

* Peregrine

An English Companion to Chutzpah Magazine

** Selected Poems by*

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Bai Hua

* Curtain Call

When he was young, he liked to brag
often in the afternoon or at dusk
sending us props
video tapes, scent, strange books...

Life can't always come in a gush
toying with tricks like children
He laughs, *is anonymity equality?*
I don't understand what this means

He is already fifty-two now
Sighs, this mouse has lived for thirty years
Writing and sighing, his pen quickens
Let it die! Let it die!

The world is a stage
My youth is gone, now your turn
Look, he has become a soliloquy
his weeping enraging others

June 13th, 2010

Translated by Fiona Sze-Lorrain

* Jialing River

Do not fear, this is just a mirror
facing a distant past —

That day, on an endless flight of scalding steps
you were training, running...
by the river, afternoon or evening
the joy of insomnia
always an odor of anger
majestic yet beyond description

Someone leapt into the water from a huge rock
Someone was chasing a barge in the river

But I was there
and saw a drowned youth

His face was ashen and swollen
body hairless
like a female corpse
putting others to shame

I am since sexless
I see everyone as a dead man

July 25th, 2010

Translated by Fiona Sze-Lorrain

* The End

What about the end?

The yearning, the ill and the newly born
please don't tell them for now

Places where I grew up, defenders of the path of hatred, the central zone of torture
please don't tell them too

Right now the face of danger or bliss is rejected
the seed or salt of an instant is rejected
even the witty tongue is also rejected

As long as the spear of revenge does not stab through sunlight
As long as a firm diet can measure the number of starved companions who gave up
As long as all friends in hiding choose to reunite on a summer morning

you will eat your own end

revised August 6th, 2010

Translated by Fiona Sze-Lorrain

* Fading, Fading...

Sky greets us, early winter, early summer
at dusk, that building, that ward

She
can't put a joyful heart in an elegy

She asks day and night, from time to time:
How would I look when I die?

A worldly heart is a lantern in a wind gap, unstable
in adversity — more than a turtle floating on water

Note:

a tiny insect sees your finger as a vast landscape

Fading, fading...

let our hearts stay in the temple

November 29th, 2010

Translated by Fiona Sze-Lorrain

Chen Dongdong

* Peach Blossom Poem

Today has also become the past

— *Kobayashi Issa*

unwithered after all
recalling a split emptiness
after wild whips of cold rain

though emptiness can transfigure peach blossoms
the doggedly immortal fornicator
is convulsed by thought

till pain is induced
the endless rouge of the bud's desire
widening endlessly like a pool of blood

immortality flickers and summons
a man from Wuling who lost his way at the water's edge
who once visited a sublime past

his adventures rest on petals
in his dreams he yearns for peach blossoms
sleepless, unwithering in your skull

what can he do with a branchful of thoughts
just one day to relish endless peach blossoms
yet he cannot die in this wondrous impasse

of lost time — the man from Wuling
falls into this night, forgets the way anew
zigzags through city sorrows

he stands by a tree beaten by cold rain
beneath compulsive sadomasochistic crows
entertaining your cerebrum with

his peach blossoms
that do not wither because of pain
because of pain, you invent him

transforming for you, and only for you
peach blossoms without end

2010

Translated by Fiona Sze-Lorrain

Han Dong

* Foggy

It's foggy, or smoky
Perhaps it's smog
No one's surprised by that

You can look straight into the sun, floating
Like the moon in ashen clouds
No one's surprised by that

This morning is no different from other mornings
Yesterday and tomorrow are pretty much the same
No one's surprised by that

Even on a clear day I can't see roadside trees and flowers clearly
Even if I see them I don't remember them
Even if I remember them I can't write about them

If I'm not surprised by that, then
No one else'll be surprised by that

Easier to muddle through life than to muddle through one thing
Easier to cope with the world than with one person
More knee-jerk reactions, fewer far-sighted actions

I cut through this fog-blanketed city
Cannily avoiding traffic

October 30th, 2009

Translated by Nicky Harman

* Walking and Looking

Go down, take a walk
Go around, take a look
Get a few things done
Look at the vast cityscape

Take a look at those trees
Take a look at the sky
Look at the city criss-crossed with streets
Vehicles flying past

Take a look at people, take a look at dogs
Take a look at people walking their dogs
People wearing clothes, that's normal
Dogs wearing clothes, that's quite different

Take a look at shops
A feast for the eyes
Take a look at bookshops
As a writer they make me despair

Take a look at skyscrapers
Take a look at flyovers
Take a look at construction sites and kids
Alive and dead, all growing

If there's a nerve left in your body
Take a few more looks at girls
I want time to stand still
It looks, tastes and smells perfect

