

TRAVELING THROUGH TIME



**Collected Poems
Of
William Marr**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Marr, born in 1936 in Taiwan, came to the United States in 1961 as a graduate student. He received his MS in mechanical engineering from Marquette University in 1963 and his Ph.D. in nuclear engineering from the University of Wisconsin in 1969. After working in energy and environmental systems research for many years at Argonne National Laboratory, he retired in 1996 to devote his full time to writing, painting, and sculpting. So far, he has published over 30 books of poetry in Chinese, English, bilingual (Chinese/English), multilingual (Chinese/English with French and Italian translations), and one Korean translation. A longtime resident of Downers Grove in Illinois and a former President of the Illinois State Poetry Society, he holds two lifetime achievement awards, including one from the Marquis Who's Who Publications Board. In 2019, he was awarded the 60th Literary Award from Taiwan's Chinese Literature and Art Association. In 2020, he was chosen as Poetry Hall's first poet laureate. His most recent bilingual poetry books are *A Dreamless Night*, and *Every Day a Blue Sky -- Humorous and Satirical Poetry*. Both can be purchased from Amazon. Since August 2019, the Chicago Chinese News has been publishing one of his bilingual (Chinese/ English) poems every Friday on its front page without interruption. In 2016, in celebration of his 80th birthday, his two sons and their wives set up the William W. Marr Scholarship for Creative Writing in the College of Letters & Science of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



William Marr's self-portrait, 1990

Foreword

by Alan Harris

Knowing Bill Marr has been a many-year joy, due to both his jovial personality and his stream of excellent poems. When I joined the Illinois State Poetry Society in 1996, Bill had already finished serving a term as president, and he has been a devoted member of the Society since then. I have been watching Bill's development as a prolific poet of short, incisive, and often witty poems. He writes in both Chinese and English languages. His poems have entered the hearts and bloodstreams of readers in the United States, China, England, France, Italy, and other countries. Along with his poetry writing, he is also an accomplished painter and sculptor.

In 2000, in the early years of the World Wide Web, Bill Marr, Larry Turner (then president), and I decided to launch the ISPS website with the enthusiastic support of the members. In an afternoon meeting in my home's kitchen, we three laid out the framework for the site, and then I developed it using HTML and JavaScript. We Web-published the Society's news and announcements, and also many poems written by ISPS members.

Between the years 2000 and 2025, Bill has been a regular website contributor, having submitted a total of 124 poems. He is a regular attendee at ISPS meetings and also what is called Arbor Hill, a casual group where poets read their creations to each other.

Having now gathered together a large number of his poems, Bill is publishing this copious collection, *Traveling through Time*, which showcases his seven-decade poetic wordsmithing career—poems with themes of humor, moments of awakening, satire, love, animals, nature, and many others.

Bill is famous in China, having had his poems published in Chinese school textbooks and presenting many readings in trips to that country.

Alan Harris:

Author of Noon Out of Nowhere: Complete Poems and Aphorisms

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7`jW`cb`h Y`mYUf` \ YUX]b[`]b`h Y`hM hlc`fYhi fb`lc`h Y`HUV`Y`cZWc bhYbly"

1956

AT THE MOUNTAINSIDE

AUTUMN

DREAM AND REALITY

1957

STARS

1970

IN THE WINDY CITY

A CUP

1958

HARBOR

EVENING

WATCHING SNOW FROM THE WINDOW

DAYBREAK

1965

YOU ARE THE WIND

I BEGIN TO HATE

MY SON'S PARROT

AT THE CONCERT

EVENING SMOKESTACK

THE SIXTIES

1966

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THE TREE UNDER THE MORNING SUN

TREES

GO-GO DANCING

THIS EVENING

MIDNIGHT MASS

A WOMAN

COMPOSITION

THE CLEAR SKY OF MAY

CIGARETTE SMOKE

DAYS

WASTEBASKET

I KNOW THE BLUE SKY

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1967

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A PORTRAIT

WINTER DAY

1969

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1971

THE TIRED DRIFTER

FOREST

DRESS PARADE

BIRD

INSOMNIA

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ROAD

PAINTING

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MARCH POEMS

THE YEARS

STORM APPROACHING

A HERD OF DEER IN THE AUTUMN WOODS

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THEY ARE STILL

1972

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NIGHT CRUISE

TELEVISION

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WARRIORS

SPRING MESSAGE

FISH AND POET

BLACKOUT

FEET AND WHEELS

INFLATION

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THE STATUE IN THE PARK

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THE THINKER

PICASSO DIED THIS MORNING

OLD WOMAN

DOVE OF PEACE

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GLOBE

1975

MEN AND GOD

UNDER THE NIGHT SKY

YELLOW RIVER

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RADIO NEWS

ONCE I ASKED A BIRD TO SING

A MESSENGER

THIS MORNING'S SUNSHINE WAS SO
WONDERFUL

EVENING

NIGHT

HIGH NOON

THAT DAY WE DRANK TO EACH OTHER

LIFE'S FINGERPRINT

PORTRAIT

IN MEMORY

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1976

SUN UMBRELLA

SHARING AN UMBRELLA

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HEAVEN AND EARTH

RAINY SEASON, TAIPEI

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1977

IN MEMORY OF A YOUNG FRIEND

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GENESIS

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THE HOMESICK DRUNK

THE TONIGHT SHOW

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IN THE GUITAR CASE

MORNING FOG

AFTER A DRIZZLE

ROOM 1469

SMILE

EMOTIONS

1978

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THINKING OF YOU ON THE TRAIN

SNOWFIGHT

HAIR

SOMETIMES YOU

YEAR OF THE HORSE

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THE WIND VANE

TAI CHI

SOUND OF LOVE

DENSITY OF LOVE

SPRING RAIN

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AN AFTER-DINNER IMMORTAL

OLD CITY NEIGHBORHOOD

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SNOW

A SNOWY DAY

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CHRISTMAS

1979

STORMY WAVES IN THE CUP OF
CHAMPAGNE

A POLITICIAN'S EYES

MOON-WALK

THE POOR OLD ROAD

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TREE

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DRUMBEATS

HUNTING BABY SEALS

A HUNGRY PRISONER

1980

FAUST

THE SUN

FLOWERS

EYES

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DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL

FLOWERS * FIREWORKS

CUCKOO

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HOMECOMING

AT LUOHU BORDER STATION

LOOKING IN THE MIRROR

IF YOU ARE ...

1981

A CLOUDY DAY

THE GOAT

THE TIGER

THE BALD EAGLES

THE ROOSTER

THE DOG

THE DUCKS

THE CAT

THE HORSE

THE COWS

THE RAT

OUT OF EDEN

THE DRAGON

THE TURKEY

THE CAGED LION

THE LITTLE GRASS

SUNSET

BIRDS

BIRDS * FOUR SEASONS

BULLFIGHT

DOGS * FOUR SEASONS

BITTER LOVE

KISSING

CITYSCAPE

EARS

HEART KNOT

NOSE

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FALL
A WINTRY NIGHT
WINTER
AT THE APARTMENT WINDOW
APARTMENT WINDOWS
STORY OF A ROCK
READING
BELCH

1982

RAT
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THE TIGER
DRAGONS
SNAKE
THE RABBIT
HORSE
PERFORMERS
LAMBS
DOGS
FOOT AND SHOE
FEET AND HISTORY
FEET AND HANDS
FEET AND FEET
FEET AND SANDS
FEET AND WHEELS
REFLECTIONS
OOPS! ALL IN VAIN
AUTUMN TREE
THE SITTING PROLETARIAN

THE CASINO DEALER
SLOT MACHINES
A WAGER
WAR ARITHMETIC
AN OLD MAN
VISITING MING TOMB IN MY DREAM
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CARS
BRICKS

1983

AUTUMN WINDOW
WORDS NOT SAID
MOUNTAIN
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YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK
DREAM DESIGN
COINCIDENTAL ENCOUNTER
SYMPHONY OF FATE
MIDWAY GEYSER BASIN
NECKTIE
THE MUTE
DRAGON BOAT RACING
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A PASTOR'S CONFESSION

1984

NEW YEAR PARTY
SPRING

MEMORIAL DAY
DRINKING TEA AT A FAMILY REUNION
THE HAWKERS
SNEEZE
INK, TEARS, AND BLOOD
AN AFRICAN BOY
EXTRATERRESTRIALS
CHICAGO WINTER
THE MAKING OF A POEM
WRINKLES

1985

ANTLERS
A SURROGATE MOTHER
ROAD
VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL
CHICAGO SERENADE
1001 NIGHTS
TREADING A WATER WHEEL
A FINGER POEM
TEMPLE
THE FUTURE PAINTER
SKIPPING STONES
TERRACED PADDIES
NO PHOTOS ALLOWED
DIALOGUE
EVERY DAY A BLUE SKY

1986

JET LAG

A LOOSE AFTERNOON
TULIPS
SPRING HAS BARELY BEGUN
THE GREAT WALL
THE WELL OF CONCUBINE ZHEN
TIANANMEN
BEIHAI PARK, BEIJING
THE TERRACOTTA WARRIORS
THE FORBIDDEN CITY
THE IMPERIAL PALACE
GUILIN
SCENE
THE ECHO WALL
THE WALL OF NINE DRAGONS

1987

ICE LANTERN
THE HYPOCRITICAL SPRING
NARCISSUS
DANDELIONS
A ROAMING TREE
LIKE A DOG
LOESS PLATEAU
THE GOLD-THREADED ROBE
WAR OF WORDS
FIREFLIES
MORNING SONG
THE MICRO-CARVING WORLD
A PEACOCK IN HIS PRIDE
THE LIBERTY BELL

MAPLE LEAVES

AT THE CLOCK SHOP

HOLIDAY

RIDING THE WAVES

THE NATIVE-BORN BROWN COLOR

WEDDING CUP

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1988

BRONZE STATUE IN THE RAIN

THE ORIGINAL SIN OF ARTISTS

THE FILLY

AN OLD MAN

FROM THE CONCENTRATION CAMP TO
THE PROMISED LAND

A WALKING FLOWER PLANT

A SUSPENSION BRIDGE

BEDTIME STORY

SPACE INCARNATION

NUCLEAR COMPETITION

A POETRY GARDEN

SPRING THUNDER

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THE STORY OF TWO DOLPHINS

IF TODAY

FATIGUE INTERROGATION

WALKING IN THE AUTUMN WOODS

LINDEN TREE

EXCAVATION

THE DISSENTING SNOW

STORY

1989

AN IMPATIENT LITTLE DOG

BIRDCAGE AGAIN

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TWIN SISTERS

IN THE HOSPITAL ROOM

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THE MAN WHO WHISTLES LIKE A BIRD

THE NEGATIVE WORLD

SURPRISE

1990

AT THE DINNER TABLE

JUNE SNOW

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BERLIN WALL PEDDLERS

OUTSIDE THE WINDOW

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CAT AND DAWN

FREEDOM IS...

TEARS

DOG-MAN

FLOATING FLOWERS

CARS

A TAIL

WHITE HOUSE DREAM

SITTING ALONE UNDER AN OLD TREE

A JULY AFTERNOON

BY THE SEA

1991

ELEVEN LINES

EVERY TIME I SEE ...

THE WINTER SUN

A MATTER OF FACE

DIALOG OF THE BLACKBIRDS

SUPER BOWLS

SHADOWS

WAR-SIGNAL STATIONS

NIGHT CRUISE ON LAKE MICHIGAN

DISAPPEARANCE

SELF-PORTRAIT

SHANTOU ROCKY MOUNTAIN

1992

NIGHTMARE

PANTHEON

COLOSSEUM

ENTERING VENICE ON A RAINY DAY

CAN WE ALL GET ALONG? *

SUNDAY AT VATICAN

IN THE WHITE SNOW A BLACK BIRD

TREVI FOUNTAIN

TRIUMPHAL ARCH

VIENNA GONDOLAS

AT THE FOOT OF BYRON'S STATUE

THE LEANING TOWER OF PISA

SONG OF BIRTH AND DEATH

THE GRASSHOPPER'S WORLD

AUTUMN'S FIRST RAIN

LOOKING UP

WATCHING THE OCEAN IN SAN FRANCISCO

SEA STORM

SONG OF THE HOMELESS

AFTER THE STORM

MORNING AT THE SEA

DRUNK

1993

SUNDAY AFTERNOON AT A STREET CORNER

AUTUMN LEAVES

JADE BUDDHA TEMPLE, BANGKOK

PORTRAIT

CROATIAN FUNERAL

A POST-IT NOTE

AN ORIOLE

LAST LIFE

MIDWEST FLOODS

A TREE

HOPSCOTCH

MENARCHE

A WINTER STORY

1994

PARADISE LOST

BAHAMAS

A STAR-STUDED WORLD

THE ELUSIVE VACATION

MOVING THE OCEAN

KISSING

PILLOW TALK

GROWING PAINS

FASHION

AN IDLE BUGLE

TRADE

ABORTIVE GESTURES

MOSQUITO THOUGHTS

ASCENDING THE YELLOW CRANE TOWER

AT THE PAVILION WHERE LI PO LAID DOWN
HIS PEN

SPRING

ON MOUNT HUANGSHAN

THE ROCK PERCHED ON MOUNT
HUANGSHAN

A BOUNDLESS GREEN DREAM

ANCIENT PLANK ROAD

WEST LAKE IN HANGZHOU, CHINA

PORTERS ON MOUNT HUANGSHAN

WATCHING THE SUNRISE ON MOUNT
HUANGSHAN

TWO INTERTWINING PINES

THE LINGERING GARDEN IN SUZHOU

CONFUCIUS TEMPLE IN NANJING

1995

SUPPORTING CASTS

BIRD * BIRDCAGE * SKY

MASQUERADE

THE CAGED CANARY

VIEWING THE JADE BITTER GOURD

APRIL FOOLS' DAY

SPRING'S FIRST DANDELION

HIGH NOON

SHADOW OF A VOID

LOVE STORY

CANADIAN ROCKIES

ON THE COLUMBIA ICEFIELD

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TYRRELL MUSEUM'S DINOSAUR HALL

CANADIAN ROCKY MOUNTAINS

ATHABASCA FALLS

CANADIAN RAPIDS

DEER X-ING

SILENCE

ECLIPSE

THE WEEPING VIRGIN STATUES

IN THE NAME OF ...

TAKING HIS POEM TO A FASHION STORE

SIZE 12!

1996

LEAP SECOND

SOCIAL EVENT

IT, TOO, IS A PERFORMANCE

NIGHT OF SHANGHAI

COMET HYAKUTAKE

GHOST STORY

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SPARROWS	EYES
NAME-DROPPER	SPRING SNOW
RETIREMENT	A DREAMLESS NIGHT
DAYBREAK	HOMESICKNESS
BORN TO SMILE	AEGEAN SEA
ODE TO AN ANCIENT CHINESE COIN	TEMPLE
FIREFLIES	THE TEMPLE OF APOLLO
WHERE DOES DARKNESS LIVE	A MIDSUMMER DAY'S DREAM
GLACIER POINT	THE GREAT SUSPENDERS SUSPENSE
YOSEMITE FALLS UNDER A DRY SPELL	MY UNBORN TWIN
MIRROR LAKE, YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK	THE MOONLESS MOON FESTIVAL
GIANT SEQUOIAS	COSMIC JOURNEY
SKY BURIAL	THE ARTIST
THANKSGIVING	METEOR
SKY BURIAL OF A POEM	SONG OF WAR HORSES
AT THE SUPERMARKET	A DARK HORSE
ODE TO MY WORLDLY SELF	
CHRISTMAS EVE	1998
PILLS	EL NINO
TO COOK OR NOT TO COOK	THE MORNING WEB
TICKLE ME ELMO	WHITE HOUSE SEX SCANDAL
INSTALLATION ART	THE CHINESE ZODIAC
	VERTICALLY CHALLENGED
1997	UNTITLED
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW	ALASKA ICEBERG
CLONE FUNERAL SONG	FOUR SEASONS #2
CLONE LOVE SONG	GRAVITY
A POLITICALLY CORRECT CLONE SONG	EYES
NEWS HAIKU	A DRY QUIESCENT AFTERNOON

SCENT
HEART
THE GAME OF BLOCKS
THE GLACIER RIVER
A STREET PERFORMANCE
AUTUMN LEAVES

1999

THE FLAG AND THE WIND
HORSE RACING IN MACAO
CARRYING NO MAP I TRAVEL
A MOSQUITO'S ODE TO A TOAD
THE MATTER OF GREEN ONIONS
THE FOUR-FACED BUDDHA IN MACAO
A FALLEN GODDESS
TWO SUNS OR MORE
THE UNFINISHED SONG
PHOTOGRAPH
A SUMMER COMMENTARY
SMOKESTACK
AUTUMNAL THOUGHTS
Y2K
BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH
THEORY OF NON-EVOLUTION
A DRUNKEN WORLD
AFTERSHOCK
MOUNTAIN STREAM
CHEROKEE CASINO
BILTMORE MANSION

AUTUMN SCENERY IN THE MOUNTAINS
BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY
COWHIDE WHIP
EIFFEL TOWER
CÉZANNE'S STILL LIFE
MONA LISA
PYRAMID AT THE LOUVRE

2000

YOU SHOULD'VE STOPPED THERE
BREATH
SPRING ITCH
TRIUMPHAL ARCH
ROOM 8129, GENTING GRAND
ULTRASONICS
GUANYIN, GODDESS OF MERCY
A HEART FOR A HEART
NIAGARA FALLS
AUTUMN
PORN WEB
FOURTEEN LINES
A LITTLE BLACK DONKEY
A WHITE FOX
A STRAY BULLET

2001

CHICAGO WINTER
TIME DIFFERENCE
ON THE TOWPATH
CHEEK TO CHEEK

VALENTINE'S DAY LOVE

BIANZHONG

UNDERWEAR

GIBRALTAR

ON THE VIEWING STAND OF TIANANMEN

INSOMNIA, XIAN

911

YUAN MING YUAN

THE COVE

2002

FOUNTAIN

BRIDGE

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AT THE FLOWER MARKET

TELEVISION WARFARE

NIGHT CRUISE ON RIVER TUO,
DRAGON-BOAT FESTIVAL

PARABOLIC CURVES

PURCHASING A RED BEAN NECKLACE IN
HAINAN

LIES, LIES, LIES

JADE NECKLACE

LISTENING TO A CHILDHOOD SONG

SPRING

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AUTUMN DAY

PAYING RESPECTS TO THE POET AT THE
LI PO HOUSE

TAKING PICTURES OF MY WIFE AND A
NINETY-POUND BABY MALE PANDA

AUTUMN LEAVES

NEIGHBOR'S FLOWERS

RAINBOW

RED SHAWL

ESTATE

CITY WINDOWS

2003

NEW TOY

EMERGENCY KIT

TRANSMIGRATION

VALENTINE'S DAY

A DESERT FLOWER

TO PAINT A BIRD

TO PAINT A FLOWER

CITY WINDOWS

ZEN

GENESIS

THAT FATEFUL MOMENT

PARADISE LOST

ON NOVEL CRONA STREET

2004

GREETING 2004

MARS MISSION

MOURNING FOR A HOMETOWN FRIEND

SONG OF YOU AND ME

SEEDLINGS

REDWOOD NATIONAL PARK

SOMEONE MUST BE CRYING

82 vs. 28

2005

SOUTH ASIA TSUNAMI
TSUNAMI TIME
ICICLES MELTING UNDER THE EAVES
STONE FOREST IN KUNMING, CHINA
AT THE LAUNDROMAT
A NEWBORN
HAVE A HAMMOCK
BIRD FISH POET
KATRINA
THANKSGIVING TURKEY PARDON

2006

ENDANGERED SPECIES
ROMEO AND JULIET
THAT WINTER
AN EASTER SURPRISE
GHETTOS
JEWISH CEMETERY IN BUDAPEST
A HELICOPTER UPSIDE DOWN IN A PUBLIC PLACE
FIREWORKS
ELECTION TIME
SADDAM'S NOOSE

2007

THE REINCARNATION OF A HUMORIST
RETURN OF THE 17-YEAR CICADAS
RUSSIAN IMPRESSIONS
MOUNTAIN VIEWS

2008

FAIRY PENGUIN PARADE
A BUTTERFLY SPECIMEN
AWAKENING
BLACK SWAN
ARTIST'S NIGHT
GENESIS
MIRROR
RECOLLECTION TRICKS

2009

FORBIDDEN FRUIT
CURVES
VINTAGE WINE IN THE CABINET
AN ART PIECE
GREAT WALL REVISITED
GIVE FREEDOM BACK.....
SEA O SEA
SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

2010

SNOWSTORM
THE SKY UNDER THE RUBBLE
A BELATED DIRGE
OIL SPILL IN THE GULF OF MEXICO
WITH LOVE
MID-AUTUMN MOON
MORNING
HALLOWEEN
GIRL IN MOONLIGHT

2011

WATCHING SUNRISE ON MOUNT A-LI,
TAIWAN

SUNSHINE SCARF

DIALOGUE BETWEEN A TREE AND A POET

PYRAMID

A ONE-HUNDRED YUAN ANSWER

A LOVE DREAM

A MAN WITH NO PULSE

MOTHER

NIGHT-BLOOMING CEREUS #1

NIGHT-BLOOMING CEREUS #2

LIVING AND DYING

MORNING

SONG OF COLORS

ARAB SPRING

2012

EARRINGS

TO ARGUE WITH THE OCEAN

TO ARGUE WITH A RIVER

TO ARGUE WITH THE SPARROWS

TO ARGUE WITH THE AIR

TO ARGUE WITH YOUR SHADOW

TO ARGUE WITH THE WIFE

BURNING LOVE

BLUE ANGELS

THIS LITTLE DRAGONFLY

CLEMATIS

TARGET

VIDEO GAMES

HIGH NOON

DRY SEASON

MALALA DAY

2013

SEASONAL GREETINGS

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

TO ARGUE WITH THE BREAD

FORTUNE COOKIE & LUNAR CALENDAR

A FORTUNE COOKIE

THIS LITTLE BIRD

SOME KIND OF HUNGER

THE AFFLUENZA SOCIETY

NELSON MANDELA

THE NIGHT BANQUET

THE WORLD OF SMOG

2014

FLYING A KITE

SNOW

EXCLUSIVE SCENERY

A FALLING LEAF

TO ARGUE WITH TIME

TO ARGUE WITH THE SKY

A WET KISS

LUCK

SONG OF NAMELESS FLOWERS

AIR POLLUTION

BUTTERFLIES

TO ARGUE WITH ONESELF

CHIMNEY

HOMESICKNESS

A LAS VEGAS STORY

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LIGHT AND SHADOW

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LONELINESS #2

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TO ARGUE WITH THE SUN

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2015

LISTENING TO BEETHOVEN'S THE
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TO ARGUE WITH THE MIRROR

TO ARGUE WITH A MOUNTAIN

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AT THE FROZEN WINDOW

MONSTERS

AFTER VALENTINE'S DAY

WINDOWS

CLOUDY WITH OCCASIONAL RAIN

A PIPE DREAM

MAGNETISM

TO ARGUE WITH THE MOON

TO ARGUE WITH THE STARS

TO ARGUE WITH A PENCIL

THE LEADING ROLE

FIRE AND ICE

DUST TO DUST

BLOOD MOON

AN ENCOUNTER

AS MY FINGERS COMB YOUR HAIR

GOODNIGHT

BEYOND THE REALM OF TIME AND SPACE

SEARCHING FOR THE LIGHT

HOLIDAY

2016

HOME

BEAUTIFULLY SERENE

BLANK SPACE

WRITING POETRY

STILL LIFE #6

THE TRUMP WALL

A SHRIEKING BABY

LITTLE GRASS

MORNING NEWS #1

MUHAMMAD ALI

A CYCAS TAIWANIANA IN BLOOM

START FROM HERE

LAKE TAI

NIGHT-BLOOMING CEREUS

FIVE EPIPHYLLUMS BLOOM TOGETHER
FRIENDSHIP
FLYING
A ONE-WAY ROAD
IN FRONT OF THE BUDDHA
JET LAG
NEW YEAR
PRAIRIE
VOLCANO
THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG
ICEBERG
WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GLOBAL
WARMING
SONG OF REFUGEES
ODE TO THE SNOW
NEW YEAR
WATERFALL

2017

MONA LISA'S SMILE
END OF THE WORLD
A SORE WINNER
A CAGED BIRD
GOOD MEDICINE
THE FIRST FULL MOON
INSOMNIA
A SWEET DREAM ABOUT DONUTS
THE NIGHTMARE OF A DONUT
A WANDERER
MORNING SONG
GLOBAL WARMING

THIS YEAR'S FIRST DANDELION
BETWEEN US
SPRING
A LUNCH DATE (ALL TOO SOON)
WIND AND LOVE
THUNDERSTORM
A STRING OF GRAPES
THE BRONZE STATUE OF FLYING WINGS
DOOR
UNFASHIONABLE SPLENDOR
SONG OF THE EARTH
A RIVER RUNNING THROUGH
WHITE ORCHIDS
MORNING NEWS #2
PHOTOGRAPHY
SNAKE
GRANDPA, PLEASE SIT HERE
AUTUMN SCENE
LATE AUTUMN
SUMMER
SUNFLOWERS

2018

A WINTER WILLOW
MOURNING
LIFE
ENERGY CONSERVATION LAW
FLORIDA HIGH SCHOOL SHOOTING
WINTER SUN
ICICLES

MORNING FOG
MARCH FOR OUR LIVES
WALDEN POND
A POLITICIAN
BIRD TRANSLATOR
CITRUS
MORNING RAIN
SUMMER CAMPS
PORTRAIT
RELEASE
THE SUN
SHADOW
THE KINGDOM OF POETRY
YOU ARE A HERO
SMILE
ZION NATIONAL PARK
MORNING MAKEUP
A NAUGHTY OLD BOY
COO COO COO
PHONE CALL
FLYING A KITE
NEUTRAL AND TRANSPARENT
EVERY GUST OF WIND IS A POEM
MORNING MAKEUP
THE TINNITUS SYMPHONY
A FOGGY MORNING
THE MORNING RIVER
MOURNING THE PRESIDENT
THE COWBOY AND THE WEAVING GIRL

2019
FAKE AND REAL
SUNSET AT THE SEASHORE
ODE TO SNOW AND ICE
VALENTINE'S DAY
ICE TREES
HIDE AND SEEK
LITTLE REFUGEES
FOOTPRINTS
CHERRY BLOSSOM SEASON
HUMANKIND
RED ROBIN
BLACK HOLES
ROBOTS UNION
A RING
SPEEDING
FLOOD
TINNITUS
A BULLY
YUANJI DANCE
FOUR BLUE EGGS
WOODS
BRIDE OIL PORTRAIT
COOKING
A VISITOR
WOLVES
HERE COMES THE RAIN
TUNNEL
NOT A DIRGE

2020

YEAR 2020

CLOUDY DAY

A RENAISSANCE COUPLE

A CRANE AMONG CHICKENS

A TWO-WAY HIGHWAY

FORTUNE COOKIE

SPRING HIBERNATION

DEMENTIA

PANDEMIC DAYS

A PHOTO OP

ZERO

BEFORE THE MIRROR

LABOR DAY 2020

THIS BUTTERFLY

MONKEYS

WRINKLES

KNIFE AND ANVIL

LOVE

EARTHWORM

WHEN THE DOOR OPENS

A GOOD OLD COUPLE

MASK

2021

YEAR OF THE OX

DIMPLES

THEY ARE ALL WAITING FOR YOU THERE

SHOES

A MOWING INTERLUDE

THE LITTLE YELLOW FLOWERS

THE GOWN

2022

19 STUDENTS AND TWO TEACHERS

A LITTLE GIRL'S SMILE

NON-FUNERAL

China/CHINA

WATCHING THE SUNRISE ON THE
MOUNTAIN

A SLENDER LADY

2023

MUSIC

OPEN UP

LIFTING OF COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

SMILE

WEATHER

SCENERY

START FROM THE BEGINNING

FIREWORKS FESTIVAL

HEAVENLY CREATIONS

2024

THE TAIL

A DAMP MORNING

PLEASE LET ME...

