

Mirage

A tale about two Poems

Years ago, starting 2011, suddenly I found myself reading and writing poems. Which I never did before. I wasn't even so much into poetry, a result of an uninspired education at high school no doubt. But writing and language always had my keen interest and passion, one of the main reasons I studied Law.

From 2000 onwards, Indian philosophy started to have my attention. Shortly after Eckhart Tolle's The Power of Now was available, I remember reading it and it stirred something in me, although only later I really understood what it was – Debbie had the exact same experience. Since there are a lot of beautiful poems written about enlightenment, Zen, Advaita, Hindu and Buddhist philosophy (by great poets like Rumi, Hafez, Kabir, Basho and Ryokan for instance), this fired my enthusiasm for poetry and I also discovered the great German poets like Hesse, Rilke and Schiller, and translated several of their poems into Dutch. Translating German into Dutch is not absolutely necessary, because most Dutch can read (sometimes even speak) German reasonably well since the languages are closely related (we are geographical neighbors after all). This makes the translating sometimes easier, sometimes however even more difficult. For instance, a sentence might be translatable almost literally word for word, apart from one crucial word that sticks out and is completely different and unrelated in both languages. Then, the entire thing should be rearranged and reworded to integrate and rime the translation after all. I was so fortunate to get some of these translations published. And translating poetry is, next to writing it, one of the most refined and subtle ways of playing with language, of which I am so fond. Diving into this realm is one of my profound joys. It is like a magical puzzle. And it clearly confronts oneself with the abstraction and conceptual limitations of language and thinking. And with its possibilities of course. I also translated a Catalan poem into Dutch, although I don't speak Catalan myself at all. But it just happened. And I started to write poems myself, as said, co-inspired by my love for Debbie.

This resulted in a small fountain of poems about all aspects of life and aliveness. We even produced a booklet of my poems which I presented to family and friends at a special festive occasion we organized in 2013. Debbie presented some of her latest paintings, I ornamenteally played the piano and a good friend of ours presented the event and told about the process behind the poems and the paintings. It was a great art-soirée and all the guests were gifted with my little book of poems.

There is not much attention for poetry in the Netherlands these days, and certainly not for amateur poetry. Although some of the poems were published, not many of the remaining

books were sold. As a result, we still have a box of about 60 beautiful booklets left, carefully stored in the bedroom closet. Occasionally we donate one to an unsuspecting acquaintance. I am rather fond of most of my poems and occasionally I still produce a new one, although not at my former pace. A second booklet is almost filled, and we might publish it as well, undoubtedly at a hefty loss.

Poems cannot be produced at will, they announce themselves under certain conditions. Then the poet more or less pulls them down from the unmanifested and acts as an intermedium to manifest what it wants to tell. This is the same with all forms of art.

Recently suddenly the English translation of one of my earlier poems announced itself and plunged down on my paper. I wrote the original in 2013 and still vividly recall the feeling that inspired it. It happened when I looked at something in my living room and was not able to recognize what it was. I think we all have moments like that. It can happen because of the object is in a strange lighting, or you look at it at an uncommon angle. Or several things blur together to produce some illusory form that doesn't trigger any recognition in the memory or imagination for a while. The mind frantically tries to give meaning to the illusion, but for a while it doesn't succeed. This interval of not-knowing can last for minutes if one is lucky, and feels very precious to me. It is a moment of pure mind, observing without knowledge, without preconceptions or conditioning.

Then suddenly, the spell is broken, something clicks and the mind recognizes what the eyes are looking at. This is both a moment of gain, and of loss. The gain is for the ego, it feels good, temporarily, a little triumph of reason and brainpower. But the loss is much more profound and lasting. You gain a little piece of manifested knowledge and you loose the entire realm of pre-manifestation that it came out of. The mind thinks it gained reality and beat the illusion, but in fact it only gained another (new) illusion and lost the substratum of unknowable reality that holds all the real secrets of life. I tried to put this into the poem.

For those of you who happen to read Dutch, I will start and write down the original version from 2013 here; it can also be seen [on our website*](#), with one of my paintings as a background:

Illusie

Tot iets in mij verteld heeft wat het is,
kon alles om mij heen nog alles zijn.
Ik denk dat ik het heb, maar heb het mis

(het is een wolk, een steen, een bloem, een vis)

Mijn duiden maakt het onbeduidend klein,
want al het weten is vooral gemis
van wat het anders ook had kunnen zijn.

And here follows the English , also on the website I was so lucky to find last week:

Mirage

Until an inner trifle says to me
what it is, that all around I see,
all the things could naturally be.
I think I know, but think erroneously

(it is a cloud, a stone, a bush, a bee)

My ever pointing renders pointlessly
all the knowing as illusory
where otherwise could be reality.

I hope you enjoyed both versions, or at least the English one.

J.Paul Jordaan (*The Blissfoot*)

Grathem 12 december 2021