Go down, take a walk
Go around, take a look
Finally, stare fiercely at your watch
The illusion's gone in an instant

December 4th, 2009

Translated by Nicky Harman

* A Crackle of Bangers

A crackle of bangers expands space
Fireworks erupt, decorating the skies
Our beloved mother has gone
And this splendid celebration feels strange

Dying, the dead expand space
Missing them, the living decorate the skies
I stand on the veranda silently smoking
The new city square deserted

Walk away
Two old-time people down new-world streets
A future rolled out by glittering lights
As if the sun had been extinguished yesterday

The wind wafts river smells
Explosions of fragrant mud

Emptiness receives me in its embrace
Mysterious kindness opening like a wintersweet flower

Walk away
Who bequeathed us this world, as they bequeathed us to it?
Who traded old for new, rewrote this New Year?
A crackle of bangers expands space
From here on we are more intimate with death

February 8th, 2011

Translated by Nicky Harman

Huang Canran

* Intimate Moment

When I rushed to the Tseung Kwan O Hospital
and saw my father in the trauma and orthopedics ward,
he was already in bed with a glucose drip,
injured right hand lying bandaged on his chest.
Mother drew me aside and told me he had wept
and refused the operation. She asked me to convince him.

I said just a few words before my father agreed
and signed. Everything went better than expected.
Just as this hospital, this sick room were cleaner and quieter
than I'd expected, jade-green hills all around,
nurses like angels — yes, this place
was Heaven, or maybe the valley of the Peach Blossom Spring.

After the operation I fed my father dinner.
This was the most intimate moment of our lives.
After I was born my father had worked far from home,
and by the time our family reunited I had grown up,
so we never spoke much to each other. I moved out,
started my own family, and my father and I
grew even more distant. Whenever I call home and he answers,
he says “just a moment,” then like a switchboard operator
puts my mother on the line, though I know
he and I share a love too deep for words.

But this moment is magic.
Father: praise God, praise the world —
you drink water, you pee, I help you
open your pants and bring the urine bottle
to your withered penis — in weakness and shame
you finally open yourself to me, show me the root of my life.
And I imagine what you must have felt the first time
you saw my little bird: what surprise, what wonder.

2001

Translated by Alice Xin Lin & Austin Woerner

* From Darkness

I come from darkness, gloom and illness
not the darkness I now enjoy at dawn
nor the gloom that an outdoor stroll
can dispel, nor the illness that can be healed
by medication and a few days' rest

For those who live in brightness, joy
and health, I do not hold back
my yearning, I walk among them,
pass by them, sit opposite them,
appreciate them, praising them in my heart

Yet I still live in shadows
some from my past, others
monstrous shadows
cast by those in the surrounding
darkness, illness and gloom —

Always reminding me (I can even
hear their whispers), *Your world
is split between light and dark
you are like a tree, even if you gaze at the sky
you will always belong to the earth*

2005

Translated by Fiona Sze-Lorrain

Jimbut Jun Feng

* To live in a narrative, no. 46

The cold air reflects an evening
in Shanghai or in Nørrebro. Broken instants and wisps of rain
an exchange of smiles between two strangers waiting for a bus

I trace my thoughts back
to a hole
in which I once sat and lit a fire
Yes, once I was a vagabond
and got help on the way here

A forged passport, an invented name
one more name
The day becomes night

My yearning for home paints a scene from a journey
A strange feeling beside the fire
Barbed-wire fence and soldiers on the lookout
Once I was an outlaw in a remote forest
and said I was there to find a flower

Still this cold air
which I dreamed about in my tropic youth
Still this cold air in which I dream about my tropic youth

2007

Translated by Gritt Uldall-Jessen

Mang Ke

* A Year Has Only Sixty Days (Selections)

1

The rattle of wind-blown bones went on all night
At dawn it finally ceased
While hungry birds pecked at the tin roof
A cuckoo's cry proves there is stillness here
People go on living their lives
Living things are still filled with life force
Why do the dead keep sighing after death?
What I'd rather not remember keeps coming to mind
Forgotten things are the hardest to forget
Do the dead realize they have died?