2025

CAT AND DAWN

IF TODAY

WALKING IN THE AUTUMN WOODS

1956

AT THE MOUNTAINSIDE

I met a little boy at a mountainside
who was quick to laugh and cry
tears had hardly rolled down his cheeks
when a sweet smile bloomed at the corner of his mouth

there was nothing purer than his sparkling tears
nothing more beautiful than his angelic face
I understood the intention of the Creator
and was moved by the child's innocence

I stared at him with a deep feeling
warmth flooded my heart
tears of gratitude welled up in my eyes
when I looked again he was gone

1957

STARS

O stars
stars
numberless ever since I learned to count
I don't know any of your names
yet night after night
I lie on the grass wet with dew
looking up at you
hoping to find something
about another world—a world beyond the range
of the most powerful telescope

1958

HARBOR

1
the harbor was asleep
when the fog moved in

a strange beast in her nightmare
licked her with its wet tongue
she woke to find the world
weeping

2
watching helplessly the departure
of a roaming son
she wondered why
she had to be a southern port
that never freezes

1965

YOU ARE THE WIND

you are the wind, leads
the palm trees to dance
among the clouds
making a man lonely

you are the wind, amplifies
the singing of Sirens
at the critical moment
making a man homesick

you are the wind you are the wind
from the flapping wings of a dying love
the last sigh of God

I BEGIN TO HATE

the wet paws of the field mice
running over the night wilderness of my despondent chest
my stomach rolls like a wandering accordion in the sea
while a black cat with indigestion
throws up a fish-white smirk from the evening
at a corner out of reach of the sick moon's yellow fingers

soon the grey mist will rise
from the overcast lake of your eyes
and when the sun finally removes your veil
our stares at each other must be even more strange
for by then we are all dead fish
drying our eyeballs on the stinking beach

1966

ANXIETY

The sea's hairy hands
are climbing up the mossy rocks
its malicious laughter, bouncing
between the disheveled wings of seagulls
and the unshakable past
now splashing salty foam on your eyelids

I dare not write on the sand with my finger
lest it might remind you
of the ancient inscriptions
on a stone tablet

THE TREE UNDER THE MORNING SUN

I laugh a thousand kind of laughs
in the morning wind
my whole body shakes and trembles
with joy

I know it's you my dear
casting my shadow to the ground
your gaze burns upon my nape

TREES

trying to uphold something
trying to greet something
when the wind comes

but the clamors of the sixties are long gone
the protesting fists now tame as sheep

when the wind passes
the restless hands drop
and become listless

GO-GO DANCING

Shedding shedding shedding
your arms her hair my loneliness
Restless heels are red and swollen
the journey of life is long and without end

Desperate are the besieged souls
sallying forth at every beat of the war drums
and the horns are stretching their long necks
calling you calling you calling you
a string of ominous names

Darling
Why are you shivering?

THIS EVENING

there's got to be whiskers from some damp corners
poking into this evening
the wind comes from the east
the rain comes from the east

in a faraway seaport foams gush
and force a salty smile at the corner of your mouth
the young sailor who likes to wager he won't catch cold
from seagulls' flapping wings is presently at a bar putting
long fake eyelashes on his girl so she won't see clearly
the warning signal from the bell tower

they conspire to get the evening sky drunk and ignite
the flames of passion to burn the blind eyes of the stone lion
and wait for its maddening tail to strike down the last lamp
so they can begin forging a sun of stainless steel
to surprise tomorrow
all afternoon you lie under an umbrella reading a skin lotion ad
quietly listening to a tan voice kicking an empty seashell
"the blacks are holding a demonstration again
I don't want them to be my neighbors"

MIDNIGHT MASS

We then drove to the greenhouse
to see if the Cross was in bloom
the Cross that was planted 2000 years ago
the Cross that was once watered
with blood

When the pipe organ became the first one
to break down crying
we all picked up our coats and headed for the door
knowing it was another hopeless year

Only the stubborn caretaker refused to give up
he kept muttering something to himself
while sprinkling the air with water

1967

STORY OF THE SUNNY ISLAND

During the day
they take a shade under the skyscrapers
at night
they bask their pale souls in the neon lights

It is said that the pair of eyes
wandering all afternoon
around a missing-person poster
have been sucked alive
into the whirling navel of Hollywood
on a nearby movie billboard

A PORTRAIT

so this is the way the unfocused naked eyes
meet the piercing sun

as the whirlwind busily transports twigs and stems
from the autumn field to build a bitter smile at the corner
of your mouth, I happen to catch a glimpse of your soul
dashing like a rat from the scorched beard and hastily entering
the dark silence behind your shiny teeth

1969

TREE TRIMMING

the outstretched hands touching
unexpectedly a cold knife
in the warm bosom
of the evening breeze. Dressing up
the reluctant daughter for an arranged date
knowing for sure she will long for the next
before they part

a sudden silence in the dark
iodine tincture poured
over the wound that has been numbed
by lies. At least for the time being
you won't dream another dream
of your hands
touching the
sky

AUTUMN

puzzled by a falling leaf
he quietly put away
his guitar
and pictures of legs
in miniskirts

love it or leave it
what a choice

DREAM AND REALITY

He wants to shout
The water grass wrapped around his legs like a pack of snakes
while the weightless sound
floating and lifting
In the spacecraft
On the blurry TV screen

When time splashes down on the sea surface
The news of human return from the moon
Exploded and spread
Just in time

1970

IN THE WINDY CITY

The homesick boy
suddenly
opens his dry eyes
to
mother's
sandblasting
mouth

A CUP

hastily
pouring
black coffee
into
a stomach
on fire

the cup
with a corner of its mouth scalded
gloats in the hissing smoke

EVENING

what finally shut her half-opened eyes
was the stale smell of beer
from a stranger's breath

tonight, with the help of Viagra
she will make those impotent names strong
and then devour them

one
by
one

WATCHING SNOW FROM THE WINDOW

1
black men's
white teeth
no longer showing
good tempers

2
a piece of snow on the branch
suddenly falls
when the bird with a frozen song
flies away

3
as the footprints in the snow
get deeper and deeper
they become harder and harder
to comprehend

4
Falling on the feverish face of
a homesick boy
the snow melts and turns into
a warm tropical shower(pps);

5
coldness makes us independent
we carefully hold our breath
as long as the sun won't show its face
we are certain to have a white Christmas

6
in the wind
the trembling hands of a withered tree
open upward
the dormant seeds in the cracked soil
are ready to sprout

7
A sudden toll
of the steeple bell
shakes down
the snow from the Cross

DAYBREAK

a pair of birds making love on the branch
shake down an innocent leaf

smack! with the slap of a huge palm
a newborn utters its first cry
while the exhausted moon shuts her eyes
to the sun's ever reddening face

MY SON'S PARROT

there was no reason to kill
a dazzling-feathered
talking parrot

like a person conscious of his underarm odor
it crouched with folded wings
at the corner of a vast space
staring silently at me

my son's parrot
that I accidentally killed
with my own hands

AT THE CONCERT

thick and heavy
music rains down
like a net

choked on surging waves
in its flight
a panicky soul
bursts out
an earth-shattering cough

EVENING SMOKESTACK

the old man
frantically puffs
his pipe
under the dying sky

trying desperately
to make another ring
of smoke

THE SIXTIES

on our backs
patches of last summer's sunshine
are still hot to the touch
the glistening light of waves
still shines into our eyes

on the beach
we play the arithmetic game
 $X+0=0$

blessed by pills, wombs have become altars
every night there are joyous sacrifices

A WOMAN

for a hat
she tempts men to kill
seven beautiful peacocks

in full pride
before seven mirrors
joyfully
she chases her own
tail

COMPOSITION

If seagulls were not given a resting place
the sea would surely be lonesome

So daring boats leave port and sail
with high masts

THE CLEAR SKY OF MAY

in the clear sky of May
there were no clouds
no birds
no wind

the string of the kite
that pulled him run
jump
and fly
suddenly broke

on the wilderness
looked at his own shadow
lying stiff and motionless
under his feet
he suddenly felt
the penetrating cold
of the sun

CIGARETTE SMOKE

when the fingers are burnt
another corpse is crowded
into the ashtray

destined to be lit, puffed
and put out
it still gasps
for the last breath

DAYS

tearing down today
from the calendar
and throwing it
into the wastebasket
he takes off lovesickness
his only shirt
folds and puts it
under his pillow
then he opens the bottle
that has been sealed
for over thirty years

WASTEBASKET

with mouth wide open
it's now ready
to spew in your face
the trash of life
it has long
swallowed

I KNOW THE BLUE SKY

I know the blue sky
a glass dome
that no human sight can penetrate

I thus have the terrible feeling
of being imprisoned
though I am wingless

SONG OF A RAINDROP

the closer to the ground
the faster my heart beats
life has barely begun
it now has to end

even if the wind suddenly changes
or there comes a hurricane
I am sure I won't be blown too far

no glow of fire
no howling
no ground-shaking explosions
the world
with a tearful eye
watches me
descend1970

WINTER DAY

grown old overnight
his eyes stare in a stupor
at another world

oblivious of the whereabouts
of a little bird
on the vast grey sky

1971

THE TIRED DRIFTER

stars fly
when he hits his nose
with his own clenched fist

even the rise of such a brilliant sky
can no longer excite him

FOREST

no more trees
no more birds
no more sky

fighting

praying

sinking

from the smoky cities
from the canon-roaring fields
from the hollow hearts
hands
rush to reach
the shelter of my hair
and become
a forest

DRESS PARADE

The cloudy sky, turned away
by the sunglasses on the reviewing stand
falls heavily on our faces

The final war has ended
we now march toward the first

BIRD

this bird
flying leisurely
toward the horizon
pulling along

an earthly
heart

INSOMNIA

blinded by the burning
midnight sun
he vows
to break the neck
of every sunflower
on earth

DOOR

the lips
of an old maiden

locking her virginity
in

STILL LIFE #1

the squirming stomach
of an orange
is quietly digesting
the world

a pair of watchful eyelids
of an artist
become heavier and heavier
and eventually slam shut
without a bang

ROAD

after a movement
the intestine
between
two towns
becomes
so comfortably
empty

PAINTING

pin you down like a butterfly
on a sheet of paper
with the tip of the pen
of reality

see if you can still smile
Mona Lisa

EVENT

stepped on
a tail

what's the matter
with this guy
I am sure
it was the tail
of a cat

MARCH POEMS

1
how to pierce how to rouse
a drumhead a pregnant woman's
belly

a pop a wail
a HORNY
bayonet

2
looking out
looking out
looking out

the bulging eyes of fish bowls
windows of lonely apartments

3
struggling to
follow
his wings
in the wind
a tired
bird

THE YEARS

after struggling through
the dry corners
of the eyes
the fish of time

is now making waves
in the ocean
of a distant century

STORM APPROACHING

holding up the falling sky
a tree
suddenly let go
of its hands
and caught
a
 fleeing
 bird

A HERD OF DEER IN THE AUTUMN WOODS

-- a Chinese painting from the period of 907-979

a palpitation
jumping from the tip
of an antler
onto the top of a branch

instantly
it roars and
echoes
throughout
the entire
woods

AS THE CURTAINS RISE

playing the role
of the grand duke
in the opera
the rooster
at the height of praising
the morning sun
to its fullest blush
swallows a long—long—
earthworm

HARVARD SQUARE

good old days
of breasts with bra

creeping from the cracked walls
the old vines
have found their new roots
on young faces
just in time

THE GREAT WALL LEGEND

hurling toward you
a ten-thousand-mile-long
umbilical cord

Meng Jiangnu's twisted
mouth
sucks away
a string of hushed cries
like a vacuum
cleaner

•According to the legend, a section of Great Wall crumbled as Meng Jiangnu cried over the death of her husband who had been drafted to build the Wall.

THEY ARE STILL

see they are still
pushing they are still
gobbling they are still
stretching (SOB) the long necks of their horns

on the shiny floors
the feet are still nimble above the nimble feet
the waists are still slim above the slim waists
the heads are still shiny on the shiny floor

they are still
alive they are still
alive they are still

1972

HOMELAND REVISITED

while packing I said to my wife
leave out homesickness, the luggage
is already overweight

at customs they searched our belongings
using all kinds of electronic devices
and finally let us go

in the taxi I said to myself
well what a relief
to leave behind the...
but was startled to see
new homesickness with its old pal
waiting at the door
like a pair of stone lions

NIGHT CRUISE

suddenly recalls
hometown's typhoon season
the bold delight in greeting the gale

so he steps on his gas pedal
and sticks his hot head out
of the car
into the radius of the typhoon
in the dead street

a red flower blooms brilliantly in his heart
as the police light flares up
from a dark corner

TELEVISION

the world
is easily
switched off

yet not quite
a spark of hatred
from the dimming screen
suddenly bursts into flames
soon spreading
over Vietnam
over the Middle East
over every feverish face

THE WARTIME VILLAGE

pale
blemished
walls

these tired Indians
the indispensable roles in Western films
squatting quietly in the flames of war
waiting for another order from the chief

Camera!

PHOTOGRAPH

The shutter flashes
your instant smile

In a mildewed evening years later
you stare at the yellowed album
and sigh

Happy days are gone

1973

WARRIORS

at a big round table
they argue about who has won
the heart of the beauty

the pricked heart of the beauty
that is still bleeding
at the tip of their spear

SPRING MESSAGE

Someone is peddling peace on the streets
in an unseasonal spring

The last flock of bombers have sown their seeds
and gone
now it's time for the frozen hopes
to sprout

FISH AND POET

the fish
 which jumped out of the water
 struggled
 and returned to the water

said to

the poet
 who jumped in the water
 struggled
 but failed to return

Your world is indeed not livable

BLACKOUT

a powerless night
when people suddenly noticed
the existence
of the moon
and stars

FEET AND WHEELS

no way to tell
whether the feet are chasing the wheels
or the wheels chasing the feet

all I know is
the metro buses are still running
their old routes
carrying new faces

INFLATION

A bundle of bills
could buy
a flattering
smile
not long ago

Now
a bundle of bills
can buy
more than
one flattering
smile

NEW AND OLD

with every step
the pretentious
new shoes
jeer
at the memory
of
the old

THE STATUE IN THE PARK

standing like this
(they call it immortality)
with a frozen smile and ponderous medals
is more barbaric
than lying in state
with a red rose on my chest

at dawn, two lovers awakened at my feet
and began reciting the beautiful engraved lies
between kisses and laughs
there was a sharp pain in my chest
at the very spot where the first ray of light hit
at the very spot where they pinned the red rose

STILL LIFE #2

1
after a long winter's illness
the emaciated vase
coughs out
a bloody red red
rose
in the bright sunshine
of April

2
with soaring meat prices
half an orange
and a few
grapes
now occupy
the entire dining table

how long can this pretended calm last
when all around
rumblings of empty stomachs
burst out
rebelliously

MIDNIGHT

with its constant stirring
the long pendulum
of the grandfather clock
finally thickened the time
and hypnotized grandfather to sleep

then at zero hour
it started to beat the war drum
dong dong dong dong
on a sleepless young man's chest

STILL LIFE #3

the bird
and
the gun

stare at
each other

see who's
the first
to blink

THE THINKER

holding his chin
thinking
how to
hold the chin
and watch the computer
do
the thinking

PICASSO DIED THIS MORNING

After frittering away the remaining afternoon
I walk up to the window many times
to see if the sky holds any last surprise

Hanging over my neighbor's roof
the sun appears almost
eternal. Picasso died this morning
I wonder what tunes the three musicians
are going to play
which way the dove
is going to fly

Having shown us the world is still
soft and kneadable
the master hands are now withdrawing
I reach out unconsciously
but realizing how childish it must be
I turn my grasping hands to clapping

OLD WOMAN

Like a worn-out record
the deep grooves
on her forehead
repeat and repeat

I want to live
I want to live
I want to

DOVE OF PEACE

coo coo coo coo
a pitiful white
joke
on the blue sky
occupied by
fighter jets

BIRD CAGE

1
open the cage
let the bird
fly

away

give
freedom back
to the
bird
cage

2
open the cage
let the bird
fly

away

give
freedom back
to
the sky

3
open the door
of the birdcage
let the bird fly freely
out
and
in

the cage
thus becomes
the sky

THE CAGED BIRD

they
put him
in the cage
to hear
his song
of freedom

LOUD
and
CLEAR

1974

STREAKERS

how to dash
in the shortest time
across the great expanse
of the onlookers' wide-open mouths

taking off the clothes
is of course
one of the best ways

no time to worry
about catching cold
or getting caught
in a storm
of morality

GLOBE

wait
until the hand
that turns the
globe
stops

I'll show you
my hometown

1975

MEN AND GOD

Men like to build temples
on unpopulated mountaintops

And to keep the lonely god company
they would move in and occupy all the mountains

UNDER THE NIGHT SKY

A wolf
howling at the sky

smells
the bait
inside the fence

drops his tail
and becomes
a dog

YELLOW RIVER

Dump
into this old river
the sufferings of one
the sufferings of two
the sufferings of hundreds
the sufferings of millions

Let it swell
and flood
over the vast territory
of the sleepless pillow
and change its course
a thousand times
between midnight
and dawn

NIGHT FLUTE

Let the ever-rising pitch
of the wind
from the bamboo grove
lead
a pair of sleepless eyes
massaging
toward the dark end
of the alley

*Years ago in Taiwan, blind masseuses used to roam the city alleys, playing flutes made of bamboo in search of customers.

RADIO NEWS

If there's no news
in the world
today

long waves
and short waves
will all cease
to oscillate

ONCE I ASKED A BIRD TO SING

he said no, I can't
and I won't
it's not spring

I grasped his neck
and yelled
SING! SING!
WHAT KIND OF BIRD ARE YOU IF YOU DON'T SING
he gasped and struggled
but to the end he did not utter
one single note

I now realize
it really wasn't his fault
even a poet could not sing
uninspired

but possessed by a burning passion
I insisted on his singing then and there
and did not notice in my hand
spring had expired in agony

A MESSENGER

after handing his arm to the shark in the sea
his bleeding heart to the Hong Kong police
his dream to reality
his silence to this noisy world
the man returned to his hometown
without ever looking back

O Mother I have received your letter
your long long letter
written on his contemptuous glance

*In the seventies of last century, Hong Kong authority routinely returned Mainland Chinese refugees who risked their lives swimming across shark-infested waters to reach the free shores.

THIS MORNING'S SUNSHINE WAS SO WONDERFUL

I set up the easel
enthusiastically started my painting

As soon as I finished covering the canvas with blue sky
a bird flew into the scene
I said, good, good, you came at the right time
please move up a little. Yes, that's it!
then a green tree rose from the lower left corner
just in time to meet a passing white cloud
and the squirrels chasing each other
were not hard to catch
soon I had a presentable painting at hand

Yet I felt something was missing
something deep and inharmonious
to bring out its purity and innocence

As I was busily mixing
some harsh and bleak color
a lonesome old man staggered into the picture
and finished my masterwork
with a blank stare

EVENING

vying with each other
like a pack of hungry sharks
the neon lights
tear at the passing
blotted faces
and
gobble them up

NIGHT

between today
and
tomorrow

a demilitarized zone
marked with
black flags

HIGH NOON

no sooner have the skyscrapers
withdrawn their front paws
than eyes of the unemployed
witness in shock
a tail
stretching longer and longer
from the employment agency

THAT DAY WE DRANK TO EACH OTHER

laughter
startled a retracted
foot
and caused its shadow to drop
into my mellow wine glass

under the setting sun
an egret flew up
from hometown's rice field

leading the eyes
through the mist
and wandering for a long time
in the horizon crowded
with skyscrapers

LIFE'S FINGERPRINT

this turning and twisting road
on my map
has brought me here

every town I have remembered or forgotten
everyone who has passed by or walked with me
the tear of a violet at the roadside
a joyous cry of a lark in the sky
all etched onto the fingers of my life

to become
my signature

PORTRAIT

-- afterword to In the Windy City

keep it if you like
this photo
that won't be displayed
in the studio window

no dreamy light
no sleek stylish hair
the unsteady eyes never looking directly
into the camera
and you won't find in the corner of the mouth
a sweet smile

but from the background you can see
the ever-moving scenery
you can even find love
in a sneer

a pair of playful hands
present you with a heart
that still dares
to change

IN MEMORY

On the moonless sky
each star
is a grain of sand
in my shoes of memory
to confirm
your existence

STILL LIFE #4

1
The Goddess of Mercy
of white porcelain
stands there with a smile
watching
 in the bright morning light
a dust mote
fall

2
standing by the window
an emaciated vase
is singing a sentimental ballad
while tearing down
from its heart
petal by petal
the withered
love

1976

SUN UMBRELLA

competing with the sunny world for glory
you prop up a flowery umbrella
a little sky of your own

then you turn your head around
and with a sweet smile
scorch a pair of eyes
hidden behind
a sunglasses

SHARING AN UMBRELLA

Sharing an umbrella
I suddenly realize the difference between us

Yet bending over to kiss you
gives me such joy
as you try to meet me halfway
on tiptoe

UMBRELLA

now that rain has stopped
you use the folded umbrella as a walking stick
to measure the depth of sadness
for every footprint
that has a premature end
on the path
leading to the light
of dawn

HEAVEN AND EARTH

to shoot
an invading bird
they define an air space
with searchlights

to shoot
a fleeing compatriot
they erect a paradise on earth
with tall walls

RAINY SEASON, TAIPEI

1
The drenched
vacation
turns languorously
in the stuffy
hotel room

2
Outside the window
the slanting poles
of rain
are fishing in the cold waves
for the lost
spring

3
Now that I realize
winter here is so cold
and damp
every joint
of my memory
starts aching

AFTER THE MASSACRE

the public square is scattered
with traces of wild excitements

hats thrown into the sky are trampled on the ground
shoes danced so fast that their feet couldn't keep up
a brown bear is held tightly in a little girl's hand
her other hand holding the string of a balloon now plucks
at her father's intestines
motionless eyeballs still flicker with last night's fireworks
blood streams out from open mouths like a passionate song

and the roaring messages from a distant festival
can no longer excite any heart to beat again

INSOMNIA

1

In the ruins of my hometown
a hesitant voice
"Hello, is anyone around? "

Escaping from a dream
to the awakened skull
of the night sky
rolling and spreading
from one star to
another

2

Walking into a dreamland

One sheep
two sheep
three sheep
four sheep
five sheep...

Suddenly
the flash of a knife
made them scramble
one after another
toward the dim
window

YEAR OF THE DRAGON

under
inflated bellies
time bombs
tick
tick
tick...

*In China, a popular notion that babies born in the Year of the Dragon are exceedingly lucky and destined to have a bright future has caused a baby boom in every twelve years.

1977

IN MEMORY OF A YOUNG FRIEND

1

Perhaps some day
your final gesture
will be natural and graceful
as a leaf dancing in the air
your last sigh
content as ripe fruits falling
to the ground
and my heart
tranquil as a golden afternoon

perhaps on that day
I'll be ready
to let you
go

2

it hangs dangling there
green and bitter
waiting for the day
when your final gesture
natural and graceful
as a leaf dancing in the air
your last sigh
content as ripe fruits falling
to the ground
and my heart
tranquil
as a golden afternoon

WINTER NIGHT

When he awakens
the ash-covered
passions
with the blow
of a pair of tongs
flames lick noisily
at the frozen darkness
of the room
and white fog rises
before his eyes
like the aroma of milk
in the spring sun

GENESIS

in the beginning
men used their own images
to create god

so
the highest god is white
the lowest god is black

as for those in-between gods
they are neither black
nor white

MORNING

from the blackened paper
of nightmares

a lucid profile
emerges

CITY SCENE

from the windowsill
a white bird
soars toward the sky

in a single flap
it disappears
into the endless
gray rooftops

THE HOMESICK DRUNK

A short alley
has become a tortuous
writhing intestine
of ten thousand miles

One step left
ten years
one step right
ten years
O Mother
I am struggling
toward
you

THE TONIGHT SHOW

tentative and hesitant
tentacle antennae are poking out
one after another
from every dark corner
of the house

the little fellows are getting ready
to watch the soap opera
of your sweet dreams

AT THE ART INSTITUTE

1

Please do not touch
underneath this cool-looking brassy skin
a sun from the Big Bang
still burns fiercely

2

A broken arm
of ancient brass
halts the rush-hour traffic
for the passing
Time Express

3

Walking into
the impressionistic mountain
walking out of
the abstractionist water
walking into
the realistic forest
walking out of
the surrealistic sky
he can't even find one animal
from the Orient

IN THE GUITAR CASE

holding its breath
the idling guitar waits patiently
for a hand
to open the cage

and lets out
a thunderous roar

MORNING FOG

--on our 15th wedding anniversary

blowing gently with my breath
I wipe your beautiful eyes
with a soft cloth of love

until not a single drop can cling
until they become wide and deep
like a lake
reflecting the boundless dream
of a roaming cloud

AFTER A DRIZZLE

It's the first time I really saw you cry
such a display of emotion
from so many a sky

You murmured with a blush
while wiping away the remaining tears
it's all because of that cloud ...

ROOM 1469

-- at a downtown hotel in Atlanta

looking down
at a city of lights
a whole yard of fireflies

an imprisoned
midsummer night's dream
tries desperately
to break out of the glass jar
and fly away

SMILE

1
as the corners of your mouth curve up
I hear the opening sound of your heart gate
and see a string of sparks shooting out
penetrating dark clouds
to light up millions of stars
in the gloomy sky

2
across the dark sky
a spark
shooting toward the sleepless eyes
starts a campfire
and turns the cold
lonely heart
into a passionate song

EMOTIONS

•Joy

bubbles
 chasing bubbles
Coca Cola

•Anger

his folded arms lock the thrusting beast
in his pitch-dark bosom
only his teeth leak out a few smothered roars

•Sorrow

to see an unwavering heart
attach itself to a cloud
that has been drowned in tears

•Delight

a heavy slap over my back
you raise your head and give out
a hearty laugh

1978

RAINY SEASON

Over and over
repeating always the same old stuff

drip drip drip
chip chip chip

O how desperately we long for
a deafening thunder
or an overwhelming shout

SHUT UP!

THINKING OF YOU ON THE TRAIN

the more I wipe
the more it becomes blurry
the foggy skies
the foggy fields
the foggy windows

yet you
are looking at me
with such clear eyes
from another scenery
from another world

SNOWFIGHT

along with a cry of joy
a snowball
whizzes toward you

it lands right on the bud
waiting to bloom
on your beaming cheek

HAIR

every morning when he gets up
there is always a small cluster of hair
at the back of his head
raising a rebellious flag

as a libertarian
he insists on never using
any placating wax
or hot air blower
only a comb

SOMETIMES YOU

Sometimes you pull down the curtains
and make your face a tall window
aloof
far from the ground
shutting out the sunshine
shutting out laughter
shutting out all concerned gazes

Though my courting days are long past
all night I wander beneath your window
hoping to catch, in the thick of the curtains
a glimpse of your eyes
like the flickering stars
behind the thick clouds

YEAR OF THE HORSE

A dashing horse
is always one step
ahead
of the rolling dust

In the Year of the Horse
one ought to make
365
tramping hoofs

THE LITTLE BIRD

Having a cold
fighting with the wife
blinded by the sun
excuses are abundant

Yet this little bird
sings the morning
into gold

THE WIND VANE

it does not know
which direction to point
so many mouths
so many opinions

the whole afternoon
sitting on my neighbor's roof
it just keeps vacillating
and whining

the whole afternoon
I have been waiting
for it to find a foothold
and to point its spearhead of anger
directly at the heart
of the storm

TAI CHI

every morning
the old man
would face the east
and gingerly
hold up
the Tai Chi
that has been eaten hollow
by the dark night
and rub, push and punch it
into a glowing
sun

SOUND OF LOVE

stretching his face
into a drumhead
a sky that is still scattering
ice and snow

just to prove
the rumbling sound
in his heart
is a spring thunder

DENSITY OF LOVE

the intense sunbeam
from your eyes
shines on my thin body
making it even thinner

that's fine with me
I can claim I possess
the densest shadow
in the world

SPRING RAIN

it starts with a couple of timid
tiny little drops
testing its feet
on the still frozen ground
then it becomes bolder and bolder
the spring rain
along the streets, over open fields
striking at doors and windows
shaking up trees
howling, shouting
like thousands of horses and soldiers
mopping up the retreating enemy

we then know
winter is over
days of hardship are over
clenched fists loosen up
enthusiastically clap together

smiles bloom one after another
from tight lips
decorating the world with a riot of colors

FOUR SEASONS #1

•Spring

Only the survivors of the deep snow
can open up without hesitation
their most delicate and colorful inner selves
to the world

•Summer

To the scorched earth
we offer our humble sweat

These sparkling dewdrops
coming from the sea of life
have a salty taste

•Autumn

When his wife and children
comb and find a gray hair
on his head
he can detect in their exclamations
an insuppressible joy
of gleaners

•Winter

The colder the day is
the brighter the furnace burns

There is no energy crisis
in our hearts

AN AFTER-DINNER IMMORTAL

"one cigarette after dinner, happy as an immortal"

-- a Chinese saying

sucking in, blowing out
sucking in, blowing out
comfortably reclining on the couch
with eyes half closed
the immortal was listening to his young son
reciting under the dim light
the history of the Opium War

in the thick of the swirling smoke
a section of ash that had been cultivated to attain divinity
was shaken abruptly by the burning words
"to cede lungs and pay indemnity with intestines"
and fell to the ground

OLD CITY NEIGHBORHOOD

they use heavy bars
to keep restless windows from jumping
onto neighboring skyscrapers
which grow taller everyday

that's why the sky and eyes
in this neighborhood
all become
so downcast

CITY WINDOWS

the higher the window
the smaller
and paler
the face

every time I pass underneath
I always have a funny feeling
something is going to land on my head
a spit
a cigarette butt
a flower pot
or a man
spreading his arms
trying to fly
like a bird

SNOW

overnight
it painted the earth
whiter than the white wall

let everything start over again
let the first big-letter poster
be simple and unambiguous
each stroke exact and deliberate
a single word –
MAN

A SNOWY DAY

The white cat
stretches
and shakes

You little devil
shedding
hair
all over the carpet

A STAR IS BORN

click click click
all cameras turned
and took aim at him

he screamed
with joy
and fell back
with open arms

since then
screens
have become
his sky

CHRISTMAS

In the department store
waiting in line
for my turn
to climb onto the lap
of Santa Claus
whom I recognized
as the fat salesman
in the Men's department

Like an innocent child
I'll pull his fake beard
and put my mouth close to his ear
and then shout with all my might
"To whom have you sold God?"

