

# The Poetry of Ouyang Jianghe 欧阳江河

Selections: 1984-1995

Ouyang Jianghe was born September 1956 in Luzhou in Sichuan Province. Because he shared his name (Jianghe) with the already famous Misty poet from Beijing, in 1985 added the Ouyang as a prefix so as to differentiate the two. It was also in this year that he began to participate in Sichuan's rowdy unofficial poetry scene, taking on a behind-the-scenes role in the production of various journals, such as *Day By Day Make It New* 日日新 and *Han Poetry* 汉诗, while contributing to most major journals in the province and some outside, such as *Tendency* 倾向, during the rest of the 1980s and on into the 1990s. During the same period, an increasing quantity of Ouyang's poetry and critical essays appeared in official literary journals, but it was not until 1997 that his first book-length collection of poetry and essays was officially published. In the early 1990s, he was able to obtain a passport and spent several months in the USA and western Europe. Ouyang has written little poetry or criticism in recent years, and now resides in Beijing.

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Selections from **The Suspended Coffin** [悬棺], a prose poem in three chapters. (1984-1985)

**Chapter I: A Book of Heaven Without Words [第一章：无字天书]**

Every moment is the same moment.

The silence you now hear is absolute: with the honor of a despot it enters the body of flesh and blood that rules all things and becomes five fiery horses galloping in five directions. The internal organs fracture and scatter into five elements -- metal, wood, water, fire, and dirt.

The Book of Heaven you now read has eyes for words: each eye is the disappearance of a language or a pile of shattered vistas, propagating taboos and subterfuge. Echoes drift by, ranges of mountains sleep like beauties. The rain of yellowing plums is suspended without comment, everywhere songs and sobs are dried by the sun to become the salt in salt.

The body you now touch is shaped like nothing: facing empty wastelands, facing a species all of one face, sometimes collected sometimes scattered, of incessant life and death, there is no soul to be called to the suspended coffin, nothing sacred to manifest. The shining path of heaven splashes out to become wind and water, all empty illusions of your eyes and ears.

A king of kings with no country and no crown: who is that?

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## Chapter 2: The Art of Escape of the Five Elements [第二章：五行遁术]

Every home is the same home.

Wishful thoughts of fighting free of the knots, a form of governance, a shape to time indifferently won from the whirling flight of a strange bird, remote and still, and moving, do not ask who goes and who stays. A chorus of incantations blows the lucky day into a cold tune, until it blows out blood, until eyes crack before they close like scars, until, in the light, tempestuous shadows form a crystal clear uncertainty.

Now that the first drop has fallen, the blood will all run out. Since life after life still returns to the same deception, the same rite, empty of everything -- therefore death has it all.

Funerals by sky, by earth, by water, by fire, and by wind.

A burial in a suspended coffin.....

### Chapter 3: A Pocket-size Flower Garden [第三章：袖珍花园]

Each inspiration is the same inspiration.

Inside another death, the flower garden is everything. The dream-omen of butterflies of uncertain origin is all but a withering fall without flowers, a burning with no fire. An eye full of disorder empty of everything, suddenly the garden has no body. An empty coffin absolved of its body is suspended alone in another astrological array.

The smile that confuses the arrangement is laid on Jupiter's head, like lightning, like an incision that carves deep in, so the seasons suddenly reverse their spin. In the eyes that cannot open is the sleeping soul of the first ancestor bird, every time it wakes it is leveled into the earth's surface, the folds of fish scales appear willy-nilly across the injured sky.

The entire generalized flower garden where no flower can bloom is metaphysical, as soon as you wait to be suspended you are hung up forever. The rapidly shifting faces of people and weird, invisible flowers mingle, indistinguishable; willfully pluck a blossom and at the same time you pluck a human head. So, the flower garden is an excessively exaggerated red.

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So, an incisive look will reveal mankind to be wholly faceless, appearing as everything but being nothing. suddenly, it attaches its bodies to those unpenetrated formless forms, those soul-reviving black arts that knead clay into flesh and turn water to blood, today's future is collected among the apparently waxen figures of posterity. Suddenly, what is grasped becomes a hand, what is heard becomes sound, water that does not run is blood or glass, or a pool of silence.

So, the sole mass body will form within individual conceit. Clothes of every color and pattern mix by way of tattooed torsos. Human heads and the heads of beasts mix by way of knife blades that flash as one. Food and hunger mix through a purifying fast. The flower garden and the suspended coffin mingle through transmigration.

So, this inspiration will be the only inspiration: people who bury flowers also bury themselves, placing yourself in a flower garden is to put yourself in a suspended coffin. No boundary exists.

This sole inspiration arrived on the day of birth, and remains only to leave on the day of doom.

## A Night in Your Silhouette [背影里的一夜]

A drop of blood makes me remember all kinds of wounds  
but not all wounds bleed  
otherwise hair and the smell of a sword would not flow over my body  
a sudden meeting on an itinerant blade seems so keen  
a calm demeanor loses you your shadow, but it is the shadow itself that shifts  
a stone has only to be set in a treetop to spill the flesh of fruit  
if you do not believe then make the flower buds fall and cover the deep courtyard  
regretfully all this is too marvelous for words

You imagine yourself a nun in white  
as a narcissus of one night in the slow leak behind you  
in an insolvable riddle worries pent up like a swan  
as soon as the moonlight dragged over the dirt is thrown off like a skirt  
your body swells up into night  
inside candles and loneliness shine, a pair of censers too  
you strike at the bars in the lines of a poem with the middle of the night  
cause vacuous lovers' complaints to fill the little boxes  
make one blossom bloom into the dance of all flowers  
the more you pick the more there are, in a quiet night everything is a riot of falling flowers

At dawn you have a chest full of heart ache, a head cold and white  
makes it seem you see stretches of March's white pear blossoms fly up  
what falls on your face is a tear, what falls into the wind flute is a soul that cannot be summoned

## A Public Monologue [公开的独白]

I am dead. You still live.  
None of you know me, just as you have never known the world.  
What remains of me becomes an immortal death mask  
compelling you to resemble one another  
no self, and no other.  
Each apple I have blessed  
grows into Autumn, forming the most apples and hunger.  
Each bird you see is my soul.  
The shadow I cast is more definite than any light.

The place in which I am finally buried is a collection of books.  
There, your lives  
are lightly excised like superfluous words.  
God is this simple, has only to simply speak, then forget.  
All eyes open just for one glimpse.  
Without my song, you would have no lips.  
But what you have sung and will go on to sing  
is only boundless silence, not a song.

