**【英译汉原文】**

**Poetry to Me**

By *Major Jackson*

【1】One of the abiding principles and important reasons why I turn to poetry, both as a reader and a maker, is the laying bare of the mystery of the self. The writing of a poem begins in ignorance. Responding to an inner imperative, the stimulus beneath most of my poems is the Greek Delphic aphorism “Know Thyself,” which also emerged in another form in Socrates’s final declarations while on trial and facing imminent death: The unexamined life is not worth living.

【2】Since a young man, poetry became my means of knowing and gave my life substance. By marking language such that it sings our selfhood, by making a linguistic record of our observations in memorable speech, poetry offers the opportunity to not only examine but to penetrate the abstract and nebulous nature of existence and to lay the foundation for an authentic self who serves as a witness to their times.

【3】In a sense, poetry writes, or rather, sings us. I deliberately use the word “sing” because I am one of those who, maybe perversely, believes in the indissoluble relationship between sound and sense, that our most profound utterances, at their purest, carry the truth and embodiment of song.

【4】Harkening back to the roots of lyric poetry, poets are communal singers. The ritualistic act of calling forth words into a series of synthesized memories and ordered impressions into artful language (whether metered or not) elevates human expression to a divine act of witnessing and being in the world.

【5】In the 20th century, Walt Whitman says “I am large; I contain multitudes” and Langston Hughes states “I, too, am America.” These pronouncements reflect as much their individual spirit as it does the tenor of the times they lived. If we understand, today, this work of poetry as both shaping and giving expression to unique consciousness, while at the same time, countersigning the age out of which it is born, then we understand how poetry maps both inner lives and the public realms of engagement. It is no accident that interiority and territory share in sound and meaning, two near common Latin roots: inter (“within”) and terra (“land”).

【6】In writing a poem, language emerges from the most undivided sense of ourselves; it is a concentrated moment of human cognition, improvisational and incantatory. Much of the music in my life has taught me to listen deeply, not merely to notes but to the underlying swell of human emotion that informs both chords and words.

【7】I inherited an abiding love of jazz and blues from my grandfather. What I long for in my own work is the exuberance of life I first heard as a child, a time in our lives when sounds are most impressionable. As a result, I aim to write poems in which language dramatically changes into feeling. I long to stylize language such that it becomes a new encounter for the reader and honors the idioms of our age. To that end, each poem I write attempts to capture the concerns and sensibilities of our times while expressing my unique relationship to language.

【8】Because language is my material, I also strive to maintain a limber attitude (and ear!) so that I am doing more than transcribing what I merely see or feel, but also to listen and hear the subaltern transactions and ideas between words and what they signify so that not only does language captures an experience or moment in time but somehow transcends the context and conditions by which it is made.

【9】This represents for me the idea of lyric freedom, when the poem is not bound by the space/time axis but bridges shared experiences and becomes emblematic of the human journey. It is when I believe most Walt Whitman’s opening to *Song of Myself*: “I celebrate myself, and sing myself, / And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.”