1979

STORMY WAVES IN THE CUP OF CHAMPAGNE

in the midst of farewell songs
a pair of moist eyes
watched the year of 1978
carry refugees from Vietnam
towed by the rope of time
toward the distant ocean

at zero hour
with love overflowing from cups
they embraced
kissed and wished each other
a happy new year
leaving the newcomer
outside the door
alone

A POLITICIAN'S EYES

they say your eyes
are as blue as the ocean

yet in this storm-approaching weather
I only see
at the corners of your foamy eyes
the dark color
of Coca-Cola

MOON-WALK

*That's one small step for a man,
one giant leap for mankind.*
– Neil Armstrong

Man had hardly set foot on the moon
when the startled Chang-e
hastily began another long flight

One small human step kicked up so much dust
that it scattered man's dreams
to the more distant and mysterious stars

*Chang-e , according to a Chinese legend, ascended the
moon after secretly taking her husband's immortality pill.

THE POOR OLD ROAD

dusty and exhausted
the poor old road
keeps pleading for some rest

but the boys
keep laughing and shouting
and drag him down the hill

NOSTALGIA

It's said that there won't be any old acquaintance
to the west of the border gate Yang Guan
I am now more than half the world away

tonight's sky is crowded
with man-made satellites
big and small
but I can't even find one
to carry my messages
to you

CHICAGO #1

dozing off
in the virgin forest
beneath the feet
of Picasso's strange animal
when suddenly a long yell
TIM --- BER ---
awakens me

I raise my head
and in the sunlight that leaks through
I see the skyscrapers
all slanting toward me

ART GALLERY

looking silently into each other's eyes
we find the entrance
to a gallery's deep corridor

on display are portraits
of our souls
transcendent, beyond desire

THE GRAVEYARD BY THE HIGHWAY

a chessboard
loaded with tombstones

when Old Father Time
moves his hand even slightly
all passing eyes
become solemn
in the deepening dusk

TREE

Day and night
I hear
the annual rings
inside my heart
rumbling
and wheeling
on the rugged road
toward the sky

AT A STREET INTERSECTION

surging from all directions
herds of clamoring animals
forced a pair of relaxed feet
to join the stampede

after the dust settled
a zebra in pain
lay motionlessly
on the ground

THE DIVINE TREE

after penetrating the dark-sleep forest
the lightning of laughter
from the ancient world
finally arrives at your foot

holding hands and circling slowly
a group of young men
try to measure your girth

suddenly they become wild
turning faster and faster
in a ritual dance

AT THE DINING TABLE

raising a pair of chopsticks
while listening to
a fish
mouth opened wider than mine
spiced up
with all kinds of condiments
telling the story
of how he got hooked

my hand
suddenly froze
in midair
when I discovered
the one stirring up
strong winds and waves
on the plate
was my very own
brother

FLOWERS AND THE VASE

what is the wind howling about?
what are the birds chirping about?
what colors are the trees?
what colors are the clouds?
what color is the sky?

fighting to see the world
outside the window
the wild flowers stretch
the neck of the vase
long
and
thin

MID-AUTUMN NIGHT

having been sitting in the
fridge for a whole
thirteen hours
the Chinese moon
cakes (bought
from Chinatown)
somehow taste
a bit
strange

* China is 13 hours ahead of Chicago.

TREES * FOUR SEASONS

SPRING

Bury the wrinkles of time
deep in the bottom of your heart

Every time I see you
you're as young as ever

SUMMER

Lofty season

A thick-plumed bird
on a branch
looks about perkily

Just as it should be
green, everything green

AUTUMN

Loud and clear
Is it a screech of an insect
frightened at the sudden solitude
or a ringing in the hollow ears
after the noisy festival?

WINTER

When he grasps
there's nothing left
but the last leaf

In the howling north wind
the old man laughing bitterly
releases the leaf
and mutters
go, go, all of you go
fly high and go far away

TYPHOON SEASON

Every year at this time
the woman within me
rages violently
with no provocation

And when it's over
I always hear her licking
my bleeding heart
with her tender tongue

ON THE TREACHEROUS NIGHT SEA

a broken refugee boat appears
like a ghost
on the tired sleepless eyelids
jolting and rolling
toward the ever-narrowing harbor
of humanity
toward the shore
where lights die out
one after another

DRUMBEATS

a hairy
fist
bangs relentlessly
on a civilized
chest
that tries in vain
to make some flimsy
arguments

HUNTING BABY SEALS

she doesn't know why a club is raised
she doesn't know why a club is lowered
as seeing for the first time
the rising and setting of the sun
the soaring and swooping of gulls
the rushing and retreating of waves
all natural
all make her happy

a raised head
pure white
a lowered head
no longer white
on the ice-covered beach

A HUNGRY PRISONER

on the aluminum plate
there are leftovers
of the burned-out day
yet this hungry prisoner
staring at some deep-fried
stars
outside the iron-barred window
keeps swallowing
his saliva

1980

FAUST

before he could consult a lawyer
he absentmindedly put his seal
on her lips

then he saw her equivocal smile
and suddenly realized
on the back of every contract
there's always a fine print

THE SUN

•Rising

I am not the only one who could not sleep
worrying about the universe
look, your eyes too are bloodshot

•Setting

Burning red and
hanging over the branches
it is indeed somewhat out of proportion

But the tree
flushed with excitement
keeps insisting
that it is his day's work
the fruit he produces

FLOWERS

•Blooming

What a vast sky

The inspired little flowers
joyfully stretch each and every petal
to t h e f u l l e s t

e

x

t

e

n

t

•Withering

Never
can I listen calmly
to you counting

forget me
forget me not
forget me
forget me not ...

to the last petal

EYES

*Opening

Chased by nightmares all night
finally he finds a slit
in his eyelids
and squeezes through it
like a dog
desperately seeking relief
outdoors

Ah!
the white ceiling
is as splendid
as the green green
grassland

*Closing

I don't recall
ever seeing a cat
with fully closed eyes

even when they take a nap
they simply squint their eyes
and peek through the thread-like slit
to look out for your footsteps
pacing restlessly in the room

CHINESE NEW YEAR EVE

Maybe it's the only way
to pop the dud days of the gone year
like popcorns

yet in lighting a string of firecrackers
hands that survived bullets and shells
still tremble uncontrollably
as if facing a fierce enemy

THE MOON

***Rising**

greeting me
with a gentle smile
as I dash out
of the red-faced
day

***Setting**

her love spent
yet she keeps turning
her head as she leaves
gazing at the vulgar man
sound asleep in bed
snoring loudly

ERUPTION OF MOUNT ST. HELENS

in an unknown tavern
the drunken hobo
claiming to be the blood relation
of the sun
murmurs
while vomiting violently

O mother this is my heart
the love I could never deliver

DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL

Routinely
dragon boats
dart out
one after another
Routinely
dragon boats
drag themselves back
one after another

They have been searching
large rivers, small waterways
lakes, ponds, and even ditches
They have been searching
the stream of time
from the instant of splash
that occurred over 2000 years ago
to the foreseeable future
There is just no trace of him

Perhaps
we should follow the river
into the ocean
Perhaps
we don't really know
what does Qu Yuan look like

*The Dragon Boat Festival is held on the fifth day of the fifth month of the traditional lunar calendar to commemorate the death of Qu Yuan, an ancient patriotic Chinese poet, who drowned himself in a river. It is said that the local people, who admired him, raced out in their boats to save him or at least retrieve his body. This is said to have been the origin of dragon boat racing.

FLOWERS * FIREWORKS

under the faint starlight
a crowd of flowers on the ground
raised their innocent faces toward the sky
and watched with sparkling eyes
the splendid fireworks
highlighting colorful city life

in the dark
the flowers did not see
the sadness and loneliness
of the fireworks
burnt and spent
falling to the ground

CUCKOO

sounded like a bird call
on TV

cuckoo cuckoo

Dad
have you watered
the plants
on the balcony
today

NIGHT SNACK

neon hands adorned
with jewelry
softly rubbing
the ever-growing
bellies
of the night sky

walking along the gluttoned streets
of Taipei
why do I always feel
so hungry

HOMECOMING

lest it dilute the joy of reunion
kinsfolks remind each other
let bygones be bygones
while turning their heads
and furtively wiping off
the tears at the corner of their eyes
then forcefully putting on
a wrinkled smile
as if opening a parasol
that has been put aside
for a long time

AT LUOHU BORDER STATION

I know she is not my mother
my mother is in Chenghai
I bade her a tearful farewell ten hours ago
but this old lady holding a bundle in her arms
looks so much like my mother

I know he is not my father
my father is in Taipei
I am going to visit him in a couple of days
but this old man staggering with a cane
looks so much like my father

they meet on the platform
glancing at each other
and are indeed strangers

having been separated for over thirty years
my mother with a bundle in her arms
encounters my father staggering with a cane
on the platform of this border station
they exchange glances
and, alas! don't even recognize each other

*Like many Chinese families, mine was split by the Chinese civil war. My father with my elder brother and myself lived in Taiwan, while my mother with the rest of the family remained in China Mainland. During the summer of 1980, I visited my mother for the first time in more than 30 years. This poem was conceived on the train waiting to depart for Hong Kong at Luohu (Lo Wu) Station which was then China's only open door to the outside world.

LOOKING IN THE MIRROR

After going through so many blizzards
I couldn't care less about these tiny patches of frost
at my sideburns

Wait until all the frail leaves have fallen
I'll puff out my cheeks and let out a storm

IF YOU ARE ...

If you are an umbrella
please save the last pure ray of the sun
wait until the next spring wakens
I will release a heaven full of magnificence

If you are a waterside tree
please freeze your shadow in the bottom of the pond
wait until the next spring wakens
I will breathe for you a mirror of heavenly light

If you are a flower
please lift slowly your humble head
wait until the next spring wakens
I can say, " You haven't changed a bit"

If you are a window
lower your curtain
wait until the next spring wakens
I will astonish you with a little mystery, joy

If you are a poet
please warm a kettle of wine of a thousand years
wait until the next spring wakens
I will come and collect your new poems,
sweet and aromatic

If you are a bird flying south
please deposit a cry to any blossom of cloud
wait until the next spring wakens
I will fashion your sorrow into the first thunder

If you are an insect fearing the cold
find a hole in the earth and slumber
wait until the next spring wakens
The squirrels will tell you a great story
of hope and newness,
the seas and the heavens

If you are a rainbow
let your little sister of vanity fold you up
in safe keeping
wait until the next spring wakens

And you can be the butterfly perched on her head
sending the world a dreamy confusion

If you are a waterfall
let me gently roll you up
wait until the next spring wakens
I will show you a vista of mountains and waters
painted in calligrapher's ink

If you are a kite
remember your place in the sky
wait until the next spring wakens
Tell me then, of the child that held the string,
how much taller he has grown

If you are the water of the river
please wind yourself around a few more stones
wait until the next spring wakens
I can glide with you down a stream of a thousand miles

If you are the sound of drums
follow the breeze into every sorrowful heart
wait until the next spring wakens
I will come and collect from one and all,
an earth-shattering sound of early thunder

If you are a tear
hold on, disappear from the face of the strong
wait until the next spring wakens
Come then, decorate beneath the happy eyes,
a feast of furious rain

1981

A CLOUDY DAY

Even with a gutful of sorrow
he is unable to cry

The listless, unopened umbrella
becomes increasingly
a burden

THE GOAT

standing erect on a cliff
was my stern
grandfather

in a dark night
they woke me up from my dream
and took the acrophobic me to him
asking me to touch his whiskers
with my sweaty palm
and to jump over the black

generation gap

THE TIGER

when you frown
all ears hear
a roaring gust

the instance you strike a pose
to pounce
all eyes freeze
at the approaching
blood-thirsty mouth

as a matter of fact
you merely
stretch
and yawn
inside the cage

THE BALD EAGLES

to the small and weak
they are indeed bullies

so righteous Americans caught them
and imprisoned them in millions of clinking coins

the proud free spirits in the skies
thus became an endangered species

THE ROOSTER

awakened by the alarm clock
he starts dancing

an early-rising rooster
in the chicken coop

THE DOG

to be man's best friend
he ruthlessly chases away
chickens and cats

what's more, every night
he props up his ears
for the slightest, most innocent footsteps
and amplifies them with terrifying howls

THE DUCKS

no matter how hard they try
the flattened beaks
can never utter
half a sentence
of crisp and melodious
Beijing dialect

THE CAT

gentle and affectionate
she loves to rub herself
against your feet
then follows you meow meow everywhere
and slips her innocent tail
underneath your unwary sole

just to show you
her raging back and fierce teeth
a roar that shakes mountains and rivers
the true color of a ferocious tiger

THE HORSE

unlike the retired generals
it never envisions the battlefield
as a prairie for galloping
nor mistakes pile of corpses
for fence to be jumped over

THE COWS

for the cows
the saddest thing is
that they cannot plough
and cultivate the asphalt streets
to make the city kids understand
the meaning of harvest

for the cows
the saddest thing is
they know too well
that their honest and straight-looking eyes
cannot lure away
the youths of the moon and stars
from the seductive eyes
of the neon lights

THE RAT

in the race with tiger and dragon
it's incredible that the rat won

to put the Chinese zodiac in a fair order
there's one strict rule all must obey
no shortcut or back channel allowed

OUT OF EDEN

The snake finds
even a straight road
becomes torturous twists
and turns

pausing from time to time
it raises its head
to hiss at the endless road
to salvation

THE DRAGON

you mystery
dragon
I don't know
whether you are
a bird a beast a god or a man

it's quite possible that you are merely
a beautiful myth
but they say there are many
of your descendants
living on an island
of the Far East

THE TURKEY

1
to speak so many words of thanksgiving
with one breath
no wonder only God can understand
its cluck cackle gobble

2
the turkey stretches its n--e----c-----k
unleashing praises stuffed in its breast
like a barrage of fire

when Thanksgiving is still far away

3
cluck cackle gobble
clamoring to speak out for humans
their choked prayer
on last year's Thanksgiving table

THE CAGED LION

upon withdrawing his gaze
from distant green dreams
he suddenly realizes
the skyscraping forest has withered
into cold iron bars

mouth wide open
yet he can no longer summon
troops thumping across the wilderness
only a few suppressed thunderclaps
roaring deep in his throat

THE LITTLE GRASS

the grass that has been scorched
will remain withered and dry
regardless of redress and reparations

a humble heart can only hope
the fawning sunflowers
will not create another big sun
red and ruthless

SUNSET

I've found it! I've found it!
the best pigment for painting
the sun

BIRDS

I don't know
whether birds turn their heads and utter
"I shall return!"
or any such grand words
as they migrate south

all I know is
every year
they come back like innocent country boys
chirping and twittering
anxious to tell their experience
of cities' glittering red lights
and aromatic green wines

BIRDS * FOUR SEASONS

***SPRING**

if you wish to know
the shortest distance
between two woods
on this enchanting day
any of the swift little birds
can tell you with their twitters

it's not a straight line

***SUMMER**

At noon
struck by a flaming bullet
a small bird
plummeted through
dense leafy shade

Until slowly awakening
to discover himself

standing on a tree
lush and luxuriant

All that can be green
is green

***AUTUMN**

When did the eyes
become so blurry

A bird flying higher and higher
discovers
its own reflection in a pond
the smaller the clearer

***WINTER**

The last thread of mist drifting in the air
finally joins
the icicles beneath the eaves

In this kind of weather
how can I criticize
a small bird's song
brief and evasive

BULLFIGHT

only when it drops to the ground
its boiling blood
washing clear its feverish eyes
does it discover
the waving red flag
has nothing to do
with the damned sun

DOGS * FOUR SEASONS

***SPRING**

Let a hundred flowers blossom
and a hundred schools of thought contend

Hoping to smell the breath of spring
a pack of excited hounds
sniff here and there
but only smell
a light historic trail
of stinking piss

***SUMMER**

Huffing and puffing
a dog
finds the mouth-watering summer day
too hot
to swallow

***FALL**

The geese cry

When a shot explodes
a hunting dog
rushes toward
the ghostly moon
fallen at the echo

***WINTER**

When the sky
showed again its stern visage
the watchful dog
covered his ears
and dropped his tail

If possible
He'd just as soon not bark
In these times
one can't be too careful

BITTER LOVE

how many bitter dry days
have chapped your face

a bitter smile burst from your lips
I am a birch tree
rooted deeply in my land

KISSING

1
both trying so hard
to suck out
the words
that neither dares
to utter
first

2
It makes no difference
your lips kissing my lips
or my lips kissing yours

What is important
is that we still have something to say
to each other
and try to say it
well

CITYSCAPE

when
skyscrapers
try to compete
with human desires

they find even with steel and concrete
they are no match for materialistic cravings
breeding and rising endlessly in their shadows

EARS

Tuned to loud noises
ears are shocked
by a deafening
sudden

silence

HEART KNOT

there are thousands of flowery knots in their hearts
colorful and flashy
a slight pull
will send them soaring to the dreamy sky
like a flock of balloons

there is only one knot in mine
yet it is fastened deep in the flesh
it hurts
when you pucker your lips

NOSE

breathing in and out
in and out
even after filtration
the air is still too thick
for the lung

CHICAGO #2

Rising from the mirage
a rectangular tower
in the western style

Traveling far from Asia
a youth arrives at its foot before sundown
without shaking off the dust
he hurriedly ascends to the top

But what he sees through the coin-opening eyes
of the scope
is half of the face
of Picasso's woman, iron-dark
in a tiny square
while her ribs
stick out of a building foundation
several blocks away

This fact of steel
he thinks sadly
can never fit
into his backpack

*A passing Taiwanese poet said: There's no place
more desolate than this city, even the desert...

THE FEET

remembering the cracked land
of a rice-field
the feet
long pampered by shoes
suddenly feels
an unbearable
itch

FALL

a busy season
so many dreams
to sweep up

suddenly she rises
saying
it's time to go
then turns
and leaves

A WINTRY NIGHT

rushing from the bathroom
back into the blanket
still warm

now, where was I
in the dream

WINTER

the whole space
sways in the wind
like an empty
birdcage

AT THE APARTMENT WINDOW

through the nets
I watch
wet fishes
swim by
freely
in the fog-filled
street

APARTMENT WINDOWS

The higher the window
the smaller
the pale face

Passing underneath
I always have the funny feeling
some spit
a cigarette butt
a flower pot
a flying man
with outspread arms
would land on my head

STORY OF A ROCK

no matter how hard you pound me
with your clenched fists
or drench me with your tears
I can only give you
a helpless smile

as to the flush you saw flying across my face
I already told you
it was the light from the setting sun
there's nothing much I can do
if you don't believe me

READING

upon opening the book
words lead the way
sentences follow
all disappear in a flash

only the best-selling title
and the hot name
of the author
remain

what a great book!

BELCH

what an earth-shaking
belch

beg your pardon
this sincere potbelly

1982

RAT

grinding
on my taut insomniac
nerve

who knows
when will it take a pause
and open the mouth wide
to try the sharpness
of its teeth

snap!

CHEWING THE CUD

Chewing the cud
can turn a long-lost spring
green

The older a cow gets
the more it foams
at its mouth

THE TIGER

squatting in the cage
squinting
gentle as a kitten

is this what
our hero Wu-song *
fought with back then?

* Wu-song, a tiger-fighting hero according to Chinese folklore.

DRAGONS

no one has ever seen
a real dragon
even with imperial permission
to raise one's head

yet on numerous towering rooftops
people sculpted the images of dragons
omitting not even such a minute detail
as the scanty whiskers

*Emperors were regarded in old China
as divine manifestations of dragons.

SNAKE

the closer to the soil
the purer and simpler

see this snake
sliding out of the hole
slippery
beyond any grasp

THE RABBIT

outside
my newly-erected fence
the eyes of a white rabbit
staring at a plot of tender greens
turn redder and redder
as the sun climbs
higher and higher

HORSE

sometimes they shoot
mercilessly
a limping horse

just to keep
the cavalier's image
proud
and
erect

PERFORMERS

The performing monkey
stretches out its hand
like a man
asking the spectators
for money

The performing man
stretches out his hand
like a monkey
asking the monkey
for money

LAMBS

not until a butcher's knife
points right at its throat
will a lamb start bleating
declaring that it doesn't belong
to the silent majority

a close blood ties
to humans

DOGS

I have never eaten dog meat
(though I am Cantonese)
so I can ask with little bias:

Was it before or after the discovery
of being blessed
with a body of fragrant meat
that dogs decided to become
man's best friend?

FOOT AND SHOE

A blistered foot
squirms
seeking compromise
from the shoe

FEET AND HISTORY

this morning
the beach near the campus
is littered with footprints

the lecture on history last night
must be very successful

FEET AND HANDS

Let feet do the task
that hands cannot handle

Carrying the not-big-enough fists
the feet
turn ever so slowly
and suddenly
dart
off

FEET AND FEET

hustling and bustling
feet
on the safety island
standing on tiptoe
watch

a lone pair of
feet
desperately holding
the restless
wheels
on the bloodstained zebra crossing
fighting for the priority
of pedestrians

FEET AND SANDS

Knowing feet
with a deep sense
of history
want to leave behind
some of their marks

Sands
wait for them
in the desert

FEET AND WHEELS

you slow feet that walk step by step
be quiet and move aside

make way for the wheels in a fast approach
blowing horns and puffing black smoke

REFLECTIONS

before the mirror
I gnashed my teeth and stuck out
my tongue at the shadow
the shadow gnashed its teeth
and stuck out its tongue at me

on the busy street
I glared at a passerby
who stepped on my foot
instantly he glared back

on a quiet night
I blinked at the stars
and the stars blinked at me

on the dewy field
I nodded lightly
at a little blue flower
the little blue flower
nodded back

getting up early this morning
with a pleasant mood
I whistled at a little bird outside my window
the little bird happily whistled back

at this moment I am thinking
of the unknown little girl
in my sweet dream last night
yet I can't seem to recall
who smiled first
she or I

OOPS! ALL IN VAIN

no sooner had the pond
become sparklingly clean
after an afternoon of sweeping
by the bending willows

than quack quack
came a flock of swaggering ducks
on their muddy feet

AUTUMN TREE

Upon the arrival of autumn
a tree suddenly becomes scared
stretching desperately its shadow
to cover more ground

Under its feet
crises mushroom
and flourish

THE SITTING PROLETARIAN

the reposeful throne
was made especially for use
after laboring

yet this rightful king
is bashful and uneasy
awkwardly sitting sideways
afraid of his dripping sweat
might stain
the spotless seat

THE CASINO DEALER

skillfully dealing cards
to the gamblers
who think they will certainly
win

even I, a cool observer
could not spot his trick
of changing his suppressed
laughing expression
to an unemotional
poker face

SLOT MACHINES

feverishly feeding oily coins
into the hungry mouths
of the slot machines

a cook from Chinatown
blinded by the splendor of the casino
has mistaken them
for the children he left behind
in the old country
where they refuse
to grow up

A WAGER

“I am also from Taiwan”
these were the words
that made a non-gambler like me
stake a wager of sympathy
without hesitation

shot with blood
my sleepless eyes
became redder and redder
my curious hand
finally made a fateful move
and turned over the bottom card

shockingly, what I found
was not a poker face
but my own face
with a wry grin

*After hearing my story of giving \$10 to a Chinese youth at a Las Vegas casino, who claimed he lost all his money and was unable to get a taxi to the airport to return home, my friend burst into laughter saying he had the exact same experience except that the forgetful youth asked him for money again the next day.

WAR ARITHMETIC

Both sides claim
numerous enemies have been killed
Both sides declare
we've suffered no losses

Nobody understands
the arithmetic of war
Only the fallen
know the number

AN OLD MAN

Chewing betel nut
at a lampless house in the countryside
the old man inadvertently chewed on loneliness
his children's faces were flickering among the neon lights
in a faraway city

Chewing gum
among the neon lights in the city
the old man suddenly chewed on loneliness
his children's faces were gleaming in America
the golden land where everyone longs for

Chewing fortune cookies
on a sun-soaked park bench in San Francisco's Chinatown
the old man eventually chewed on loneliness
under the dim streetlight he read his fortune with a trembling voice

*You Will Enjoy Both Felicity and Longevity
And A House Brimming with Descendants*

VISITING MING TOMB IN MY DREAM

the stone beasts raised by the emperors
squatting on both sides of the historical corridor
like a herd of tame animals

had I not looked back by chance
catching a wicked sparkle from their feigned blind eyes
in the slanting rays of the setting sun
I might have walked right into a bloody mouth
opening wider and wider
and never to wake up again

* Also called the Thirteen Tombs, Beijing's Ming Tomb is a group of thirteen graves for thirteen emperors of the Ming Dynasty.

BIRDCAGE AND FOREST

to keep the forest silent
they put the noisiest bird
into a cage
from childhood to old age to illness and death
paying no attention to any bird rights

as the birds clamored
they just built the cage bigger and bigger
until one day
the entire forest turned into a cage
but was never silent
only the sound
of singing
became crying

CARS

herds of wild animals
stop and crawl
stop and crawl
in the crowded downtown streets

after gobbling up
a shoe abandoned by some rushing feet
at a street intersection
these strange beasts
of civilization
suddenly come into heat
lusting unashamedly in broad daylight
chasing after their own kind
that emit fumes of funny smell

BRICKS

building a pyramid
Look
what's outside the wall

1983

AUTUMN WINDOW

Now that she is middle-aged, my wife
likes to stand before the window
and comb her hair

Her only makeup a trace of cloud
the landscape of a graceful
poised maturity

WORDS NOT SAID

there was something
I wanted to tell the flower
blooming in front of my window
she brought me spring

this morning
full of warm gratitude
I finally gathered up courage
and began
"you sure are ..."

when suddenly a pair of scissors
sticking out from nowhere
snipped both my words
and her

MOUNTAIN

It's still there
for me to
climb

Looming from the childhood
my father's
back

THE LOWER FALLS OF THE YELLOWSTONE

without a doubt
the roaring sound
that shakes the sky and the earth
is heard by the creeks in the woods
and the snow at the mountaintop

but it does not seem to disturb
their steady pace

you can see
all the murmuring streams
are converging leisurely
toward the destined location
you can hear
the sound of melting
and transformation of the snow
so deliberate
speck by speck
drip by drip

AT THE WATERFALL

Deep in the mountains
there are plenty of caves
where one can sit in solitude
and meditate

Yet I stand here full of joy
looking up at the waterfall
as enlightened thoughts
dart through the air
like thousands of silvery horses

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

deep in the mountains
I am supposed to look for a secluded spot
to sit alone
and meditate

yet with open arms
I stand here under the rushing waterfall
savoring the sprinkles
of cool joy

DREAM DESIGN

-- Evening at Yellowstone

Right after sundown
the animals in hiding
all rush to the edge of the woods
and set their twinkling eyes
in the openings
among the leaves and branches

A beautiful dream design
is waiting for the call of the first star
to soar
into the evening sky

COINCIDENTAL ENCOUNTER

in the icy air
269 warm
bodies
happened to be
the object
of the cold-blooded
heat-seeking
missile

*Korean Airlines flight 007, a passenger jet that was shot down by Soviet air-to-air missiles on September 1, 1983, near Sakhalin Island, Russia, killing all 269 persons on board.