## The Death of a Swan [天鵝之死]

The death of a swan is the thirst of a stretch of water  
Helen flows from a bloodthirsty pose  
the death of a swan is the dance of an invisible dancer  
inside immutable change a natural delight that forms itself

Or merely a self-forgetting beyond all things  
a shadow rocking a city under siege  
that on six sides causes the wind to be pinned down in an empty valley  
causes the twice-open hole of love to lay bare the chill of the previous night

Whoever rises he is the tyrant  
the world's form escapes in the flesh  
a caress reveals another nude body  
-- it is not clear where Leda went

**Shostakovich: Waiting to be Shot [肖斯塔科维奇：等待枪杀] April 7, 1986**

An entire life he waits to be shot  
he sees his name displayed together with the innumerable dead  
however long the years may be, however long is the list of death

All his music is a grieving for himself  
the sobs of thousands of dead souls resound in it  
some human heads drop, like fruit without hope  
inside rolls the blood and emptiness of fifty years  
so this music sounds so distant  
so deep and low, as if there is no sky above  
so unsettled and tense, like the bones that dance in bodies  
so the silence of the living is deeper than the dead's  
so, from the start, the shooting never makes a sound

A shooting without sound without shape is a collector's item  
its invisible body surreptitious like Russia  
an unfathomable face sometimes leaders sometimes people  
but people and a leader are just words  
coming out of books they run absolutely wild  
if seen, your eyes become bullet holes  
all Russians have been shot enmass  
waiting to be shot is a way of living

A truly terrible shooting does not launch a bullet  
it just aims  
like a prearranged plot it never dispels  
sometimes it comes out of the dead, on their  
bodies piled up high like a stage, performing the impromptu nature of death  
the looks of those who return alive fall all around  
like snow scattering on the ground confusing sad thoughts  
at other times it peeps into your soul  
enters your heart to hollow it out or smash it  
goes into food and the air to clean out lungs  
enters the light and exterminates the burning exiled shadows

The shooters shoot in the name of eternal life  
so the time that is shot does not die

Forever a shooting awaits him  
beyond us he suffers an unending death  
becomes our body-double

## Girls Out of School [放学的女孩]

A local afternoon, a stretch of street is splitting  
an affected school turns belly up  
like a fish vomiting roe and algae  
lots of water, but not enough air

How to explain those girls let out of school who never wilt  
under the sun an eye-catching patch  
in a perfectly clear way they pass out of form  
shoulder to shoulder lanterns of sleeves  
left and right  
hands joined, justifying themselves

They are born as their own daughters  
a suitable age does not need proving  
they are in love with their fathers  
from the interior of virtue they issue high-pitched laughter  
the mothers' defeat reflected on their faces  
a physiognomy laid over by dark clouds  
for an hour, an overcast sky knit into a sweater

In transit to a careless get-up  
they seem similar and take names that change  
hide in textbooks opened only once  
they change knowledge into illusion  
change into a weird mirror only shining on the old and the dead  
everyday when they are let out they walk by the life of man  
they casually eat things  
ask the state for cash  
and pare down adults with a revolving penknife  
they play like this, every year growing up one day

## Between Chinese and English [汉英之间]

I reside in a pile of character parts,  
between the casual looks of this and that form.  
They stand alone and penetrate, limbs rocking and unsteady,  
a monotonous beat like shots from a gun.  
After a wave of sound, Chinese characters grow simple.  
Some arms, legs, eyes fall away,  
but words still move on, stretch out, and see.  
That kind of mystery raises a hunger.  
Moreover, it left behind many delicious days,  
let me and my race eat it, pick over it together.  
In the accent of this place, in a local dialect gathered up like a crystal,  
in classical and modern Chinese mixed into one speech,  
the figure of my mouth is a circular ruin,  
teeth sink into an open space  
and do not collide with a bone.  
With this kind of vista, this kind of flesh, Chinese feasts over the land.  
I finished eating my portion of days, then ate the ancient's, until

one evening, I go to stroll on the English Corner, and see  
a crowd of Chinese round a Yank, I surmise they  
want to move into English. But English has no territory in China.  
It is merely a class, a form of conversation, a TV program,  
in university a department, tests and paper.  
On the paper I feel the strong likeness of a Chinese to a pencil.  
Light strokes and vague outlines, the life of a worn eraser.  
Having experienced too much ink, glasses, typewriters  
and the weightiness of lead,  
relaxed and smooth, English rolls up on a corner in China.  
It accustoms us to abbreviations and diplomatic language,  
also western food, forks and knives, Aspirin.  
This type of change does not involve the nose  
and skin. Like a daily morning tooth brush  
English moves over the teeth, making Chinese white.  
Once I ate books     ate the dead, therefore

everyday I brush my teeth. This concerns water, hygiene and contrast.  
This produced a feeling for the mouth, a taste for speech,  
and the many differences in the language of everyday use.  
It also relates to a hand: it stretches into English,  
the middle and index fingers spread apart, simulating  
a letter, a victory, a kind of fascist experience of yourself.  
A cigarette drops to the ground, extinguished when only half smoked,

like a part of history. History is a war that suffers  
from a stutter, earlier it was the Third Reich, it was Hitler.  
I do not know if this madman shot English, shot  
Shakespeare and Keats.

But I do know in the Oxford dictionary there is the English of the nobility,  
also the English of Churchill and Roosevelt armed to the teeth,  
its metaphors, its objective reality, its aesthetic of destruction,  
exploded at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In Japanese I see piles of Chinese characters become corpses –  
but beyond language, China and England-America make a pact.  
I read this part of history, and feel very suspicious.  
Between history and me I do not know which is more preposterous.

More than one hundred years. Between Chinese and English, what actually happened?  
Why do so many Chinese migrate into English,  
work hard to become white people of a yellow race, and see the Chinese language  
as a divorced wife, see it as a home in a broken mirror? What  
actually happened? I live alone secluded in Chinese,  
in dialogue with a great many paper people, daydreaming of English,  
and see even more Chinese climbing up into it,  
changing from a person of pictographic likeness to a phonetic linker of sound.

## The Glass Factory [玻璃工厂]

1

From sight to sight, between is only glass.  
From face to face  
separation is invisible.  
In glass, matter is not transparent.  
The whole glass factory is a huge eyeball,  
in it labor is the blackest part,  
its day flashes at the core of things.  
Things adhere to the very first tear,  
like a bird in a stretch of pure light sticks to its shadow.  
In the way of darkness you take in rays of light, then make them tribute.  
In a place where glass is everywhere,  
already glass is not itself, but is  
a kind of spirit.  
As if everywhere there is air, air is nearly nonexistent.

2

In the neighborhood of the factory is a large sea.  
Knowledge of water is knowledge of glass.  
Solidified, cold, fragile,  
these are all the price of translucence.  
Transparency is a mysterious visible language of waves,  
when I say it I have already separated from it,  
separated from the cup, the tea stand, the dresser mirror, all this  
concrete matter produced on an assembly line.  
But I am also situated in a siege of matter,  
life is filled by desires.  
Language leaks out, dries up, before light penetrates.  
Language is to soar, is  
openness facing openness, lightning against lightning.  
So much sky is beyond the body of birds in flight,  
and the reflection of an isolated island  
may be the gentle scratch of light on the sea.  
Whatever cuts across glass is lighter than a shadow,  
deeper than an incision, harder to exceed than the blade of a knife.  
A crack is nowhere to be seen.

