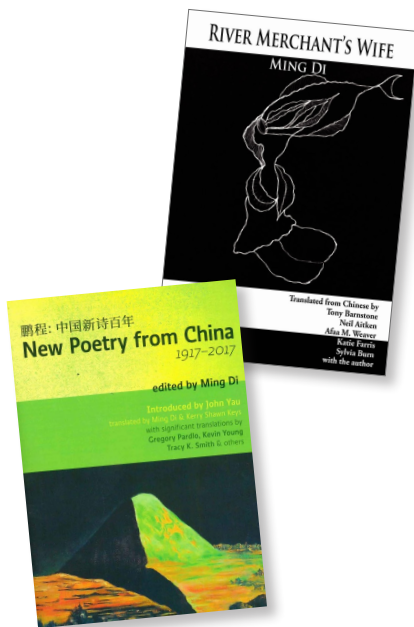




POETRY

Four Bilingual Poems

Ming Di



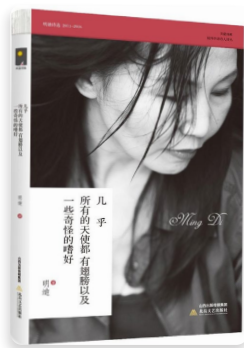
About the Poetry

Borders loom large in my mind. Living in two cultures, I write about marginalization, borderlands, divided worlds, conflict, and confrontation. I recall refugees sleeping on the ground at the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe. I remember applying for a visa to cross the divided city of Nicosia. Between India and Pakistan, pilgrims cross an international boundary to visit their holy shrines. I have read poetry at border schools in Central and South America where European empires divided the land among themselves. Borders are the product of colonialism and war.

“Soon we will live in a box” was written for Struga Poetry Evenings in what is now called North Macedonia. I wrote “Life in between” while participating in the Festival Mundial de Poesía in Venezuela many years ago. “River as a border” was one of the poems from my trip to my hometown, Hankou Concession of Wuhan, China. I struggled with “The Nile” for weeks after returning home from Africa. These poems traverse different kinds of borders, geographical or psychological.

About the Poet

Ming Di is a Chinese poet and translator, born in Wuhan, currently living between Beijing and California. Her publications include nine books of poetry in Chinese and one in collaborative translation in English: *River Merchant's Wife* (Marick Press, 2012). She has co-translated several books into English, including *Empty Chairs: Poems by Liu Xia* (Graywolf Press, 2015) which was a finalist of the Best Translated Book Award and won a translation prize from the Poetry Foundation. She has received two translation fellowships from the Luce Foundation. She edited and co-translated *New Cathay: Contemporary Chinese Poetry* (Tupelo Press and Poetry Foundation, 2013) and *New Poetry from China 1917-2017* (Black Square Editions, 2019), among others. She has translated seven books into Chinese including Marianne Moore's *Observations*. She received the Lishan Poetry Award (translation), 2021 Spring Gala Best Ten Translators Award and Motie/Xiron Poetry Prize—Best Ten Chinese Poets of 2023. She has served as a Chinese coordinator for Lyrikline (Berlin), editor of the China domain of Poetry International (Rotterdam) and co-organizer of International Translation Workshops (Beijing). Currently she is a translation editor for Tupelo Press and a member of the International Council of Vicente Huidobro Foundation.



Poetry International profile:
<https://www.poetryinternational.com/en/poets-poems/article/104-28617-Ming-Di>



Soon we will live in a box

I watch birds every day and they watch me too.
Do birds see me as in West Korea?
North Vietnam? Or South Mongolia?
Or do they see Mongolia as North China?
They are confused. They don't know
why humans divide land
and even rivers and lakes into countries.
What the heck is a country?

Birds fly much slower these days
afraid of crossing borders illegally.
Very soon, we will build walls on rivers
and lakes and seas
to make the borders higher and higher
so that rich water doesn't flow to the neighbors
and we will even draw lines across sunlight
and put ourselves into divided boxes.

Birds imitate us, seize mountain tops,
push away dissidents.
Colors of feathers are passports.
Crows fly at night,
as only darkness is their home.