SYMPHONY OF FATE

ta-ta-ta-daaaa----

it's Fate the old drummer
setting the tune
by banging on the wall of reality
a proud head
which refuses to use the back door
when the front door is tightly
shut

MIDWAY GEYSER BASIN

--Yellowstone National Park

there are no envious children in rags
looking in the lenses that hang on his big belly
only the hissing mouths of ghastly colored rocks
spewing the poisonous mist of Hell

treading on the wooden catwalk
he desperately needs
a mob of noisy peddlers
to pull at his sleeves
and remind him
this is the world of mortals
where he is a tourist

NECKTIE

before the mirror
he carefully makes himself
a tight knot

to let the hairy hand
of civilization
drag him
on

THE MUTE

1
sometimes
the smart
are dumber than
dumb

dare not even utter
a simple
i

2
the sound
gushing from the mouth
of a volcano
is often
more eloquent
more intriguing
than words
from glib tongues

DRAGON BOAT RACING

if those drumbeats are the heartbeats
of the dragons
then the wooden paddles must be their feet

the drums, banging louder and louder
the hearts, pounding faster and faster
the pace of the feet, tapping on the water
becomes quicker and more graceful

and the little hearts on the shores too
boom boom
 rise and fall
boom boom
 rise and fall

O fathers! Please hold on to the little hands
of your children
not sure when some of them
will soar to the sky
following the roar of a dragon

A PEBBLE

fire-burned water-soaked
rain-beaten wind-swiped
this little shiny pebble
lies on a sunlit road
quietly awaits
a playful little foot
to kick it
onward

A PASTOR'S CONFESSION

those invisible ears
listening to the dark secrets
behind the walls
do not belong to God

so I take a walk in the woods with a penitent
let the wind the insects the birds and the animals
convert his endless confessions into secret codes
and give them to the reticent trees
to transmit directly to heaven

my ears, by the grace of God
were deafened by gunfire during the last war
yet as usual I keep it secret

* According to a news report, in order to prevent national secrets
been stolen by eavesdropping Russian secret agents, an American
pastor in Moscow adopted the practice of " taking a walk in the
woods" during a confession session.

1984

NEW YEAR PARTY

at zero hour
we traditionally raise
our champagne glasses
and sing Auld Lang Syne
bidding farewell
to the old resolutions
that were made
exactly one year ago

then we turn around
and shout with joy
while new determinations
rising from the bubbling champagne
turn into
colorful balloons
that fill the air

SPRING

Spring is a bed
sweet
yet short

awaking from hibernation
you are about to yawn
yet find your outstretched limbs
suddenly confined

MEMORIAL DAY

At Arlington, someone
Unknown goes down

The thousands, the thousands
Who have gone down in faraway fields
But who won't die in the hearts—
How do we bury
The thousands

DRINKING TEA AT A FAMILY REUNION

--After Thirty Long Years of Separation

Down at one gulp
how unbearable it would have been
to taste drop by drop
the cup of thirty bitter years

You smile and say to me
good tea
should be sipped
and savored

THE HAWKERS

constantly hawking fighter-bombers and tanks
to the open-mouthed crowd crying out for bread
in the fields tilled with caterpillar treads
bombs are the only fast-growing crops

soon after the bloom
the reaping

SNEEZE

achoo achoo
a bee
suddenly found itself
suffering from pollen fever

ac-----
the poet who had been writing
surreal poems most of his life
suddenly discovered
the images he had used
words and sentences
even punctuations
now all became an unbearable
itch

achoo achoo achoo

INK, TEARS, AND BLOOD

--- For the War Dead

Ink dries too fast
tears are pale
only with blood
once written
can never be washed out
it remains an eye-piercing red
into history

AN AFRICAN BOY

Day and night
a monstrous stomach
wiggles in his bloated belly

sucking up
the hesitant laughter
sucking up
the teardrops that moisten a mother's heart
sucking up
the meager flesh under his wrinkled skin
sucking up
the indifference in his eyes
and eventually sucking up
from his open mouth a ghastly cry
which we take for soundless
but is in fact at a pitch
well beyond the limit
of our comprehension

EXTRATERRESTRIALS

The evening newscast
is swarming with images
of extraterrestrials

Protruding foreheads
dark and skinny
and big eyes
staring straight out
from sunken sockets

What?
Starving Africans?
no wonder they look
so familiar

CHICAGO WINTER

Even steel trembles
so do teeth

Red lights burn in turns
at each icy corner
giving every eye a chance
to keep warm

On two feet
with two hands
pulling down a hat
and tightening the scalp
you greet the wind

THE MAKING OF A POEM

when his wife's warm gaze
turns into an icicle
he knows
there must be a deep freeze
on his own face

but before the bloom
of its first flower
the earth must endure
a long long winter

so he once again attains
though not without a qualm
his peace of mind
and arduously awaits
the clear and crisp sound

ice breaking brows relaxing
composedly he spreads out
a sheet of paper
and puts down
his first word

WRINKLES

during the day
these canals of time crisscrossing
your indifferent face
are dry
only the occasional wind
blows sand across

but at night
water rises from the deep well
of your eyes
overflows and fills them up

then like a first-time sailor
you set the ragged sail of your boat
of memory
jostling about all night
in the labyrinth that has no outlet
till dawn

1985

ANTLERS

At creation
God loves antlers so much
that all day he polishes them
smooth and shiny

Lest these horns be sullied
by clumsy hands
He lets anyone nearby
constantly feel the existence
of their pointy tips

A SURROGATE MOTHER

All eyes are on
the bulging belly

the fruit of loving
money

ROAD

Twisting and turning
yet the road
constantly draws people
forward

It never considers itself
the only right way—
at every crossing
there's always a big sign pointing

TO WHAT TOWN
HOW MANY MILES

VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL

A block of marble
and twenty-six letters of the alphabet
etch so many young names
onto history

Wandering alone
amid the mass grave
an old woman has at last found
her only child
and with her eyes tightly shut
her trembling fingers now feel
for the mortal wound
on his ice-cold forehead

CHICAGO SERENADE

Evening
a desolate street

A car with its windows tightly rolled up
stops for a red light

Suddenly
in the rear-view mirror
a dark figure
looming

Sir, buy ...

The ashen driver
steps in fright on the pedal
and rushes through the red light
like a rabbit running for its life

... buy some flowers
today's Valentine's Day

1001 NIGHTS

Listen to a story, kill a wife
kill a wife, listen to a story
this sort of *Arabian Nights'* fairy tale
I actually took as the gospel truth
when I was little

Sooner or later one grows up

Recite some scripture, kill some infidels
kill some infidels, recite some scripture
this sort of *Arabian Nights'* fairy tale
only now do I take
as the gospel truth

Sooner or later one grows up

TREADING A WATER WHEEL

1

no matter how endless
the road appears
one has to move on

no matter how loudly the feet moan
one has to catch up

2

thousands of mountains and rivers
yet in front of him
only this endless tortuous road

finally the youth
begins to lose his temper
and starts running wild

feeling responsible
the father utters a sigh
and hurries along

* In the old days, Chinese farmers treaded water
wheels to irrigate their rice fields.

A FINGER POEM

if the lines of a poem are fingers
the poet can buy a suitable pair of
gloves
to keep them warm

so

he does not have to worry about catching cold
or wonder aimlessly about the poetic thoughts in his hands --
sometimes long, sometimes short
sometimes thick, sometimes thin
sometimes more, sometimes less
now there, now gone

TEMPLE

The smallest, brightest star
in the distant sky
is a corner of its soaring eaves

Even such a colossal temple
can not accommodate
a self-worshipping
god

THE FUTURE PAINTER

rocks become rotten
oceans dried up
and the sky is out of breath

in the blackened landscapes
extinct birds and beasts
are the glaring blind spots
that cannot be blotted out

O the artistic hands for painting life
now must paint death

SKIPPING STONES

posing to take off
yet a stone can only skip across the water
six
seven
eight
or at most
nine times

even so
it's enough to make us clap our hands
and cry out loud with joy
when round dreams
ripple across the surface
one after another

TERRACED PADDIES

Toiling hard
to build green-carpeted stairs
on a steep slope
for the heaven-ascending gods
to step on

NO PHOTOS ALLOWED

you would not see anything ugly in this world
if there were no meddling mirrors

that's why they want to destroy
the lenses
that try to expose
their true colors

not knowing
the stars in the sky
the ponds and the lakes
and millions of eyes
can all see things
black and white

DIALOGUE

What are you running away from, old woman?
ARMY!
What kind of army? Red Army or White Army?
ARMY!

What are you hiding from, young mother?
BOMBS!
Which way are the bombs from? East or West?
BOMBS!

What are you crying about, little girl?
BLOOD!
Whose blood? Human or animal?
BLOOD!

EVERY DAY A BLUE SKY

Every day A Blue Sky
is merely a song
it has nothing to do with the eyes
the eyes blurred and hazy
dare not look directly
at the stern face
of the sky

Every day A Blue Sky
if you still are stubborn about it
then let the seductive neon lights answer you
it's the sky
the sky is the one that is color-blind

* *Everyday A Blue Sky* is the title of a popular song in Taiwan in the 1980s when air pollution was still a severe problem there.

1986

JET LAG

Lying on my back
I patiently
wait
for a pair of pondering eyes
to rise
before a window of sunset
on the other side of the earth
and repel
the wide-awake darkness
that occupies my room

A LOOSE AFTERNOON

Light-footed
lest I should startle the squirrel
at the foot of a tree
nibbling at a tender piece
of the early spring sunshine

Still, there's the warning cry of a bird

Yet what makes the squirrel climb to the treetop
is apparently not fear
for in its rushing path through the branches
green buds burst out gaily
one after another
in the spring breeze
of April

TULIPS

sent by spring
a group of little reporters
in the wind
each holding a microphone
try to reach
pedestrians on the road

yet people who like to show off
just shake their heads
making no comments

only the baby in the stroller
and the birds on the trees
rush to utter
praise for spring
in a pure and original sound
without the ostentation of language

SPRING HAS BARELY BEGUN

spring has barely begun
the snow on the trees is yet to melt
but they are already arguing
where to place the vases

THE GREAT WALL

1

The struggle between civilization
and barbarism
must be ferocious

See this Great Wall
it twists and turns
with no end in sight

2

What valor
to climb the ragged ridge
and to look long and hard
through a self-adjusting lens
at the skeleton of the dragon
sprawling miles and miles
in the wasteland
of time

THE WELL OF CONCUBINE ZHEN

1

Concubine Zhen deserves to die –
a wavelet in a teacup

put Concubine Zhen to death --
an upsurging wave in the well

death –
a freak wave in the ocean

2

mouth wide open
waiting
for a loyal servant
to feed it
another disloyal
Concubine Zhen

TIANANMEN

as a grand plaza
of heavenly peace
it must somehow attract
flocks of pigeons
from the sky

and let them walk leisurely in the square
let them peck food out of tourists' hands
let them coo coo
and shit all over the heads and shoulders of the statues
without any fear

BEIHAI PARK, BEIJING

smile!
while frostbitten faces still hesitate
the lotuses in the pond
break into joyful smiles

years later
when the stiff faces in the photo album
fade
I still see clearly
the pinkish lotuses smiling
atop clusters of green leaves

THE TERRACOTTA WARRIORS

kneaded and molded
these figures of clay
without any doubt
are the most reliable and loyal creatures

for thousands of years
they gallantly stand
(though a few were unable to endure the test
and crumbled with broken limbs or missing heads)
guarding the utterly decadent underground dynasty

THE FORBIDDEN CITY

how cruel a punishment
being pushed out to be decapitated
at the Meridian Gate
the poor old official must stumble through
one long corridor after another long corridor
one huge mansion after another huge mansion
one tall threshold after another tall threshold

after a treacherous road to power
an endless road to the dead end
on the uneven brick floors
one can still see his indistinct footprints
markings of calumnies and heavy chains

THE IMPERIAL PALACE

This is a great place to play house
This is a great place to play hide-and-peek
And they indeed
Play house every day
Prostrate themselves, kowtow, and shout three cheers of long live
Singing and dancing all night long

And they indeed
play hide-and-peek
From the East Palace to the West Palace
From Shenwu Gate to Meridian Gate
From one dynasty to another dynasty
They are in this maze
Play seriously and continuously
These games originally belonged to kids

GUILIN

1
the round-tooth saw
is ideal for cutting hearts

you can still see green sap
oozing from annual rings
on the whitish cross section

2
surging waves
ran ashore and froze

our stranded
primitive love

SCENE

out of focus
a tree stands in mute amazement
watching in front of him
another group of tourists
devouring the scenery
with flashy teeth

THE ECHO WALL

One answer
to each call

Happy and content
though the faint voice I hear
is from my worldly self

Not from God

*Located in the Temple of Heaven, Beijing, China

THE WALL OF NINE DRAGONS

baring fangs and brandishing claws
each claim

to be the one and only
real dragon

1987

ICE LANTERN

let the frozen Song Hua River
raise its head
to challenge the icy sky

let the lofty colorful dreams
soften winter's severe heart
warm and moist

THE HYPOCRITICAL SPRING

winter
honest and kind
unlike the hypocritical
spring
which uses words of wind and birds
to lure seeds
to stick out forgetful heads
and let the shiny knife of frost
cut and reap

NARCISSUS

How could such stems, slender yet erect,
and flowers with such a permeating aroma
arise from a handful of clear water
and a few small stones

I know my two sons
who have grown used to fertilizer
must be wondering
if the flowers from my native country
are just another myth I made up
to remind them of the hardship-filled past
so they would appreciate the plentiful present

DANDELIONS

The horizon is so far away
that the dandelions make their roaming dream
a relay event

from
 generation
 to
 generation

A ROAMING TREE

pulled yourself up by the roots
then violently shook off
the clinging dirt
you who like to travel
let yourself go wandering
and find yourself again and again
in an unaccustomed climate

grasping your hand
I can feel the roots
that crave sunlight and water
climb up my arms
and cling to my heart
sucking greedily
the remnant water droplets
from our moist homeland soil

LIKE A DOG

GUILTY!
The bat in a white man's hand shouted
YELLOW IS GUILTY!

So
a yellow man was killed
like a dog.

NOT GUILTY!
The gavel in a white man's hand shouted
WHITE IS NOT GUILTY!

So
a white man was released
like a dog.

*In June 1982, in the enclave of Highland Park, Detroit, [Vincent Chin](#) , a Chinese American, was beaten to death with a baseball bat by an unemployed white worker who mistook him as a job-grabbing Japanese. The case generated public outrage over the lenient sentence of the murderer, and it became a rallying point for the Asian American community.

LOESS PLATEAU

To survive
On the dust-rolling
yellow earth
they must protect whole-heartedly
any tiny green hope

on their blank, indifferent faces
very seldom can one see
a frown
or hear a sigh

it must be a rare holiday
that from their tightly shut mouths
a sudden burst
of short laughter
an incomplete sentence
or a passage of tuneless song
rousing our eardrums
to become
the resounding cymbals of joy

THE GOLD-THREADED ROBE

-- for a Taiwanese movie actress

after putting on the priceless
ancient burial artifact
your spirit
with nose in the air
laughed out loud
exposing
a mouthful of gold teeth

WAR OF WORDS

southern accent growls
hurling characters with pointy corners

northern accent howls
tossing back letters with sharp edges

foreheads with bulging veins
long for the interflow
of blood

FIREFLIES

quietly
you light up
a brilliant summer night

not the illusion of neon lights
nor advertising anything

MORNING SONG

With dewdrops
to refresh their throats
the birds know
sooner or later
the worms will stick out
their sleepy
heads

THE MICRO-CARVING WORLD

horizontal
vertical
or diagonal

which way can give
this universe
on a grain of rice
more room
to expand

A PEACOCK IN HIS PRIDE

turning slowly
to give all eyes
an opportunity to adjust
their focus

he knows
the shining mirror of time
has never reflected
a more brilliant image

THE LIBERTY BELL

1
the loud shouts for freedom
cracked the corner of its mouth

now no suffering heart
will ever remain silent again

2
earth-shattering roars
cracked the corner of its mouth

still there are people
who would point and laugh
and say
this liberty thing
is not perfect

MAPLE LEAVES

from a sheet of green
they appear

to demonstrate
THIS—IS—RED—

AT THE CLOCK SHOP

Oblivious of time
the clocks on the wall
just keep ticking
busily going
their own
way

HOLIDAY

Hair grows when the wind blows
As frantic as a racing driver
Finding direction on an exit-blocked road

Eyes wandering the streets
suddenly like an enraged cow
Rush straight toward
the provocative red light

RIDING THE WAVES

over and over
the wave-riding boy
struggles to climb
the high-rising back of the ocean
and look for a cloud
that roves over the horizon

THE NATIVE-BORN BROWN COLOR

-- Hawaii, 1987

almost choked by numbers
Wall Street
now suffers from an incessant diarrhea
making the sunbathing faces
at Waikiki Beach
deathly pale

the brown skins of the native laborers
that are in intimate contact with the sun
all year round
now appear even more real
and rich

WEDDING CUP

with bottle raised
and your head tilted back
you used to drink yourself drunk
now you find the pleasure
of pouring and drinking
at leisure

solemnly you raise the sparkling glass
against the brilliant sunshine
and when the bubbling amber joy
rises from the bottom of your heart
you move the filled glass to your nose
close your moist eyes
and draw a deep breath

hmm, how sweet!
this love that has fermented
for so many years

CASTING VOTES

-- election massacre in Haiti, 1987

the whizzing bullets
marked the blank ballots
of bodies
with blood

this is the only democratic way
they know
to
gather votes

1988

BRONZE STATUE IN THE RAIN

the lofty general in bronze
always likes to maintain the posture
of reining in his horse at the edge of a cliff
just to show
his critically important position
in history

thus the horse's front hooves
are constantly up in the air
exposing its vulnerable belly
to the flying arrows
of rain

THE ORIGINAL SIN OF ARTISTS

it suddenly occurred to me
that God might not be
a celibate

in the chaotic beginning
it might have taken
more than one pair of hands
to create in a mere six days
such a world of wonder

is it possible that there's a helper?
a Goddess would seem most natural

after they finished the work of creation
and rested for the long, long seventh day
a restless voice from heaven's high window
raised the fateful question:

Who's the better artist?

*A Greenwich Village artist was charged with murder of throwing his wife, also an artist, from the window of their 34th-floor apartment. The tragedy was said to be caused by an argument about who was the better artist.

THE FILLY

upon returning from the racecourse
the luckless master
keeps staring greedily
at her unsteady slim legs

while she struggles to maintain
her steady stand
afraid of being mistaken
as a new-born prostitute

AN OLD MAN

he cursed out loud
someone was blocking sunlight
from his easy chair

he did not know
his days were long gone
the light shining on him
was the last radiance of the setting sun
or the moonlight
or simply an illusion
from the flickering neon signs

but his dim-sighted eyes had not deceived him
it turned out that it was indeed
a gigantic road machine
crushing crumpling roaring
straight toward him

FROM THE CONCENTRATION CAMP TO THE PROMISED LAND

Those who were escorted
to Auschwitz by guns years ago
are now escorting themselves with guns
to the Promised Land—
the oozing territory of blood

A WALKING FLOWER PLANT

I am only an ordinary gardener
you spoke
with a humble smile

High above Hong Kong
In the center of the urban desert
on the rooftop devoid of fertile soil
you had been tirelessly watering and weeding
dreaming of someday brightening the world
with joyful colors

when the plants finally sprang into blossom
under the sun-filled morning sky
I saw you, gray-haired
moving among the colorful flowers
with a watering can in your hand
like a walking flower plant

A SUSPENSION BRIDGE

1
a man
struggling
on gossamer
between two cliffs

waiting underneath
is a gaping mouth
the abyss

2
between two cliffs
a flimsy spider filament
still sticky

waiting underneath
is a gaping mouth
the abyss

BEDTIME STORY

all attractive stories
are full of sufferings

when it comes to
they live happily ever after
we know that's the end of the story

what comes next is an endless chain of yawning
hurrying the white horses that carry the princess and the prince
to enter the dreamland
before the eyelids
and the castle gate
are completely shut

SPACE INCARNATION

Many would take it
as the midway station to heaven
nineteen hundred miles up
can heaven be far away?

Some would even think
that sixty three million years
is eternal enough
especially for those hopeless potbellied souls
knowing that it's impossible for them to pass through
the tiny eye of a needle
here, God is not
the Final Judge

Of course there are details to be worked out
for instance, should there be racial segregation
like that in the old South Africa
so as to preserve the purity of the ashes?
or, as long as they can afford to pay
should even dogs and cats be allowed?

*A Houston space service company has a plan to send human
ashes into space. According to the plan, ten thousand human
remains will orbit the earth at a distance of nineteen hundred miles
for a minimum of sixty-three million years.

NUCLEAR COMPETITION

the whole world
is holding its breath
at the starting line

the signal gun
raised high
is pointed at the black hole of the universe
while in its burning throat
an insuppressible cough
is waiting impatiently
to jump out

A POETRY GARDEN

The poems written on earth
with your shovel
they claim
though beautiful
will wither easily

This
I know
is just their jealousy or superstition

Because on this side of the earth
my heart is responding
to your every steady and forceful pounding
And I believe
the beautiful words and wonderful music
flashing up from the rocks underneath your feet
will light up countless eyes and hearts
in dark nights

*For my Taiwanese poet friend Yang Kui, who retired in his old age
to cultivate gardens alone in the deep mountains.

SPRING THUNDER

1

waking me up at midnight
it asks
self-righteously

isn't your heart too
restless and itching for action?

2

waking me up
in the middle of the night
just to tell me

listen
my rumbling heart

PAINTING LESSONS

not every evening glow
is ablaze with desire
not every melancholy patch of sky
is a primary color

each glittering leaf in the sun
has its withered yellow life story
each roaming cloud
is watched by a tiny pallid face in the window

on the resplendent palette of the world
he mixes and mixes
knowing sooner or later
he will come up with a color
that even God will envy

THE STORY OF TWO DOLPHINS

now
your mouths must stay away
from this big bowl
and go to the ocean
to assume your own responsibility

or to another shore
to make lots of money
that will stuff up your pockets
and your souls
and let your heads stay forever in the hothouse
so well-fed and well-clad
that you won't have to think of today
or tomorrow

*Before an experiment on dolphin communication with humans was terminated, scientists had to train the two dolphins that were used in the experiment so that they could survive in the ocean.

IF TODAY

If today
There is no news in this world

The TV screens are blank
The lens cannot find any object to capture
The show-off mouths are speechless
The muzzles are silent
bombs refuse to boom

TV series have lost their plots
love and hate
will not entangle us

If today, ah
There is no news in this world

FATIGUE INTERROGATION

The sun was blazing hot
He didn't remember how many days and nights
it had burned out
He only felt
the hideous smile in the shadows
piercing his numb spine with waves of ice
making him hold open his eyelids
gelled with blood and sweat
to glare at the piercing reality

He had confessed
And would never speak again
Conscience
is his only accomplice

WALKING IN THE AUTUMN WOODS

When a cold current came, the alert trees
began to shed their leaves
that were exposed to wind and rain,
and their faces became stern

Only a few young trees
never having seen ice and snow before
still stood on tiptoe and craned their necks,
with fresh and excited
green

LINDEN TREE

walking by you every day
somehow I had a hard time recalling your name
till this morning
when someone started the magical singing
*By the well before the gate there
stands a linden tree...*

Linden Tree!
no wonder I felt so familiar and intimate

EXCAVATION

along with gravel and soil
they removed the trees
with an excavator
making the dark sky
even darker

tomorrow they will build a skyscraper
right here on this grassland
and decorate the hollow eyes
with twinkling glass

THE DISSENTING SNOW

The children's hearts are warm
the snow ice-cold

The children's faces are red
the snow white

The children's laughter is loud
the snow silent

The children's feet are restless and adventurous
the snow always smooths out the ground
so their clear footprints
can never stray far
from the corners
of their mother's watchful eyes
inside the house

STORY

The dog has her eyes closed
but the old man knows she's listening

Her warm back is moving
closer and closer

1989

AN IMPATIENT LITTLE DOG

dashing forth a few steps
and dashing back
dashing forth a few steps
and dashing back

the excited little dog
keeps urging his wobbly little master
who has just started learning
how to walk

a bright smooth ground
lies right ahead

BIRDCAGE AGAIN

open
the
cage
let the bird fly

away

and give
the sky
back
its
freedom

TEN LINES

at
Tiananmen Square
where people are restless
the earth is restless
and even the heaven is restless
I am using these ten lines
soaked with tears and blood
to recover the rapidly increasing numbers
100, 300, 700, 3000...
of corpses

TWIN SISTERS

In New York harbor
the Statue of Liberty, poised and majestic
holds a torch high with only one hand
the torch that illuminates the whole world

Yet her twin sister in Beijing
the Statue of Democracy, on her knees
and bloodied by crushing tanks
must struggle with both hands
to hold onto a smoldering torch
which she eventually thrusts
with all her might
toward the smoke-blackened, impassive sky
the old and wrinkled forehead

IN THE HOSPITAL ROOM

dripping from a hanging plastic bag
winding through the tube
into your motionless arm
is that transparent fluid
time?

the water in my heart is boiling
gurgling through
the rugged mountain streams
waiting to enter
the calm
sea

REARVIEW MIRROR

--- warning: objects are closer than they appear

eyes
travel on a smooth highway
at 65 mph
from tipsy green
to lush green
suddenly are awakened
by a yellow leaf
that looms in the rearview mirror

THE MAN WHO WHISTLES LIKE A BIRD

when he leaves home for work
his wife with puckered lips
pecks at his cheek with a light kiss

instantly the not-so-young man feels
young again
and puckers up his lips
whistling gaily

arousing many stale souls along the way
to beat their wings
in the hope of lifting
like a bird

THE NEGATIVE WORLD

beating gongs and drums

they celebrate light
in a world
where black
is white

SURPRISE

-- the end of apartheid-era in South Africa

on a city bus
this black lady
opens her fresh and bright eyes
brighter than the white skins
sitting behind
and in front of her

just to give the world
a black-and-white
surprise

1990

AT THE DINNER TABLE

bloated by famine in Ethiopia
the stomach must now digest
a TV commercial
of delicious cat food
cholesterol-free

JUNE SNOW

drifting white
an abnormal omen
finally came true
turning into this year's
bloody June

a tragedy
that can no longer be played
in a theatre

NOW THAT AUTUMN IS HERE

now that autumn is here
it's hard to avoid
biting insects and pecking birds

but he finds it impossible to moan
no sooner has a wound opened up
than it's filled with sweet juice

BERLIN WALL PEDDLERS

History on sale
One chunk for only twenty dollars

Look at this one
it's full of bullet holes
this one is stained with deserters' blood
and see these two dark holes
they were burned by an anxious gaze
the remains of cold war on this one
still make you tremble
and what we have here
are the dancing footprints of youth
and the shouting and clapping
when a heavy chain tore it down

Our supply is abundant
after the Berlin Wall
we'll tear down the walls
between
the rich and the poor
the fortunate and the unfortunate
the oppressors and the oppressed

and of course we can always find
walls
between indifferent hearts

OUTSIDE THE WINDOW

Outside the window
the winds were howling
and the snow was swirling
my beloved maple tree
was fighting
with its naked body

I couldn't help shivering
when I thought of you
clenching your teeth
under a harsher sky
alone

THE MODIFIED TONE OF SNOW

*Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow...*

-- T. S. ELIOT: "The Waste Land"

Under the wind-howling sky
The naked maple trees
Dream of fluffy hairs

Snow! Snow!
Give us snow!