3

I came, I saw, I spoke.  
Language and time all muddy, dirt and sand all descend,  
a patch of blindness spreads out from the core.  
The same experience also occurs in glass.  
The breath of flames, the heart of fire.  
So-called glass is water altering attitude within flames,  
is two types of spirit coming across each other,  
two forms of destruction entering the same eternal life.  
Growing into a frosty subzero combustion,  
like a truism or a feeling,  
obvious, clear, refusing to flow.  
In fruit, in the depths of the sea, water has never run.

4

So this is the glass I see –  
still a stone, but no longer solid.  
Still a flame, but never again warm.  
Still water, but never soft nor passing on.  
It is a wound but never bleeds,  
it is a sound but never passes through silence.  
From loss to loss: this is glass.  
Language and time are transparent,  
we pay a high price.

5

In the same plant I see three kinds of glass:  
In material, decorative, and symbolic state.  
People tell me the father of glass is a chaos of stone.  
In the void of stone, death is not the end,  
but a changeable primeval fact.  
Stone is smashed, glass is born.  
This is real. But there is another truth  
leading me into another state: from height to height.  
Within that truth glass is merely water, already is  
or just becoming hard, has bone, water that cannot be spilled,  
and flame is a bone-piercing cold,  
moreover the most beautiful is also the most fragile.  
All that is sublime in the world, and  
the tears of things.

## **An Apple Tree in Sunlight [阳光中的苹果树]**

I do not want to spy on flesh and bones shot through with illusions,  
let the black fruit scorch the afternoon,  
ten minutes of falling leaves, before slicing it open.  
I go, but I seem not to leave.

Silence, a far-off tree, and more distant sunlight.  
Only a person with a shadow enters the water,  
arms like waves rock the summer.  
The day is ferocious and tilting.

Ripeness starts from the end of words,  
until arid lips enter fruit,  
and in a single night, they all fall.  
Alive, awake, morose and carried away.

Everywhere a windless day and soft warmth.  
Skin walks in July's inflammatory malady,  
but the soul is not fervent.  
Inside the soul the world is nothing.

Cut open from within, an aspect of memory.  
Childhood is distance and vain fantasy.  
We jump up, or climb many trees,  
then all fruit are beyond reach.

Twenty years suspended, I lift my head.  
Nothing compares to the sight of flames of water,  
and placed inside it the insurmountable blade,  
even prettier, even colder.

**Wisdom's Dance of the Skeleton [智慧的骷髅之舞] Oct. 14, 1987**

A solitary suitor, limited to conflict and harmony  
turning its body but not turning  
the silhouette close behind. This skeleton, a glorious dusk  
in a burst of joyous shouts withers away for the sake of yesterday  
hands clasped, in a high voice yelling the lie that kills  
the innate fruit of evil, the weighty mortal body, with beauty for a basis  
a more daring title flourishes in the broad daylight

Two secret bodies, idols of serious mien eye to eye  
between them who is more frightening  
who moves there, sneers, boasts, warns  
a fierce arrival together with the truth  
only the contours of a great man can shake a boast  
all blood, that brain-ful of blood is all blood  
and on the earth we boundlessly wander and drink

He arrived among us to make things boil  
to make things grow old, to cry amid old things  
such an honor! All new things are ancient  
wisdom is the solitary suitor between old and new  
contrary, antagonistic, the impossible possibility  
body and soul both injured in defeat. The start of tears  
a heavy snowfall renders the shimmering tears of no import

But who is the master of that wild thought and ornate diction  
speaks with flames, smears lips with tulips  
the body's search for a mate, the text's title of widow  
possessing wealth but both hands empty  
carrying hell on his back but walking in heaven  
his sudden death is the whole world's  
but who do we live for, and who lives for us

Among us who is more pitiful  
who has shed his life leaving a body of hot blood  
replacing the hunger of teeth with gold  
the weather with an image a lover with an aesthetic  
and love either burns or lasts  
or for a promise to pass away puts aside an abyss  
a large dual boundary, and that inescapable failing warmth

When he thirsts or dims  
Pisces in a leaky eye governs us

its a piecemeal attitude, like the glint in a fish eye passed of as a pearl  
When in the depth of the light's core he grows doubly dark  
for our sold-out souls we flourish our flesh  
When he sings, we who can not dance  
are yet wild with joy for the old days, and bitterly mourn, and our gloomy tears fall

## Seawater Bites Deepest to the Bone [最刺骨的火焰是海水]

The sea falls into the sun, leaving just one drop  
the heart of a spot of water falls into the eye of a flame  
in a frenzy to ascend to heaven it sprinkles tears everywhere  
and for the light it carves a darkness that can be struck  
has an invisible pair of hands carry off a village  
leaves behind a solitary city and an even lonelier crowd  
of roses there is only one, nearly not a rose  
this will carry a nip in the air to its future burning  
a season of falling flowers, our years like flowers  
and we did not shoo it away. Children net big dead fish with their eyes  
shoot the sun with water guns. The sea is alongside  
forever shivering on dark tanned skin  
seawater is the flame that bites deepest to the bone

**The Beauty [美人]** Feb. 27, 1988

This is the night of weak bones for all things,  
the feeblest billow in the sleep of the earth.  
She lowers her head to conceal the face of the water,  
behind her lashes, the water deepens the pain.

This is the first night of her falling on the water,  
the hidden moon icy clear jade.  
We see a fashionable rubbed-up pallor  
burn her brow, a patch of cover!

The unpolished grain of a piano,  
stirs up weather as thin as silk.  
Does she see the first snow as arrogance,  
see teardrops as shimmering with the help of imperial crowns?

Her lyrical hands carry to us dreams that sooth the soul.  
The whole night floating in an inverted image and reflected light  
all the more dark, to us her eyes are too bright.  
For this night, we will be blind for life.

But then her beauty does not make us uglier.  
She coldly smiles, yet my hot tears flow.  
All people have been beautifully alive,  
then reminisce and sorrow, over beauty's unbounded decline.

### **The Hand Gun [手枪]**

A handgun can be taken to pieces  
broken into two unrelated things  
one the hand, one the gun  
a gun grown long can become a clique  
a hand painted black another

And the things themselves can be further pulled apart  
until they grow in contrary directions  
in the endless deconstruction of words the world segregates

With one eye people look for love  
the other presses into the barrel of a gun  
bullets make eyes at each other  
your nose aims at the enemy's living room  
politics incline to the left  
one person shoots at the east  
another falls in the west

The black-hand gang puts on white gloves  
the party of rifles changes to short guns  
immortal Venus stands in stone  
her hands reject mankind  
from her chest you pull out two drawers  
inside are two bullets, one gun  
that becomes a toy when you pull the trigger  
Murder, a dummy round

Selections from **The Final Mirage** [最后的幻想] A series of 12 poems, Nov.-Dec. 1988

#1. **A Strawberry** [草莓] Nov. 6, 1988

If a strawberry is burning, she will be the junior sister of snow.  
She touches the lips but has another love.  
Before the strawberry was given, nobody told me if it had vanished.  
My lifelong stroll starts from a strawberry.  
A pack of children wildly race against the wind in a fresh red idea,  
when they are weary, they unintentionally turn back  
-- so beautiful and desolate a moment!

