

Words for my forthcoming book

Wings Towards Sunlight

(2010-2011)

Anna Yin's poetry provides a gracious blend of elements from both Asian and Western poetic traditions. She says in one poem, "I wake to listen." Indeed, she does listen: she listens especially to the natural environment, dreams and the longings of the heart. There is a mysterious quality about some of her poems which pulls at the reader's feelings. Images (such as "a river / where a black rose floated," and metaphors (such as tea grown cold, bread in a toaster and "a hooked fish") will not readily be forgotten. You will want to put this book on the nightstand or coffee table where you can pick them up and read them again.

-- Wilda Morris / President of Poets and Patrons of Chicago and author of Szechwan Shrimp and Fortune Cookie Poems from a Chinese Restaurant.

An authentic, direct tone brings the author's native Chinese voice to these poems, which are charming and fresh at their best. There is a Mary Oliver-like feel of 'merging with nature' captured in simple diction and similes, and unusual images.

Elana Wolff/ Poet and Editor from Toronto

It is a rare thing to come across a first collection of poems that leaves the reader feeling completely captivated and awed. Such is the case with Anna Yin's collection, "The Door Ajar." Writing mainly in short narrative lyrics, Yin's highly imagistic style brims with freshly-conceived similes and metaphors and an economy of language that belies the powerful messages of loss and love. These are poems that remain with you long after you have finished reading them; a collection that constantly surprises and delights with its beautifully-rendered images, unexpected turns of phrases, and its equally powerful quiet moments of longing and regret. Simply dazzling!

Laura Lush / Poet and Instructor from University of Toronto

Review of Anna Yin, “Wings Towards Sunlight”(forthcoming)

In writing of the evolution of language in his classic Poetic Diction (1928), Owen Barfield noted that “to the poet or critic, a language which has reached “the stage of development “in which word order is fixed and so essential to the expression of meaning that a slight change may actually reverse the sense” will present “the appearance of crystallization.” Barfield further remarked that “of known languages, Chinese is the farthest developed in this direction.” James J.Y. Liu, in his The Art of Chinese Poetry(1962) suggests that “the Chinese mentality” itself “ is inclined to concentrate on the essence rather than the appearance, and is therefore ‘essentialist’” with regard to the immediate experience, but, paradoxically, “in its attitude towards life as a whole, it is more ‘existentialist’, a structure of consciousness productive of short, concrete, and rather eclectic poems.

Wings Towards Sunlight , this first full collection of poems by the gifted emerging Chinese-Canadian poet, Anna Yin, has not only the above qualities, but has also blended this highly imagistic style with freshly-conceived similes and metaphors.

As a plant grows from its roots, tradition plays an important role in her poetic vision and its influence is reflected throughout the book. However, as a careful reading of this poetry will reveal, Anna Yin, who has lived in Canada for a decade, has developed the ability in her writing to bridge the Chinese and Western sensibilities, an achievement which has not often occurred either in China, where traditional and Western-style poetic “schools” have been in competition since late Manchu times, or in Europe and North America, where “oriental” themes and prosody have been copied since the Romantics.

Wings Towards Sunlight is a sequence of two movements of the consciousness, named by Yin as “There Must Be Something” and “We Grow Faces” which describe the poet’s discovery of meaning, joy and loss with regard to human love and the natural world, through her oriental consciousness and poetic dialogue with Western poetry, and with two rather different American women poets in particular, Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath. Indeed, the epigraph for Yin’s collection is a line from Dickinson, “The soul should always stand ajar, ready to welcome the ecstatic experience.” Yin writes about common natural things that stimulate her ecstatic experience, as in her opening poem “Rain”:

You don’t pray for rain in mountains,

it comes and goes as if to home...

This poem ends with a surprise sublime meditational experience.

In "A White Moon Looms":

*The tree grows dark ears
listening to winds' intense voice,
throughout restless nights.*

*Rain falls on your lips,
dry thirst resists.*

*Stay.
I only utter this word.*

She vividly evokes a feeling both exotic and erotic through her distinctive voice. This well represents the mixture of Eastern and Western cultures and styles where imagistic implication and direct expression both come together.

Through observing daily life and a seemingly-unimportant scene, Yin brings our feelings and senses to the fore by her engaged mind and sensitivity. For example, in her poem "The Flowers in My Vase", she writes:

*Tonight, I gaze at them,
inhaling their silence.*

Thus, those unknown flowers become alive through this touching sad expression.

And the poem "Raspberries" (On our bed / we lie like flatfish' Outside, stars grow old...) also demonstrates these qualities and powerfully reveal the loneliness of Humans and Nature.

There are also many other poems wherein dreams, desires, shadows, moonlight and memories are expressed as both interior and exterior, where moments and experiences describe the openness to the transcendent in the ordinary affairs of life, a quality that the philosopher Eric Voegelin (in his The Form of the American Mind) finds in American Puritan mysticism and Common Sense philosophy at their best.

In this book, Yin leads the reader to meditate on personal relationships and universal feelings by means of her unique structure of words and images. **Although her writing sometimes approaches the self-absorption and Surrealism of much contemporary Western poetry, it never falls fully into these modes of expression, Anna Yin clearly rejecting Plath's self-destructive solipsism. In her poem, "the Wall", she writes:**

A grey wall now, clawed and bloody.

We mount the mirrors,
side by side, fixed with glue.

The light spins.

We grow faces.

Yin is passionate for answers and solutions to the puzzle of love and life. She refuses to surrender to the difficulty of reality. A balance of consciousness is achieved, but dreaminess is not denied. This is, I believe, because of Yin's genuine blend of Chinese "mystical naturalism" and the rather stark cultural reality she has experienced as an immigrant to Canada, (she is a working high-tech professional, rather than a literary academic, or member of the "opinion-forming classes"). Here she has found a spiritual home among the followers of the "People's Poetry" tradition (in 2005, she received the Ted Plantos Memorial Award for People's Poetry).

Wings Towards Sunlight leads the reader from the mundane ordinary life to the realms of the exquisiteness of nature and the spiritual world, a place with a promise of clarity without abandoning ordinary experience for a "Second Reality", as Eric Voegelin calls the ideological dream-world. Yin describes this experience of the psyche at the conclusion of the first half of the book:

It is the sowing season

Your finger points to the distant mountains-

Terrace farms spiral

Like ladders to heaven.

/ Beyond Our Knowing

Wings Towards Sunlight demonstrates that, despite the dehumanizing technocracy in which the whole world now lives, the Romantic imagination is still "alive and well".

Terry Barker (Humber College)