Under the wind-howling sky
People who haven't been warm for a long time
Finally shoot out flames of fury
from their eyes

Blood! Blood!
Give us blood!

CAT AND DAWN

The cat had been calling for spring all night
Finally became realistic
Licking its lips and rubbing its paws
Facing an ever redder bloody fish belly
In the east

FREEDOM IS...

Freedom is a flower
slowly blooming
on the crumpled face of the old woman

Freedom is a cloud
changing the scenery
in the eyes of dull despair

Freedom is a brick
shattered yet still have to go down
the barrier wall

Freedom is a roar—
Warriors, mount your horses!
Let's sweep across the grassland
at lightning speed

TEARS

outside is cold
while the tears rising
from the bottom of his heart
are boiling hot

so the softhearted man
keeps them rolling and rolling
inside his eye sockets

DOG-MAN

tucking its tail like a dog
tucking his tail like a dog
tucking its tail like a man
tucking his tail like a man

dog
not a man
not a dog
not a man not a dog

you...

FLOATING FLOWERS

on our front yard
a swarm of butterflies
are busily dress rehearsing
a midsummer day's dream

but merrily chasing each other in midair
the two in bright yellow
are in no hurry to come down
to take their places

CARS

leading a fast life
the prodigals
lavishly expending
Mother Nature's
fortune
while frantically
kissing
her cheek

A TAIL

there must be some
residual value
for a tail

up and down
left and right
to and fro
it vigorously wags and shakes

but noticing the darkening face
of the sky
it suddenly stops
and drops

it's much safer
to hide itself
between legs

WHITE HOUSE DREAM

A night's snow
turns every house
into the White House

Nancy darling
what does the astrologer say on TV
can I go to work
this morning?

*It is said that former US President Reagan often consulted his wife, Nancy, who believed in astrology.

SITTING ALONE UNDER AN OLD TREE

after thinking hard all afternoon
he relaxes his brows and stands up
stretching his arms toward the evening sky
tall and elegant as the old tree

every compressed
and distorted joint in his body
juts out and creaks

A JULY AFTERNOON

filled with hot summer air
the July afternoon
becomes a bulging transparent
balloon

in the treetop a cicada cries
let me out...
let me out...

while the bees with stingers
are too occupied with their own
business
buzzing from one flower
to another

BY THE SEA

He has been adjusting his breath
and now feels that he has finally entered
the sea
each wave
makes his chest experience once again
the near-bursting pain
but he no longer must endure
the entire weight of the world
alone

Even the twilight brought in from a dead fish by a seabird
no longer reminds him
of a stranger's cold, contemptuous eyes

1991

ELEVEN LINES

Escaping from the boredom
of the soap opera
a colorful bubble
wanders through the neighborhood
where people are in school
or at work

When it finally decides to burst
and give itself a last, loud clap
we hardly hear anything
unusual

as the world turns

EVERY TIME I SEE ...

Every time I see a little tree
budding timidly
in the spring breeze
I have an urge
to hold your thin shoulders in my arms
and squeeze

a good morning to you

THE WINTER SUN

gentle
as the moon
in silky clouds

I wonder right at this moment
how many of the manly men
who have become househusbands
after conquering the world
are in their aprons sipping coffee
watching you with a smile
from their kitchen windows

A MATTER OF FACE

a red face
so flushed with self-righteousness
eventually needs to be washed
with redder blood
of others

DIALOG OF THE BLACKBIRDS

(this winter is not cold
the blackbirds have not gone south)

they crow
so that eyes of the passersby
can be led to the bare treetops
to witness them cleaning up
the February afternoon sky
with their perky black tails

(the blackbirds have not gone south
this winter is not cold)

they crow
so that they can measure
with the sound waves
their vast monopoly
of the empty woods

SUPER BOWLS

Sunday afternoon without any ball game
most of the faces in this country
would be as dark as the TV screens

so the smart producers pull out
bombers and missiles and tanks and cannons
to light up every screen
splendid as the night sky
on the fourth of July

satellite broadcasts
electronic games of war
war of electronic games
Super Bowl
played in the desert
of the Middle East

SHADOWS

noticing the sky has raised its eyebrows
and darkened its face
the shadows stop
their singing and dancing
and vanish
without a trace

leaving the dark dirty business
to poets and fools
to expose
and explore

WAR-SIGNAL STATIONS

1
waiting patiently
for a black emergency smoke
from the buried ages
to rise

in the swirling sandstorm
the earth the sky the eyes
all are vast
and lonely

2
when the setting sun lighted the last fire
the war-signal stations darkened one after another
in the dim light of history

amid a dusky sandstorm
he saw the sudden ignition
of an evening star
sending out a warning signal
all over the universe

*Ancient Chinese system of relaying war signals by series of fires
from high stations.

NIGHT CRUISE ON LAKE MICHIGAN

Standing on top of a skyscraper
one can no doubt pick the stars with ease
yet from here it seems more likely
that the stars descend from the sky themselves
to decorate the Magnificent Mile

Shining bright in the fabulous windows
or growing pale in the darkening sky—
what a choice

Near McCormick Place the ship turns around
farther down are ghettos
pitch-dark
not much to see

DISAPPEARANCE

-- for all political prisoners in the world

it's still right there
a vacancy refuses to be filled
a bright spot lingers
in a darkened room

a green tree is blotted out from the scenery
by violent strokes of a paint brush
yet under the thickened patches of colors
the uncompromising silhouette
remains

SELF-PORTRAIT

is this me?
I asked

this is me
you answered

SHANTOU ROCKY MOUNTAIN

the rocks in this mountain
must be some sort of crop
cultivated by innovative farmers

slow yet certain
with our every ascending step
together we grow

1992

NIGHTMARE

to save myself
from falling
to the bottom
of the
deep
valley
in
the dream
world

I stoutly
wake myself
up

PANTHEON

placed in front of this building
even the most magnificent palace
becomes a mere shed

for the gods to stretch freely
they built the dome at such a height
that makes all up looking necks stiff

if it were not for the tourist guide
we probably would not have noticed
in a dark corner
Raphael's penetrating eyes
were rolling with the transparent ball

COLOSSEUM

after we were finally rid of
the little tangling hands of beggars
and entered the Colosseum
there arose a thundering cheer

the tour guide, a former university professor
told us that sending Christians
to preach in the empty stomachs of lions
were Bible stories produced by Hollywood

sure enough
in the bare underground cage
we saw only a herd of hungry cats
chasing after food
amid the cheers
of the tourists

ENTERING VENICE ON A RAINY DAY

as we stepped off our tour bus
the passionate Venice greeted us
with her embracing tender little arms

but the ladies were well prepared
they took the umbrellas out of their travelling bags

and hooked their mates
of twinkling eyes and gaping mouth
pulling them back
to their senses

CAN WE ALL GET ALONG? *

no
we can't
if we continue
to be blinded by colors
loving only our own
pallid skins

no
we can't
if our eardrums
are still muffled by biases
echoing only distorted
hollow sounds

no
we can't
if our faces remain
unpredictable as the weather ---
one minute there's laughter blooming among friends
the next minute a wintry stare freezes up
a stranger's smile

no
we can't
if we keep breeding hatred
in our narrow minds
showing fangs and brandishing claws
wild beasts are ever ready to pounce

*A line spoken by Rodney King in a press conference following the Los Angeles riots of 1992

SUNDAY AT VATICAN

It had been raining for days
but when we arrived the sun shone brightly
on St. Peter's Square

And if this is not enough
our tour guide said
the Pope is coming out soon
to pray for everybody

Just as we were marveling at the statuettes
that stood on top of the pillars lining the square
a tiny white figure appeared
at a small window so high that the sun could not reach
he waved slowly with both hands
and began his long sermon
with words that I could not find
in the pocket Italian for Tourists

I supposed he was preaching on love and world peace again
just as he used to do on television
but the sunshine was so beautiful
I felt an urge to invite him down
to join us in the sun
or just roam around
listening to the songs and laughter
of birds and children
for a wonderful Sunday

IN THE WHITE SNOW A BLACK BIRD

It is because of this bird
chin up and chest out in the cold
that last night's snow did not fall
in vain

It is this uncompromising
black dot
that induces the burst
of dazzling colors of spring
from all dull and vacant
eyes

TREVI FOUNTAIN

I saw you in Roman Holiday years ago
but you are much thinner now
today is Monday
both you and your master have a day off
the seahorses make no waves
nor the Triton and the chariot

Wishing for a happy return
I stand with my back toward you
as done in the movie
and quickly toss
three five-hundred-lira coins

Hoping they won't devalue too badly
before they hit bottom

TRIUMPHAL ARCH

all roads lead to
the business districts
of high-rise buildings and neon lights

on the stretch of a deserted road
overgrown with wild grass
I see the arch standing astride
squinting in the evening light
as if trying to recall from which side
the returning triumphant troops approached
flags covered the sky
drums shook the earth

but there is only the wind now
mischievously playing between its legs
back and forth
tirelessly back and forth

VIENNA GONDOLAS

Every boatman is lyrical
Every couple snuggling together
is romantic

Amidst the creaking sound of the long pole
The couple quickly enter the dreamland
In the shadows of storied buildings and rippling love songs

A sudden shout
Hello! Hello!
Wakes them up

It turns out that the boat has reached a bend with no traffic lights
The boatman greets the unseen incoming boat
To avoid a collision

AT THE FOOT OF BYRON'S STATUE

amidst the stream of time
here you stand
at a corner of the frozen space

unlike a political prisoner
who can only scrawl his poetry with his burning sight
on the dark walls
you possess the open sky
and underneath your fluttering coat
your youthful passion is still warm
you turn your head and stare into the distance
are you trying to remember the past
or looking beyond the future

perhaps you are just listening
to your thoughts
thump the heart of a poetry lover
like a ripe fruit pounding the ground
in the golden sun

THE LEANING TOWER OF PISA

descending from the tour bus
we knew right away
that the earth was gaining
in its wrestling match
with the sky

to help maintain the balance
we all raised our hands
in front of the lenses
strenuously trying to prop up
the tower

but the local guide shouted at us
our exertion threatened his Money Tree—
it must neither be allowed to fall
nor be straightened up

SONG OF BIRTH AND DEATH

--for a starving Somali child

he wants to blow up with his last breath
the collapsing balloons
that hang listlessly
from his mother's chest
and watch them soar
high into the sky

on this birthday of his
on this deathday of his

THE GRASSHOPPER'S WORLD

1

leaping upward
it finds plenty of room
in the world above

smothering lush green
suddenly lightens

the irrepressible joy of life
springs
up
and down
up
and down

2

leaping upward
it is pleasantly surprised
to find

the sky is still so immense
the earth is still so vast
the summer is still so green

life is still undefined

AUTUMN'S FIRST RAIN

No sooner had the last day of summer
been announced than it jumped to its feet
splashing water all over the campfires
and putting some anxious yellow leaves
in autumn's hands

looking out the window at the rain
the green apples we picked several days ago
from our friend's backyard
sit quietly on the windowsill
so quiet I can hear
the sound of sweet secretion
from their ripening bodies

LOOKING UP

looking up
looking up looking up
looking up looking up looking up

in his dream
he finally makes himself
a lofty statue
looking up at the heavens

arrogantly
with a stiff neck
he waits patiently
for a warm shower
of bird droppings

WATCHING THE OCEAN IN SAN FRANCISCO

Another wave rushed in
As I was about to ask
“Did you think of poetry in those dark days?”
it crashed on the black rocks
and retreated with a white sigh

We looked away at the bay
through the thick fog
Suddenly the sun appeared
brilliant and solemn
as if it were a miracle

But we both knew
it had been there all the time

SEA STORM

no matter how hard they beat
the glued black wings
just won't take off

"if you can't fly
then forget about flying"
always right at this moment
her words would effortlessly rise
like the nimble white wings
of the little seagulls
flapping
before the approaching storm

SONG OF THE HOMELESS

vastness belongs to the oceans
emptiness, the sky
chill, the bones
hunger, the stomach

and the bodies
stretched out or bent
faced up or down
belong to the streets
or the wilderness

AFTER THE STORM

now the sea
calm like a kind old grandfather
squints at a little seagull
flying leisurely in the sun
brushing its white wings
against the blue cheeks of the sky

so blue that no one seems to remember
why all the shouting and howling
pounding and beating

MORNING AT THE SEA

a little seagull
drawing a white thread
out of a motionless red dot

up and down to and fro
weaves the blue sky and the green sea
into a seamless splendor

DRUNK

jumping out of a wine cup
a mob of wretches dressed in black
push his head down
trying to drown him

he struggles and cries out
NO, I AM NOT
DRUNK

1993

SUNDAY AFTERNOON AT A STREET CORNER

Protruding from the centerfold
of Playboy
a nipple, round, and firm
dares the eyes
of the passersby

Busily blowing up his balloons
near the newsstand
the balloon seller knows
it'll be a blooming day
for business

AUTUMN LEAVES

Every leaf
helps
thicken
the carpet
&
soften

(
)
(
the
)
(
Fall

JADE BUDDHA TEMPLE, BANGKOK

the smoky summer day
gasping
waiting for the arrival
of the Water-Splashing Festival

yet inside the gilded temple
my heart is as cool
as the white porcelain Kwan Yin*
when I see
a little girl's devoted hands
gilding an idol
while at the same time
putting a sweet smile
on her own face

*Kwan Yin, Bodhisattva and Goddess of Mercy and Compassion

PORTRAIT

They kept enlarging
his image
until its every pore
became a great
hollow

But before it could be put into the big frame
of history
Time, the critical old man
already started the work
of reduction
step by step
as he walked backward
squinting at it from a distance

CROATIAN FUNERAL

uninvited mourners
the Serbian shells
wail
from funeral
to funeral

death
after
death

A POST-IT NOTE

I've put some
poems
in the icebox

They'll be cold
and sweet
when you get home

AN ORIOLE

don't bother me
I am feeling a bit down
on the branch an oriole
murmurs in a low voice

without so much as a sideways glance
at the sky's
ever gloomier face

LAST LIFE

roaming somewhere in the universe
a clang from an anvil
or a hollow resonance from the woods
is yet to reach me
otherwise I might be able to tell you
in my last life
I was a blacksmith
or a woodpecker

a painter, or a flower
if only I could recall
the face of an evening sky
still wet on canvas
or a brilliant dewdrop
precariously rolling
and rolling

a trace of cloud
a whiff of air ...

MIDWEST FLOODS

Ground Control to
Shuttle Colombia

Backyard flooded
return immediately

A TREE

after struggling with the thunderstorm all afternoon
alone
losing many leaves and suffering several broken limbs
the young tree finds itself still
standing erect

calm and serene
it declares
I am now grown up

then it melts into the woods
and becomes
part of the scenery

HOPSCOTCH

-- for a girl in a Chicago neighborhood

Standing in the way
of a bullet's joy flight
another little girl fell
on a blood-stained pavement

A triumphant smile
crossed her twisted face
as she finally managed
to plant both feet
neatly
in the chalked squares

MENARCHE

--for a girl in a Chicago ghetto

Stumbling on a bumpy sidewalk
a little girl was hit by a stray bullet

Blood gushed from her immature body
Her stiffening mouth had yet to ask girlish questions
of her wailing mother

A WINTER STORY

Bitter cold
no flames of war
can warm

Shielding an old man
from the streaming bullets
the dying tree
watches with pity
a dying man
chop down
one of its blackened limbs
stagger
and drag it
into another dark ash night

1994

PARADISE LOST

-- Journey to the Bahamas

every corner
bright and transparent
nowhere to hide

(no wonder men saw
their own shyness
in the Garden of Eden)

the water so green
the cloud so white
the sky so blue

BAHAMAS

water so green
clouds so white
sky so blue

no rambling tour guides
no scattered ruins

here
every blade of grass
every blooming flower
every towering tree
is original
and pure

here
everything is beautiful and attractive
everywhere is bright and transparent
there's no place to hide

A STAR-STUDDED WORLD

Soap operas
of real people and real events
every day
from every corner of the earth
fight ferociously
for a bloody
Hollywood
shot

THE ELUSIVE VACATION

at the poolside far from the big waves
people try to sunbathe away
their long-accumulated pallidness
on a row of reclining chairs

yet the pre-booked sun
refuses to show its face

when a gust of cold wind blows
people hurriedly pull up their blankets
some even put on their newly acquired T-shirts
with the brightly printed word
BAHAMA

MOVING THE OCEAN

again and again
with her toy bucket
the little girl scoops up water from one ocean
and pours into another
that her mother created just for her
where even the strongest storm
can stir up no waves

on the gray beach
the young mother discovers
the azure light shining from the little eyes
reflected from her ocean
is brightening up the sky
second by second

KISSING

It makes no difference
your lips kissing my lips
or my lips kissing yours

What is important
is that we still have something to say
to each other
and try to say it
well

PILLOW TALK

spiraling down the ear canal
an age-old dream
splashes onto the sleepy lake of the mind
rippling gently
one ring
after another
into the boundless
sweet sweet darkness

GROWING PAINS

The branches stretch upward
trying hard to touch the bright sky
while the roots
yearning for warmth, moisture, and darkness
reach for the deep soil

After a sharp pain of growing
the tree relaxes
as the boy underneath
agonizing over the weighty question
of his being
now laughs and walks away
taller

FASHION

Whirling through the revolving door
she finds the fashion she just bought
already out of style

From mini to midi to maxi and back again
every year she adjusts her legs
as if they were a tripod, or
should we say, bipod

And she can never understand
how a dress shrinks and loses its shape
once it leaves
the model on display

AN IDLE BUGLE

Holding its breath
a bugle stands in the shadow
of history
patiently waits
for the approach
of a pair of fiery lips

Triumphantly it will rise
to call up
the hunters and hounds
who will set out before dawn
shouting and barking
for a game
of rabbits
or
humans

TRADE

Buying

unwrapping
the package
layer
after
layer

he finds
he has bought himself
a life
of
emptiness

Selling

he dives
into the sea
of money

when he finds
he can't sell himself
dry
on land

ABORTIVE GESTURES

-- an abortion doctor was murdered in Florida

A man swings his sign
Shakes his fists
Raises his gun
Aims
And fires

These
He claims
Are the unborn gestures
Of a fetus

MOSQUITO THOUGHTS

buzzing
 in a sweltering
evening marsh
 a swarm of mosquitoes
vexed and unsettled
 waits
for a cool swoosh
 from a toad

ASCENDING THE YELLOW CRANE TOWER

the sky
is covered with dark clouds
trying to show
its vastness

as far as my eyes can see
there are ever-growing lines of cars
Like a group of headless and tailless dragons
crawling onto the crossing bridge
while on the shore
two cranes are ambitiously
trying to retrieve
a lost legend
from the Yangtse River
its water is even more turbid
than the Yellow River

Please come back
O yellow cranes

viewing from a height
a wide-angle lens
keeps stretching
and shortening
I don't know what it's trying
to capture

AT THE PAVILION WHERE LI PO LAID DOWN HIS PEN

I don't believe he laid down his pen
just to show his humility

there must be more
sober reasons

like, leaving space
for some ambitious future poets
to scribble on

** Li Po, who was seldom seen sober in public, once mounted the pavilion on the shore of Yellow River in Wuhan, China. As he was about to write a poem on the wall for the occasion, he saw a poem written by Cui Hao, a contemporary poet. He was so intimidated by the superb poem, it's said that he laid down his pen with a sigh.*

SPRING

no good no good no good
shaking violently his head
the artist erases and whitens his canvas
for a fresh start

tender green
is only a test stroke

ON MOUNT HUANGSHAN

a thick fog moves in
erasing the scenery
on its way

suddenly we find ourselves lost
not knowing where we stand—
above the clouds
or below

THE ROCK PERCHED ON MOUNT HUANGSHAN

the pines
cling tightly to its back
not sure when the *Flying Stone* will rise up
and take off

kowning
it came here
only for a rest

A BOUNDLESS GREEN DREAM

-- at the Yangtse Gorges

One after another
soaring mountain peaks parade before our eyes
hypnotizing us
soon we all slip into a deep green sleep
no birds flying
no monkeys crying

Millions of years must have passed
when chimney smoke
rising from the mountainside
awakens us
with an earthy touch

ANCIENT PLANK ROAD

the gibbons swinging on treetops
can only watch from a distance
and utter an occasional cry toward the sky

it was a shortcut ascending to heaven
built especially for the gods
who had not yet cultivated wings

WEST LAKE IN HANGZHOU, CHINA

right before leaving for a morning walk
my wife asked
should I dressup?

I said no no
we are going to visit West Lake
the unadorned beauty

walking hand-in-hand
from the Broken Bridge onto the White Dike
I knew I was right
when I happened to turn my head
and caught a glimpse of a bright smile
on her face

PORTERS ON MOUNT HUANGSHAN

Every step
makes the whole mountain shake
and tilt

We turn sideways at the edge
of the steep stone steps
to let their heavy burden
and panting breath
press by
then listen to their bent legs
rattle on

coolie
clog

coolie
clog

coolie
clog ...

WATCHING THE SUNRISE ON MOUNT HUANGSHAN

we heard a pop
and a mature pimple
burst
right from the sleepy face
of the sky

we all cried out with joy
when we saw in each other's eyes
the laughable youth of the universe
face flushed
at a loss of what to do

TWO INTERTWINING PINES

-- On Mount Huangshan

thousands of days of mutual respect
erect this scaling ladder of love
let those who want to enter
the freedom to climb up
those who want to leave
the freedom to go down

*In his novel *A Besieged City*, Mr. Qian Zhongshu referred to marriage as a besieged city, saying those who are without want to rush in, while those within want to get out.

THE LINGERING GARDEN IN SUZHOU

this potted landscape
mostly was built
for women
young and old
who had never stepped out of the garden

beside the shiny stone path polished
by embroidered shoes
I saw tortured pines
totter on the toes of wire-bound feet
peering
at the outside world

CONFUCIUS TEMPLE IN NANJING

*Having learned the WAY in the morning,
it's quite all right to DIE that very evening.*

-- Confucius

Inside the dim temple
the starving Confucius says
Having learned the WAY in the morning
it's quite all right to DINE that very evening

Outside the temple
lights hanging over the eatery stalls
glitter with splendor
Crowds attracted by the aroma of food
pour in like ants

* Several years ago we toured the city of Nanjing in China. One of the tourist attractions was the nightly food market in front of the Confucius Temple. This poem was written right after our visit to the market, with a quote from one of the Confucius sayings.

1995

SUPPORTING CASTS

Almost as real and exciting
as the hot-pursuit scenes
from a police story
the stairs
racing against the elevators
wind themselves
down with all sorts of commotion and empty
echoes

BIRD * BIRDCAGE * SKY

open the door
of the birdcage
let the bird fly freely
out
and
in

the cage
thus becomes
the sky

MASQUERADE

Walking in the streets
he suddenly realizes
last night's masquerade
is still going on

Everywhere he turns
he sees a mask
fastened to a face
like a second skin

THE CAGED CANARY

no clammy walls to carve
the canary
can only scatter his musical notes
to the wind
hoping it will carry them
to the sky

VIEWING THE JADE BITTER GOURD

-- At The Palace Museum In Taipei

Despite their sweet aftertaste
my wife refuses to include bitter gourds
in her menu

Standing in front of the glass case
I watch my favorite delicacy
simmer in the slow flames of time
while the tip of my tongue
goes skinny-dip
in the saliva
of memory

APRIL FOOLS' DAY

April arrived
with a message on my desk
"Call Mr. Lyon—
Urgent !!!"

I dialed the number
"Sorry Mr. Lion can't come to the phone right now
He is in the CAGE!"

Before I could put down my phone
her irrepressible laugh jumped out of the line
and bit off my ear, splashing blood
all over my face

It then attacked my innocent officemate
I stood by helplessly and watched him
roll about and eventually die
of laughter

SPRING'S FIRST DANDELION

It most likely was blown here
last fall, from some faraway place
an immigrant of a sort
yet it now produces
the year's first surprise

After a long winter
from the earth
that embraces all and nurtures all
a yellow flower emerges
and thus begins
a new spring

HIGH NOON

Breaking the stalemate
a falcon shoots up
from the dense woods
like a bullet
then turns around
and dashes toward the earth
facing its own shadow
darker
and darker

SHADOW OF A VOID

The sky becomes dizzy
watching
a circling falcon
train its beak
upon a trembling rabbit

A sharp cry flashes
and is gone
only the shadow of a void remains
dazzling
like a bloody new wound

LOVE STORY

on a desolate island
a turtle
is making love
to a rock

on a head
grey hair
is making love
to time

on a sheet of paper
a pen
is making love
to an ever-expanding
blank

*According to a news report, a turtle unable to find its kind on an isolated island, took a rock as its mate.

CANADIAN ROCKIES

Those unafraid of the cold
please step up

Immediately
the whole valley fills with pines
standing tall and erect

ON THE COLUMBIA ICEFIELD

in awe
facing the frozen
time

still
there are some adventurous feet
walking unsteadily toward the brink
of a hole marked with red flags
try to measure the depth
of the origin

LAKE LOUISE

so delicate
so vulnerable
in a chamber
deep in the high mountains

alone

there's got to be a sign
guarding
this little girl
of God

NO DINOSAURS ALLOWED
NO NOISY TOURISTS ALLOWED

TYRRELL MUSEUM'S DINOSAUR HALL

at the homeland of the dinosaur
pieces of fossils large and small
are used to form a backdrop
to capture
the starry eyes

raising their necks howling running chasing
such an earth-shaking scene
is definitely beyond the scope
of Hollywood's biggest screen

CANADIAN ROCKY MOUNTAINS

Nothing can cling
to their towering
solitude
except the purest snow

Summer
is the cruelest season
baring deep wrinkles
on their foreheads

ATHABASCA FALLS

maybe
this is the only way
to deafen
the arrogant
ears
and pound straight
to the
heart

CANADIAN RAPIDS

every laughter
 is bright
every song
is jubilant
every mouth
is calling
come on! come on!

at the approach of a rubber raft
all hands rush up with a shout
splashing water seizing the oars
and turning the world upside down
with one vortex after another
swirling and tearing the hearts on the raft
into pieces
no way to tell
which way is north east west or south

right at the moment of the soaking screams
are about to be drowned
they hold the raft steady
and with an easy push all is back to normal
while setting up
another smiling trap
as if nothing has happened

DEER X-ING

You can call me
a jaywalker if you like
but I must get to the other side
of your road
that divides our woods

When your overspeed rams
into my underestimate
you passionately kiss my bones
with your bumper
and I, in return, wash
your windshield
with my blood

Then you step on your gas
and are gone
while I gather all my might
for a final leap, trying in vain
to admire
for the last time, the brilliance
of the yellow sign

SILENCE

When poetic language
is used to ignite
hatred
and bombs
it's time to abandon
words
syllables
and sounds

To this absurd world
they really have nothing to say
anyway

*Many children born and raised in warring Bosnia were so
traumatized that they lost the ability to speak. Ironically,
one of the Serbian leaders was said to be a poet.

ECLIPSE

Young at heart
the old sun
once in a while
likes to put on
his mischievous black mask
just to scare
the superstitious jittery
shadows

He doesn't know
we now keep shadows
safely in a world of virtual reality
where we eat and drink
make love
all without benefit
from a single ray
of sunlight

THE WEEPING VIRGIN STATUES

held up
for nearly 2000 years
a mother's tears
are finally rolling down

Standing in the wind
with heads bowed
people wait
for another miracle
a mother's wail
to arrive

IN THE NAME OF ...

they must have convinced themselves
that God, or Allah, or Buddha, or ...
is dead

otherwise
how dare they point to
Him
for all of their devilish work

TAKING HIS POEM TO A FASHION STORE

Frowning and pouting
she declares
that she can't stand any longer
the rags he made for her
with his beat-up old typewriter
she wants to go
to a fashion store

Reluctantly he takes her to his new computer
and watches her try on
several fonts of various sizes
when he sees his little girl suddenly change
into a pretty woman
he cradles her in his arm
and breaks down crying

SIZE 12!