Then I was young, a mouthful of strawberries.  
The green grassland I have long forgotten,  
the tiny tear I will let fall but yet have not,  
a boy, entangled in parents, once wept beneath the sky.  
I turn back into a black cloud, so that he can not see.  
The solitude of two is only half of it.  
Can first love be passed on by a strawberry?

A childhood giddiness persists till today.  
when the moon fills the breast, lovers grow purple.  
This is not a lyrical age,  
strawberries are only a speed from teeth to flesh,  
O, old dream that will never come home again,  
who will hear my dirge of limitless pity?

**#4. Blackbirds [黑鸦] Nov3, 1988**

Happiness is dismal, perplexed by phantoms.  
Wind, a masterpiece that surrounds the body.  
So many faces fall, and autumn has such deep feeling,  
past in a flash, the evening sun on your forehead,  
first a sheet of pain, then it cools, vanishes,  
it is the ultimate love blacker than these.

But then in our lives there has never been a true black night.  
In daylight, the sun pours out blackbirds,  
happiness is gloomy, when the moon falls on a knife blade,  
when our limbs are sprinkled like tears on yesterday  
repeatedly freezing. In the rooms fires and air burn,  
the living room slides down from your shoulder,  
guests sit down in the embrace of blackbirds.  
Each blackbird brings us two kinds of warmth.  
And these words to love: if there is still time to speak of it.

We have never seen more beauty than that in a blackbird.  
A naked woman burns from midnight until the sky is bright.

**#11. Butterflies [蝴蝶]** Dec. 19, 1988

A butterfly, a fire of self-pity unrelated to us.  
A huge nothingness comes from this petite figure,  
a piteous plea, without power.  
You dream of breaking free from the butterfly,  
but the butterfly is itself a dream, deeper than your dream.

Your secret solitude begins with the loss of a brooch.  
Once it was pinned to your chest, so when the lanterns are first hung  
you can hear warm words, reread old letters.  
You do not remember the appearance of the letter-writers. Among them

is there somebody dying at the speed of writing,  
going in at the speed of a pin? At night you read letters,  
the brooch is already lost. A butterfly  
first a portent of flying away, then a return,  
carrying the inexplicable substance of the body.  
Wanting to shake off matter by way of butterflies is futile.  
Matter is absolute, there is no forgotten surface.

A butterfly is love just so long as one day,  
if the night is added, it will reduce to a kiss.  
You have never learned which of the two is briefer:  
Your life, or the day and the night of a butterfly?  
A butterfly is too beautiful, but instead appears cruel.

#10. First Snow [初雪] Dec. 14, 1988

Before the snowfall there was the sun's bright gaze.  
I looked back to see my home fall down in a fruit,  
the grain of the earth burns onto my body.  
A beauty that shatters jade and places is deep hidden, secretly loved.

Shift to another summer. Before I move  
already I am stiff, my features stagnant,  
then before the sky, the snow falls.  
The bare smell of plants moves submerged through the day,  
carrying my daily fantasy, a pale flame, a book of fire.  
Watching snow fall is a kindness and a sorrow such as this,  
moreover, the snowfall is so marvelous!  
Who treads on snow there, for a lifetime never comes home?

Before walking on snow, I am heard by another name.  
A windstorm rolls up a flock of sheep    blows past my cheeks,  
but I am entirely unaware.  
one day in my life is forever snowing,  
forever there is a forgetting of which the world cannot be told,  
there, the sunlight feels the cold that comes with life.  
O first snow, forgetting, like a vast unknowable beauty.  
How is it that the first snow is slow to fall?  
Before the snowfall, nothing is white.

#12. Books [书卷] Dec. 29, 1988

Daylight, the sinking of eyes,  
words and light hide inside your body.  
An extended hand, makes perception linger or drop.  
Close your eyes decisively,  
for those books you have read or will read.

When the rays of light gather on a head darkened by ashes,  
the books in my breast are so high it snows, the field of vision all mist.  
That kind of wisdom is obviously a bit of a swoon.  
The day has no outward form, but will hide in my body.  
If my eyes have not shut,  
who is full like a word but does not speak?

Always I read, draped in flame or hunger.  
Hunger is fire's food, fire is the tongue of snow.  
I see the mirror and the study facing me,  
in the shape of scissors birds in flight spread across the sky.  
Reading is to place rays of light under scissors.  
Tell the drawers of water, the gods are thirsty,  
knowledge is burning, like queer fashionable clothes.  
A tight-fitting age, who is nude like the emperor?

Selections from **The Fast Food Restaurant** [快餐馆],  
a sequence of 10 poems. (March 1989)

#3

A crowd of customers walks up the street carrying homes like birdcages,  
the restaurant hangs alone at the height of colloquial speech.  
A generation physically in possession of both parents, the lips equally divided between  
two bodies. Rumors and prices, this rising that falling  
enter the trifles and uncertainty of a low sky and cool wind.  
So much nutrition it resembles mist, like rays of light that drag in shadows.  
Age passes through a skirt, gently raised to the waist  
when walking slow or sitting still it hangs down, courtesy raises creases.  
The wind exposes in specific things the mental state of middle age,  
clearly bares suddenly fallen motions and teeth marks.  
This is noon, sunlight drops straight down to a standstill,  
crowds of customers hem in a housewife hiding in her sex,  
her skirt swirls like a flame.

## #5

All the meaning of civilization is in prefabrication and collocation.  
We are informed the death of our diet is preordained,  
irreversible, it sustains life  
and time, and the tenses of verbs are mixed into the recipe.  
The organs of animals and quiet blood, when the knife stabs the heart  
the body's scream, protein and fat, all of these  
arranged together. Forgetfulness and digestion indivisibly unite.  
To forget is to read, so digestion contaminates sight.  
I cannot differentiate speaking and writing, they  
are not glass, but in the way of glass  
when blocking space they tolerate the field of vision.  
Vocabulary hangs down like a curtain, the room's atmosphere  
spreads over my face, dark and moving, but not flashy.  
Let me throw off those premature, willfully arranged  
compound senses of words, see the true environment of my writing and diet,  
reading materials, structures, and the civilized people who pass between.

## #8

So connect the limbs of people to an electric current, let them experience speed, origins, the power of heat and anesthesia. Add some ice to their beer. A manmade modern winter, is only an hour of a high-voltage power flow. Taken together how many of these types of winters can prevent the old man of summer from spilling like suds? A locomotive is passing through the ice and faces in the glass, so many shuddering objects of concatenation, reality is cut away from all this by a dinner knife, or cast into false teeth. Summer is the season of travel, yet winter implies only old age remains yet to be conquered. Are we really able to conquer old age? Can those antibiotics ameliorate time, change the costly summer season into a slow moving green spring? Can the world freeze? When aging and growth in turn appear on the inside of your diet, an ice cube, an hour of high-voltage winter, are too frenzied. We are informed that the death of the body is preordained. A person who is dying everyday still has what thing that can really die? Death has always been an arrogance, just like the old age we have not the strength to reach.