I sit by the river, watching all the wars
with kinship, neighbors, or faraway land.
My father's tribe and mother's tribe
have fought thousands of wars.
My father's father's tribe
and father's mother's tribe
have fought nine thousand wars.
My mother's father's tribe
and mother's mother's tribe have fought
ten thousand wars,
all my ancestors defeated.
I am a descendant of crocodiles,
gigantic, but I'd rather be a sparrow,
traveling through the wind,
through winter and summer.

囚居

我每天看鸟，鸟也看我，
它们看我在西朝鲜？北越？南蒙古？
或者它们把蒙古看作北中国？
鸟儿感到困惑，
它们不知道为什么人类要把土地
甚至河流湖泊海洋划线，
划成国家，国家是个什么鸟？

如今鸟儿飞得慢多了，害怕非法越境。
很快，我们将在河流湖泊海洋上筑墙，
让边界更高，肥水不流外人田，
我们甚至会把日光，月光，甚至灯光划线，
把自己装进分割的盒子里。

鸟儿模仿人类，
抢占山头，筑巢，赶走异己，
羽毛是形形色色的护照。
乌鸦在夜间飞行，
只有黑暗是它们的家园，
但经常白天出动，叼走幼鸟。

我坐在河边，眼睁睁看所有的战争，
我父亲的部落和母亲的部落
打了几千年仗，
我父亲的父亲的部落
和父亲的母亲的部落，也打了几千年，
我母亲的父亲的部落
和母亲的母亲的部落，你死我活几万年，
我的祖先都被打败，
我成了鳄鱼后代，
巨婴，但我宁愿是一只麻雀，
穿越风，
穿越冬天和夏天。

Life in between

Wayuu people traverse
between Colombia and Venezuela
searching for fertile land.
In the dry season they move to Venezuela
and in the rainy seasons to Colombia.
Children are born at home, no birth certificate
no citizenship. When they grow up
they have no passports to move back and forth
for food. They drink rain water.
They learn to save food for the dry season
but dry seasons are longer and longer.

When I arrived, they served me with potatoes
and corn, everything they could grow.
They didn't speak Spanish, nor did I.
I read a poem for them in Chinese.
They applauded politely. I read more and
saw their faces lightened. The rhythm was
our mutual language.

A young Wayuu man played an instrument
and sang a song. He taught me how to play,
how to sing. It was the pre-cellphone age,
no photos or videos but I remember the way
he sang loud, with all the energy from the potatoes
and corn that the village women brought.
He sang for me but his eyes were locked on
the young woman who was bringing me
a drink from a local plant. It was a good year
and I didn't need to drink rainwater
like they used to.

边界

原住民佩玉人，在哥伦比亚
和委内瑞拉的边界，寻找肥沃土地。
旱季时，迁往委内瑞拉，
雨季时，迁往哥伦比亚。
孩子们在家里出生，没有出生证，
没有公民身份。长大后没有护照，
无法在两国之间来回奔跑
寻找食物。他们喝雨水。
他们学会为旱季储存食物，
但气候变化，旱季越来越长。

我到的那天，他们用土豆和玉米招待我，
所有他们能种的东西都拿出来了。
他们不会说西班牙语，我也不会，
我用中文为他们读了一首诗，
他们礼貌地鼓掌。我又读了几首，
看见他们脸上亮了起来，
节奏是我们共同的语言。

一个年轻佩玉男子，弹奏三弦琴，
还唱了一首歌。他教我弹，教我唱，
那是前手机年代，
没有照片或视频，但我记得
他大声唱的样子，吃了村里女人带来的土豆
和玉米，吃完后所有的气力都使出来
喊唱。他出于礼貌为我唱，眼睛却盯着
一位当地女孩，
她正给我端来一碗当地植物制成的饮料。
那一年是丰收年，不用喝雨水。

River as a border

Yangtze that flows through my hometown,
that flows through my childhood,
merge into one painting.
A map composed of dots and lines,
each dot is a place I lived or walked by,
a school, a candy store, a flower shop,
now connected, forming a border.
On the back of the map is the past
that I try to return to
but I can't walk on a map
nor cross an imagined border.