—Ode to Larry Turner

we shouted almost at the same time
as if we were all fashion experts
while he just sat there and smiled
looking proudly
at his youngest daughter
the poem he conceived and delivered last night
with the aid
of his new computer and laser printer

1996

LEAP SECOND

Witnessing mother earth
stagger away at her advanced age
you stretch your farewell song
to the limit of your breath
and watch a man who is dead broke
laughing and crying
clutch in his hands
the windfall
of a long----- long-----
second

** With the earth now rotating more slowly, the Central Bureau of the International Earth Rotation Service in Paris will add an extra "leap second" to the end of 1995.—Reuters, Dec. 18, 1995*

SOCIAL EVENT

From the sterile suburban life
to the drastic climate changes
they try desperately to find excuses
for a loud
burp

and he the originator
just stands there
nodding and smiling
as if nothing happened

IT, TOO, IS A PERFORMANCE

on the grey field of snow
a barren tree
in a stiff, awkward posture
motionlessly stands there

no decoration of leaves or fruits
no accompaniment of cicadas or birds
no scenic setting of white clouds or blue sky
it appears on the darkened obscure stage alone
waiting for Godot

as the only audience
I applaud wildly for the austere performance
and promise myself not to leave
before the curtains fall completely
and all the lights are turned off

NIGHT OF SHANGHAI

with its gigantic mouth wide open
it swallows up truckloads
upon truckloads
of steel, cement and sand

turning over and over
every sleepless heart
is busily pounding
trying hard to build a dream
more beautiful and colossal
than this city

COMET HYAKUTAKE

a cosmic exercise
of missile firing

warning the earth
not to go astray

GHOST STORY

1

The candle flickers near the end of the story
shadows on the walls stretch then shrink
swaying right, left, back and forth
Together we move closer to each other
as the windows creak behind us
(are the ghosts too
moved by their own sad stories?)

Suddenly I am startled
by the touch of something...
a cold little hand

2

I am told
that even the most timid listener
has survived

WINTER ANDANTE

In order to warm the eyes
white snow gently embraces
the naked trees and the fields

Distant mountains tremble softly
herds of deer with thickened hide
move slowly
in the vast empty woods

In the evening wind
the toll of a bell
quietly lights up the twinkling stars
adorning the sky
a solemn cathedral

AT THE CONCERT AFTER A LONG WINTER

from the stage behind the curtains
occasionally light leaks out
with the shuffling sound of feet and chairs

impatiently the audience waits
for the master musician to sit down
pick up his instrument
caress it with eyes and fingers
finally take a deep breath
and blow away
his first note
that sets the tone
for spring

SPARROWS

In this bright early-spring morning
there is really nothing you can do
to those noisy little rascals
no use to yell at them
for they all know too well
that behind old grandfather's stern face
an insuppressible smile is on the rise
about to overflow
and you can forget about your childhood trick
all the time they just stay in the sun
chasing rolling necking biting
going from rooftop to treetop
down to the not-yet-green grass
and will not go near
the traps of shadows
that you set up at the corners
of your eyes

NAME-DROPPER

From his pocket he took out
a whole bunch of big names
and threw them up in the air
to crown himself

He was shocked
to find the old friendly names
come down really hard
and hammer him
into a midget

RETIREMENT

1

At last
he can call
the clouds the birds the squirrels the flowers the trees
and millions of other things
by their first name
as now he too
is qualified for membership
in ANRB—
the Association of Never-Retired Beings

2

With a vacant step
he is surprised to find
under his feet
the exercise wheel in the cage
has turned
into a firm level ground
where children after school
cheerfully scatter
to find their respective
life adventure

DAYBREAK

outside my window
little birds are striking flints
here and there
trying to light up the sky
gradually

yet the impatient woodpecker
keeps pecking pecking pecking
trying so hard to pierce through
the dark dome of the sky
to let light in

BORN TO SMILE

In front of Life's big mirror
she has been practicing
for eight long years

just to show us
how to make
a hearty
smile

*for Chelsey Thomas who was born unable to smile but after several operations, she was able to smile for the first time at her 8th birthday party.

ODE TO AN ANCIENT CHINESE COIN

--a rare gift from a friend in Mississippi

sweaty transactions
fishy transactions
oily transactions
from hand to hand
pocket to pocket
how much food and clothing have you provided
how many youths have you consumed
how many lots have you drawn
how many fortunes and misfortunes have you foretold

rolling from the rusty-green Song Dynasty in China
passing through hot and humid Mississippi
you finally land in the Windy City
completing a priceless deal
that involves neither selling
nor buying

FIREFLIES

based on their laborious studies
scientists have predicted
this summer we won't see
many, if any at all
fireflies

some viruses must have again infected
their computers
for in my backyard tonight
flickering here and there
fireflies are everywhere

in view of the equally wavering
scientific results
the question is no longer
to drink or not to drink
another cup of coffee
rather it's which lighted path
I should take
that will lead me
to the lost treasure
of an enchanted childhood

WHERE DOES DARKNESS LIVE

through an early
window
light rushes in

just in time
to silence the little mouth
that full of questions

GLACIER POINT

in the dizzy shadow of the Half Dome
a lone eagle
stricken with acrophobia
is circling lower
and lower
toward the bottom
of the valley

clutching at the black iron railing
a young man suddenly
sticks his head out
amid the voiceless cries
of terrified bystanders
and spits something whitish
at the dark green-yellow valley
below
just to reassure himself

YOSEMITE FALLS UNDER A DRY SPELL

decorating the scenery
a wisp of white hair
from the head of a sage
is blown right
and left
by the wind

even my electronic lens
can't catch
its focus

MIRROR LAKE, YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

The mirror
dry and ragged
is made of stones

reflecting
the protruding face
of the sky

GIANT SEQUOIAS

before stepping forward
these mighty feet from heaven
must wait

for the wobbling earth
to regain
its balance

SKY BURIAL

1
At the Tibetan sky-burial site
the starting point
of reincarnation
they let his body soar
with his soul
piece by piece
to heaven

For the sake of the hooked beaks
of the circling vultures
which they believe to be
the Emissary of Death
they feverishly crush his stubborn skull
with a hammer
lest it should miss its last chance
and fall
into the everlasting deep

2

Huffing and puffing
they carried the corpse
of a poem
onto the sky-burial site
Without the touch of an ax or a knife
it fell to pieces by itself

Embalmed with aromatic oil
they tossed high into the sky
words and phrases
that were once beautiful and in good rhyme
hoping the Emissary of Death
would catch and take them
to heaven

Without even casting a glance
the vultures with their wings folded
just perched on the dead branches nearby
They had been taken in too many times
by such tasteless stuff
devoid of flesh and blood

*Sky burial is a Tibetan custom. During the ceremony, a corpse is cut into pieces and fed to the circling vultures. They believe the vultures will carry the spirit of the dead to heaven.

THANKSGIVING

roasting
turkeys--
thanksgiving

not roasting--
turkeys'
thanksgiving

SKY BURIAL OF A POEM

Huffing and puffing
they carried the corpse
of a poem
onto the sky-burial site
Without any touch of an ax or a knife
it fell to pieces by itself

Embalmed with aromatic oil
they tossed high into the sky
words and phrases
that were once beautiful and in good rhyme
hoping the Emissary of Death
would catch and take them
to heaven

Without even casting a glance
the vultures with their wings folded
just perched on the dead branches nearby
They had been taken in too many times
by such tasteless stuff
devoid of flesh and blood

*Sky burial is a Tibetan custom of disposing a corpse by cutting it into pieces which are then scattered for the circling vultures.

AT THE SUPERMARKET

the chickens are packed
in plain nakedness
the temperature is adjusted
to hide
their blushing

ODE TO MY WORLDLY SELF

O worldly self, my identical twin,
you, engaging me in a constant tug-of-war,
are trying everything to win.

You tell me I am at the wrong door
as I arrive home after a long journey.
When I say enough; you say more more.

To you my hat is old-fashioned and uncanny;
you laugh at my best friend,
saying he is a mere pauper.

Material wealth and instant fame are your life's end.
Poetry is for the birds, you claim,
there are more profitable things to be penned.

Well old pal, though we share the same surname,
I must say, your mind is fitted with a different frame.

CHRISTMAS EVE

a peaceful night

the gasping earth prays
for
a peaceful night

PILLS

she became dizzy as her head swirled
with the yellow pills on her sweaty palm
and could not decide
whether to swallow them
or be swallowed by them

in fact she wondered if they were
the pills prescribed by her unfeeling doctor
or, in her desperation, the stars she grasped
from the sky last night

last night she kept telling her doctor
what she needed was love
not pills
but he just stood there with a cunning smile
take these, he said, you'll feel better
in the morning

in the morning the room grew even darker
and emptier, she could hear
echoes of her own heartbeats
or, were they heartbeats of the room
banging her head with all its walls

scattering in the night sky
the yellow pills swirled
faster and faster
like shooting stars

TO COOK OR NOT TO COOK

-- a reverie on Thanksgiving Eve

To cook or not to cook
that is not the question
rather, the question is
are the bulging bellies, even before stuffing
about to burst?
are the lips that should utter thanksgiving
bemoaning instead the plateful
of calories and cholesterol?

To cook or not to cook
that is not the question
the question is
why all the anointed, plump turkeys
flock, like migrating birds,
to decorate joyful feasts?

For the hungry mouths
in the dark, barren rooms
to eat or not to eat
that is the question

TICKLE ME ELMO*

on this silent night
it's no laughing matter
for ticklish Elmo
to be snatched out
of the gift-wrapped box
and to endure
endless torture
from the touching
little hands

*A popular toy for Christmas, 1996.

INSTALLATION ART

--for a visitor to Chicago on a snowy day

such a gigantic undertaking
needless to say is far beyond
the capability of an artist
like me

the snow on the grass
must be thick and soft and pure
tempting your innocent feet
to tread to sink to burst out laughing
the sun should make the icicles sparkle
in your dreaming eyes
and the breeze caressing your face
has to ripple your memory pond

on the top of Sears Tower
everything far and near
must be clear
the distant purple haze should not be
a blush of pollution but the flushed air
of this bustling city of steel

the floating ice on Lake Michigan needs to support
a flock of sun-bathing gulls
the tropical fish in the aquarium
should weave a colorful fairy tale
just for you

and of course
this masterful installation art
must be dismantled
right after you leave

1997

OUTSIDE THE WINDOW

snow falls quietly

I don't expect
any birds to appear
in this weather

but there's the shadow of a bird
flashing by
pulling my sight
to a familiar
yet strange field afar
where
birds are singing
and clamoring
in the celebration
of a long-awaited
new birth

snow
falls quietly
outside my window

CLONE FUNERAL SONG

With the same
clonal expression
a group of clones
solemnly gather
to witness the burial
of their original
died of exhaustion

CLONE LOVE SONG

I
love
you

I
love love
you you you you

I
love love love love
you you you you you you you...

Would you please slow down a bit

A POLITICALLY CORRECT CLONE SONG

Ambitious politicians
will mass reproduce themselves
to gather votes

And once in power
they will without doubt eliminate
their blood replicas
knowing full well
that they are every cell
as power-hungry
as themselves

NEWS HAIKU

New housing project
Bricks and stones flying
East Jerusalem

Surfing the web
Of the spider—
America Offline

Black is beautiful
White is beautiful
Where is this Bridgeport?

A golf foursome
Is all O.J. seeking
Triple alibi

Scattered outside the Heaven's Gate
Thirty-nine lifeless bodies
Waiting for the arrival of the ambulance

* Recently, a columnist of the Chicago Tribune advocated imitating Japan's Asahi Shimbun to write the editorials with haiku. Our poetry workshop therefore used it as the designated topic of this month.

1. Israel built new houses in East Jerusalem, triggering days of violent protests by Palestinians.
2. America Online changed the charging standard for unlimited use at the beginning of the year, and caused large-scale network chaos and user dissatisfaction.
3. At the Bridgeport in the white neighborhood of Chicago, a black teenager riding a bicycle was beaten up by three white youths. He was seriously injured and unconscious for many days.
4. Because of his murdering charge, O.J. Simpson, a football star, was kicked out of a private golf club.
5. Thirty-nine members of the Heaven Gate Sect committed suicide in California, saying they wanted to separate their souls from their bodies, so that they could take a flying saucer following the comet Hale-Bopp to heaven.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY! SPRING

— for a friend whose birthday coincides with the first day of spring

wide-awake with excitement at midnight
she recounts over the phone
the candles with flickering green flames
that surround all the lakes and ponds of the world

I remind her
not to forget the best wishes
that light up one after another
in my joyous heart

EYES

*Lovers' eyes:
black and beautiful.*

*November,
Leo's meteor shower.*

-- Lovers' Eyes by Ji Xian

last night he wrote on a blank sheet
of paper a big title:
EYES

her eyes
reminded him of those charming eyes
that infatuated so many fair-complexioned young scholars
in bizarre ancient ghost stories

several centuries had since passed
and those enchanting eyes
that should have something to say to him
now just stared at him in a stupor
on the blank sheet

this morning as he was reading
the *Collected Best Poems of Ji Xian*
it suddenly dawned on him
that those lovers' eyes
black and beautiful
must have all been gathered
like shells on the beach
by the beauty-loving early-rising poet who lives near the ocean

after passionate and extensive studies
the poet obtained a patent on the writing of eyes
with a poem of nine words
and six punctuation marks

SPRING SNOW

I know you love to dream

Standing in front of my window
I watch the snow
swirling in your dream
a sweet smile rippling
around your mouth

How I'd love to place an overseas call
raise the receiver toward the sky
and let you listen in your dream
to the sound of the snow
wafting and drifting

A DREAMLESS NIGHT

From every angle
I tried to capture your bright smiles
for a colorful dream

Overexposed
the images overlapped
and I had a sweet dark sleep
till dawn

HOMESICKNESS

suffering from homesickness
he returns to his homeland
returning to his homeland
he suffers from homesickness

there's nothing he can do about it
there's nothing he can do about it

AEGEAN SEA

to make Helen's reflection more brilliant
men coated the bottom
of this gigantic mirror
with their own blood

this year's hot season has barely begun
already there are pallid limbs and bellies
scattering on the beach
like drowned men

TEMPLE

Only after its wooden roof has rotted
and collapsed
allowing the marble pillars to emerge
and prop up the sky
is the temple formally
complete

THE TEMPLE OF APOLLO

every marble column stands erect
reaching to heaven

day after day tourists
gather in front of the temple
to hear young guides
give the oracle

A MIDSUMMER DAY'S DREAM

He holds her laziness in his hand
and plays with it for a long time
as if he is holding his favorite cat on his knee
stroking her silky fur

From a shadow in the glaring sun
suddenly words leap out
In the dark all cats are grey
which blind and hurt his eyes

He feels a pause
under his stroking hand
He then watches her take a long stretch
and with her half-closed eyes full of languor
her mouth slowly opens and is about to yawn
yet with the speed of a grey flash
she snatches at him and holds him in her mouth
like a rat

* In his "Old Mistress Apologue," Franklin advises a friend to take an old mistress, saying, as in the dark all cats are grey, it is impossible of two women to know an old from a young one.

THE GREAT SUSPENDERS SUSPENSE

the whole world
depends on
it

will it
will it snap
and let fall the curtain
exposing
(Bravo! Bravo!)
unrehearsed
mime

MY UNBORN TWIN

in front of a crowd
I point my finger at him
and declare
HE DID IT!

a roar of laughter wakens me
from my dream
I open my eyes
and find myself
standing there
naked

somehow he has switched places with me
and is now returning to the warmth
of our mother's womb
with a cunning smile and the announcement
I HEREBY MAKE YOU WHOLE!
he bends my pointing hand
to make a self-accusation

THE MOONLESS MOON FESTIVAL

How do I know, tonight
above the heavy layers of dark clouds
the moon is a round ball, not a flat pancake
or a square or triangular block
or some formless mass
And how can I be sure
that there is only one moon
not a cluster
of man-made satellites

And of course in today's digital world
I can't rule out the possibility
of the old moon being now
a virtual image

Yet I know in my heart
that thousands of miles away
your gaze, penetrating the thick clouds
has filled the virtual image
with a pure brilliance
guiding my eyes
to the true moon

COSMIC JOURNEY

-- In memory of a poet friend

in the dark sky
a beautiful arc of light

a meteor!
we hail
we sigh

without glancing back
the bold poet just proceeds in his poetic voyage--

riding great wind and breaking huge waves
across the ocean of the universe
O what joy! O what joy!

THE ARTIST

in this postmodern time
of deconstructed sky and earth
he still employs the traditional technique
pouring red and yellow
over mountains and plains
to become a modern painting of autumn
brilliant, harmonious and full of meaning
astonishing us
one more time

METEOR

throw a shiny stone
at the dark universe

millions of light years later
someone might hear
a clang
when it hits bottom

SONG OF WAR HORSES

The war is yours
yet we are spurred to the battlefield
while sweat and blood are ours
the medals
are pinned on your chests

Death is fair to all
without distinction of breed
still you use our hides
to wrap the corpses
of your unfulfilled ambitions

A DARK HORSE

Not a single hair
is unbecoming
No particle of dust
clings to its polished eyes

If not for the glistening nose
and the rousing mane
you probably cannot tell
that it has just run all the way
from the depth
of a midnight dream

1998

EL NINO

Even God is weary
of the day-after-day
repetitions
and becomes a deconstructive
postmodernist

With a casual stir
the cradle
secure and stable
immediately goes
topsy-turvy

THE MORNING WEB

Every thread
flashes
the message of life
beautifully simple

while a fly
tries desperately
to decode
online

WHITE HOUSE SEX SCANDAL

R-rated soap opera

flush with shame
we are the audience
we are the supporting cast

THE CHINESE ZODIAC

for these animals who have experienced
so many cycles of transmigrations
it has become an undeniable right
to take turn ruling for a year

even the lion who is out of the system
every year joyously leads the way
clenching in his mouth
the traditional sweetening red envelope

VERTICALLY CHALLENGED

knowing it's impossible
he still joyfully raises his hand
and reaches for the stars

this is the only posture
that does not require him to stand
on tiptoe

* In the eyes of the stars, there is no difference
between 5' and 7' on the ground.

UNTITLED

there's flicker of salts
on the other side
of the bloodshot sea

someone is calling
in a sandblasting night
for someone else
with electric pulses
or the flutter of a heart

though he is sure
that the orchard he entered
is ownerless
he hesitates in raising his hand
lest he should pain the naked breasts
that hang heavily down

ALASKA ICEBERG

Half floating half sinking
the joyous shouts during their escape
can still be heard
on one side
the frozen imprisonment
on the other
the freedom
of boundless ocean and sky

In a morning of rain and shine
I watch you half floating half sinking
melt drop by drop
into the ocean

FOUR SEASONS #2

SPRING

Such commotion
it can only be
first love

I don't recall ever seeing
so fresh a green

SUMMER

To say that your smile
lights up the whole garden
is of course an exaggeration

but I did indeed see
a flower blooming
at your approach

AUTUMN

Harvest season
not all flowers
need to bear
fruit

after thinking the matter over
the apple gracefully let itself
go

bang
it landed right on the head
of Mr. Newton
dozing under the tree

WINTER

If not for the night's snow
how are the venturous feet to find
knee-deep shouts and laughter

or to look beyond
the vast white

GRAVITY

after thinking the matter over
the apple gracefully let itself
go

bang
it landed right on the head
of Mr. Newton
dozing under the tree

EYES

when did your eyes
hide themselves amid the stars
fading away together
at dawn

then suddenly burst into flames
in the darkened eye socket
and become the sun

A DRY QUIESCENT AFTERNOON

When the wind comes
it brings hearsay of the rain
and when the rain comes
it brings hearsay of the wind

And when you don't come
in this dry quiescent afternoon
I sit here and fabricate
all the hearsays
for the wind
and the rain

SCENT

A short while ago
thousands of miles away
you were standing in the wind
facing me

Such a keen sense
God bestows upon all animals
hungry
in cold dark nights

HEART

reality is not necessarily reliable
or even real

for instance
reports from the wind and the rain
all say that it's grey and grave
this morning

but on the clear sky of my heart
your never-setting warm smile
shines brilliantly

THE GAME OF BLOCKS

It was right here
on this ruin of hearts
they built with their own hands
using sturdy colorful blocks
a magnificent lofty temple

As to what happened later
whether it was carelessly pushed over
by a bored hand
or one of the blocks
was so eroded by the elements
that it crumbled under its weight...
since it was such a long time ago
nobody could really tell

THE GLACIER RIVER

all the passion
and color
were swallowed up and buried deep
only a hint of blue
waving there feebly
asking for help

but we can't even help ourselves
a cry of fear
barely escaped
from an open mouth
it had already frozen
into a transparent nightmare

the sluggish sound of ship engines
like an ancient failing heart
thump, thump, thump
finally returned to
silence

a large cradle
rocking toward
the primitive dream of billions of years

a piece of escaped ice
on the water surface
half floating half sinking

A STREET PERFORMANCE

In a storm of indignation
he began his performance
but seeing the audience was unmoved
he raised his voice, sharper and sharper
and finally reached the climax
where he seemed to engage in an endless quarrel
with himself

When at last he finished his finale
he was prepared to sing an aria as an encore
but the crowd, shaking their heads as they walked away
did not give him any chance to open his mouth again
while the little girl who was the cause of the whole event
just stood there with bowed head, like an innocent stone

AUTUMN LEAVES

Their first journey
quite possibly their last
of course it must be
high and far
with chilling speed
and grace

on branches
the leaves patiently
wait
for a gust of wind

THE FLAG AND THE WIND

No one knows more
about the art of flattering
than the wind
whichever direction
the flag desires
the wind is always ready
to oblige

under the bright sun
they conspire hand in hand
to occupy the entire sky

when the flag is vague and vacillates
the wind whirls around huffing and puffing
and whenever there is a depression
the wind is always the first to abscond
leaving the downcast flag
to the rain

HORSE RACING IN MACAO

Before making a bet
we all went down to the paddock
to see the horses carrying their numbers
and the feather-like jockeys on their backs

Neighing, stamping, steaming
the horses were led to walk in a circle
to show off their glittering skin
and twitching muscles

For some sentimental reason you picked
number 8 the white horse
while I favored the grey number 4
under the dim light
I believed I saw a mysterious gleam in its eyes
and an almost imperceptible nod of approval
of the biggest bet I'd ever made
in my life

CARRYING NO MAP I TRAVEL

In this land of beautiful scenery
there's no starting point
nor ending point

Hills, lakes, gentle slopes, unfathomable valleys
all try to lure my adventurous soul
into a perplexing maze

Under the tender strokes of hands
and exploring gaze
the water in the springs
the lava in the volcanoes
all rush to the surface in response
Come! Come!
Everywhere gates open with greeting arms

And to make sure I won't lose my way
you open yourself up like a roadmap
on the path of my life

A MOSQUITO'S ODE TO A TOAD

With a soft moist tongue
you set up a sensuous trap
waiting for careless little me
to drop in

and be shocked
at the discovery
that I am such
a tasty prey

THE MATTER OF GREEN ONIONS

A whole ten cents to buy green onions for the New Year
look here everybody, this lady has given me
A WHOPPER TEN CENTS
for green onions

the vegetable vendor half-jokingly flashed
the coin she gave him
and pronounced repeatedly the biggest event of the year

I could not help laughing heartily
as the green onions she wanted for her fish dish
were inflated to spice up
a dull marketplace afternoon

*a scene at a marketplace in Zhuhai, China

THE FOUR-FACED BUDDHA IN MACAO

After she put together her palms
and offered a silent prayer on each side
she smiled at him shaking her head
secrets of heaven can't be revealed
but he can tell from the duration and her facial expression
she has made four different wishes

Secretly he feels complacent
knowing the silent prayers he made on all sides
would have a fourfold chance of being fulfilled --

Wishing her a boundless happiness
Wishing her a boundless happiness
Wishing her a boundless happiness
Wishing her a boundless happiness

A FALLEN GODDESS

He could not find the slightest crack
on the idol that he picked up from the floor
Wiping off the dust
he put it back in the high niche

Last night's earthquake
caused the downfall
that shook his faith

Now that all is well
no doubt he will go on with his worship

But the goddess who descended to earth last night
knows the man has failed her test
By repeatedly turning and inspecting
he has shattered her inner parts
irreparably

TWO SUNS OR MORE

Finally came the news
that the flesh and blood scattered
during the Big Bang
may have settled in another solar system
44 light-years away

The possibility of having relatives
as cultured and peaceful as the human race
aroused intense excitement throughout the world
Now just let us pray
they and we worship
the same God

THE UNFINISHED SONG

sitting around the campfire
we listened to him singing
of the old country
one beautiful song after another

suddenly the singing stopped
without saying a word
he got up and left
to lie down and listen
to the unending note
reverberating in the air
and in our hearts
the lullaby he had just sung
for himself

PHOTOGRAPH

adjusting the focus for distance
farther and farther
until it stops
at my hometown
many years and many miles away

click
well, how original
how real

A SUMMER COMMENTARY

the brighter the light
the darker the shadows

the racists claim
this is the proof
that even God
is not colorblind

SMOKESTACK

1
under the pale ravished sky
the overindulgent earth
is still erect
with the help
of Viagra

2
How shocking
the overindulgent earth
still carries on
with such an erection

3
thrusting
from the overindulgent earth
the erect smokestacks
are gang-raping
in broad daylight
the innocent sky
that has long lost
its purity

AUTUMNAL THOUGHTS

it's possible there won't be anything glorious after all
carrying the seeds of a poem the entire spring
it bloomed under the summer sun
but did not produce fruit as expected

instead, it shriveled like a lifeless balloon
hanging listlessly on the branch

the palace of love we are building
is also proceeding very slowly with no end in sight
before the snow comes
it most likely will crumble

a tranquil autumn day
thus turns into an evening
of wind and rain
neither bright nor dark

Y2K

1

it was people of foresight
who put the two magical eggs inside each computer
to hatch at the exact moment a can of monstrous worms
creeping crawling leaping and (whew
taking off flying back and forth up and down
whirling turning somersaults tearing apart their insides
and eventually the invincible computers
all stare with a blank face
at the new century

2

from zero
to zero

put life's regrets mistakes failures sins sufferings hatreds...
all into the black hole
of the computer
let a new self be born
naked with the first cry
and start from scratch a blueprint of life
on the blank screen

BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

A falling apple
suddenly stops midair
unsure of whether to continue its course
or to return to the treetop
while the Kansas State Board of Education
argues over the weighty question
of gravity

* Several years ago, under the pressure of some American religious groups, Kansas State Board of Education decided to remove the Theory of Evolution from high school curriculum.

THEORY OF NON-EVOLUTION

A falling apple
suddenly froze in midair
not knowing whether
to continue its course
or return to the treetop
while members of the Board of Education
argued heatedly
about which force of gravity is greater
of the earth
or of heaven

A DRUNKEN WORLD

So much pent-up sorrow
so many beer cans popping
the world froths
and overflows

AFTERSHOCK

The bloody mutilated
terror
dug up from the ruins
by an excavator
still lies there
trembling

with intensity
exceeding the Richter scale
its epicenter
right in our heart

MOUNTAIN STREAM

these mischievous stones
love to stand
in the path of the stream
pulling at her hair entangling her feet
watch her dodging right and left
while running downhill
panting and gasping

the stones know
the pouting stream
is secretly feeling delighted
at her own graceful figure
and the stream knows
the naughty stones
are admiring at their own bodies
smoother
and shinier

CHEROKEE CASINO

A surviving band of Indians
finally settled
in the mountains near Cherokee

Using hunting skills handed down
from generation to generation
they built a trap with glittering lights
Now they just sit there and wait
for people of all colors
to drop in

BILTMORE MANSION

where can I find thousands of spacious buildings to house the world's poor scholars and make them look happy

--Tu Fu, "Song of The Thatched Hut Blown Down
by Autumn Wind"

This mansion, more spacious than a royal palace
might not be able to house all the world's poor scholars
but it can easily make a few hundred of them look
less unhappy

This morning the wind is calm and the sun bright
and these people holding tickets in their hands
with their heads high on their shoulders
sure don't look like any poor scholars to me
They move around the ornate furniture and decoration
admiring the beautiful image
of the hostess behind the curtains of time
and sniffing at the aroma
of perfumed hair and wine and food
that are still permeating
from banquets of over a hundred years ago

Besides, they probably have never heard
of the name Tu Fu
In fact, they might even confuse it
with Tofu, the weight-reducing health food
also from China

*Biltmore House, the largest private home built in America at the end of the 19th century, is situated on 8,000 acres in Asheville, North Carolina. It has 250 rooms, 65 fireplaces, 43 bathrooms, 34 bedrooms, and 3 kitchens.

