

THE DESERT HORSES

(*Ye ma* 野馬)

AND

THE WHITE COLT

(*P'eh k'ü* 白駒)

BY

G. SCHLEGEL.

So often already I have complained of the lamentable insufficiency of our chinese dictionaries, that I am afraid the public will get weary of my complaint; but I will not cease complaining until the measures I have proposed at the occasion of the Congress of Orientalists in Leiden in 1883 will have been carried out.

For illustration's sake, I will again adduce a specimen of the deficiency of these dictionaries, native as well as european ones, as, for want of good definitions, one of the finest comparisons made by *Chwang-chow* (莊周), commonly called the Philosopher *Chwang* (莊子 or 莊生, a native of the state of *Liang*, circa B.C. 330), whose writings have drawn the attention of all Sinologues and european philosophers for their truly philosophical tendency, has remained uncouth and incomprehensible.

In one of his writings (Book XXII, Part II, Section XV) the following phrase occurs: "Men's life between heaven and earth is like a *white colt's* passing a crevice, and suddenly disappearing"¹). None of the chinese or european dictionaries give us the signification of this term *white colt*²). Even the *Pei-wen-yun-fu* does not quote

1) 人生天地之間若白駒過郤.

2) GILES translates the phrase literally by "Man passes through this sublunary life as a white horse passes a crack" (p. 96 A).

Chwang-tsz in his article on 白駒. I am the only one who has given the real meaning of the term in my Dutch-Chinese dictionary ¹⁾, i. v. *Fata morgana* (the 野馬 or desert horses of the same philosopher). I will reproduce here my article in english garb, according to the 周祈名義考, quoted in the chinese Cyclopedica 格致鏡原, Kiuen II, Article 日, Sun: "The desert horses or the horses of the desert of *Chwang-tsz* are the dust. *Ch'in-kwoh* (Wylie, Notes, p. 31) says: Dust and the desert-horses are the floating vapours in the fields and deserts. From afar they look like a herd of sheep or like waterbillows. In the buddhist books it is said: dazzling like the desert-horses during the hot season. In the *Wei-pa chuan* we read: "Men's life in this world is like a white colt's passing by a crevice" ²⁾).

According to the commentary, the white colt is the light of the sun; the vapours of the sun are called "desert horses", and the light of the sun is called "white colt". The meaning is that *colt* and *horse* are taken as symbols of the quickness of their movements in running and jumping. The word *desert* refers to the place (the desert); the word *white* to the colour ³⁾.

Another commentary says: "when the sun shines upon the dust, and a slight breeze makes it fly in the desert, it is called by metonymy Sunblaze; the ignorant man seeing it, calls it the desert-

1) Published in 1882—1890.

2) The same words were said by *Liu Tsih* (劉澤) to *Chang Liang* (張良) who lived B.C. 189 (Mayers, Manual, N^o. 26). Cf. *Pei-wei-yun-fu*, Chap. VII E, fol. 159 *recto*.

3) 莊子野馬也塵埃也。沈括云。塵埃與野馬乃田野間浮氣。遠望如羣羊、又如水波。佛書謂如熱時野馬陽焰。魏豹傳。人生一世間、如白駒之過隙。[注]白駒日景也是。日氣謂之野馬。日景謂之白駒。駒與馬以疾馳上騰爲義。野言其處、白言其色耳。

horses, and a thirsty man who sees it, thinks it to be running water" 1).

I must refer the reader to my long monography in my dictionary, as it is too long to be reproduced here. It suffices to state here that the term *white colt* is a popular name for the light or the beams of the sun, and in taking this sense, the passage in *Chwang-tsz* becomes vivid and beautiful: "Men's life between Heaven and Earth (or in this world) is like a beam of the sun passing by a crevice, and suddenly disappearing": and Legge's query (Texts of Taoism, II, p. 65, note 1): "Why is it the colt here is white?" is fully answered by this elucidation. Of course, there is no reference here to the white colt in the *Shi-king* (II, IV, 2) where the poet really speaks of a white horse.

Concerning the symbolism, we will only mention that all people of antiquity, the Chinese included, have considered the God of the Sun as riding in a chariot drawn by fleet horses. An old ditty says:

"Towards the end of the year, the sun declines;

"Whence does it get a vigorous master to turn the sun's chariot?" 2)

and *Wang-chung* 3) says: the sun travels a thousand *li* (miles) daily, and a good horse as much; so the pace of a good steed is comparable to the rapidity of the sun's course 4).

1) 日光著塵、微風吹之曠野中、轉名之爲陽燄。愚夫見之、謂之野馬。渴人見之、以爲流水。(龍樹大士)。

2) 年歲晚暮日已斜、安得壯士翻日車。 *Vide* 本尤九曲歌, quoted in my *Uranographie chinoise*, p. 116 and 266.

3) 王充論衡, Mayers, Manual N°. 795, circa A.D. 19—90.

4) 日晝行千里。騏驎晝行千里。然則日行舒疾與騏驎步相類。 *Uranographie chinoise*, p. 116.

With the old Greeks, the chariot of Helios was equally provided with fleet horses. Apollo had four white steeds before the sun's chariot, for which *Aurora* opened in the morning the gates in the East, and during the night the sungod and his chariot were put to rest in the palace of *Tethys*, in the West of the universe.

In consequence of the misapprehension of the term "white colt", Wells Williams ¹⁾ has translated the saying 駒光易逝 by "the bright racer quickly disappears", which is in the first place incorrect as in Chinese the adjective precedes the substantive, and if this was really the meaning the phrase would stand 光駒 "the bright colt", and not 駒光, which has to be translated by "the light of the colt", i. e. "the gleam of the Sun". The metaphorical sense is "time gone cannot be recalled", as W. Williams himself says, but apparently without understanding the metaphor.