2

The time of desire draws near again
While restless ghosts and lone wraiths
Continue their search for love
Dancing tombstones fill my vision
Bizarre birds wheel through the sky
At this moment I pay them no mind
I allow my flesh to find release
The animal lust in human nature
At the time of desire its panting sound is never far
And before long the human scent grows faint

3

A sirocco that steals into the blood
Flesh-tainted affection
The only thing I can touch
Is quietness, the quietness she is
Time falls to pieces, bit by bit
Only her remote gaze embraces you
You taste the water of a woman's scent
And are tasted by her
The one you possess possesses you
Your distance from her
Is her distance from you

4

Behind the masquerade of language
Light rays stretch their ruler-straight necks
Wearing necklaces of lust
Crazily in love
I seem to have forgotten my own existence
Imagining I can only imagine
A hand reaching out from my head
Every day is one of the last days
Every day I guzzle myself down
For this is the only way I can get drunk on love

5

At sunrise
The first quickening of a life
Within soft walls of flesh
Flit ever-changing shadows
I can feel her heartbeat beating in my heart
I can sense her uneasy heart
More peaceful than when she is at peace
Only through love can we be so close
Only in closeness can we share silence
The sound of silence is thunderous
Sometimes it seems to engulf us

6

A road cut off in rainy weather
Damp wisps grow on water surfaces
Thorny stems float
On two face-shaped pools
A cry cuts through the flesh
Its frightened clothing quivers too
The body you took when setting forth
Will be brought back home someday
The desire that dogged it
Will be carried off with the rain

2010

Translated by Denis Mair

Meng Lang

* Kite in the Treetop

that kite in the treetop
twists like a trapped, tangled man

an ember awakens
alarmed by its prior flame

the treetop's taller than the highest kite
the last bud on the topmost branch extends its desperate head

a nation burned down should reincarnate
blind faith sweetens the continent to a sugar cube

the museum's steeple braces the snare of knowledge
the children, all kneeling, touch only their fingertips

tears flowing like magma
ruin a thousand faces

innocent children learning to fly kites
are themselves flown high

the ember summons a deeper extinguishing,
deeper, untraceable

a hundred wisdoms, withered, fallen, scatter in the gale
if the truth is laid bare, the children's planet will appear at once

fragrance forgets to yield fragrance
memory spins, as layers of thick fog brim one's will

the shattered I-beam is driven into human earth
the Chinese language written on kites suddenly forfeits its order

the ember still awake
no longer joins the endless fullness of the burnt earth's dream to the blue heavens

April 19th – 24th, 2006

Boston

Translated by Diana Shi & George O'Connell

* To Travelers from the 20th Century

He who bears his country everywhere
rides his country's shoulder.

Yes, the motherland,
his whole household.
Yes, the motherland,
indeed his whole household.

In his body, rivers weave like roads,
in his blood, departure's bells and horns.

The country moves on beside him.
They regard each other's gaze. "Carry him," it grins, "On the shoulder!"

Yes, the motherland,
his life's whole direction.
Yes, the motherland,
indeed his life's whole direction.

Where he walks,
open fields, mountains, cities, villages, soil, fresh flowers —
his pride's the country's measure.
They walk arm in arm toward the horizon.

Yes, the motherland,
beside him now, tasting the far off morning dew.
Yes, the motherland,
beside him now, its glow the old garden's at dusk.

The man shouldering his country, walking in pain,
himself on its own bitter shoulder, forever unbetrayed.

May 29th, 2008

Boston

Translated by Diana Shi & George O'Connell

Ouyang Jianghe

* For “H”

— on turning 53 in Vermont

1

A long-awaited August, arriving in September.
An ancient moon, rising in Vermont.
Memories, moving in the light from Friday.
Zhuangzi approaches
with receding footsteps.
Footsteps of cloud patterns, unfolding petals, postal systems.

2

A letter written in an ancient autumn
has not yet found its way into my hand.
The postman is winging through the blue.
On the other side of the earth, you're reading a letter I've yet to write.
You've yet to send
a letter I've already opened twice.
Preflowered, unbroken, empty voices.

3

I pick up your call. I hear your lilting voice.
A sound to open blossoms in lamps, that voice.
I say hello, you answer *wei*?
In the background, the din of a Chinese banquet hall.
The guests are starving, but the chef is an artist
who paints ribeyes in ink, serves them on a scroll.
Is the concept of *cow* worth more than the meat?
A weaning mother crams the teat of Marx
between her infant's lips, suppressing the milk's
proletarian yelps, while a banker
at the ATM machine inside his own head
presses the button to empty his heart.

4

When we've hung up on the voice of money,
will we hear poetry's voice?
An invisible finger presses a button:
the world is on speakerphone.

Will King Lear hear Shakespeare calling?
Will Li Bai hear, in Sappho's moon,
flurries of butterflies, lighter than philosophers' dreams?
Will I hear my other me?
In the minutes before my cell phone rings —
silence, wide as the universe.

5

Strike a match, light an anti-me.
Send the paper flames of your postcards by express mail
from ancient China to twilit Vermont.
Blow lightly, light as butterfly wing-dust.
Blow out my heart.
Brittle heart, billowing heart, which together with the universe
composes a point:
a smallness of infinite size,
the million light years of fifty-three years.