AUTUMN SCENERY IN THE MOUNTAINS

Waving flags and shouting
And then at one command
Flash out colorful plaques hidden in their arms
To put together a praising slogan
Long live, long live, long live

At this beautiful moment
Thinking of such a nauseating scene
is of course a bit out of place

Yet the blind masses
Do believe this is the way
God the greatest artist and magician
used the red, green, and yellow colors
to create the masterpiece

BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY

at every turn
there's a fresh scene
waiting to brighten our eyes
and draw the wheels
forward

tender-yellow dark-red scorched-brown
and the rebellious-green that refuses to change
all find their own places
in this colossal painting of autumn
without the slightest discord

COWHIDE WHIP

When a cow is flogged
with a cowhide whip

the pain must be bloodily
immediate

EIFFEL TOWER

thought they were building
another guillotine
merciful God swooped down
trying to pull it apart

unexpectedly its steel-reinforced base
stubborn as human sins
kept it firmly on the ground
and it was turned into a lance
pointing at the heart
of the sky

at night
we can hear
grotesque dreams rise and pop
at its very tip
like balloons

CÉZANNE'S STILL LIFE

Lying back to back on a plate
an orange
and a banana
each dream
its own dream

Cézanne comes over
gives the banana
a half turn
Its graceful inner curve now
embraces the orange's plumpness

Instantly the air softens
the color fluid
and rich

MONA LISA

1

I know why you smile
I know why you always smile
at me

you want to see me
always smile
at you

2

let the brush
of time
paint over and over
the ever-changing background
and outlines
on the canvas of my heart

still
I'll use the softest line
and the warmest color
to put the final touch
at the corners of your mouth
and eyes

the eternal and everlasting smile
when we first met

Mona Lisa

3

There must be some d-e--e---p
secret

Staring at her smile
a man tilts his head left and right
Beside him a painted woman
wears a wide grin

PYRAMID AT THE LOUVRE

the question of immortality
never crossed his mind
when he entered the glass structure

only after seeing a mummy
grinned at him
from the glass coffin
did he suddenly remember
the growing long line
at the main entrance

2000

YOU SHOULD'VE STOPPED THERE

first I see words coming out of your mouth
black words all UPPERCASE and **bold**
they become so dark and dense that I think they are bullets
wait a second they ARE bullets now all streaming hissing
smoking burning toward us

we scatter and run for cover waiting for something
to happen but are surprised to hear a sudden silence
explode in our ears
I look up and find you just standing there
with your mouth wide open
as if you are running out of ammunition
but from the expression on your twisted face
and out-stretched tongue there must still be
something inside that wants to come out

for a few seconds you remain in your frozen posture
then right before our eyes your body shatters and breaks up
we slowly rise and gather around
trying to pick up the pieces but find they are so badly burned
that they crumble at a touch

you should've stopped there really
before you opened your mouth

BREATH

A puff of air
from your sweet sigh
must have caused this breeze
that entices the flowers
to release their fragrance
and sends a quiver of happiness
through the leaves
and me

SPRING ITCH

Once again in his adolescence
the old tree in my backyard
keeps squeezing the budding acne
before the vanity mirror
of the blue sky

TRIUMPHAL ARCH

after enduring snow and ice
these trees know well
the cruelty of flames of war
and the pretentiousness
of drums and banners

right at this moment
they are building
with their withered
yet sprouting branches
a genuine
Arc de Triomphe

and with songs of birds and scent of flowers
they warmly welcome
the return of spring

ROOM 8129, GENTING GRAND

--- Malaysia, 2000

it is nothing
like the skyscrapers I have seen
but on the other hand
I won't feel too cold at this height either

the clouds lingering earlier
outside the window are now gone
it is clear everywhere
in this Southland afternoon

awakened from a green nap
I am surprised to find myself
on an equal footing
as the not-too-distant mountain peaks
sitting or standing

ULTRASONICS

I think I have discovered in you
the indubitable proof
of the existence of ultrasonics

You always know
every word I am about to say
before I open my mouth

GUANYIN, GODDESS OF MERCY

even with her almighty power
she had to lower her head
and hold her breath
careful not to give
a spontaneous
stretch

*A few years ago in Penang, Malaysia, the Chinese community's plan of erecting a 120-foot statue of Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy, was forced to scale down to 80 feet so as to meet the ordinance of not exceeding the height of the tallest mosque in the city.

A HEART FOR A HEART

In this modern civilized nation
of Arabian Nights
people are extremely polite
talking in soft and lowered voices
lest someday someone might point
and cry out

it is he
Your Honor
he who with his words
wounded my heart

*An Egyptian man recently had one eye removed under orders of a court in Saudi Arabia for throwing acid at another Egyptian six years ago, damaging his left eye. It was the first time in more than 40 years that the literal eye-for-an-eye punishment had been carried out in the conservative kingdom.—Reuters, Aug. 15, 2000.

NIAGARA FALLS

splashing black ink
onto the sky
of memory

always triggers
a downpour
of deafening
white

AUTUMN

gone are the days
of bees and butterflies

looking up at the white clouds
that roam the open sky
the wanderer gives out a hearty laugh
amidst the loud calls of the wild geese
then strides away

PORN WEB

Nothing
in this world
can cover
their virtual
breasts

wriggling
in the net
they know
sooner or later
they'll lure
some sleepless
fish
out of their virtual
holes

FOURTEEN LINES

harvest season
yet the entire orchard
is so deserted
no laughter can be heard anywhere

no bees no birds
no picking hands
the trees are so downcast
some even wither prematurely

having gotten used to artificial fertilizers
applause and cheering sounds
they can no longer bear
the fate of being left alone

watching their own fruits drop to the ground
listening to their own quiet echoes

A LITTLE BLACK DONKEY

from the tender neck
to a sturdy wooden post
to a pointing finger
to a steaming pot
to a dining table to pairs of chopsticks
to the mouths to the stomachs
to bottomless desires and stacks of money

the little black donkey
is thus tightly tied along the way
by an invisible rope

only its wide open eyes
remain free
rushing and dashing
without any constraint

*At a Chinese restaurant in Canton, China, caged wild animals in the basement were waiting for customers to pick for dinner.

A WHITE FOX

before cultivating yourself into a vixen
you were caught and locked
into the iron cage

otherwise
all you have to do is to give them a wink
they will all rush over
to open the cage
and take you into their arms

*At a Chinese restaurant in Canton, China, caged wild animals in the basement were waiting for customers to pick for dinner.

A STRAY BULLET

flying up and down
round and round
seeking a target

no permanent enemies
nor permanent friends

look out
it's now hissing
straight toward you

2001

CHICAGO WINTER

inside the window
a girl dressed in red
singing and dancing
on the TV screen
tries to fabricate
a spring full of birdsongs
and blooming flowers

while outside the window
a trembling old tree laden with snow
tries to fabricate
for the void left by a flock of noisy birds
the reasons why they flew south

TIME DIFFERENCE

It is morning
and he paces up and down the room
in silence

In a distant room
she too paces up and down
in silence
yet it is already evening

Thousands of miles apart
they walk to a window simultaneously
and look up at the half-lit sky
in silence

knowing at this moment
a flick of the eyelids or a twitch of the lips
will certainly set off
an avalanche

ON THE TOWPATH

Cut into the flesh
the rope
raw as original sin
pulls them back
on the muddy shore
each step a struggle
for the last stand

The endless succession of *ayo ayo*
is neither a complaint
nor a song
just to remind themselves
they are still alive

CHEEK TO CHEEK

he put his clean shaven face
to
her soft gentle cheek

roses candies chocolates
candlelight serenade
solemn vows wedding music

then came
creeping weeds and cold moons
long -- long ---- dark nights

back to back

*A middle-aged woman in Beijing said:" Valentine's Day is for
lovers, isn't it? Not for old couples like us."

VALENTINE'S DAY LOVE

with the fortitude of steel
and the passion of gold
I am sure their love
will at least last
till Valentine's Day

*LONDON (Reuters) Two complete strangers have handcuffed
themselves together and flown to New York in a bid to win \$7,200
each if they stay locked in love until Valentine's Day. -- 2001.2.9

BIANZHONG

They put in this time capsule
whispering wind from a bamboo grove
rippling stream under a wooden bridge
joyous shouts of children playing
gentle chat of grownups
mooing barking crowing chirping cooing
and the occasional rumbles
from a distant mountain

All of these and many more
they sealed and buried in the ground
to let us hear
thousands of years later
the ringing of a tranquil world

* An ancient chinese musical instrument unearthed.

UNDERWEAR

Last line of defense
against nakedness

Retreat !

GIBRALTAR

sprawling beneath its feet
the world
like a frightened lamb
waiting to be quartered

Mediterranean Sea
left
Atlantic Ocean
right
Africa
front
Europe
back

under the setting sun
I see Gibraltar
gazing like a predacious lion
ready to pounce

ON THE VIEWING STAND OF TIANANMEN

From this height
you all look so tiny
like ants

Had it not been for the darkening face of the sky
and the sharp-eyed guards
I might have raised my arms
over my head
and proudly announced to the world

*today
I too
am standing tall*

INSOMNIA, XIAN

insomnia
in fact, is another sort
of sleep

if the bell atop the Bell Tower
suddenly tolls
it will still awaken him
and make him wonder
what body this body
what place this place
what time this time
of course he might just as well turn
and enter into another dream
deeper and keener

as to the plump yet not fat snore
rising and falling beside him
he knows
it's from the Tang Dynasty

911

We really didn't care much about
the collapse of the Twin Towers
nor the Pentagon turning into a Tetragon
but when thousands of innocent lives
were agonizing in the flames
we frantically tried to dial for help
from Allah or whichever God

yet somehow we hesitated—
there might not be anyone
on the other end

YUAN MING YUAN

all that could be looted were looted
all that could be burned were burned
except these slanting, crumbling columns
and the man-made lake not big enough to
accommodate fleets
yet can extinguish fire and provide recreation and entertainment

suddenly something scorched my heart
I look around
is it possible that in the ruins
there are still some unextinguished
ashes

*Yuan Ming Yuan, the Imperial Palace in Beijing, was looted and
burned down by the British and French armies in October, 1860.

THE COVE

With a sardonic laugh
the huge wave dashes toward her

She dodges
swaying slightly her hips

She then turns her head
and smiles

Immediately
the sea and sky become boundless
calm and tranquil

2002

FOUNTAIN

suddenly the startled bunch scattered upward
but the fountain was left behind
watching helplessly the disappearance
of the pigeons into the blue sky

when the fountain lowered its head
to see the fate
of perpetual rising and falling
within the little pool
it was surprised to find
the omnipresent sunlight
cheering brightly amidst its bursting flowers
eyes wet with joy
a young couple were dancing hand-in-hand
round and round

suddenly a shriek of joy
a bare foot was dipped
into the cool water

BRIDGE

Clasped together
intimate and tight

We really don't know
nor care
who was the first
to extend
a hand

PLAYING IN BED

1*

A self-scripted self-directed self-acted
soap opera

In front of a pinhole camera
a fervent masquerade
is pushing the frigid world
higher and higher
toward
its climax

2**

eyes open
eyes closed
what he sees
is always the same frigid self
trying fiercely

to create
a climax

*In recent years, many celebrities in Taiwan have been facing extortions after their illegitimate sexual activities were secretly recorded by pinhole cameras.

** A Taiwanese man was divorced by his wife based on the grounds that he often forced her to wear a mask of a movie star during their love-making sessions.

AT THE FLOWER MARKET

in the riot of colors
a bee is buzzing
before a light-yellow flower

though the flower has yet to find a buyer
already the bee is exhausted
flying between past and future
between an open field
and the vase on a kitchen table

its brown stinger
throbbing
in the bright sunlight

TELEVISION WARFARE

Guns are silent
bombs refuse to explode
the mouths of talk shows are dumbfounded
and the intertwining love-hate
of soap opera
is cut

No camera finds its focus
the screen goes blank

The remote is hidden
somewhere remote

NIGHT CRUISE ON RIVER TUO, DRAGON-BOAT FESTIVAL

While our memory is still flickering and drifting
with the water lamps in the stream of time
our eyes are already filled with fog
like the chilly surface of tonight's river

The drumbeats pounding our chests all day
are finally silent
waves stirred up by the thousands of paddles
have also calmed

Under the hazy starlight
a couple of mandarin ducks
are chattering and necking

don't forget tonight

PARABOLIC CURVES

darting from the deep of dreams
these swallows
after circling in the air
glide swiftly onto the water surface
to steal a kiss
then fade into the dark

they take turns in this way
using nearly perfect curves to weave dreams
and to arouse ripples
big and small
in our enchanted hearts

PURCHASING A RED BEAN NECKLACE IN HAINAN

my mouth
is still trying to bargain
my heart
is already filled with tenderness
and warmth

It's a bit too expensive
how about lower the price a little

sir
this is a genuine necklace at a fair price
besides
love is something not supposed to be
discounted

LIES, LIES, LIES

nowadays
even lie detectors
lie

if you ladies don't believe me
just try and ask the following question
Does this dress make me look fat?

JADE NECKLACE

A live cinder
from the creation

Stroking with your finger tips
you stir up the green flame
that flickers on your breast
then smile
and walk straight towards me

LISTENING TO A CHILDHOOD SONG

Flickering across the dark open space
a firefly...

then two...

then three...

soon they multiply
become flashes of lightning
reveal ragged hills

and mountains

flooding rivers

and ravines

of a face

SPRING

from white to brown to green to blue to red to purple
you dazzle us with your fast-moving dance
making heaven and earth dizzy

when we finally steady ourselves
and look around

you are already gone

VISITING POET TU FU'S HUT ON AN EARLY AUTUMN DAY

the breeze is gentle and the sun is bright
the hut that was once blown down
has already been rebuilt
into a shrine
spatial and clean
it is unlikely the roof will ever leak again

still
they erected in front of the hut
your emaciated statue
just to remind us
there's always a gusty gale
in the staggering realm of poetry
lying in wait

PAYING RESPECTS TO THE POET AT THE LI PO HOUSE

several days ago, I was at the Du Fu Thatched Cottage
and we were talking about you
old Du Fu wanted me to convey his regards to you

he still stayed skinny
but he was happy and not at all jealous
that you were blessed with a body, plump and healthy
he also said
the titles of Poet Immortal and Poet Saint are meaningless
poetry is not a primary student's composition
why worry about who is the number one writer

as for your life and background
where were you actually born
was Li really your last name
he said just leave them to the moon
and let those self-claimed sober guys
to fish in the water

TAKING PICTURES OF MY WIFE AND A NINETY-POUND BABY MALE PANDA

as if bored with the incessant flashes
he becomes restless on her lap
his sleek fur slips again and again
from her unsettled embrace

frantically I adjust my lenses
hoping to capture another image
before he sinks to the ground
or becomes extinct

•At The Giant Panda Conservation And Research Center In
Wolong, China, On September 17, 2002

AUTUMN LEAVES

*first time leaving home on a field trip
they are all so excited
you can see patches of red and yellow
on their little faces*

*not in a bit of a hurry
they are playing around
chasing each other in the wind
whistling loudly*

NEIGHBOR'S FLOWERS

A week ago our neighbor Eddie passed away
This morning I saw the potted flowers on their patio
all drooped and withered

His wife Helen who loves flowers so much
must not have heard the weather report
warning of an early frost

RAINBOW

it'd be faster than a roller coaster
and more breathtaking
to glide down the perfect arc
the smooth colored-glass slide
of the universe

just stretch out your hands
and close your eyes if you are afraid of heights
then utter a whoop
before the sound fully leaves your mouth
you'll reach the end of the earth

RED SHAWL

*if she drops
that shawl
she will reveal
the hidden desires
of every man
to pass this way*

ever since he read somewhere
these haunting words
he would on every windy day
walk aimlessly on the streets
like a lost soul
then plunge into a smoke-filled club
watch a female stripper
layer by layer
peeling off his strange self
in a front-row seat

ESTATE

they've been plotting the earth for years
building skyscrapers
(though still far away from the sky)
now they have set their eyes
on the moon

these smart businessmen
overlook the prospects
of prime building lots
on their belly
where anything would grow
day and night
to reach the sky

*A company in California has divided up the surface of the moon for sale. At \$19.99 per acre, it claims to have millions of customers worldwide.

CITY WINDOWS

day and night
what the eyes see
are reflections
of imprisoned faces
cracked and mutilated
behind metal bars

2003

NEW TOY

voice-controlled
plastic goldfishes
need no feeding
and are lively
even in poisonous water

on the heavily polluted earth
a human species made of plastic
could be the next favorite toy
of God

EMERGENCY KIT

flashlight
batteries
food
water

oh yes don't forget
rolls of plastic sheets
and duct tape

we need to seal off
fear and hatred

TRANSMIGRATION

Swaying alone in the evening wind
a little blue flower in the wilderness

a passing poet with misty eyes
suddenly turns his head
and gazes upon her

One evening centuries later
a faded blue book of poetry
stands at the corner of a dusty bookshelf

a little blue flower in the wilderness
swaying alone in the evening wind

VALENTINE'S DAY

1
meticulously cultivated
to bloom in time for this occasion
or at least be in bud

these magnificent roses
trimmed and wrapped
are now showcased under neon lights
with a hundredfold price tag
on love

2
with holiday excitement
these roses
all splendidly dolled up
stretch their necks
from florist windows
looking for any sign
of love
as dressed-up men and women
hurriedly pass by

A DESERT FLOWER

under the setting sun
a flower of absurd red
awakens to the stinking heat

gradually
she recollects the thunder-filled nightmare
treads rumbling bullets whistling humans crying
then dead silence

finally she remembers
she was a cool little blue flower
amid the mirage

TO PAINT A BIRD

when you tilt your head
this way
she will tilt hers
that way
anyhow
she is no model
posing
for no one

after mixing the colors
squinting one eye then the other
beckoning to this and that
finally you are ready to start
just then she flaps her wings
and takes off
leaving behind
a tree of
green

TO PAINT A FLOWER

the wind can no longer hold its breath
butterflies impatiently open and close their wings
restless bees fly around
humming louder and louder
yet the brush
just won't come down

they don't realize the flower
is presently engaged in a fierce struggle
with a blooming face
for a vantage in the painter's eyes
any inadvertent stroke
will certainly bring an accusation
of being partial
and heartless

CITY WINDOWS

divided by metal bars
the sky is to be sold
at retail

day and night
behind every dark window
wary eyes are watching
for the ultimate big sign
of clearance sale
of the universe

ZEN

When the wind moves, the flag also moves
When the flag doesn't move, the wind doesn't move either

Zen
li's that simple

you love her, she loves you too
she doesn't love you, but you still love her

Zen
It's so complicated

GENESIS

God said
Let there be light
and there was light

Satan said
Let there be shadows
and there were shadows

God said
Let there be mountains
and there were mountains

Satan said
Let there be valleys
and there were valleys

mountains of light

valleys of shadows

God said
Let there be humans
and there were humans

Satan said
Let there be beasts
and there were beasts

God said
Let there be beasts
and there were beasts

Satan said
Let there be humans
and there were humans

humanly beasts

beastly humans

THAT FATEFUL MOMENT

-- In Memory of President John F. Kennedy

every year on this day
right at this moment
in Dallas
the bullet of hatred
enters his skull
and fragments
into millions of pieces
to fly in all directions
striking millions of bodies
each with a stunned posture
frozen at that fateful moment
and repeating the same assassination
over and over again
of something deep
inside our hearts

PARADISE LOST

no place to hide
here in Bahamas
everywhere is clear and bright

(now I know why
in the Garden of Eden
they saw their own nakedness)

the water so green
the cloud so white
the sky so blue

ON NOVEL CRONA STREET

unmasked
the big eyes
of glass windows

stare all day
at a sea
of emptiness

2004

GREETING 2004

no sooner had we escaped
from a tangle of Saddam's
bushy beard
we stepped right into the field
haunted by the shadows of SARS

suddenly a terrifying orange light was raised
reflecting the glare
from a maddening cow

while at Times Square
thundering at the top of their voices
people made the frantic countdown

---5---4---3---2---1---

seeing 2003 was knocked cold on the ground
they whirled around with great relief
yelling jumping embracing kissing
as if this is indeed
the very first new year

MARS MISSION

according to this ambitious plan
man will send the coolest and most brilliant people
to Mars around 2030
and use the great red sand table
for a realistic training and tactical exercise
on how to instigate more hatred
and create deeper and bitterer estrangement
between

individuals
racial groups
nations
religions
cultures
white and black
yellow and brown
even those of the same skin color

and with one stroke make the earth
into another great red sand table

MOURNING FOR A HOMETOWN FRIEND

Drought season
Tonight's pouring rain
Comes just in time

Large raindrops
Hit the window glass
With your
Strong accent

SONG OF YOU AND ME

1
I let
the bird
in your cage
go

I know you want
to hear her
sing

but I believe
the acoustics are much better
in the woods

2
I ripped up the passionate poem
you wrote for me last night
and threw the pieces
into a river

now you can never change it
or take it back

3
I put out
your lamp

It was kind of you
to try to illuminate

the way
for the moths

but I believe they can see
far better
in the dark

4
forgive me for exposing
the negatives

I couldn't wait to see
your lovely poses

completely forgetting
this is a world
where black is white

5
I took your painting
not yet dry

it reminded me of the scenery
where we emerged
hand-in-hand
years ago in a faraway land
after a day's rain

my dim study room
needs a window
with a picturesque view

6
I closed
the poetry book
on the table

the page you bookmarked
was a love poem
written for all lovers
of the world

the poem I am writing
is for you
alone

7

I broke on purpose the strings
of your guitar

many evenings I had been sitting
quietly by your side
listening to the beautiful tunes

but now I want to see
the graceful movements
of your body

8

I have eaten
the donuts
in the fridge

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

they were indeed delicious
besides
it would be fun to watch
the way you laugh half-angrily
knowing I was concerned
for your slenderness

9

with one stroke I crumbled
the castle of love you had built
with blocks

forgive me
passion made me impulsive and blind
I could not find the key
nor the password you gave me

10

I gave your new hat
with seven pretty peacock plumes
to a girl with big bright eyes

after listening to my fairy tale

she kept saying she wanted to be
the beautiful princess

11

I snatch the sweet dream
from a smiling corner
of your mouth

You turn over
murmuring something
strange yet familiar

It turns out to be
my long lost
childhood name

12

I gave your pair of high heels
to a starry-eyed girl
who was anxious to grow up

she dreamed of following you
into the glamorous world

13

I broke your mirror
into pieces
now blinking in the sun

forgive me
I just want to watch
your morning expressions
from various angles

14

I ripped apart
a pearl necklace
in your jewelry box

forgive me
I just read Bai Juyi's
Song of **A Pipa** Player
and am anxious to hear
the tinkling sound
of pearls large and small
falling on the jade plate

SEEDLINGS

I brought your kids to the countryside
not to an amusement park

so used to shoes on pavement
they mistook the supermarket
for the native land of grains

I wanted them to plant their feet
firmly into the paddy field
to grow with seedlings

REDWOOD NATIONAL PARK

here
everything seems so natural
so straightforward
as if there were no oppression
bending or twisting
in this world

innocent hands
all are joyously stretching
to reach the sky

SOMEONE MUST BE CRYING

-- for Iris Chang

Someone must be crying
in such an evening
wind coming from the west
rain coming from the west

and she is the one
who can't hold her tears
after seeing so many piles
of white bones in history
the injustice and the dead silence
of the world

and she is the one
who once starts crying
cannot stop
human sins surround her like icebergs
choke her
with their oppressive shadows

someone must be crying
in such an evening
wind coming from the west
rain coming from the west

*Iris Chang was a Chinese-American writer who in 1997 published a book entitled, <The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II> telling the story of the murder of more than 250,000 defenseless civilians by the invading Japanese army. She later committed suicide due to severe depression.

82 vs. 28

if one can't see in these two numbers
the symmetrical beauty
of an object and its image in the mirror
then it would be difficult to comprehend
the mysterious and profound nature
of the theory of *Parity Nonconservation*

taking the result of a simple arithmetic
 $82 - 28 = 54$

as the only solution
how can one appreciate
this fuzzy, chaotic and uncertain
love affair of dusk

*Chen-Ning Franklin Yang is a Chinese-born American physicist who works on statistical mechanics and particle physics. He and Tsung-dao Lee received the 1957 Nobel prize in physics for their work on parity nonconservation of weak interaction. In 2004, he married a 28-year-old girl when he was 82. The event stirred up quite a storm in China. 11 years later in 2015, it was **93 vs. 39** (he was 93 and his wife 39). What magic numbers!

2005

SOUTH ASIA TSUNAMI

wearing no shoes
animals felt the earth trembling
under their feet
and they saw the sea
with its mouth wide open
ready to roar

they ran around warning each other
to escape
while some humans
remained spectators
stood watching the unfolding Hollywood episode
from the shore

TSUNAMI TIME

When acres and acres of debris
can no longer be used
to reconstruct the memories
of sunshine and laughter

When a bloated body becomes
the last hope and comfort
to grief-stricken relatives
survival is not an option but a miracle

When black tidal waves crash down
one after another in our nightmares
we scream helplessly
and wake up soaking wet

When all fishermen suffer from hydrophobia
a lone boy picks up a stone
and throws it toward the sea
with all his might

When people around the world
no matter where they are
instantly become
orphans

ICICLES MELTING UNDER THE EAVES

1

at the mere sight
of your warm smile
the frozen tears
of the lovelorn
winter
begin to
melt
and
d
r
i
p

2

upside down
this translucent candle
has every reason for believing
itself the light source
bright
and dazzling

3

even the awe-inspiring glory
of the empire
cannot keep
these freedom lovers
from jumping
off
crashing
joyously
to the ground

STONE FOREST IN KUNMING, CHINA

here "annual ring" becomes meaningless
just like we don't ask
the life history of an individual wave
in the ocean

still we focus the lens of our cameras
on their rugged faces
each bearing a mark
from the Big Bang
while their hands
thrust toward
the sky

AT THE LAUNDROMAT

a laundry bag
stuffed
with smelly
days
of the gone week

he begins his ritual--
emptying contents into the washer
adding bleach
and detergent
closing the lid
putting three coins in the slots

the recycle
of another week

A NEWBORN

The world
is full of
light and smiles

Light and smiles
are the things he sees
when opening his eyes
the very first time

HAVE A HAMMOCK

Bright sunshine above
cool grass below

swinging between two trees
a sweet Mayan dream

Dark sky above
a sea of lights below

swinging between two skyscrapers
an acrophobe's nightmare

*The Mayans still sleep in hammocks between two trees.
"Have a hammock" is their daily greeting

BIRD FISH POET

Getting lost
in the smoky sky
a bird asks a cloud
for direction

In the water
where no sunlight can penetrate
a bubbling fish desperately seeks
its own shadow

A poet strolls the brown earth
looking casually up and down
now at the sky now at the water
finally finds his inspiration
and composes a beautiful poem

*Everywhere green water
Everyday blue sky*

KATRINA

--New Orleans, August 2005

With such a name
of course she had to be
a wild dancer

A slight swing of her wide skirt
instantly sent all watchers
into a daze
not able to escape
nor to tell
if what engulfed the city
was water from the ruptured levees
or tears from their eyes

On the turbid water's surface
there were bloated bodies
querying the sky
with outstretched arms

THANKSGIVING TURKEY PARDON

with eyes closed
she was about to utter her last prayer
when suddenly a voice yelled
PARDON!
immediately she withdrew her long stretched neck
and opened her eyes
finding herself an instant star
in front of flashing cameras

of course the bigger star
was Mr. President himself
with a look of deep concern
over the destiny of all beings
he stood there quietly
nodding and smiling
just like a kind old grandfather

such a man
she could never believe
was responsible for the bloody
Iraq war

thus she made up her mind
to pray day and night for humankind
especially for the President
with a language that only God could understand

before the arrival of Bird Flu

2006

ENDANGERED SPECIES

he can't recall
when he became
an endangered species

yet he can sense
the pitying stares
behind the scopes
streaming towards him
like bullets

flying alone
in the vast vast sky
he knows he must utter
his last cry

like a poet
who sings
to confirm his being

ROMEO AND JULIET

1

of course they could not know
Shakespeare had dipped his quill
while actors shuffled and shifted
waiting impatiently to go on stage
to let audiences of future generations
eyes sparkling with tears
see how a beautiful love was interrupted
by human hatred

being young and innocent
they were unwary
of the warning chirps of birds
and opened their eyes

instantly the sweet dream they had woven all night
flew away with the morning rays
as fate's cruel hands
violently tore them apart
from their embrace

before they could engulf each other
with kisses lined with magic potion
to sleep in the warmth of each other
for a thousand years

2

Shakespeare's quill has spent its ink
actors shuffle and shift
waiting impatiently to go on stage
here and there we hear chirps of birds
as the musicians tune their instruments
while occasionally a few rays of dawn
peep out from the dark backstage

all is ready except the innocent protagonists
embracing motionlessly in their sweet dreams
but as soon as the magic potion loses its power
they will open their eyes
the curtain will rise
and the audiences of all generations
will see with their tear-sparkling eyes
a beautiful love story playing
again and again
in the tragic world of suspicion and hatred

THAT WINTER

It was a long and cold winter
the sky full of snowflakes
people breathing white steam
from their mouths and noses
scribbled with clusters of friendly words
like characters in comics
And hands hidden in gloves or pockets
were all ready to pull out
the frozen passion
for the passers-by

The smiles on their faces
like flowers that never fade
so many years later
still blooming colorfully
in my heart

AN EASTER SURPRISE

Lying magnificently in the nest
the two blue eggs, still radiant
with the mother's warmth
must have been hidden by God
to give children an Easter surprise
yet I, no longer a child
happen to find them

The mother bird startled away
by my intrusion
is now standing on the grass
watching my every move

Though knowing well
the briefer a beauty is
the more lasting it can become
I still want to take another look
but promise to let the mother
get back to her nest
before her warmth on the eggs
dissipates completely

GHETTOS

this is where they remain active
living persons
not to go one step beyond

this is where they remain inactive
dead persons
not to go one step beyond

JEWISH CEMETERY IN BUDAPEST

Unwilling to be forgotten
the memories of humanity
rather inhumanity
struggle hard to emerge
from layers beneath layers
tombstones
aslant and askew



A HELICOPTER UPSIDE DOWN IN A PUBLIC PLACE

To fly from this position
is of course difficult
unless
we too stand on our heads

and rapidly cross our feet

Sure enough
we hear the propeller starting to roar
yippeeeeeee !
we soar high into the sky
above the cheering crowd

5/27/2006 8:06 pm
cold rain falling hard
at the Residentsplatz
not a single soul in sight

*As part of Mozart's 250th birthday celebration activities in Salzburg, "A Helicopter Upside Down In A Public Place" was an art piece displayed at the Residentsplatz. The artist, Paola Pivi, was born in Milan in 1971. Her works are enigmatic, patently absurd, and humorous. When displayed in public spaces, her creations are meant to surprise and amuse viewers, lifting them briefly from their ordinary routine.