From **1989, To My Friends** [1989, 致友人], a group of 9 poems. (Sept.-Oct. 1989)

**Stand Firm** [确立] -- for Chen Dongdong, Sept. 17, 1989

Out of sleep and into water. Drops of water fill the afternoon.  
From this I think of the ocean at rest.  
Children racing the tide, wanting to sun bathe.  
In the pieced-together light they wobble and bend.

Bare-headed they enter a razor  
thinking the blade's edge does not touch the afternoon.  
I think their growth is very perilous.  
Out of my sleep and into a trance, a stretch of indulgence.

Deferred, the children's one and only afternoon  
grows like this, swaying, without a bone.  
Wobbling is beautiful, but it's hard to establish character.  
The children mediate between bald heads and a razor.

Since the dispersed afternoon is not standing,  
and the firm stand required for growth was never truly established,  
so, before going back to growing,  
return to a piece of land where you can kneel or lie down.

No matter how unfathomable the source of the afternoon,  
it is only inevitable to those who sit still for life.  
Silently sit and write, and so establish the necessary kingdom.  
Then even man-children will be ruled by chance.

## Love in the Time of the Planned Economy [计划经济时代的爱情]

In the end fads will find favor with those  
who scorn them. Not one but  
a swarm of officials with children like clouds, leisurely walk down  
the marble staircase, the flashlight's pillar of light  
stands straight up: the false climb between  
two legs. Deftly the female secretary pulls out  
the metal plug of an electric appliance, and does not  
insert it again.

Soft, hollow plastic pipes between the yin and the yang,  
tightly wrap one hundred distinct  
strands of hair knotted now but loose spread at the start. After the  
electro-silvering has faded, the secretary says to the officials'  
many underlings: every second provide  
three thousand cubic meters of flow discharge  
install one hundred reductor switches.

The hard softens, the old  
get even older. In the black night climb up  
following a faint pillar of light --  
coins, paper money, your family's water bill,  
the savings of a lifetime like flames at river bottom.

An official must pass through a hundred bedrooms  
before he can enter, like a water reservoir rising to lip's edge, the so peaceful  
sleep of his wife. A phone recording  
passes on the receptacle-laden voice of the secretary.  
Water in one tube,  
flows out of a hundred. Love  
is the equal distribution of accumulated funds, is a towering fountain  
in a flower garden in the center of the street, is the secret switch  
to a neglected imperial harem in feudal times: the fuse wire is broken.

**Tsvetaeva [茨维塔耶娃]**

Three tangerines carrying love race between brittle branches.  
A Russian horse carriage with two vacated seats, halted in thick fog  
like the ears of a rabbit diverging from the face's place.  
The breast bared, no true brooch.  
A flower garden on the head like an avalanche, in the evening  
when the wind blows up I see people wearing red mountaineering clothes  
blow by across the mountainside clutching the fallen sun.  
The summit is behind the roof, not very far off.

A short saw. At the wedding ceremony  
the groom mysteriously vanishes, the bride surrounded by a crowd  
wears an imitation necklace and gold bracelets.  
I do not believe she will grow to twenty-one,  
she pretends not to know all the things she already knows.  
Three tangerines of love, she can only get one.  
Perhaps even less than one: the tangerine is split in two,  
it is made of wax.

**The Reading Room [阅览室] April 12, 1990**

In this public reading room, through the depths of our field of vision,  
we exchange the glasses of aging eyes for a pair of gloves  
and a top hat not worn for years,  
thereby retrieving the shy portrait of a childhood head  
a quality that is spared baldness. Nobody can  
pull it back, and nobody admits  
the reading room of the elderly is a mistake to the new generation.

This is a sublimely brilliant error,  
this is a reading room of dim old eyes.  
Like a cap its roof is conveniently lifted off,  
exposing many strange heads,  
and amid all these heads we are the youngest.  
The reading room in the head,  
you search for a secret body for yourself,  
a body of the times that is everywhere,  
the body of a dictionary, the body of a dossier or a legal clause.

No one can search, and no one can  
find. A reading room where all eyes are blind  
behind glasses flashes the jumpy words of a diplomat.  
The world behind the glasses is taboo to us,  
it passes through to a pair of gloves put on by chance,  
not to flip through books, not to touch a thing.  
In the gloves there are no hands,  
behind the glasses no eyes,  
and under the hat no head.  
Are all these still on our bodies,  
this head, these eyes, these hands?

A mistake repeated over many years,  
a reading room that cannot be left,  
passes through the dim essence of our age,  
through the billowing black clouds in our hearts,  
through plugged ears, aching teeth, dizzy heads,  
and through a severely nearsighted passage,  
arriving among the commands and the march of the dead.

An error foretold,  
a reading room built of all houses.  
No one could assert it, no one could  
think it. The reading room is the living room, the kitchen, the bedroom,

it is the shopping center, the nursery, the morgue.  
The hat is the ceiling. The gloves are a sculpture.  
The glasses are the reservoirs of the face, linked double moons.  
A steel girder is a bone. A bookshelf is the gallows.  
A philosopher is a spy or a butcher.  
The head is a philosopher,  
eyes are spies,  
the hand is a butcher.  
Paper is a box on the ear. Words are lead pellets! A ray of light is the rope!

Although reasons are as abundant as light in the room,  
yet we have no reason to leave the reading room.  
Located within it we read a book --  
a book of sand, a book of lost souls, the book of books,  
a book within which all books are annihilated.

**The Mark of the Leopard [豹微] May 5, 1990**

The roar of a leopard startles a flock of sheep  
it lightens the tremors in the echo  
to a wound as tenuous as a cicada's wing  
and its unbridled limbs are steeped in its voice  
it pays no heed to whether on the ground by its ear  
there is a noisily gasping lamb

The leopard roars in the insignia of people  
its forehead is broader than previous anger  
yet it does not follow the setting sun and roll among the sheep  
the stacked clouds on the bodies of sheep  
sweep the leopard into the ranks of rulers  
but it is already tired of the chase  
This is like the wild wind and driving rain in the depths of night  
that is burnt red by fire that falls from the sky

A rare sight the people distantly see  
like an imperial bloodline flashing on a frontal eminence  
as if a roar aided by a flame of anger has been suppressed  
lowered heads eating grass    sheep live a peaceful life  
people prick up sheep ears  
listen to the distant leopard being sliced open by sheep horns  
listen to the spotted leopard pelt that conceals summer

In its rage the leopard burns to ashes  
its noble blood winnows through the bracken on the barren plain  
brandishing a leopard tail people drive the flock of sheep  
not knowing a crushed leopard skull is prettier  
the leopard is a fever breaking out inside people  
festering on the human chest  
like an ugly wound or a badge  
as if the shards in their tears are spouted out from the corner of an eye

**Crossing the Square at Nightfall [傍晚穿过广场] Sept. 18, 1990**

I do not know were a square of past ages  
begins, or where it ends.  
Some people take an hour to cross the square,  
some a lifetime --  
In the morning it's children, in the evening people in the dusk of life.  
I don't know how much farther you must walk in the twilight before you can stop your steps?

