

# The Way of Poetry

## Zheng Xiaoqiong

Modern technology is gradually dismantling nature's sense of sanctity and imagination for poetry. Centuries ago, when humans raised their heads to gaze at the moon in the heavens, we had endless imaginations: the mythological Lunar Palace, Toad Palace, Osmanthus Palace, and the jade-likeness of the moon... we used to imagine there to be Chang'e living on the moon, and Wu Gang the feller trying to fell a perpetually self-healing osmanthus tree; there was also a jade rabbit, moon fairies... and so on. When humans landed on the moon, all imaginations for the moon were instantly dashed. We learned about the true appearance of the moon, the fact that it's an arid and desolate rock mass, and that there was no Chang'e, no Wu Gang and no osmanthus trees on it. I grew up along the banks of Jialing River. When I was a child, my grandparents would tell me stories about monsters and clam spirits, about how hermit fox spirits and floral nymphs lived in the mountains on the other side of the river, and about how there the bamboo forests at the back of our house were where snake spirits and crane spirits lived in seclusion. In recounting my childhood, I once wrote in my poem the following expressions, "Spirits are found in all things in nature | When time and reincarnation are transcended, plants become spirits and beasts discover the Way of nature | Death or the withered flesh, immortalized or ascending souls." When I'd grown up, I was constantly told in countless books that none of them existed. All of my childhood imaginations about objects in nature were ripped apart and dismantled by science and technology, which left me with anxieties in regards to aging, sickness and reincarnation.

I used to believe that we as humans are made up of the body and the soul; when a person dies, their soul goes to another realm, leaving behind the physical body in this world. The soul either goes to heaven or to hell, or to reincarnate into any of the six realms of existence. I'd always imagined the meeting and communication between humans and deities, humans and the heavenly bodies, humans and the natural landscapes, humans and cave-dwelling spirits. Despite the fact that they have been keeping human beings company for millennia, modern science essentially dispels all of them into thin air. Science makes us re-acquaint with nature, and that re-acquaintance has led to nature being articulated in poetry in diminishing deference and reverence. Depictions of nature found in contemporary poetry have been reduced to simply imaginations about objects themselves, using elegant poetics as descriptions of nature. Imaginations about and the sense of deference and reverence for nature are all but lost. Poetry is no longer the temple of discourse, the sacred functions that poetry used to hold are being gradually eroded by modern science. Poetry has become a technique, and passing off this technique as art has become a prominent mission and consensus in the poetry world. If the effects that modern science exerts on "the art of sacred imaginations" caused us to cast doubt on the way we had previously imagined objects, or if they disrupted our previously held world views and led us to scrutinize ourselves and the world around us, if modern science were diminishing the divinity of poetry, this kind of attenuation would just be like a person without a soul. A soulless person is no more than a bag of fleshly desires and ideas. Likewise, poetry devoid of divinity is no more than a showy display of a collage of techniques. As modern science prevails to an ever greater extent,

and as technologies mature, they are crowding the divinity out of poetry, thereby reducing the width of the poets' mind and causing the narrowing of the horizon of their thinking. Some years ago, I articulated this in one of my poems, "We retreat from the Cosmos in the Qin Dynasty to the World in the Tang Dynasty./ We then retreat from the Mountains and Gorges in the Song Dynasty to the Temple Chambers in the Ming Dynasty./ Alas! The greenery and the beauties of the Qing Dynasty./ We have let go of the torso, leaving behind sex and the lower body. / Into poetry we enter so as to express motions./ Rivers run east./ Our mental horizon contracts in a regular manner." Consider these verses from Tang poems, "The feelings of one who travels away from home drift like a cloud. My sentiments are like the sun setting into the horizon." "A long row of trees have leaves falling out of them; the seemingly endless Yangtze River torrents towards him." "With stars hanging on the edge of the sky, the wilderness is made to seem even vaster. The moonlight shines on the shimmering water surface, the great River will flow east." The heaven, the earth, mountains and rivers, they have all become part of a poet's sentimentality that churns in his/her heart; their existence hinges on the poet's existence. Poets open their hearts and emotions to the world in composing poems, the world then becomes part of their poems, the imaginations embodied in the verses could reach the extremities of the cosmos. For poets, the horizon marks the width and breadth of their sentimentality. The increasingly abundant modern technologies crowds out the stars, greeneries, the moonlight, the rivers, the wilderness and so on in poetry, just as living in confined urban spaces crowds out certain features of living. While these nouns still appear in poems, but the objects for which the nouns serve as labels have all but lost their luster and texture as objects in the natural world... modern science and technology have taken us to the border, and the beauty and aesthetics that once was has completely disintegrated along the way.

