

# The Company of Souls

*Yu Kwang-chung (余光中, 1928- ) is a prolific writer, having published more than fifty collections of verse, prose, and criticism over the past five decades. He is well known on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, and many of his lyrics have been turned into popular songs. Yu has taught Chinese and English literature in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the United States and is currently teaching English and American Poetry at National Sun Yat-sen University in Kaohsiung. In the course of his career, he has translated numerous works from English into Chinese.*

**T**ranslating a literary work and creating a new one are essentially similar activities, in that they both involve "translation." What writers do is translate what's in their minds into words. Their thoughts and emotions are often quite vague, and can't take on the necessary quality of subtlety until they've been put into words that will enable readers to share the author's experience. The language has to be commensurate with the experience if readers are to access the experience through the language used.

Translators work on clean text composed of phrases and sentences. They ponder the author's thoughts and feelings through this text and then translate them into another language. The original, the author's experience leading up to

this original, and the translation are like the three points of a triangle, connected with and influenced by one another.

To know what was going on in the author's mind, a translator therefore needs to research as much as possible of the writer's cultural, historical, and social background and personal experience. When translating Hemingway's books, you need to know him as a writer, as a person, who his best friends were, his frustrations in love. You need to know about Hemingway in the Spanish civil war and why he went to that war. When translating *The Old Man and the Sea*, you have to read Hemingway's other books as well, to acquire the necessary knowledge about the species of fish and the weather in the Caribbean, because they were all part of the environment and personal experiences Hemingway based himself on.

"A translator never has to worry about running out of ideas, because there are so many great works awaiting his attention, so many great souls waiting to be accompanied."