Yangtze river is narrowed,
a bund has been built, a bund I don't recognize,
where retired people practice Taiji.
A turbulent river has become a slow stream,
a wide river, now you can see the other side.
A border between a strange metropolis
and my small, fast fleeting childhood.
The streets have become so narrow
that you can cross with one step
but I can't cross to the side of my teenage years.
The river quickly flows into the Pacific ocean
that divides my past and present—
a border in front of my eyes, like a Machu Picchu
that I can look at as an outsider
or even an intruder, an invader of the past.

The line on the map suddenly moves and flows,
a river, not a dividing mountain,
where I used to wait for my mother to return home
from the ferry. It was a concrete river
with hopes. When did it become an abstract line
separating me and the other me?

河流，边界

长江流过我的家乡，流过我的童年，
汇合到同一幅画中，
一张由点带线构成的地图，
每个点都是我居住或走过的地方，
学校，糖果店，花店，
连成线，形成一条边界。
地图的背面，
是我试图返回的过去，
但我无法在地图上行走，
也无法跨越想象的边界。

长江变窄了，
多了一个外滩，一个我不认识的外滩，
有人跳广场舞，有人打太极拳。
一条湍急的河，变成了一条缓流，
一条宽阔的河，变成看得见对岸的细水，
这是陌生的大都市
与我飞逝而过的童年的边界。
街道变得如此狭窄，一步就可以跨过去，
但我无法跨越到幼年。
江水迅速流入分隔我过去与现在的太平洋，
所有的远，都显得近，
正如所有的宽，都变得窄，
但近在眼前，无法跨越，
像马丘比丘神山一样，横在眼前，
我像外来者一样观看，更像一个侵犯者。

地图上的一条线，突然流动起来，
真的变成一条河，而不是山，
一条并不宽但我无法横渡的河，
我曾经每星期等母亲坐轮渡回家，
那时候是一条具体的，有期待的河，
什么时候抽象起来，阻隔我与另我？

The Nile

I have been dreaming on the Nile these days.
Sun rises from the right, sets on the left,
an arc of a flaming bird.
Meltwater flows from the south,
the origins of the Nile, through Tanzania,
Kenya, Uganda, through Ethiopia,
meeting above my head, flowing down through
my chest, the almost submerged Aswan;
my stomach, temples and tombs of Luxor;
my feet and toes like twigs of the Delta
down to the Mediterranean sea where I see
reflections of gods and goddesses,
golden and silver words in various scripts,
straight and cursive lines, circles and dots.
Hieroglyphics flow into my veins and meridians
forming the lines of latitude and longitude.
I become full and abundant,
trees branching out from my body like sun rays,
distant planets greet me with ill intentions.
I dream of waking up as a lotus
on the Nile, disoriented, up south, down north.
I hear Nubian, Siwi, Beja, Coptic, Arabic...
I have dream-flown as a continuous stream for six
thousand years—who chopped me off
and divided me into Egypt and Sudan?

尼罗河

这些天我在尼罗河上做梦，
太阳从右边升起，左边落下——
一只金鸟飞过的弧线。
融化的水从南方流过来，
从尼罗河的源头，穿过坦桑尼亚、
肯尼亚、乌干达，穿过埃塞俄比亚，
在我头顶汇合，流经
我胸膛——几乎被淹没的阿斯旺，
我的肝脏——卢克索的寺庙和陵墓，
我的脚、脚趾像三角洲的溪流，
一直流到地中海，在那里我看见
诸神和诸女神的倒影，
金色和银色文字，各种字体，
直线，曲线，圆圈，圆点……
象形文字流入我血管和经络后，
成为地球的经纬，
我变得丰硕，盈满，
树木从我身体分枝，像太阳的光线，
各路行星，各怀鬼胎。
我梦见醒来变成了一朵荷花
在尼罗河上，迷失了方向，
太阳阴性，月亮阳性，上南，下北，
我听见努比亚语，西维语，贝贾语，
科普特语，阿拉伯语……
我一觉睡了五千年，一条延续的河流，
谁把我劈开，切成埃及和苏丹？