Modern science and technology have dismantled our imaginations about nature, but they also prompts us to re-examine human beings and humanity. Science and technology bring about modern poetry, allowing individualistic liberation to develop to the fullest extent possible. Heroism, characteristic of former times, is slowly disappearing from poetry, whether it be from Chinese, European, American or Australian poetry. We can no longer sense from poetry the heroism and romanticism found in Homer's *Odyssey*, or Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*. Instead, our poetry has become a form of realism and sombre modernism, with poetry now becoming an ordinary technique or skill.

The sacred bastion that used to exist in poetry has crumbled in the face of modern technology, and the sense of self-aggrandisement and self-exaltation held by poets are also slowly disappearing. We can no longer derive at a sense of reverence from an poetry collection that others may or may not understand or appreciate, as it contains merely linguistic techniques or artistry. Modern science dismantles our imaginations of things that are remote from us, it also opens the door for us to continually scrutinise our own fleshly desires. What is left with respect to objects in nature are the objects themselves; and poetry, having lost the mystique it once had, is now merely linguistic descriptions of objects.

I have noticed something interesting based on my observation of life in farming villages and in industrialised urban settings, that is, the science and technology-based rapid industrialisation and urbanisation are bringing back realism for literature. And as science dismantles our understanding

of nature, our hearts are pulled in opposite directions by tradition and modernity, by revivalism and vanguardism. We enjoy the convenience brought about by roads, aeroplanes and electronics, while at the same time experiencing the wrath of industrialisation such as the destruction of natural environment and human traditions. As species and rural villages disappear from out of sight one by one, we mourn for the loss, we express our grief, and yet we find ourselves incapable of resisting the many conveniences in life that our fleshly desires bring for us, incapable of resisting the temptations of this complex and exuberant world. In my work *Going Through the Pinholes of Stars*, I talked about the relationship between nature and industrialisation. In this poem, I fuse modern industrialisation and nature together. The first verse of the poem says, “The moon | cut up by gas-powered lights, a quarter of its light and shadow, the skin burned | by acid”. The metaphor here points to the barbarous development by humans in the early days of industrialisation. In the second verse of the poem, I write, “In the afternoon I strolled along the threads of a screw, | wedging into a swamp in the dark night. The crouching moon looks | as if it’s a sufferer of an occupational disease coughing in the smog”; this verse speaks figuratively of the brutality that industrialisation has directed against the natural environment. The process of going from the “cut-up moon” to the “crouching moon” represents the transition from an agricultural era to an industrial era. When I moved from the farming Nanchong to the industrial Dongguan some twenty years ago, I felt the moon changing in my eyes. I’ve written many poems about the moon, for example *Rusty Moon*, *Sentimental Moon*, *Bloody Moon*, *Raging Moon*, *Grey Moon*, *Greasy Moon*, I wrote them to characterise the harm done to the natural environment by industrialisation. In the third verse of *Going Through the Pinholes of Stars* (《穿越星宿的针孔》), I wrote, “The ignition device quickly sinks into the acid, the dark night unrobes | its black garment. The moon, the night’s alarm, | it is bright, the snow did not fall after all.” The moon is more than just a celestial body to humans, it is more than the palace from the fairy tales of our childhood; rather it is like the nature’s and the environment’s alarm that constantly serves as a reminder for us.

How should we explore poetry’s potential between industrialisation and the environment, between development and the ecology, between tradition and modernity, between revivalism and vanguardism? There are a number of poets in both China and Australia who are exploring it from different angles, such as Australian poet Les Murray with his work on tradition and nativity. In his poem *Sanskrit*, it reads “The house is nudged by a most ancient flow. / I will wake up in a world that hooves have led to.” The *waking up in a world that hooves have led to* is a call for the revival of traditions. By means of poetry, poets have been trying to defend that which has been harmed by modern technology, and it has become a shared experience of the human race. I myself am also exploring the revival of Chinese traditions in poetry. In my poetry collection *Rose Garden*, I experimented the use of classical poetics in modern poetry. I took antithesis and intertextuality from classical poetics as the rhythm for modern Chinese poems, and to employ in large numbers techniques used for traditional Chinese landscape paintings. In *Rose Garden*, I used many couplets, in fact I even used large numbers of five-character and seven-character verses as a way to explore and discover rhythms that convey a sense of Chinese tradition.