6

If I have only one past, I am that past.
But if I have five hundreds pasts
then I don't have a single present.
Do you have another present?
Perhaps you are not where you are, and I am not
who I am. I have two past selves, one of them
newborn: a 53-year old
no one at all.

7

A fish lies on a dinner plate,
cut by knife, cooked by flame.
This can happen.
The same fish swims up out of the river and onto my keyboard,
where it studies me with surreal eyes —
this can also happen.
Can a human play the music of the fish,
play an inversion against the parallel motion of species?
Play a chef out of the fish on the plate,
a philosopher out of the fish in the river?
But Zhuangzi is playing at something far stranger:
a cooked fish, swimming to life in the sky.

8

The universe is an elderly scientist's toy.
A kid stands on the globe, demanding a lollipop.

An engineer spins the world in his hand,
then turns, hands paradise to a crane beyond the sky.
A crane, even of paper, has a pair of wings —
and a one-armed crane has two feet
to dance, stand on tiptoe, crane-stance of the heart.
Zhuangzi follows the crane's example.
He stands tall, looks far, unbridles the spirit.
And you give motionless poise to the thunder of horses,
balance the foundation of a dream atop the stem of a narcissus.

9

When we set foot in paradise, peach blossoms wither.
Time fades, worn by beginnings and endings.
Pain fades. A jackhammer
bores into the teeth of the earth.
The ache of human ears: an endodontist's chair
placed in the hushed nave of the planet.
Every day, we bore a few inches deeper.
Any deeper, and our hearts would touch.
And an underground sky would gush forth, fountain-like,
pyrotechnic flowers unfolding in space.

10

The beard of Zhuangzi, moving in the wind —
this is just a picture in the mind of Stevens.
I offer them both an electric razor.
Now, our three chins
have the same small battery-powered heart:
time turns, anti-time turns.
An ancient moon, returned to China unanswered —
every day, I use my razor.
The past is my present.
I'm a reproduction.

11

Beneath the moon of a different world
I pause, listening for your footsteps, waiting
for the moment from which eternity will spill.
Am I really in Vermont?
A distance of an inch puts you in another country.
I can't see the pine trees in the dark,
but pine cones are falling everywhere.
Life is falling, like a porcelain urn.
Empty, falling.
I stoop, gather the shards of its emptiness.
Every shard, both instance and idea,

word and flesh, past and future.
Pieced together, they make a finality.
And the world is once again fragile and full,
the night unmarred.
Though this is not the last time the urn will fall.

September 18th, 2009

Translated by Austin Woerner

* Mother, Kitchen

Where the immemorial and the instant meet, opening and distance appear.
Through the opening: a door, crack of light.
Behind the door, a kitchen.

Where the knife rises and falls, clouds gather, disperse.
A lightspeed joining of life and death, cut
in two: halves of a sun, of slowness.

Halves of a turnip.
A mother in the kitchen, a lifetime of cuts.
A cabbage cut into mountains and rivers,
a fish, cut along its leaping curves,
laid on the table
still yearning for the pond.

Summer's tofu
cut into premonitions of snow.
A potato listens to the onion-counterpoint
of the knife, dropping petals at its strokes:
self and thing, halves of nothing
at the center of time.
Where gone and here meet, the knife rises, falls.

But this mother is not holding a knife.

What she has been given is not a knife
but a few fallen leaves.
The fish leaps over the blade from the sea
to the stars. The table is in the sky now,
the market has been crammed into the refrigerator,
and she cannot open cold time.

January 9th, 2010

New York

Translated by Austin Woerner

Wang Jiabin

* Tang Xuan Zang in Qiu Ci, 628 A.D.

So bitter is life,
if there's reincarnation,
I'd like to be a bird
winging through the sky.
Not walking the ground,
crossing the oven of Fire Mountain,
where sand grinds my teeth
and stones bruise my heels.
I collapse in my sweat several times
like a dying camel.

So many fiendish scenes. Not just the bull king
grinning in my dreams, soundlessly chasing,
but nameless tricksters,
twist-faced demons
scaring me night after night,
proof my sacred charge
entails humiliation.

I wake to a bleak world,
a dead mountain,
a desert of gravel without one blade of grass.
Over a ruined temple, the random cry of cicadas
more terrifying than tigers' roars,
wolves from childhood.

And thus I know whose envoy I must be.

Once more I drag myself westward,
but a figure stands before me,
trudging as I trudge,
pressing on when I halt
in the blaze of absolute noon.

If he stops, the sliding dunes will swallow him.

