

Paths in Dreams: Selected Prose and Poetry of Ho Ch'i-fang. TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY BONNIE S. MCDUGALL. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, (Asian and Pacific Writing 7), 1976. xi, 244 pp. Bibliography, Index. \$A9.95

To most students of contemporary Chinese literature, Ho Ch'i-fang (1911-) is not a startling new discovery. Ho had already acquired a reputation as a lyrical poet and prose stylist in the early thirties; and he was still in the proletarian literary arena as late as January 1966, when *China Reconstructs* published one of his political poems about the Vietnam War, "No, Not This Kind of 'Peace'!" As far as I know, he also weathered the political storm of the Great Cultural Revolution. Yet, prior to Dr. McDougall's volume of translations, which is devoted entirely to the poet's early writings (ranging from 1931 to 1942), the English-reading public had been exposed to no more than a handful of his verse scattered in a few anthologies (notably, *Modern Chinese Poetry* edited by Harold Acton and Ch'en Shih-hsiang, Duckworth, 1936; *Contemporary Chinese Poetry* edited by Robert Payne, Routledge, 1947; and *Twentieth Century Chinese Poetry* edited by K. Y. Hsü, Doubleday, 1963). In *Paths in Dreams*, McDougall has rendered not only thirty-two of Ho's

poems but also twenty-two of his prose-poems and personal essays, though excluding his critical writings, which preoccupied his post-1949 literary activity.

Translation, according to Ezra Pound, is a form of literary criticism; and the translator, in the role of literary critic, is entitled to exercise critical judgment in making selections. McDougall is, of course, fully justified in limiting herself to Ho Ch'i-fang's early writings, because she is primarily interested in the development of his thought and style as he progressed from romantic adolescence to political maturity. "In selecting his work for translation in this series *Asian and Pacific Writing*," she states in her Acknowledgements, "I have concentrated on pieces which seem to illustrate this progress, rather than provide a full representative range" (p. vii). Possibly the pieces translated here are the most appealing to her because they represent a Western-oriented individualist who, in his search for truth, is forced—by fate or by circumstances—to abandon his romantic dreams in the light of social reality. Hence she adopts for the title for this volume *Paths in Dreams*, the title of one of Ho's lyrical essays, which begins by quoting the concluding lines of a poem he wrote in 1933: "Now I begin to feel the loneliness of adults,/ Only to love still more the wilderness of paths in dreams" (p. 54).

Romantic in temperament, aesthetically conscious, and highly sensitive to external stimuli, Ho was soon to find his private world shattered by the brutal reality of his surroundings. On the eve of the Sino-Japanese War (1937-45), he decided to channel his creative energy into the war effort. In a poem titled "Funerals," he announces his resolution:

Never again shall I sing of love
As the summer cricket sings of the sun.
Adjectives and metaphors and artificial paper
flowers
Blaze up just once in the fireplace.
Caterpillars which silently nibble the pages of
books

Are busily making their cocoons.

This is winter. (p. 122)

Indeed, winter had come into Ho's writings. Both his prose and poetic style became bleak, devoid of youthful exuberance and luxuriant imagery. Whether or not his poetic sensibility had coarsened, his lyrical voice became hoarse from outcries such as this:

My fatherland, where lies your strength?
How can you resist the enemy and safeguard
yourself?

Speak!

Why don't you speak?

Who has got you by the throat? (p. 219)

For Ho to pass from this kind of war cry to the propaganda literature he was to write later is only one short step, and it should surprise no one. But McDougall finds it inexplicable: "The story of Ho Ch'i-fang's gradual acceptance of communist direction and his emergence as a party and academic bureaucrat is so foreign to his earlier life that it is difficult to reconcile the two in one context" (p. 28). Consequently, this volume offers us only a youthful portrait and not a three-dimensional statue. A sample of Ho's more mature critical essays concerning his literary theories, especially his famous critique and Marxian interpretation of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, would have been desirable. In addition to giving depth and perspective to the image of the poet, examples from writings of his later period might very well illuminate the process of his subsequent literary development.

While McDougall's Introduction and Conclusion provide valuable information and critical insight that enable the reader to better understand Ho's life and works during those tempestuous years (1931-42), it is her translations which deserve our greatest admiration. She achieves a nearly perfect balance between felicity of expression and faithfulness to the original. Her merit goes beyond mere accuracy; she allows the full play of the poet to transcend the language barrier as wind through the "reed," to borrow Ho's own description of the poet's role (p. 52).

My only criticism is that footnotes are too sparse and not sufficiently informative to the general reader. To illustrate: to tell us that "Ch'u" is "an ancient state in the south of China" (p. 46) sheds no light on the verse in which the allusion occurs, nor does it illuminate the reference to the "Ch'u songs" in the line that follows. More appropriate would be an explanation of the rich connotative meanings behind the reference to the "Ch'u songs," which brings to mind the defeat of the Hegemon of Ch'u prior to the founding of the Han Dynasty (221 B.C.—A.D. 206). In a "Translator's Note," McDougall

states that Ho annotated only one of his poems, but she does not tell us the reason for his annotations. It may be noted that most of Ho's references are to foreign sources (e.g., Oscar Wilde, Shakespeare, André Gide, and Dostoevsky) that might not be familiar to Chinese readers. McDougall should have emulated Ho by explaining Chinese allusions which, although well known to every literate Chinese, are not necessarily familiar to a Western audience.

On the whole, both translator McDougall and the editors of the *Asian and Pacific Series* ought to be congratulated for producing this highly enjoyable book, which can be read both for pleasure and for broadening one's knowledge. Its bibliography, mostly annotated, will prove useful to those interested in further research.

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