I also read in Les Murray’s *The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle* where he wrote, “through Coolongook, through Wang Wauk, across the Wallamba.” He then went on to talk about forests and villages disappearing. We see in the vast land of China the hollowing out and the gradual

disappearance of villages. I feel that the “Way”, or *Dao*, as characterised in ancient Chinese philosophy will likely make a path for literature, industrialisation and urbanisation. The “Way” is the most ancient concept in Chinese philosophy. “The Way follows the laws of nature”, as noted in the Chinese classic text *Dao De Jing*. The Way emphasises equality and equilibrium for all things and being in harmony with nature. All lives are equal, and “lives” here refers to all living creatures, not just humans, and so that equality extends to the relationship between the human race and all other things in nature. The “Way” emphasises how balance and harmony must be achieved to realise peaceful coexistence of the human race and nature.

As society progresses, the challenges we face will not be confined to the humans’ coexistence with nature. We now have the added challenges arising from the relationship between humans and machines. The issue of how humans should coexist with their own creation is becoming the new core issue for industrialisation and urbanisation. How do humans relate to the cities and machines of their own creation? How should such dialogues be presented in poetry? As technology advances, humans do not limit their creation to machines that facilitate production; humans have and will create Artificial Intelligence that is capable of actual communication. How do humans coexist with Artificial Intelligence, something that possessing thinking faculties as humans do? It is now a question that requires our urgent attention. In recent years, I’ve been looking for poetic ways to express the relationship between humans and machines. I once wrote in a poem, “With a sandpaper | I sand the rusty sky, my hands cover up the bitter night | our love is stored with a tiny thermostat.” A thermostat is a common industrial electronic device, its temperature control characteristic makes an interesting metaphor in contrast to the indifference and the cooling off of love among human beings. If our love can be stabilised like a thermostat, the world will become a much better place. The exploration of the balance between industrial objects and poetic expressions has become the theme of my most recent poetry collection, and I draw inspirations from the Way, or *Dao*, of ancient Chinese philosophy. The Way helps me to find equilibrium and peaceful coexistence between the human race and all other things in nature. The Way helps me to realise that all things are equal and sacred, be they natural or artificial; we need to love and embrace natural matters as well as artificial objects. The coexistence of the human race, nature, machines, artificial intelligence, and all other things in the world, form a new ecology, and perhaps the Way in ancient Chinese philosophy will be able to provide important lessons for this newly emerged ecology.

# 诗歌之道

## 郑小琼

科学技术逐渐瓦解了自然对诗歌的神圣感与想象力。数百年前，当我们仰望天空的月亮，我们对它充满了遐想：月宫、璧玉、蟾宫、桂宫……**想象月亮居住着嫦娥，有桂花树，有伐木的吴刚，有玉兔，有月仙子等等。**当人类登上月球后，便粉碎了对它的所有想象。我们知道月亮它本来的面目了，**是一片荒漠的石头，没有娥嫦、吴刚和桂树。**我生活在嘉陵江边，童年时代，我的祖辈会跟我讲江边的水怪、蚌精，对岸的山中会有得道的狐狸、成仙的花仙子，屋后的竹林间会隐藏着蛇精、仙鹤。回忆起童年，我曾在自己的诗歌中有过如此的表达，“**自然之物俱有灵魂 | 穿越时间轮回，草木化仙，走兽得道 | 死亡或枯萎的肉身，羽化或飞升的魂灵**”。长大之后，书本会不断地告诉我，它们并不存在。我童年时对于自然事物的想象都被科学与技术否定与解构了，让我对于人的生老疾病，轮回报应，都有了一种焦虑。