2004

Translated by Diana Shi & George O'Connell

— The speaker, Xuan Zang, (602-664 AD) is the Tang dynasty monk and translator who helped bring Buddhism and its sutras to China. Immortalized in the Chinese classic novel *Journey to the West*, his trek from the ancient capital of Chang'an (Xi'an) to India involved arduous adventures. Here he crosses the kingdom of Qiu Ci, an area now known in Xinjiang Province as Kucha or Kuche.

— In the novel, as he traversed western China, Xuan Zang encountered “the bull king” (Niu Mo Wang), a bull-headed demon who controlled Fire Mountain, bringing heat and drought to the region.

* The Legend

In Dang Tu, Anhui, I can hardly believe
Li Bai's buried here, at the foot of green hills,
even if the graveyard is ancient.
Yet the moment I stepped before his tomb
I felt the loneliness of the distant past.

Later, at Cai Shi Rock, its edge
hanging over the river,
I saw the spot where “the poet leaped to scoop the moon.”
That legend I believed.
I believed by some startling impulse
neither drunkenness nor delusion.

In the bus, returning through towns
where people dwell in mud and dust,
standing around, or on smokey, rumbling tractors,
they stared at us blankly,
visitors from afar.
I saw them and believed the legend.
I believed it
through the clutch of grief
on a jolting, dust choked road,
as I believed once more
in poverty, loneliness, death.

I believed it,
and slowly, stately, the moon drew close.

All our lives,
we try to recognize
a face without a name.

2005

Translated by Diana Shi & George O'Connell

Wang Yin

* Why Do You Revolve Around Me?

Beloved sunlight, my butterfly
Why do you revolve around me?
My poems are hesitant salt grains on a horse's back
Taciturn postmen on their rounds

I know blue shadows that steal along
Beneath white boulders
The sea has a luster like moonlight
Heaven tends not to be on God's side

Rain with its rainy scent
Is constantly deflected into the past
The season's sickness sweats and shivers at my window
Jumbled shadows have their own truth

I like old photographs, make a habit
Of reliving time in a movie theater
Bach like water, Chopin like snow
Melancholy and rice wine partake of one darkness

The black men on the keyboard are blind to wind-borne dust
Sightless birds fly through zones of fragrance
Falling light is still unable to pass
Through a long night and reawaken afterward

2010

Translated by Denis Mair

* Yesterday's Downpour is Falling Today

Yesterday's downpour is falling today
Its beauty like an icy endowment
At this moment the city harbors sorrow
Ashes of glass are left in a lute case

The naming of a dirigible has been put off again
Still I do not know the color of a sound
One must go to the world's end
Before the tears of angels obscure the sea

Secrets below the lips press close to the wind
Not a key, not a flame
Not bashfulness in starlight, much less
This night's downpour falling tomorrow

2010

Translated by Denis Mair

* The Waning Years Have Come Too Late

The waning years have come too late
At a time that does not lack wine
I can find no cup, and dusk
Is no longer the color of grapes

An October sunflower is delirious rainfall
And silk going up in flames
A straw hat set adrift still covers
A landscape that keeps its name to itself

Time with its grains magnified
Photograph album filled with dark night
Fear in life, pain under a sweater
A storm fraught with remnant spirits

The waning years have come too late
I continue to honor prophecies of love and death
As my heart has grown accustomed
To shameful bouts of melancholy

2011

Translated by Denis Mair

Xi Chuan

* Passing through Hongjiang Historical Town, Xiangxi, July 2010

The old lady, left behind,

94, clean and tidy, still living, watching strangers
enter and leave the dim yinziwu, says little.

The middle-aged man, left behind,

got up like a local Qing official, acts the judge in another yinziwu,
amusing tourists and himself, earning a few kuai.

His wife's still his wife,

her face shining with sweat, rinsing vegetables, chopping noisily,
cooking in the smoky pan.

She hopes to move into a new house on the mountainside, abandon this old place
owned by someone else.

In the thirties, the small warlords left Hongjiang.

In the forties, the bandits left the brothels.

In the fifties, the shopkeepers left their counters after donating airplanes
to the nation.

The coffinmakers' craft

left to a young man with a middle-school education.

His trade will last till heaven and earth expire, no matter
how the world inverts.

What's left behind makes good landscapes,

old revolutionary slogans fading on the walls, preserved for tourists,
the intersection where counter-revolutionaries were executed,
preserved for capitalism's new face.

Yet the old capitalism remains

beneath the farmer's moon, beneath the rush of the river, the rats' squeaks,
the high-flown recitations of old ghosts.

Under an ancient oil-trader's shop

a few tons of gold bars were found, turned over to the government. Who knows
what recirculates? Those with the upper hand, their laughs unbearable.

