleansed, at Thee
From clouds upsprung, one may
Mark with wide eyes the homing flight

Italian version (By L. V. Arena)

Ecco il Tai-tsung – che dirne?-,
sospeso tra Ch'i e Lu, nel verde sterminato;
La Creazione gli diede i talenti divini,
il lato nord e il sud fendono alba e tramonto.
Poi passando le nubi e mi si allarga il petto,
mentre poso lo sguardo su uccelli di ritorno.
Ancora qualche istante, e scalerò la vetta;
da lì, in un colpo d'occhio, tanti monti minuti!

Of birds. Some day
 Must I thy topmost height
 Mount, at one glance to see
 Hills numberless
 Dwindle to nothingness.

Class comment: the Italian version is more concise and reflects a more personal approach to the original text. Nature is perceived as an engine for change, whereas the goal is the ability to change our point of view. The mountain has the ability to unite, to connect, to help a person to reach a freer perspective of reality.

TU FU

Alone in her Beauty (Una donna stupenda)

English version

Who is lovelier than she?
 Yet she lives alone in an empty valley.
 She tells me she came from a good family
 Which is humbled now into the dust.

...When trouble arose in the Kuan district,
 Her brothers and close kin were killed.
 What use were their high offices,
 Not even shielding their own lives?-

The world has but scorn for adversity;
 Hope goes out, like the light of a candle.
 Her husband, with a vagrant heart,
 Seeks a new face like a new piece of jade;

And when morning-glories furl at night
 And mandarin-ducks lie side by side,
 All he can see is the smile of the new love,
 While the old love weeps unheard.

The brook was pure in its mountain source,
 But away from the mountain its waters darken.
 ... Waiting for her maid to come from selling
 pearls

For straw to cover the roof again,

She picks a few flowers, no longer for her hair,
 And lets pine-needles fall through her fingers,
 She leans in the sunset by a tall bamboo

Italian version (By L.A.Arena)

C'è una donna stupenda, la più bella di tutte,
 Reclusa in una valle desolata.

Si dice figlia di un illustre ceppo,
 Però avvizzisce nella campagna incolta.

“Un tempo,ferveva la sommossa nei sobborghi,
 e i miei fratelli furono trucidati!

Grandi ufficiali – occorre dirlo? -
 non se ne vanno a marcire sottoterra!

Si sa che il mondo deplora la disgrazia;
 da quel giorno, per me, ci fu una luce fioca
 sulle cose!

Mio marito, guardate, è frivolo e sfrontato,
 ora s'è preso un'altra bella donna.

All'imbrunire la mimosa si assopisce,
 neanche le anatre riposano al sole.

Invece, lui è attento al riso della nuova
 sposa;

e chi mai udrebbe l'altra singhiozzare?

Alla fonte montana, l'acqua è pura;
 soltanto dopo, fluendo,viene a imputridirsi.

Mando la serva a vendere e perle;

Infine, farò un vestito d'edera per la capanna.

Raccolgo fiori, ma non li pongo tra i capelli;
 spesso un pugno di cedri è la mia gioia.

Il vento freddo scuote le mie maniche verdi;

e intanto io, al tramonto, mi appoggio a alti
 bambù.”

The poem is about a woman,who is very sad because her husband loves another woman. To let the reader understand the woman's thoughts, the poet describes accurately the setting around her making comparison between her feelings and the elements of nature.

Similarities and differences: the Italian poem is shorter than the English one and it isn't divided into stanzas. I prefer reading the English version because it's more effective to convey the meaning.

Gloria Crea

Class comment:

While in the English version we can read a poem, in the Italian version the reader is in front of a story. In the English version the poem is in the third person and so we can feel close to the narrator, in the Italian translation it is the woman who tells her story and the reader can sympathise with her feelings and share her pains, so he/she is much more involved in the reading.

It seems that in the English version greater emphasis is given to Nature, while in the Italian one Nature remains in the background, as a frame to the sufferings of the protagonist.

TU FU

A spring view (Scorcio di primavera)

The author of this poem, Tu Fu, belongs to the second generation of Chinese Poets, that is characterized by a disillusioned attitude towards life. There is the strong contrast between the common idea of spring (the season in which the nature is colourful and bright) and the spring seen by the poet (the poet himself is getting old, in fact he defines white his hair, and the flowers "cry"). The plants and the trees are growing, while the poet is in old age. The nature is pervaded by the sadness of the war, lasted three long months, the State is going into decadence and the birds singing bring melancholy to the poet. The theme of the importance of the family is underlined by the expectation of letters from the poet's family, that he compares to gold.

We don't know enough about Chinese poets, it would be very interesting to learn more about this culture. We usually read European works, also because we are much more similar and we can understand what these authors want to communicate. However, this world is proceeding towards globalization, so it will be necessary to open our mind to other cultures, in order to make poetry international, just as music and art are.

Anna Arkel , Roberta Ghione

English version

Though a country be sundered, hills and
Rivers endure;

And spring comes green again to trees and
Grasses

Where petals have been shed like tears
And lonely birds have sung their grief.