以前我认为人分为肉体与灵魂，死了以后灵魂会去另外的世界，肉体会留在尘世。灵魂是上天堂或者下地狱，或者陷入六道轮回中。我一直幻想着人与神，人与自然，人与日月星辰，人与河流高山，人与洞穴间的精灵……**交流与相遇。**它们陪伴了人类几千年，但现代科技瓦解了这一切。科技让我们重新认识自然，使得自然在现代诗歌中的表达越来越丧失神圣感与崇高性，现代诗歌对自然的表达只剩下对于物本身的想象，以精美的诗艺来完成对自然的描述，而丧失了传统中对自然之物的想象力与神圣感。诗，不再是言论之寺庙，它以前神圣的功能**逐渐被现代科技瓦解**，诗歌成为一种技艺，把技艺当着艺术几乎成为诗歌界的一种显性共识。如果说科技对“**神圣的想象力的艺术**”的影响，**使我们对以前想象的事物产生了怀疑，或者它推倒我们以前的世界观，让我们更清晰地观察世界与自身，使得诗歌本身具有的神性在消失，这种消失正如人丧失了灵魂一样。**丧失灵魂的人只余下肉体的欲望与思想，而丧失神性的诗歌只有技术的炫耀与拼贴。科学技术越来越盛行，越来越成熟，它不断地挤压着诗歌神性的部分，使诗人们的情怀与胸襟越来越小，数年前我曾在自己的诗歌中有过这样的表达，“**从先秦的宇宙退守到唐代的天下/从宋朝的山水退守到明代的斋室/唉，大清的草木，美人/如今，我们退去了上半身，剩下性与下半身/进入诗歌中，开始抒情/河流保持了向东的方向性/我们的胸襟在做有规则的缩小运动。**”阅读着唐诗中的句子，“**浮云游子意，落日故人情。**”“**无边落木萧萧下，不尽长江滚滚来。**”“**星垂平野阔，月涌大江流。**”天地山河已成为诗人情感的一部分，在诗人的心中涌动，它们跟随诗人的存在而一同存在。诗人在写作中，情感与内心都朝世界敞开，世界成为诗歌的一部分，他们的诗句呈现的想象力能够达到万物的边界，诗人情怀的地平线便是天地的地平线。而现在越来越拥挤的技术就像居住的城市一样，挤掉了诗歌中的星辰、草木、月光、江河、旷野……虽然作为名词它们还在我们诗歌中出现，但是这些作为名词出现的事物已丧失了它们作为自然世界的景物原来的色泽与质感……**科技已经让我们抵达了它的边界，在抵达中瓦解了曾经的美好。**

科学技术瓦解了我们对自然的想象，它却让我们重新开始认识人的本身，科技带来了现代主义诗歌，它让个体解放得到充分的发展。属于以前的英雄主义渐渐地在诗歌中消失，无论是中国或者欧洲或者美国或者澳洲，我们无法再从诗歌中感受到《荷马史诗》、《神曲》等那种英雄与浪漫主义的气息，我们的诗歌变成了现实主义，变成了更加阴郁的现代主义，诗歌变成了一种日常的手艺。诗歌中存在的神圣堡垒在科技面前已经崩溃，诗人那种自以

为高于凡人的优越感也慢慢在失去，我们无法再从一本别人看得懂或者看不懂的诗集中获得原来的神圣感，它包含的仅仅只是语言技艺或者纯粹的艺术。科技瓦解我们对遥远事物的想象，同时它也打开了我们不断审视自身肉体欲望的那一道门。自然万物剩下的只是物的本身，诗歌剩下对物的描述上技艺的表达，丧失了曾经的神秘感。