The waters of the Yuan and Wu still merge where they always did.

The big boat that carried tung oil, will it open to tourists, as the party wants,
towed to its old dock?

July 30th, 2010

Translated by Diana Shi & George O'Connell

— “Yinziwu”: an ancient type of rectangular building found in Hongjiang & elsewhere.

— “Kuai”: the common term for RMB or Chinese yuan.

* One Afternoon

Gold's going up, investors sorry they waited.
Diamonds too. Surely some see diamonds are just stones.

Libya's war endless, Europe clutching the tiger's tail. All so remote.
Bin Laden shot dead in Pakistan. Too bad the Seal pulling the trigger won't be famous.

Many tangled in the stock market, including clever friends.
Checking the latest quotes on their cellphones, they chat and chortle
as if texting love notes. Here and not here, they're utterly devoted yet distracted.

The afternoon's so pleasant it seems fake. Clumps of white clouds dream they're adrift
over Paris. Shopping centers styled like Europe's hamlets, so foreigners feel at home,
so children dabbling in water get used to global consumption, while the parents
toy with cameras.

A dozen streams in the fountain dance high and low, confirming their happiness.
The central jet suddenly shoots ten meters, like a magician grandly closing his performance.

A girl struts out of a cafe, tossing her hair, donning sunglasses. How sunshine loves her.
The straps of her pink bra show on her shoulders, her flipflops slap at her soles, “pip-pap.”

A middle-school girl walks with Japanese mini-steps, but soon she'll return to Chinese
— marry a chicken, live like a chicken; marry a dog, live like a dog.

A middle-aged man from a small town suddenly finds himself in the palace of the gods,
but can't grasp the foreign ads.
Still, he enjoys *Titani's* theme song: new products should now be in the market.

Roped into surrendering an afternoon by my wife and child,
I find a free chair in a streetside cafe.
The sun creeps west along its arc, falling faster soon enough.

Since the wife's off shopping, the child skating, I dial a friend's number.
His phone off lately, now it rings through.
I thought he'd been arrested, but he picks up.

His life's alright, but his mother's lung cancer has entered her bones.
He's serving out his last filial duties.

We arrange to meet in two weeks, about nothing important.

June 1st, 2011

Translated by Diana Shi & George O'Connell

Xiao Kaiyu

* Bladesmith

the bladesmith is selling tea, his body runs hot, bitter like black tea
in a tea house, the possessed come to mind
hair stands up on his neck
should he stop selling knives
or try his luck in Wuhan

top-notch tea, water yet to boil
premature lumps in the warm water
tea festival in full swing, less labor on Labor Day
he gesticulates, knife in hand

voice stuffed with flu
can't taste the tea or speak clearly
he insists the market is confusing him

insists we're both ill, we've been distracted
to the point of distraction
this water won't boil, this river basin is filled
with sneezing fish

we compete at pole-climbing
I was looking for someone to kill the virus but landed here, amorous
stammering and full of flirtatious bluster
let's go and tease him!

others pay him no mind
the landlord shows himself off
Second Uncle enjoys robust mental health, tea prices are in chaos

the weather clears up over the Dabie mountains, tree buds open one by one
I imagine him running back to the tea house, dropping his loot to take a quick shit — the detergent,
soap and bowl are all mine, in a heap by the stove — I can't help but laugh
tea leaves redolent of licorice
knives scattered all over the place

May 2nd, 2009

in a fishing shed by South Bay Lake, Xinyang

Translated by Fiona Sze-Lorrain

* Nocturnal Jinze, Shanghai

midnight near, moon again over the river fork
slumped on a sofa in the lounge, mindful of divergences
as it turns out, implicit shatteredness is exquisite motivation
back to our rooms, each face fuming gunpowder smoke

so quiet, when ambiguity falls from the sky
seeping from bed frames, fitting the bridal room
we lie low, afraid to stretch our legs or turn over
fearing we are the leading rebels of our bodies

in town old age greets us with sloppy snores
we each sit up stiffly, get dressed
as if settling scores, to tread the recobbled lanes on the far bank

courtyard dotted with brine, will youth with a chestful of havoc
return? Master Hu is sleepless in Shanghai
helping ghosts flee into paper, while these willows droop disquiet

