

Visualization and Gary Snyder's Translation of Cold Mountain Poems

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Abstract

Visualization is Gary Snyder's unique translation method used in translating the Tang hermit-poet Han Shan's poems. This consists of four steps: remembering, visualizing, writing and checking, and it emphasizes a visual process of the mind, which is very similar to Ezra Pound's translation principle of *phanopoeia* and Snyder's own poetic production method. The mastery of visualization makes a translated poem sound like an English poem, although some distortions are inevitable in the translation process because of the reworking. Thus, selection and adaptation principles appear to be more important for a translator before and after the visual activities in his mind and it is these which largely determine the quality of translation.

This article thoroughly examines Snyder's twenty-four translations of the Cold Mountain poems, and compares them with Arthur Waley's translations. It demonstrates that Snyder's success is not separate from his personality, cultural taste and mountain experiences influencing his visualization. Snyder's direct treatment of diction, style and form is in accordance with Han Shan's vernacular language and Chinese Chan poetic aesthetics. His selection and adaptation principles present Han Shan as an old mountain hermit in self-forgotten joy on Cold Mountain, a place of seclusion which becomes synonymous with Chan enlightenment. With regard to Snyder's inaccuracies, three aspects should be considered: first, errors caused by his misunderstanding of the original; second, deliberate naturalization of exotic terms; and third, unconscious replacement of the Chinese mountain scenery with his American wilderness. Therefore, the article contends that while

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Snyder's visualization provides a good paradigm for some poet-translators, it is not a method to be followed by all translators.