As soon, however, as we translate here 駒 by Sun and 駒光 by the *sun's light*, the *gleam of the sun*, the metaphor, which evidently is inspired by *Chwang-tsz's* saying, becomes quite clear, and we can translate it by "the sun's gleam easily passes away"; or *tempus fugit* as the Romans said, which is also literally rendered in Chinese by 光陰一去再不還, "time gone never comes back", or by 光陰易過, "time easily passes away", or by 時光迅速, "time is swift", etc. ²⁾

The desert horses are mentioned by *Chwang-tsz* in his *Perigrinations* (逍遙遊, Book I, Part I, Section I) in the phrase 野馬也、塵埃也。生物之以息相吹也, which simply means "Desert-horses are (only) dust; it are natural productions ³⁾ blown against each other by a breath".

1) Chinese Dictionary, p. 438 B.

2) See my *Nederlandsch-Chineesch Woordenboek* i. v. *Tijd* (time) and *Vliegen* (fly).

3) We cannot translate here 生物 by living things; for the sand of the desert is here meant, which is a natural production of the desert.

De Rosny paraphrases: (et cependant cet animal prodigieux ¹), comparé à l'univers, n'est) qu'un peu d'air, un peu de poussière; c'est un souffle de la création. In a note he adds: Cette phrase est d'une extrême concision, et l'expression *ye-ma* (vulg. "cheval des champs"), qu'il faut interpréter par "l'air qui circule dans les champs" (田間遊氣), appartient à ce style figuré, allégorique, souvent ampoulé, dont l'intelligence présente d'ordinaire de sérieuses difficultés ²).

Legge (Texts of Taoism, I, 165) paraphrases: "(But similar to this is the movement of the breezes which we call) the horses of the fields, of the dust (which quivers in the sunbeams), and of living things as they are blown against one another by the air".

The difficulty lies not only in the interpretation of the term *ye-ma*, but in the use of the particle 也 *ye*, which has been taken in the sense of "to be", by the translators. Now 也 has in this whole chapter of *Chwang-tsz* the meaning of 者; and a modern writer would say 野馬者、塵埃也.

Prémare says in his *Notitia linguae sinicae* (Ed. Bridgman, p. 187, § 3): *Ye* 也 is sometimes found in the end of the first member of a sentence; e. g. 道之不行也、吾知之矣, if reason be at fault, I know the cause; and § 6: 無異也、一也, there is not a particle of difference; 則一也、無異也, there is then no difference. In the same piece *Chwang-tsz* says: 且天水之積也、不厚、則負大舟也、無力, "moreover, when the accumulation of the waters of heaven is not deep enough, then it will not have the strength to support a large ship". In this phrase again 也 *ye* makes the subject concrete, which is generally

1) *Chwang-tsze* has first spoken of the fabulous bird *Rokh*; but the phrase has no connection with that in which he speaks of this bird, and so we can dispense with the paraphrase in brackets given by de Rosny and Legge.

2) Textes chinois traduits en Français, Paris 1875, p. 74.

expressed by 者, as in the definition of the word Humanity: 仁者、義之本也, Humanity is the root of justice; literally "that which constitutes humanity, is that it is the root of justice".

Von der Gabelentz (Chinesische Grammatik, §§ 811, 1166, 1188b) quotes several examples of the use of 也 for 者; as *e. g.* pag. 449: 陽也、剛也、仁也、物之始也。陰也、柔也、義也、物之終也, where 也 stands for 者. Compare also St. Julien's *Syntaxe nouvelle de la langue chinoise*, Vol. I, p. 163, where several quotations are given of the use of 也 *ye* for 者 *che*.

Wells Williams' definition of *ye ma*, "a column of dust flying over the desert", is pretty correct; that of Medhurst "the simoon of the desert" and that of Giles "a sunbeam" are wrong, for a simoon is a dust-storm, which is called in Chinese 塵頭; whilst the *ye-ma* is light dust hovering over the desert upon which the sun shines, and affecting the wellknown form of mirage so ordinary in all deserts and tantalizing to the poor wanderer parched with thirst.

The famous pilgrim *Hïuen-ts'ang* suffered frightfully from the fantastic visions appearing suddenly and disappearing as quickly in the desert *Mo-kia yen-tsil* ¹⁾, when on his way to the 野馬泉, the "Well of mirage", and not, as St. Julien has translated it, the "Well of wild horses".

Ye-ma are also the little motes or atoms of dust, dancing in a beam of the sun. The chinese poet *Han-oh* (韓偓) says: 窓裏日光飛野馬, "In the sun's beams through my window the motes dance" ²⁾. It were ridiculous to take here the term *ye ma* as "wild horses" or as a Simoon or dust-storm.

Chinese is difficult; not on account of its easy and transparent syntax, but on account of the figurative use of characters, which

1) In Mongol *Makhai Gobi*, the ugly desert.

2) See my "Nederlandsch-Chineesch Woordenboek" i. v. *Zonnestofje* (Sun-motes).

are wanting in our dictionaries, and so can even lead the most experienced sinologues into error. Before we have a complete chinese dictionary in the fullest sense of the word, we will all be liable to misunderstandings and errors in our translations of chinese texts. But it is impossible for one man to make such a dictionary, and we want a special commission of Sinologues, unfettered by material wants, to compile it. The expenses, divided over a goodly number of years, would not be so heavy, that the British government, which is most concerned with it, could not easily bear them.