March 21st, 2011

for Master Hu Xiangheng, and friends at the Jinze reunion

Translated by Fiona Sze-Lorrain

Yang Lian

* Baby Girl

to a deliberately drowned baby girl

you're so small you're not worth that chill water choking
pocket-size lungs pocket-sized explosions fresh and tender
you're so small you're not worth breaking in an eyeblink
bloody streaks open into red flowers each one welcoming mother

splattered hands still the loveliest
hands in the world each droplet a toothmark
when you're half under your snowdrift collapses
pressed under water a sea so small it doesn't shudder

tied to the womb your eyes
closed to witness your final moment your fate
is a chain of bubbles of denial the wailing bulge of your sex
all your organs stamped prohibited

you have to die for the possibility of a younger brother
die quickly water quicker than love nip off this cycle
small eddy stirred by smaller limbs
subsides mother dissolves into a toxic name

2008

Translated by Brian Holton

* Blood and Coal

to AIDS-infected sellers of blood and slave labourers in the coal mines

absolute hardness stirred in a filthy bucket
drop of blood stuck to your name pulling out
is falling in names indistinguishable in sticky poison
needle's tunnel stinking of meat jabbed in deep

needle filled up blood or coal your call
a calcified necrotic lung stifles your breath
and again someone is exchanged for coal-black bright-red filth
some twenty-first century circulating human sacrifice

you can't crawl out of blood's mouldy fever cave
when the breastbone's rack is broken the pit

of your burial collapses into amnesia strata locked
bolted shut on cries that exhaust the oxygen

earlier below the skin the hell of hemorrhaging blood
forms a counterfeit hell face upon face in the bucket
bought once only needle marks in the arm showing
once even death has been sold to a lie

2008

Translated by Brian Holton

* Meditation

to the banned meditators

inhale deep as the sea runs deep as the starry sky
exhale temperature the pink of a blossoming lotus
circulate and circulate a human-shaped vessel
silently containing the storm silently rhyming with the cosmos

inhale a spot of night below the skin more distant than space
exhale always a newborn horizon
always pushing the music submerged ears hear all
percolating blue as blue as the pain you bear

inhale another breath of the life you bear
exhale a pair of identical blood drops write a syllabus
to teach you history has no two sides the pornography of destruction
puts every human on the same side a wet likeness

sitting listening to the body's petals fall emptiness unfolding
boundaryless as the heart's lotus embracing its many seeds
the roadless road even behind bars the spring is greening
the world never fear is a pure poem

2008

Translated by Brian Holton

Yu Jian

* The Dark An Absolute Substance

The dark is an absolute
substance, not a chest within a chest,
nor a lock within a lock, nor an iron chain,
nor a coalmine soon to collapse,
nor a metaphor, nor the face of a corpse
behind a mask. Those you may remove.
God gave us no power to end darkness.
Many may come to consciousness, trading dark for light's shelter.
But if that way won't work, drift on the raft and die.
Some magnificent fireflies, feeling lucky,
rise like stars, then flounder in pitch dark,
though the hand reach out
to thin this substance
so beyond redemption, so beyond hope.

2008

Translated by Diana Shi & George O'Connell

* Summer

The Queen of Summer sits alone in the garden of her old estate,
attended by beevies of fragrance, forests ranked like faithful samurai.
Bees relay her distant thoughts.
Snow-capped mountains, the plain below,
lakes enlarging from the mouths of creeks,
the wells of leopards' eyes profound.
Packs of wolves traverse the swamps,
a wheeling hawk recedes in vastness. Born so late
I can't be a subject of this kingdom
except in moments, say at dusk,
when in deep woods partridge flex their legs,
or deer in wind will turn their heads. I sense
a kind of life, a secret order,
a civilization, a nature so obscure,
my words can never speak.

2008

Translated by Diana Shi & George O'Connell

* That Rainy Day, We Sat Here

That rainy day, we sat here
speaking of the dead: Wang Wei, Li Bai, Su Shi.
No doubt they're dead. But where on earth are their writings?
These liars, wandering the old country
only across grandfathers' rice paper. Outside the window
a postman in grey raincoat pushed off on his bicycle.
Han Xuzi passed the exam to high school — congratulations!
Ni Tao, radio announcer, steeped himself in beer.
A text message came,
some friend on a Tibetan mountain,
his horse staring up at snow.
Then mother called, trying to get home.
She'd bought green peas, got lost in the supermarket on Xichang Road.
A black dog darted from the kitchen,
weaving through our legs
as if pillars in a temple.
When we dipped our chopsticks, one put his hat on.
Believing in God, he'd rather not dine with meat eaters,
yet his smile didn't bruise our friendship.
Bound for Mecca to open doors for newcomers,
the old Wei and Jin-style friendship in his arms,
he quietly drank the leftover wine. To leave or stay,
decisions that count always look trivial.
The duck half-eaten — some food's hard to swallow.
Bring more to the table, then more. Potatoes are best, never sickening.
When he left, a long sleeve of yellow dust rose to choke us,
a bulldozer gnawing between the garden and some ruins,
as if a fat skeleton lay beneath.
So many roots tilted up from earth, even gods' graves could not escape.
How the dust whirled in my hometown. The banquet over, the guests gone,
we paid the bill, then stepped toward the boil of the bustling road.