...After the war-fires of three months,
One message from home is worth a ton of
gold.

...I stroke my white hair. It has grown too thin
To hold the hairpins any more.

Italian version (by Leonardo Vittorio Arena)

Lo Stato è in decadenza: restano monti e fiumi;
primavera in città, mentre erbe e piante crescono.

Al momento toccante, i fiori piangono lacrime;
io detesto l'addio – gli uccelli mi commuovono!

Tra i falò della guerra, costanti, per tre mesi,
lettere di famiglia varranno tanto oro.

Gratto la testa bianca: capelli ancor più radi -
si arruffano a tal punto da sfidare il fermaglio!

Class comment:

the English version appears more effective, direct, tragic. The Italian version is more poetic, hopeful and, also in the layout, brings a continuity of tension, is less fragmented and the reader feels the presence of the poet. Some students prefer the English version and some the Italian one.

Here are some notes on the two poets analysed, downloaded from the net and used with my students to give them a background to a better comprehension of the text

LI HO 791–817

Chinese poet.

INTRODUCTION

Li Ho lived during the late T'ang period (618-907) in Chinese history and wrote poetry remarkable for blending traditional poetic forms with images of shocking violence and a general mood of pessimism. Although his verse was admired by his contemporaries despite its strangeness, it subsequently lapsed into obscurity. A revival of interest in Li Ho's poems has recently taken place, with commentators expressing admiration for the vivid imagery and evocative, haunting quality of his verse.

Biographical Information

Li Ho was born into a distant, impoverished branch of the imperial clan.

According to some sources, he began writing poetry at age six. When he was still a boy his father died, leaving him solely responsible for the welfare of his large family, and at age eighteen Li Ho sought to provide for them by becoming a civil servant. He passed a provincial examination, but was blocked from taking an examination which might have secured him a more substantial position at the imperial court by a prohibition against sons using their fathers' names. (One of the characters in his name matched one of his late father's.) He eventually accepted a minor office to which he was entitled by hereditary right. While at court, Li Ho began to write about the lives of courtesans, interested in their beautiful and ceremonious lifestyles. His own circumstances proved less attractive; he suffered from chronic illness, and success continually eluded him. As a result, his poetry increasingly turned to metaphysical treatments of death in which he savagely debunked mythology and rejected religion. In 817 he returned home and died the same year.

Major Works

Only 243 of Li Ho's poems, ballads, and songs have survived. Like nearly all Chinese poets of his day, Li Ho wrote much of his verse in the traditional shih form, which features a controlled number of lines of a specified number of syllables. He experimented with the form, however, introducing, for instance, unusual rhyme schemes and unorthodox stanza patterns. The subjects and tone of Li Ho's poems are unconventional as well. Bitter, ironic, and frequently morbid, his works are subjective expressions, employing an idiosyncratic range of images invested with highly personal significance. Repeated references to spirits of the dead and to such elements as rain and mist, light and shadow, create a pervasive sense of melancholy throughout much of Li Ho's work and have earned him the reputation of a poet preoccupied with supernatural phenomena.



Li He, from the book *Wan hsiao tang-Chu chuang-Hua chuan* published in 1921.

Critical Reception

To some extent Western critics have taken greater interest in Li Ho's works than have their Chinese counterparts. Scholars have accounted for this apparent anomaly by observing that Li Ho's emphasis on subjective experience places him outside the Chinese poetic tradition with its emphasis on impersonal, generalized experience, while it permits comparisons of Li Ho's poems to those of John Keats, Charles Baudelaire, and other exemplars of the Western poetic notion of the "tortured genius." J. D. Frodsham has noted several ways in which Li Ho's poems seem peculiarly modern, particularly the manner in which he "sees things in flashes, apparently disconnectedly, so that his technique is probably far more familiar to modern readers, whose eyes have been trained by years of television and cinema, than it was to his traditional audience." Several critics have pointed out that the startling juxtapositions of images in Li Ho's poems contribute to their unsettling and otherworldly qualities. Burton Watson has pointed out the poems' "deliberately disjointed, nonlogical manner of presentation," which was intended to "increase the effect of shock and surprise" felt by the reader. Commentators have also argued that, despite Li Ho's reputation for individualism and aestheticism, his poetry reflects his deep involvement in the affairs of his time. As Frodsham has emphasized, "even the most cursory reading of his verse will show that Ho was deeply concerned with the problems of his day and used his ballads, which had a wide circulation, to satirize contemporary abuses."

Tu Fu

Tu-Fu ranks together with his friend [Li Tai-po](#) as one of the greatest poets and social critics in Chinese history.

Born into a scholarly family Tu Fu received a Confucian education but failed in the Imperial examination. As a result he spent much of his youth travelling, during which he met the famous poet [Li Tai-po](#). While [Li Tai-po](#) was Taoist in spirit Tu Fu remained devoutly Confucian. [Tu Fu](#) was deeply moved by the sorrow of his troubled times. [His poems](#) speak of the sad fate of the people, and his deep hatred of war.