我从农业的乡村到工业的城市生活，我发现一个很有意思的现象，就是以技术为主体的工业化与城市化的高速发展带给文学现实主义的回归。而随着科技不断地瓦解我们对自然的认识，我们的内心在传统与现代、复古与先锋之间徘徊。我们享受着高速公路、飞机、电子技术带给我们的便利，我们同时也承受着工业化带给我们自然环境的破坏，对人类传统的破坏。当一个一个的自然物种、村庄等不断在我们视野中消失时，我们为逝去的感到悲伤，表达这种伤逝的情感，我们却没有能力抵抗欲望带给我们的便利以及复杂而多彩世界的诱惑。我在《穿越星宿的针孔》中表达了自然与工业的关系，在这首诗中，我将现代工业词语与自然之物融合。这首诗第一节写到，“煤气灯分割的 | 月亮，它四分之一的光与阴影，被酸液 | 灼热的皮肤”隐喻早期工业时代人类野蛮的开发；然后第二节我写到，“下午沿着螺丝的纹路徐徐而行 | 楔入黑夜的沼泽，佝偻的月亮像 | 职业病患者，在雾霾下咳嗽”则是象征野蛮工业对自然与环境的伤害。从“分割的月亮”到“佝偻的月亮”，这正是农业时代走向工业时代的历程。二十年前，我从农业的南充到工业的东莞，我感受到了月亮在我视野中的变化。我写过很多有关于月亮的诗歌，比如“生锈的月亮”、“伤感的月亮”、“带血的月亮”、“愤怒的月亮”、“灰月亮”、“油腻的月亮”，来表达工业对自然与环境的伤害。在诗歌《穿越星宿的针孔》的第三节，我写到，“启动器迅速沉入酸液，黑夜脱去 | 它的黑衣裳。月亮，夜的警报器 | 它亮着，雪终于没落下”。月亮，对于人类来说，不仅仅只是一个星球，或我们童年时神话的宫殿，它像自然与环境的警报器，时时警醒着我们。

如何在工业与自然、发展与环境、传统与现代、复古与先锋之间，探索诗歌的可能性。中国或澳洲，都有一批诗人从不同方向寻找，比如澳洲诗人莱斯·马雷对传统、本土的表达。在他的诗歌《步入牛群》中，我读到“最古老的牛队蹭唤着房子。/我在一个牛蹄引领的世界中醒来”。一只牛蹄引领的世界醒来，这是在呼唤传统复苏，诗人们一直用诗歌捍卫被科技伤害的部分已成为人类共同的经验。我自己也在探索中国传统在诗歌中的复苏，我在诗集《玫瑰庄园》中探索古典诗歌在现代诗歌中的运用。我将古典诗歌中的对仗、互文化用为现代汉诗的节奏，在表达上大量运用中国传统山水画的创作手法。在《玫瑰庄园》中，我采用了很多的对仗句式，甚至嵌入了大量的五言、七言诗句来寻找有中国意境、情感、传统的节奏。

当我读到莱斯·马雷的《布拉迪拉镇与塔里镇的假日套曲》，“穿越苦隆古鲁河，穿过王葛河，穿过瓦蓝巴河。”然后他又写到，森林在消失，村镇在消失。在中国的大地上，同样可以看到一个个村庄被空心化，然后慢慢消失。我觉得中国的“道”可能会为文学与工业化、城市化找出一条途径。“道”是中国最古老的哲学，“道法自然”，它强调万物平等、顺应自然，一切生命都是平等的，并非独指人与人之间的生命平等，而指人与自然万物之间的平等，它强调人与自然之间如何平衡而和谐地共处。

当社会越来越发展，我们面临的不仅仅是人与自然之间共处的问题，现在又有了人与机器、人与自己创造之物如何共处，构成了新的工业化、城市化的核心问题。人类如何面对自身创造出来的城市、机器？如何在诗歌中与其对话？随着科技的日益发展，人类创造的不仅仅只是会生产的机器，人类还创造了能够交流的人工智能。人类如何与这些具有我们同样思维的人工智能共处，构成了我们急需解决的问题。这些年，我一直在寻找人与机器之间

诗意的表达。我在一首诗中写过，“我用砂纸擦拭 | 生锈的天空，我的双手覆盖苦涩的夜 | 用一枚细小的恒温器贮藏我们的爱。”恒温器是工业中常用的一个电子元件，它的恒温特征与人类日益消失的爱以及冷漠之间构成了有趣的隐喻。如果我们的爱能够如恒温器一样保持一种平衡与稳定，那么世界会美好很多。探索工业器物与诗意表达之间的平衡成为我最近一部诗集的主题，我的灵感来自于中国的“道”，是它让我找到了人与万物平衡相处的方式，让我认识到无论是自然之物还是人类自身创造之物都是平等而神圣的，我们需要热爱自然之物也需要热爱自身创造之物。我们与自然、机器、人工智能、世间万物如何共存相处，构成了人类的新生态，也许中国的“道”能为这种新生态提供有效的经验。