In the twilight how long must you survey  
before you can close your eyes? when a fast moving auto  
opens its blinding lights  
in the rearview mirror I saw the flash of the faces  
of those who once crossed the square on a bright morning.  
In the evening in buses they leave.

A place that no one leaves is not a square,  
a place where no one falls is also not.  
The departed come home again, but the fallen are forever fallen.  
A thing called stone  
quickly piles up, towers up,  
unlike the growth of bones needing a hundred years time.  
Also not so soft as a bone.  
Every square has a head built up out of stone

making the empty-handed people feel the measure  
of life. To look up and think with a huge head of stone,  
not a simple matter for anyone.  
The weight of stone  
lightens the responsibility, the love and the sacrifice on people's shoulders.

Perhaps people will cross the square on a bright morning,  
open arms and tenderly embrace in winds from every side.  
But when the night falls, hands grow heavy,  
the only body emitting light is the stone in the head.  
The only keen sword that stabs at the head quietly drops to the ground.

Darkness and cold are rising.  
Surrounding the square tall structures put on the latest fashion of china and glass.  
All grows small. The world of stones  
lightly floats up in the world reflected in the glass,  
like an oppressive notion scrawled in children's workbooks  
that at anytime can be ripped out and kneaded into a ball.

Cars speed past, pouring the speed  
of running water into a huge system of concrete that possesses muscles and bones of iron,  
in the shape of the horns bestowed on silence.  
The square of past ages vanishes from the rearview mirror.

Disappears forever --  
a square covered by acne in its green spring, in its first love.  
A square that has never appeared in the accounts and notices of death.  
A square that bares its chest, rolls up its sleeves, tightens its belt  
that wears patches and energetically scrubs with both hands.

A square that through young blood runs outside its body,  
that licks with its tongue, strikes stone with its brow, and covers itself with flags.

A square of daydreams that has vanished, no more exists,  
stops in the morning as if there has been a night of heavy snow.  
A pure and mysterious thaw  
shimmers in turn in eyes and conscience,  
a part grows into a thing called tears,  
a part grows hard inside a thing called stone.

The world of stone collapses.  
A world of soft tissue climbs up to the high spot.  
The entire process like spring water leaving minerals through a draw pipe  
going distilled into an airtight, beautifully packaged space  
Riding an express elevator I rise in the umbrella stem of a rainy day.

When I return to the ground, I look up and see a circular restaurant  
opened like an umbrella revolving in the city's sky.  
This is a cap grown out of wizardry,  
its size does not agree  
with the head of the giant piled up out of stone

The arms that once supported the square are let down.  
Today the giant relies on the support of a short sword.  
Will it stab something? For example, a fragile revolution  
that was once stirred up on paper, posted to walls?

There has never been a power  
that could glue together for long two different worlds.  
In the end a repeatedly posted head will be ripped away.  
A repeatedly whitewashed wall  
has a half occupied by a girl of mixed blood baring her thighs.  
The other half is enticing ads for the installation of prosthetics and the regeneration of hair.

A pram quietly parks on the evening square,

silent, not related to this world soon to go mad.  
I guess the distance between the pram and the setting sun  
to be farther than a hundred years.  
This is an almost limitless yardstick, sufficient to measure  
the length of the confined era that passed over the square

The universal fear of house arrest  
brought people off their perches to gather in the square  
changed the lonely moments of a lifetime into a fervent holiday.  
And in the depths of their dwellings, in the silent eye-catching ceremony of love and death,  
a square of shadows empty without a sign of life is treasured,  
like a tightly sealed room for penitence it is only a secret of the heart.

Must one pass through the darkness of the heart before crossing the square?  
Now in the dark the two blackest worlds combine as one,  
the hard stone head is split open,  
in the dark keen swords flash.

If I could use the mysterious black night chopped in half  
to explain a bright morning trampled to the ground by both feet –  
if I could follow the flight of stairs swept by the dawn light  
and climb up onto the shoulders of the giant standing high on the summit of nothingness,  
not to rise, but to fall --  
if the epigraph engraved in gold is not to be a eulogy,  
but to be rubbed out, forgotten, trampled --

Just as a trampled square must fall on the head of the trampler,  
those people who crossed the square on that bright morning,  
sooner or later their black leather shoes will fall on sharp swords,  
as heavily as the lid of a coffin must fall on the coffin.  
As long as it is not me lying inside, and also not  
the people walking on the blade of the sword.

I never thought so many people could cross the square  
on that bright morning, dodging loneliness and immortality.  
They are the survivors of an era of black confinement.  
I never imagined they would leave or fall in the evening.

A place where nobody falls is not a square.  
A place where nobody stands also is not.  
Was I standing? How much longer must I stand?  
All in all those who fell and me are the same,  
we were never immortal.

## The Season of a Full Moon [月圆时节]

A restricted influence, the lack greater than the surplus.  
I must obey the halo of the moon that leaks but once  
I see less and less of a response and pity  
A lifetime of love less than one night. The blackest

Night: I do not know who's awake who asleep  
The pressing waist of love limited  
To a dream. A cat suspends its claws. When the mice  
Press down from above, there's no need to remember to appear

In an unknowable kingdom mousetraps gleam  
At dawn I see the fall of a sky full of food  
It once buried a moon

I have never been told what that perfectly round radiance lacks  
The mousetraps did not clip mice, the parts that grow into pure  
Speculation are the most, one more than the whole

## A Bottle of Ink [墨水瓶]

The remote winter that rises and falls on a paper face  
the paper roof stirred up by a wild wind  
exposes the ink-sucking head at the tip of the pen

If the pen tightens the pen's cap  
I can only use a sharpened pencil to write  
posing as the wind the daddy-long-legs of winter rapidly stirs  
I saw the muddle of footprints that fell on the snow  
and the sheet of white paper  
between the ink and the eraser

The fastened cap of the pen, who twisted it open?  
and with pencil has already written a contemptuous life  
who dips into the ink and writes it again?

A covering. An endless covering  
the steps I scatter through my life covered by bus stations and airports  
the pretty faces that brush by overlaid by few stationary words  
on earth the true but distant winter  
covered by a man-made 220 volt winter  
the green fields covered by a leaden roof

But when my lonely study falls onto a sheet of paper  
covered by an apartment that drips down like ink  
who then is the inclining bottle of ink?

## Refusal [拒绝]

There is no need to hoard, no need  
of a bumper crop. The fruit blown down by the wind,  
the fish burnt red by the sun, the birds that strike  
our foreheads, are enough for a lifetime.

There is no need to grow, no need  
to be immortal. Days that come out from our bodies  
blow over others that have returned  
to the dirt. They gently breeze over tears  
and cheeks, blow across rooves sunk in the waves.

