

Author Commentary

These poems from “The Tibet Sequence” are loosely based on the writings of Victor Segalen, whose work has spoken deeply to me for years. In his short life (1878-1919), Segalen, a medical doctor for the French navy, traveled extensively in Polynesia and the Far East. Like Gauguin, with whom he is often linked, Segalen was one of the great travelers of indwelling, of otherness. In his little-known “Essay on Exoticism,” he explores “the notion of difference, the perception of Diversity, the knowledge that something is other than one’s self...Exoticism’s power is nothing other than the ability to conceive otherwise.” In his *Odes suivies de Thibet*, he takes up his interests in Buddhist and Taoist thought, attempting at times to mimic the language of the Sages whose genius, compassion and knowledge of the illusory self he venerated. My own poems are written in the spirit of Segalen’s phrase “to conceive otherwise;” which I believe to be the poet’s essential task. In following Segalen’s habits of mimicry, my work involves an opportunistic, even perhaps exploitive mingling of Segalen’s thought and language with my own. Playing with his words and with mine, I have called these poems “transpositions” and not “translations.” All along, my aim has been to conjure through language an imagined, timeless “Tibet,” a place not only of great and rugged beauty but of spiritual instruction and ethical hope.