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Shadowboxing

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write dozens of short stories and start my first unfinished novel. But I never wrote a poetry book until I saw the sea and touched its sand.

The difference between writing a story and writing a poem is just like the difference between my corner and the two doves' edge. They could kiss in that edge because they chose it after seeing all the possibilities from above. I couldn't write a real poem from my corner because I had one choice: that was my imagination. In fiction, you can write anything you want and it will never be wrong or illogical, because the thing you need the most in writing fiction is a creative imagination. While what you need in poetry is a real experience and then the other elements. I can't agree more with the Norwegian poet Olav H. Hauge (1908–94) when he said: "A good poem is not imagined. It's based on a personal experience."¹

/ Notes /

¹ Frode Grytten, "Picking Plums, Building Poetry. Fosse Meets Hauge," trans. Mari Skjerdal Lysne. *Hauge Tveitt* 08 (September 28, 1991), <http://eng.ht08.no/Default.aspx%3Fpageid=873.html>.

MANAL AL-SHEIKH is an Iraqi poet and writer born in Nineveh in northern Iraq in 1971. She has a bachelors degree in English-Arabic translation from the College of Arts, Mosul University. She has worked as a freelance journalist, has published creative and critical texts in many Iraqi, Arab, and European newspapers and magazines, and participated in many cultural festivals within and outside her native country. Her poems and essays have been translated into several languages including English, French, Norwegian, Catalan, Spanish, and Italian. She currently resides in the city of Stavanger, Norway.

SHADOWBOXING

EMMA RAMADAN

What if our poetry only exists as translation? What if our words only arrive in a global seep, smuggled in through the space between others' words, emerging sheepishly from the corridors of other countries? What if our phrases depend on foreign agents to bring them to the page? My way into poetry is through other lands and languages, my understanding comes in the process of pulling poetry into an idea that's English, and now my poetry has no mother tongue: poems written in the hush between me and someone else.

Translating poetry has taught me about patience, what readers of one language will tolerate better than readers of another. About punctuation: how we can do without it. Translating rhyme and rhythm has taught me a new cleverness, what experimentation can mean, how languages can be forced to accommodate creativity.

Maybe the way forward is to build our poetic language from the cracks in our translations, the places where what we write differs from what the author wrote, where something rings out to us and we decide that what we have written is better than what they had in mind, and we gift ourselves the authority to invent. The shadowboxing of different versions of poems, and we win every time. Those words that reach out to us because they are the start of our voice, pieced together over the course

of multiple voices and styles already honed. We cannot speak but we listen, for that ringing on the page. And then we walk away from each translation with a clearer idea of what kind of writer we are, who we might be if we were to write poetry.

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IMITATION

TIMOTHY YU

The notion of poetic originality may seem elusive, even quaint, in the era of the global postmodern. The language of mimicry and hybridity frames our understanding of writing from postcolonial spaces, and more broadly helps us grasp the relationship of any minoritized or marginalized writing with regard to the dominant mode. And collage, appropriation of texts, and other styles of “uncreative writing” are the most prominent manifestations of the contemporary U.S. poetic avant-garde.

My own poetry collection, *100 Chinese Silences*, would seem to participate in this flight from originality. The poems in the book are all parodies, rewritings of poems by other modern and contemporary authors that thematize Asia

in some way. A deep irony I've been aware of throughout this project is that Asians themselves have often been stereotyped by the West as mere imitators, incapable of the originality and invention that allegedly characterize Western modernity. Having, supposedly, no voice of my own, I was reduced to rewriting the works of those who had already spoken for me. Indeed, I strove to be a diligent pupil, trying to capture the voice, style, and rhythms of each poet I was imitating.

But of course “imitation” is itself fundamental to poetry, whether in the broader sense of an “imitation of nature” or in the more specific sense of an apprenticeship grounded in the imitation of other poets' works. As a master term for global poetics, “imitation” may have the advantage of signifying a *conscious inhabitation* of another text or voice, one that is fully aware of its belated, secondary nature, and of the relationships of power that connect the “original” and the “copy.” And yet a poetic imitation is not *merely* a copy. It is an attempt to “sound like” someone else, but as a means toward finding one's own way of speaking.

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TIMOTHY YU is the author of *100 Chinese Silences* (2016) and *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry since 1965* (2009). He is professor of English and Asian American studies and director of the Asian American Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.