And the warning that comes from our hearts is clenched  
like a fist, brandished over our heads. There is no need  
to cogitate, no need to obey.  
When knife blades roll up our innocent tongues,  
when truth is as hard to bear and to swallow  
as a stomach ache, there is no need for an appeal.  
No need to shuttle between loudspeakers that arrive with a screech.

There is no need to promise, no need  
of eulogy. The loudspeaker of words is a threat  
to the world. It threatens material ears,  
and in the ear it plots, pulls out the bonds of matter  
in the ear, making it tremble,  
making it weak and powerless in the sound  
of the enraged rebuke of nerves. There is no need to be strong.

There is also no need of praise under another name  
or of curses, no need to bear it in mind.  
one heart will cease beating in the hearts of all,  
in the bones where power is gathered it will  
mould its own blood. And there is no need  
to punish the body with the few bones that are left.

There is also no need to pardon, and no need  
to pity. The drifter will always drift,  
the planter will not harvest a grain. There is no need  
to make offerings, no need of gain.

The planter sees his alkaline wife as maize.  
When hunger like a whip abruptly falls,  
there is no need to flog the corn of conscience,

of to search for a tear for the corn,  
or the seed of a rose. There is no need  
to exchange our hunger for our son in the corn,  
and then watch him betray his bloodline.

## Dinner [晚餐]

After the spice hits  
the wind, the food entering the flames does not  
go into pig iron. At pot's bottom the snow gathered over the years  
rises from my finger tips to my head, dinner  
stretches out all the way into my dusk.

Never again  
can there be dawn. Last night in a candlelit  
roadside diner, I had a double order of cabbage, spinach,  
raw fish-sticks and sausage. The beer suds  
hung in the air. After  
clearing up the bill, a handmade ivory toothpick  
between my loose teeth, slowly stirred in the depths  
of solar eclipse of time. Never again to be dawn.  
Late at night the noon news is rebroadcast,  
in it there is an obit: The dead died

a second time.

A brief stare, a gentle retelling,  
for those who have been listening and staring  
at me for a long time now. I have already paid the bill for the lost soul.

Never again  
will there be dawn, but also no more black night.

## Spring [春天]

Just as a rose is reddest amid all fresh blood,  
it will also grow blacker in a black wound,  
stopping the world from rising high on your left arm  
or hanging down, because what's clenched in your hand is not spring.

Just as a flame grows whiter in white terror,  
it will also shine green in the eyes of the dying,  
not because of hatred, but for love,  
the springtime love sunk in the flesh like the claws of a wolf:

A spring of tightly sealed lips and clenched teeth,  
the hiss of a venomous snake is spit from the tip of your tongue,  
shadows of death pass through wolf lungs  
twisted tight, shaken in upright blood.

The spring wound round our neck is a poisonous snake,  
the spring that leaps into our embrace is a pack of hungry wolves.  
Like a drowning man saved and thrown into a fire,  
spring gives to love the power for blood to flow.

Wearing the moon the snake darts out from the flames,  
bearing love the wolf falls in a rose bush.  
This is not the fault of lovers, nor  
that of the immortals imposed over our heads.

The evil in the heart of man grows up with all things,  
it plunges roots into a place the dead can see.  
There, the heart sees farther than the eye,  
like the smoke that puffs up, your hands are inhaled into nostrils.

A person cannot warm frozen hands on a rose,  
although roses and flames answer a similar call,  
among the mass of left arms raised in salute that transmits  
the annual blossoming, the yearly conflagration.

Neither can a person cool singed lips on a flame,  
although a flame becomes water faster than a lover,  
rising up into the coldest kiss of kisses,  
the yearly selection, the annual annihilation.

**A Daytime Beauty [白日美人] Nov. 14, 1992**

After noon from the tongue the ocean reaches the flower garden.  
In the shape of a black cloud the sea twice opens its tongue,  
like blossoms rapidly returning to the start of leaf's fall,  
like the fields that flood rooves seen at a distance.

From nearby you look at me, why  
not move off a bit, as far as you can see all round in this scene the sea  
lifts up its silk under things, I have already bared  
a bumper crop of breasts, but you see nothing.  
At this moment as if ironed the sea grows still  
like a mirror, a surface endowed with the depth of forgetfulness.

Close against my face the sea casts down its sand  
and caverns, its dense beard pierces my heart,  
in a puff of held breath its ashes like tears cannot be checked,  
like musk released into the lungs, spreading its limbs.  
Let the world's water be gathered in one place,  
water: so gentle an old age.

But you know I am still young, the other summer in my body  
ferociously gusts. In a night retreating from the night  
does not mean the day will die away over a greater expanse.  
This is the moment to signal love, from a place three meters from a dreamland the sea  
recedes, the boats in the dream are only paper-cuts.  
Out of past affairs you try to place a call to me,  
a brief conversation, perhaps it can be put off into the hereafter?

I have yielded to temptation because I myself am temptation.  
The sea pulls back its tongues that touch like lightning,  
as the grogginess of an afternoon releases black clouds from a lightning bolt.  
I am the daylight beauty, the night is my father,  
but before going into the night you are gentle.  
Only a gentle person can understand the sweetness of night,  
the night: a splendid sea on one hundred feet of film.

We possessed such a loving  
unwake-able night. The sea's sustained arrival  
already become snow, become the flames of an arid virgin.  
The sea calls out from its deep deep throat,  
but the listening of former days has already turned to the next life.  
The sea passes through a keyhole and makes it impossible to close my mouth,  
and in the night's mysterious bedroom two keys turn.

In the midair flower garden of the night there are no stairs to the throne,  
during the day I am empress, at night a person alone.

My night is prettier than my day.

**In an Elevator [电梯中] Feb. 7, 1993**

The elevator is about to descend, an apple is passed over  
as a supplement for the imagination. First struggle out from the crowd  
then you can come in. Too early if going to work,  
the apple is still on the tree, like the new generation refusing to grow up.

When the elevator went down you thought they would stay in the air?  
If you are late for work, then just be a little later.  
The implication of taking your shift is two seats tight together  
swapping luck and number plates.

Power has a face pasted on with glue,  
from it I smell the odor of chemical change.  
The way you cry it seems you are faking it,  
do you really believe tears have no bones?

Take your daughter, a beauty parlor  
can dispose of the beauty incessantly growing on her pretty face.  
But what remains still grows, aging is only  
beauty trembling as it grows more beautiful.

All this can only be explained from the heart.  
The entire city lands on your body, goes beyond  
the limits of heart illness. Why today?  
The apple abruptly falls, the elevator has no time to descend.

**The Homeland of an Alien [异乡人的故乡] April 21, 1993**

The alien walks toward dawn from the little that is left of his nude body,  
this is only a process of dressing that will return him to the previous night.  
When a provisional breakfast lies between us,  
we see the lively square at noon rising up with an elevator,  
the kitchen withdraws from the living room, and behind the frame of the glasses  
look for eyes of a belted baroque design.