2009

Translated by Diana Shi & George O'Connell

Zheng Danyi

* Near Cairo, 2005

we ride Egyptian camels around the pyramids, happily
riding black horses, happily
riding donkeys, happily, riding the hotel's
blue plastic chairs, very tired, but very happy

ride — another pyramid

not departure, just enjoyment
we take off our shoes, run in sand, shoes
open their mouths in shadows
waiting for us to return, sand

is the basic grain of temptation, we

take off our shoes like pharaohs undressing, wear pyramids, wear
strips of cotton yarn dipped in antiseptic
it is a privilege, death

inside, including those who have never seen death
who have no right to die, so they take baths, eat vegetarian meals, back away
as if no one had ever died

death — an exquisite mask from a small accident
worn on faces that still want faces
to gaze at the nut of eternity

from the tip of their stone noses
houseflies stare with wide eyes
an old dog sleeping by the road near a pile of shoes

January 21st, 2008

Translated by Fiona Sze-Lorrain

* It Can't Be Bluer

— for M.

it can't be bluer when we alight from the boat and walk toward
dark blue places on the map, fill our empty stomachs in advance
with clear water to trade for sweat

only in bed or by water does man resort to nudity

audacious, avid for shouts and shrieks
wavy tattoos, holding our breath
freestyle, breaststroke... then, like two
leaking bags

we walk everywhere, sunscreen all over, at times
hopping one-legged to expel hot seawater

from ear canals, it's hard to imagine who is who
rare creatures in an aquarium, the impossible
blue when we trade gazes

actually, what can't be bluer
is your canoe on turbulent waves

a closed book inside an open
book, two years ago, east bay and west bay

can't be bluer

January 23rd, 2008

Translated by Fiona Sze-Lorrain

Zhong Ming

* This Night

Two noses in the candlelight, two milk-white lanterns.
She is pale because she is watching the TV's lurid fireworks.
Last year it was in Miyaluo, and lonely...
holding vigil over the dragon's ashes. It was Dragon Year, that year:
the city full of air defense troops, the year the drums rolled,

year of snuff bottles in Shanghai elevators, customs clock booming,
sweethearts in Suzhou and hot sesame tangyuan, Lu Xun
gaunt-faced and thwarted, lingering over croakers with Xiao Hong;
a loved one frittering away his talents in Yan'an, a child
capering on the table, his father hoping

he might grace out the year, perhaps undo the flowered qipao.
Too many of "those years" — years of literary salons
and men dying in each other's arms, flesh passed quickly
from hand to hand, and at last into the hands
of a profligate, the revolution we hoped for

history reprinted, "this year" a lithograph of "that year":
policemen tossing roof-tiles to the same ground
and the swift chop become slow tailing and torture. The lustful
marmot seizes the maiden, who flies into a rage:
in those days she loved madly, now she's mad as hell. So

for beautiful breasts, there is no this year, only this night:
this strange sense of remove, like the gentle beating of feathers,
fevered visions, braids caught in seething undergrowth —
I have seen these shy, oxygen-starved curves
splash back into darkness... say only "this night,"

waste it, pop it like a spinning bubble.
Blow out the candle, commit your small act of subversion.
Every year we curse, try to curse away our hemorrhoids
and our misfortune, or else vow not to cross the thresholds
of the unlucky, and all the abovementioned perils come to pass.

January 24th, 2001

Translated by Nicky Harman & Austin Woerner

* Slowness

My heels move fast,
tongue pressed down, hands
lifted then dropped
like a bird with an injured wing.

My daydream is to run
unhindered down mountain roads
free, speaking to no one.
A stone kicked by a mountain

to its hole where it howls,
where hands mold it
quickly into an idol, like
a carving in a museum.

Domesticating my clouds
into UV rays, my Shangri-La
of slowness and seclusion
from which more has been taken

than a restaurant's name, whose secret
is tardiness (Lijiang, Dali: eager entrants to tourism's Party School).
These places enrage me, for I move with summer.
While here snow piles up, trees wither...

I go mad with boredom, then suddenly
gone are my grandiloquent dizzy spells, our sickness
of empty sentiment — cured!
I'll leave you to play cards with the mountain. I'm off —

let Shangri-La be cleared for cultivation,
let the locals expend a lifetime's energy.
For the image of a moonflower requires a bulldozer
not the dictates of a celestial orbit.

November 12th, 2002

Translated by Nicky Harman & Austin Woerner

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