This is America. In a frying pan with a tongue of flame the sturgeon  
makes public the smells of fruit jam and onions, if we  
have already forgotten the origin of grapes. The light  
and the heavy, two kinds of sound written and face-to-face  
win similar ears from an assembly. The alien vanishes,  
his outer appearance of granite, and a heart unknown to man.

In the place where his head will finally fall, a cobbler  
saws off his legs, and a teacher  
smashes his glasses, burns the textbooks of a lifetime –  
I imagine the cobbler opening his toolbox, his eyes  
tightly fixed on a butterfly on a shoe tip. I imagine  
an elderly professor facing his students bearing a hopeless love.

I imagine Hurley. In a law office  
in Oklahoma he ponders the ancient lost soul of the Orient.  
Mr. Ambassador: I imagine a mysterious abrogation  
of Whitman's open spirit. From thirty years of prohibition  
Americans learned the temporal quality of strong Chinese spirits. The flesh does not exist,  
the homeland I touch revolves round a single alien.

**Hamlet [哈姆雷特] Dec. 18, 1994**

Staying long in one character you will seem isolated.  
But this is only a ghost, the breathing behind the mask,  
he hears too much in the sound of applause from everyplace,  
although the ever more tranquil sky raises not the slightest wave.

He arrives at the center of the stage and all the lights go on.  
From start to finish the darkness of his heart is a mystery to us.  
Elderly people not in a mirror still age,  
and among the old he who ages is such a pretty youth!

Beauty compels him to defend his isolation,  
especially that beauty hastened on by his organs.  
Close behind beauty the march of the usurper is quickened,  
does a dead man trample him on us?

As to death, a person can only try to live as if it is morning.  
(If flowers can try to blossom like an avalanche.)  
The huge palace orchestra and rosemary's lawyers of leaves  
entwine, his voice recovers its former weariness.

A rainstorm, like a sieve and a vortex, grows smaller and smaller,  
its confluence exposes the rotten foundation of an empire,  
like a variant form of Pisces it climbs up to the high point of a sword blade,  
it never blew over the heads where the autumn wind rustles beyond the stage.

The scenery surrounding the stage carries the fictitious nature of pure flesh.  
From this onlookers obtain an anger that cannot be played out,  
when a youth among dead men lashes like a whip,  
when he passes through a bloody spectacle it transforms into torrents of hot tears.

And we also will forever, uncontrollably wail.  
To the power of dead men suddenly evoked on our bodies,  
the grasslands under the sky are so tranquil,  
the man strolling there is so happy, so stupid.

## **Our Sleep, Our Hunger [我们的睡眠，我们的饥饿]**

A sequence of 13 poems, March 7, 1995

### **#1**

Stylishly slavering the banquet rises.  
In the sky the waiters stand the entire night,  
no stairway to go down.  
The feeble candlelight climbs up alone.  
That kind of height obviously does not suit you  
when you try to look on happiness from a higher hunger.  
Happiness is just a lowly wind blowing by your ear,  
you must bend down to hear it.

### **#2**

Shadows lower themselves lower than banquets  
and wait for the leopard to appear. The leopard's hunger  
is a spiritual peril,  
possessing the vast textual space of a clan chronicle,  
but not preserving the marks of sawtooth mastication;  
no digestion, no defecation,  
expressing regret for food  
and a tendency to obsessive spiritual purity.

### **#3**

No need of a sky for a bat to appear.  
Bat close on bat flies by --  
this masked, mongrel flight,  
a face transformed from a rat,  
but the other body parts  
are identical to the birds' we see in the daylight.  
Bats smear the sunlight on a negative, deepening  
our reliance on sleep and the night.

### **#4**

Asleep you invent birds in flight,  
beautiful bird calls, pure white  
loose feathers. But they are only

official ways of talking about flight.  
A bat has no daytime residence,  
its visibility lower than a candle.  
Blow out your candle, let the night grow dark.

## #5

Sleep screens sleep like a bat draws in its wings.  
You stay in the original spot, getting up and leaving  
is the leopard knocking at the door a thousand miles away,  
its hunger is the hunger of a prison,  
the gate to freedom opens toward weapons.  
The sky of the bat vanishes at dawn,  
leaves the earth with insomnia carved deep,  
polishes the bright key in the depths of darkness.

## #6

As you fall asleep you hear a mysterious knock on the door.  
It is the dead who knock: what do they want?  
Between two real states there is no door to open.  
Abruptly you take off your shoes and exchange footprints with the leopard,  
take off your glasses and give them to the bat,  
and also pull out your heartsick cash for the dead to spend.  
When you wake you discover chains  
that grow into your flesh like the exquisite spots on a leopard.

## #7

A man standing alone on the earth  
is weightily pressed down by the people lying in the sky.  
The bodies lying down are all somewhat alike,  
difference like the fur of other animals  
gleams in your sleep. A woolen blanket  
falls from the sky, burns your lucky night,  
but the earth has no bed for you to lie in,  
there is no need of your wish to sleep in the sky.

## #8

For many years now, we have waited for a dinner in the sky.  
Latecomers walk up by an old style

staircase, but there are no chairs to sit in.  
To us what is a gathering of various foods,  
to a leopard is but one, an elitist banquet:  
When you order you must use the difficult language of a leopard.  
This is real hunger: you almost  
cannot sense the hunger, unless you spice it with some beastliness.

## #9

The food pithily ascends, nobody knows  
how much salt you add to your dinner,  
this is the secret of life.  
Why do we feel thirsty at night?  
After drinking all the world's water, we drink the sky's.  
The rain that falls all night needs a throat and eyes  
to preserve it, needs a faucet to twist tight,  
gentle and fine it runs to the heart of shame.

## #10

Water collected in one place can not be spilled.  
Seawater overflows but our cisterns and cups  
are still empty. Look at this stretch of sea  
how can it care if a body full of water contains metal  
or rotten wood. Do not hope that boundless happiness  
can keep a little happiness for you,  
as little as a black filling in a rotten tooth,  
and you will hit on an age-old pain.

## #11

A leopard with a toothache: no matter how it catches and eats its food,  
its vast stomach spreads like the sound of applause.  
But all this is purely a product of our heads,  
an advanced form of violence carried out in an action against the soul,  
it seems hunger is an ancient art,  
its face is the ever unchanging  
face of time: food is its mirror.  
And we, making a crutch of our aging, live till today.

## #12

A bat's night is a white painting turned upside down.  
In that type of darkness you can see very far,  
return to the light and you will sadly go blind.  
The light on the bat's body is already blind,  
it opens human eyes  
and regards itself, vision dodges into another kind of nature.  
As a bird a rat flies,  
but the bird in the nature of the rat has lost its sky.

### #13

If you attend the dinner, it is sure to be in the sky.  
A pair of hands push down the power switch making the garden quietly rise.  
But are our hunger and sleep so high?  
When a leopard endures harvest and distribution  
like grain, when a bat on the wall turns white.  
Last night's rain is the sunlight in which we remotely bathed.  
The first spiritual transport of the sun is a candle,  
illuminating our bedrooms and our kitchens.