FIREWORKS

knowing perfectly well
nothing can ever change
the fate of the dark night
still it bursts into the sky
to dazzle itself momentarily
while warming eyes
that crave the light

no time to inquire
why celebrate
what occasion

ELECTION TIME

looking around
suddenly he found people
once alert
all seemed to be in a trance

clinging tightly to balloons
of rapidly expanding lies

bobbing up and down
up and down...

SADDAM'S NOOSE

scorched with gun powder
fumigated with poisonous gas
drenched with tears
soaked in blood
strengthened by sinister laughter
entwined with piercing cries
every thread of the rope
he knows
is tough and dependable

he walks up to the gallows
and calmly sticks his neck
into the noose he made for himself
confident it will not break

2007

THE REINCARNATION OF A HUMORIST

Hi. I am Art Buchwald
and I just died

no sooner had he finished his last words
than I heard a baby's first cry

Hi. I am Art Buchwald
and I was just born

*American Humor columnist Art Buchwald died of kidney failure on January 17, 2007. The next day the website of The New York Times posted a video obituary in which Buchwald himself declared: "Hi. I'm Art Buchwald, and I just died."

RETURN OF THE 17-YEAR CICADAS

no room for doubt
God makes ears
just for listening
to this heated argument
about life

seventeen years of desolate incubation in the dark earth
a few days of endless joy under the sun and the stars

lonely lonely lonely
joy joy joy

lonely joy lonely joy
lonely

joy.....

RUSSIAN IMPRESSIONS

1

Hoisted to the sky
the magnificent domes

Winter palaces summer palaces
big palaces small palaces

My upward-looking eyes
suddenly become blurred
as drops of sweat and blood
flying through the dim air of history
splatter on my face

2

It took only a few days
for him to get used to the grandiose dreams
of Imperial Russia—
the imposing columns
the onion domes
the magnificent churches
the even more magnificent palaces
the biggest cannon the heaviest bell the tallest statue
and in the five-star hotel
the insurmountable bathtub
the elevated toilet...

In fact it was the homely American toilet
that plunged him back
to earth

MOUNTAIN VIEWS

At Dawn

You have never seen
 such a fresh world
rising from birdsongs
 in such a fine morning
every ray of light
 brilliant and dazzling
each love
 the first love

At Dusk

Without the tick of the second hand
or chirp of birds
without the changing light moving across the window sill
or footsteps of the wind rustling the leaves
I might not have become aware of the darkening twilight
permeating the corner of your eyes

A rude hand
carrying a heavy shadow
is slowly approaching
your proud and defiant
forehead

2008

FAIRY PENGUIN PARADE

-- A night on Phillip Island, Australia

1

In complete silence

they march in file onto the stage
like well-rehearsed kindergarteners
their white-breasted costumes
glittering joyously
under the dim light

Since no flash is allowed
it is hard to tell
from which backstage they emerge—
the boundless ocean
or the dark night

In wobbling steps
without any gesture
or dialogue
they shake water off their bodies
and fill the eyes of the audience
with tears

2

Exultant over their freedom
they have again spent all day in the Ocean Bar
celebrating and drinking
now pop ashore
one by one

Oblivious to all furtive eyes in the dark
they form a line on the beach
and do their routine exercise
left.....right...left.....right
trying strenuously to turn their unsteady steps
into graceful movements of the waves
before they reach home

A BUTTERFLY SPECIMEN

netted with one scoop
dazzling wings~
 bright sunshine~
 gentle breeze~
 flower fragrance~
 soft birdsong~
fluid glances~

now a Latin name
in the dim light
of the museum

AWAKENING

of course you have never seen
 such a fresh world
rising from bird songs
in such a fine morning

every ray of light
 brilliant and bright
every love
 the first love

BLACK SWAN

on the stage
of glistening light waves
a graceful queen in black gown
emerges
from some classic play

eyes
of possessed men
and envious women
all stare at her unadorned yet exquisite
shiny black neck

when she gently straightens
the arc of her neck
the world seems to be stretched as well
and suddenly brightens

ARTIST'S NIGHT

no matter how he daubed
he couldn't blot out
the pair of melancholy eyes
on the canvas of the evening sky

finally he grabbed a pail of black ink
and was ready to end it all
when the curtain fell

GENESIS

after painting The Day
God the great artist
continued mixing
all sort of colors
hoping to create
a few more
eternal art pieces

yet in spite of his repeated efforts
he was unable to cover up
the pair of melancholy eyes
that remained stubbornly
on the canvas of the Evening

finally he could no longer control
his swelling artist's temper
grabbed a pail of black paint
and splashed all over the canvas

unwittingly
he created a masterpiece
The Night

MIRROR

it sees every minute detail clearly
not even a gray hair or a tiny wrinkle
can escape its view

sometimes it finds hard to hold a stern look
facing
a coquettish pose
a naughty stare
a cunning smile
or a mischievous wink

RECOLLECTION TRICKS

-- after sixty years

Lifting his feet
he stepped into the magnificent palace
where he was once a happy little prince

Surprised
he found the tall threshold
had shrunk and sunk
and suddenly he became a giant
trapped in a miniature room
with crumbling walls

Above the courtyard
the ever bright vast sky of his memory
was now downcast
with sunken shoulders
and eyes staring blankly
at his perplexed look

2009

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

the higher the forbidden fruit
the longer the reaching hands

you know there's a lair of wriggling snakes
in every human heart

so you arch your back
mold yourself into a colorful and juicy
apple
hanging on the highest branch

now you just patiently
wait
for the sound of the flute
of a snake handler
to rise

CURVES

the melody of a song
an enticing glance
the profile of a body
lying on its side

softer than the breeze
wavier than the mountains
soaring higher and louder
than the ocean

lips parting slightly
an intimate dialogue
between
distant stars

VINTAGE WINE IN THE CABINET

water and fire
love and hate
soul and flesh
after countless fierce battles
and intermingles
it now becomes settled
clear and bright

the older its age
the more romantic

floating on the sea
of time
emitting amber light
this magic bottle
from Arabian Nights
is waiting patiently
no, impatiently
for someone to fish it up
and uncork

AN ART PIECE

they put thick coating
layer after layer
over her face
to cover up the deep-and-shallow footprints
of time
then painstakingly polished it
into a fresh, tender eggshell
and used all kind of colored pens
to paint the spring full of plastic flowers
blooming in a riot of color

a swarm of bees and butterflies
along with Father Time
all flew up and down
humming and whirling around her
yet none could find a spot
to set foot on
or poke the stinger

GREAT WALL REVISITED

Huffing and puffing
finally reached the top of your back
to become heroes
they were so busy cheering
that nobody noticed
your desolate struggle
on the polluted earth

For thousands of years
you have been poised to take off
yet are grounded
by an invisible chain

In the smog
we see the tail of a dragon
keeps wriggling and crawling
in eerie silence

*In China, the Great Wall is sometimes regarded as the divine
manifestation of a dragon.

GIVE FREEDOM BACK.....

open the door
of every heart
let all
misunderstandings
prejudices
grudges
hatreds
.....
go

return
freedom
to
freedom

SEA O SEA

Calm after carnage
the bloody sea
finally ceases boiling

Soon the night curtain will fall
to conceal the savage scene
letting the glaring red fade
into the deep dark corner
of inhumane memory



*The slaughter of pilot whales
in the Faroe Islands, Denmark

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

full sails
outspread wings
all are ready to dispatch
every note
to eager ears

lights dim
silently they wait
for the baton to rise
and summon music
from some mysterious corner
of the universe

2010

SNOWSTORM

bury deep
all unseasonable
passions

then invite adventurous feet
to trample
scribble nonsense

THE SKY UNDER THE RUBBLE

-- for a baby rescued in the 2010 Haiti earthquake

The blue sky
high and remote
is sternly cold

The little sky
under the rubble
built by flesh and blood
of your family
is only inches above the ground
yet warm and safe
never collapses

A BELATED DIRGE

-- for the students who perished in recent earthquakes
in Wenchuan, China

We should have sung the dirge for you
when they put down the shaky foundation
propped up shoddy beams
and whitewashed flimsy walls

Yet for years we all kept silent
until the earthquake struck
burying you alive

Now all we can do is wail
and sing a belated dirge

OIL SPILL IN THE GULF OF MEXICO

Drilling...

drilling...

drilling...

finally they drilled right into the heart
of Mother Earth

Black blood gushes
from the bottom of the ocean
an unstoppable wound

On the murky ocean surface
a flock of pelicans
dive one after another
into the water
preparing themselves
to become offerings

WITH LOVE

with love I drowned you roasted you
begged you tempted you
threatened you kidnapped you
blackmailed you
in this windless summer afternoon

a shadow flashed by
was it a low-flying bird
a high-flying plane
or
O your eyelashes
suddenly lifted

MID-AUTUMN MOON

knowing
those who can't go home tonight
will all stare at her
with sleepless sad eyes

she fancies herself up
plump
and brilliant

MORNING

Upon pulling up the curtains
of the eyes
sunlight rushes in through the windows
and kicks up
a roomful of daydreams

HALLOWEEN

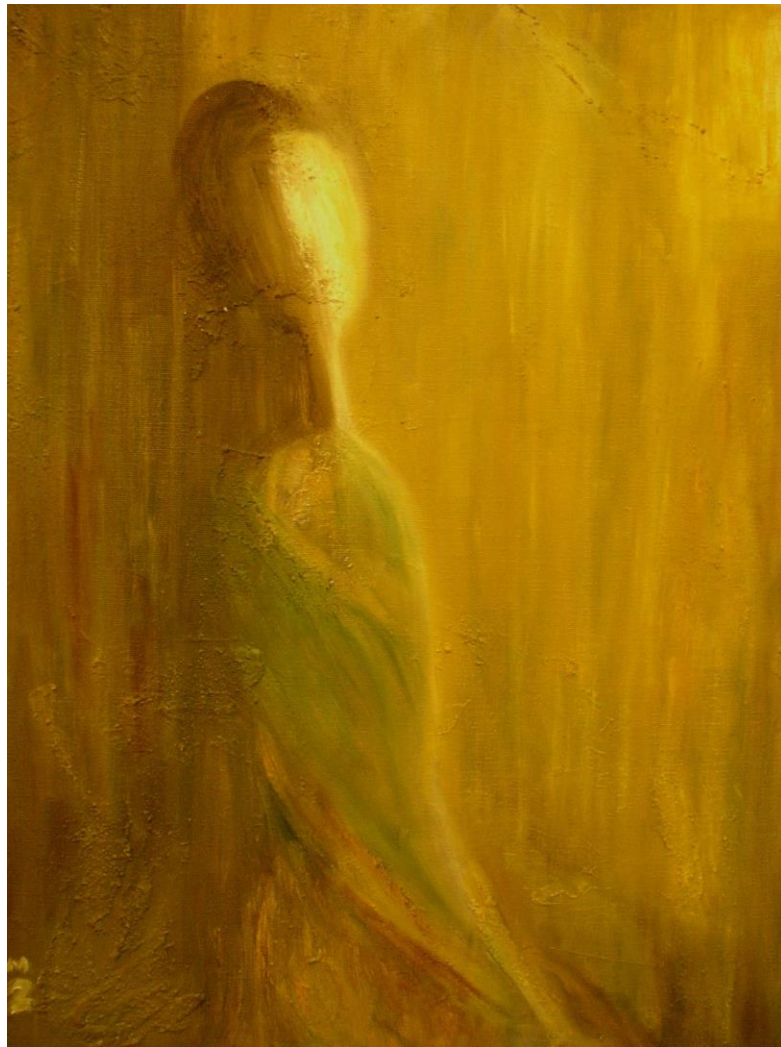
All hell breaks loose—
on this day
children wear hideous masks
to hide
their innocent faces

All hell breaks loose—
every day
adults wear innocent masks
to hide
their hideous faces

GIRL IN MOONLIGHT

unable to bear the sight
of her staring
at the sky all night
he blotted out her lovelorn eyes
with a paintbrush

then dabbed two imperceptible holes
to let the surging emotions
ooze out
run down her cheeks
and blend into
tonight's tender
moonlight



William Marr's painting Girl in Moonlight

2011

WATCHING SUNRISE ON MOUNT A-LI, TAIWAN

Only at this altitude
can one see clearly the face
after a good night sleep
brilliant and composed
not at all hyper
as they made me believe

The hyper black and white camera
blinking its black and white eye
told me afterwards

*Believing the sun would rise in an instant atop the mountain, I used up my entire roll of film only to capture the forehead of the sun.

SUNSHINE SCARF

Suddenly
snow-laden boughs
stop trembling
From afar
chirps of birds
can be heard
drawing nearer and nearer
One after another we see
contracted necks
straighten up
and s-t-r-e-----t---c—h

This must be the scarf
which lit up
Modigliani's eyes
that gloomy winter afternoon
and illuminated
Paris sky
a riot of color

* Letter of a friend from the South: " It's full of sunshine here today. I believe your place is still covered with ice and snow. Do you want me to cut a piece of sunlight and make you a scarf?"

DIALOGUE BETWEEN A TREE AND A POET

A tree says
we are more fortunate than humans
Without having to wait a lifetime
for the chance of transmigration—
we die in winter
and rejuvenate in spring

A poet says
winter and spring
night and day
every heartbeat
every breath
every blink
all are my transmigrations—
I die in an obsolete verse
and am reborn in a brand-new poem

PYRAMID

--for the Egyptian revolution of 2011

giving a shout
they lifted a few hundred young bodies
toward the sky

in a mere few days
they erected with bare hands
a much grander
miracle

A ONE-HUNDRED YUAN ANSWER

In today's society
this is the only correct answer
he believes
to any question

*A high school student in China left his answer blank and instead, attached a 100-Yuan bill to a question on his exam paper.

A LOVE DREAM

floating and drifting
he knows he is in the ocean
yet he does not feel lonesome
nor wants to be rescued

amid earthshaking
thunderclaps
wind and rain
volcanic eruptions
this miracle created by God
the ocean of life

inexhaustible
boundless.....

A MAN WITH NO PULSE

crashing waves
now become
a steady stream
winding around a rock
day and night
polishing and pacifying

no more pounding
no more blushing

*Several years ago, a heart pump was implanted in the chest of former Vice President Dick Cheney who played a big role in a war launching against Iraq . A product from my son Dennis' former company, the pump was supposed to take over the function of the heart, but produce no pulse.

MOTHER

-- for the centennial celebration of my Alma Mater,
National Taipei University of Technology

busily watching her kids grow up
busily showing them the way

a hundred years have past
like a single day

not knowing that she herself
has become younger
and more beautiful

NIGHT-BLOOMING CEREUS #1

a child
awakened one night by his mother
to see it blooming
petal by petal
but in the dim light
his sleepy head drooped
before it withered
though he knew
it would appear later in life
over and over again

in the wilderness where flowers bloom
at the water edge
where light and shadows intertwine
in the white clouds drifting over the treetops
a beautiful tune
a line of poetry
a glance
a smile
he often catches a glimpse
of its grace

tonight under the bright light
it finally appears
in splendid, perfumed attire
patiently waiting for him
to wake up his long-asleep mother
and watch together, mesmerized
a memory
that has never withered

NIGHT-BLOOMING CEREUS #2

all is ready

the stage is set
cool and peaceful
no lighting from the savage sun

the most elegant color
most delicate fragrance

now we just wait
for mother to wake up her child

heavy eyelids lifting
curtains parting
smiles blooming
petal by petal

LIVING AND DYING

-- for a little girl in Foshan, Guangdong, China

heavily the front wheels of a van ran over her
heavily the rear wheels of the van ran over her
heavily the front and rear wheels of a truck ran over her
lightly she kept herself alive

lightly eyes of passers-by glanced over her
lightly indifferent hearts brushed by her
lightly gossips swept around her
heavily she let herself die

MORNING

drawing open the curtains
he pleasantly finds
in the bright sunshine
the maple he planted years ago
dressed in splendid green
still stands erect

the world is alive
and well

SONG OF COLORS

Black

*Dark night has given me my dark eyes
yet I use them to search for light*
-- Gu Cheng

he deeply believes
the darker the eyes
the easier to find the light

he lets a flock of
crows
perch on his eyelashes

* Gu Cheng, one of the well-known Misty poets. He and his wife settled in Rocky Bay, a small village on [Waiheke Island, Auckland, New Zealand](#) in 1987. In October 1993, Gu Cheng killed his wife with an axe before hanging himself.

White

even in broad daylight
it's harder and harder
to find pure white

this world
urgently needs
a refreshing
snow shower

Red

mistaking the setting sun for a huge red gift envelop
and the flashing red lights at crossroads
small little red gift envelopes
the corrupt night, dead drunk
watches with one eye closed
a pack of wanton rats
roaming the streets

Between Blue and Green

the horizon knows
embracing the sky and the sea
is the only way
to broaden itself

the sole reason
for being

Yellow

yellow leaves
dancing with the wind
round and round
become so dizzy
they land one by one
in the golden sunshine
with a sigh
of relief

Brown

sticking its feet deeply
into the brown earth
it becomes
a persistent tree

no matter how fierce and strong
the wind and rain can only shake down
a few irrelevant pieces of
leaves

ARAB SPRING

awakening from a severe winter
all together they shout out
spring
spring
 we want spring

they use bullets and shells
to light up the skies
their blood
to irrigate the land
 and fill the rivers

hoping
colorful flowers will bloom
in profusion
fresh streams
will rush over
people's hearts
all night long
fireworks will illuminate
countless
exulting faces

2012

EARRINGS

1

a pair of loyal satellites
readily amplify
your radiant smile

and on cloudy nights
when I am about to lose my way
they always mark precisely
your moonlike existence
gentle and brilliant

2

The way the earrings vibrate
like wind chimes
you'd think her sensitive ears
are hearing music from afar
or in her burning heart
an uncontrollable joy
is about to erupt

only I know
she is playfully tempting me
to stretch out both my hands
grip her shoulders
and vigorously sway

just to hear the sound of raindrops
from a rattle drum
dancing on the excited
innocent hearts

*The rattle drum is one of the oldest and most traditional toys in China. It is a small double-sided drum with a handle and a wooden ball hanging from a string attached to each end of the edge. When swayed, the balls on both sides will beat the drum, sending out rattling sounds.

TO ARGUE WITH THE OCEAN

it makes no sense to argue with the ocean
you have neither the limitless supply of saliva
nor the enormous lung capacity

the best thing you can do
is to lie down and become a beach
entice him to rush passionately toward you
over and over again
desperately trying to kiss you
 embrace you
 possess you

while you just lie there with a mischievous smile
toying with him
 wasting him
 exhausting him
watching him let out a long sigh
and retreat in the end

convinced and speechless

TO ARGUE WITH A RIVER

to argue with a river is pointless
especially right after a heavy rain
it just keeps gushing and rushing
on and on
without glancing back
you have no chance at all
to interrupt
and it will not pause to listen

you have to wait for it to calm down
as it moves leisurely in the warm sunlight
pulling at waterweeds along its shores
like stroking a lover's hair
and joyously answers bird calls
it might even whirl and dance around
some smooth rocks protruding from the water

at this time there's no need for you to speak
it will agree with you completely
and you too will forget
whatever you try to say

TO ARGUE WITH THE SPARROWS

to argue with the sparrows in the sun
is of course pointless
they chitter and chatter
flutter and twitter
getting more excited and louder every second
there's simply no chance for you to open your mouth

only after the sun too becomes bored and impatient
and darkens its face
do they stop

at this moment
all you have to do is
stamp lightly your foot on the ground
whoosh----
they'll all be gone
without leaving
the slightest trace

TO ARGUE WITH THE AIR

to argue with the air is pointless
effortlessly it surrounds you
and occupies every pore of your skin
it even penetrates your nostrils
to probe your heart and lungs

it's odorless and colorless
(if the humans don't pollute)
leaving no trace for you to find
when you exhale deeply with a sort of resignation
it retreats first
then comes right back at you

and when it really opens its mouth
the wind starts to surge, the sand fly
the sky and the earth darken
no matter how hard you shout
it will blow your cry away
even you cannot hear it

so it's pointless to argue with the air
the only thing you can do is to calm down
idle away each other's time
and to coexist in peace
at least this will show
that you are still breathing
and alive

TO ARGUE WITH YOUR SHADOW

it's pointless to argue with your shadow
either he has his back toward you
or is behind your back
you can never look him straight in the eye

from his voiceless murmurings
half a word here
half a word there
you know he is either trying to anger you
or annoy you
and you cannot tell
if he is for you
or against you

when you finally lose your temper
waving him away
he just waves back at you
knowing full well you can never rid yourself of him
unless there's no light around you
or you concede defeat
and shut your eyes

TO ARGUE WITH THE WIFE

it's hopeless to argue
with your wife
right from the start
by claiming ladies first
she seizes the better half
and stuffs the worse half in your mouth
leaves you dumbfounded
listening to her endless

chit chat chit chat
chit chat chit chat
until dark clouds gather over your face
thunders rumble in your choked throat
she then breaks into a smile and draws close to you
pecks on your pursed lips with her now quiescent mouth

instantly
the black magic spell is lifted
the sky clears up and brightens

BURNING LOVE

the heated passion
of the ocean
must have roused the fishes
to chase their own kind
or other kinds

copulate
or cross breed
producing in haste shoals of
purebreds
and hybrids

in the hope that
before the ocean water boils over
before being cooked and brought to the table
of the Last Supper
some lucky ones would escape
to carry on their family lines

* According to a news report, due to climate change in recent years, ocean water has become increasingly warmer, causing some fish species to change their sexual behavior and increase their breeding and crossbreeding.

BLUE ANGELS

the little girl knows
these trees with blue ribbons
their feet planted deep in soil
are not angels

but she believes
they will all rush to help her
when she stumbles

*Neighbors put blue ribbons on trees in front of their house to give encouragement and blessing to a little girl, a third grader at a neighborhood school, who is battling cancer .

THIS LITTLE DRAGONFLY

oblivious to a full garden
of blossoms and bird songs
this dragonfly
just stares
at a postmodern poem
on the open page in my hand

totally ignores
my premodern stare
at her raised
transparent little tail

pondering

how to catch an innocent
poem
from childhood
with my mischievous hands

CLEMATIS

No vines
can hold back
her skyward
dreams

This morning
she wakens the poet's window
with her brilliant smile

Knowing the passionate poet
will take pictures of her radiant face
with his sparkling eyes
and post them on Facebook
of the sky

TARGET

-- To a mass murderer

Hollywood's screen directors
have polished their scripts and set the stage
Guns provided by arms dealers are loaded
all waiting for you
to burst the anger and hatred pent up in your heart
and ignite the flames in your eyes

No need to aim
Bullets randomly penetrate innocent bodies
carrying wails of victims' families
and the tearful gaze of the world
all stream toward the loneliest
target

your mother's
heart

* Every time I hear of such a tragic event, I always feel a deep sympathy for the mothers involved, regardless of whether they are the mothers of the victims, or the mother of the killer. Especially for the mother of the killer, I can't imagine the pain and loneliness she would suffer and have to endure throughout her entire life.

VIDEO GAMES

-- for the Aurora movie theater mass murderer

Life is a video game
a virtual reality

Outfitting yourself from head to toe
in gleaming steel armor
and with guns in hand
you took up the self-appointed role
of villain
rising from the dark night
randomly spraying bullets towards the world
bursting the pent-up hatred in your sick mind

Life is not a video game
it's a bloody reality

Four young men lost their lives using their own bodies
to shield their girlfriends from your bullets
A father tries to gather up his courage to tell his young daughter
that her mother will never come back from the midnight show

A semi-conscious young woman with your bullets lodged
in her body
keeps asking about her little girl
not knowing she was your youngest victim
A soldier willing to sacrifice his life for his country and freedom
was killed instead by your cowardly act at the theater
In a darkened room
the candles on the cake will remain forever unlit
for the man who started his birthday celebration at the movies

And for those lucky survivors
they find out they are not so lucky after all
having to relive in the dark of night
the haunting experience of your game

Life is not a video game
Life is not a video game
Life is not a video game

Yet if life has to be a video game
then let's make sure it's not of fear and violence
but full of smiles and laughter
the parts all depend on each other
kindness and compassion the rules of the game

And when the night comes
let splendid fireworks
not gunfire
light up the dark sky

HIGH NOON

at midday
the lone marshal draws his gun
against the gang
at the sun-drenched field
in Hadleyville

at midnight
a lonelier man
in Aurora's packed, darkened movie theater
with armor head to toe
and automatic rifles in hand
pulls his trigger

against innocence
against humanity
against emptiness
against the evermore lonesome
self

DRY SEASON

even the shadows
are dry to the bone
their whiskers sparse and brown

with no dewdrops to moisten their throats
birds won't come to the window
to chirp
to waken dreams
to inspire

holding a dried-up pen
the poet stares at the blank sky
where not a single trace of cloud
is in sight

no tears of joy
are expected
anytime
soon

MALALA DAY

--for Malala Yousafzai

A day
to let the whole world know
cowardly bullets
have tried desperately to silence
a 15-year-old girl
who dares to speak the truth

A day
to let the whole world hear
the deafening shout
from millions of once silent mouths

MALALA
MALALA
MALALA

2013

SEASONAL GREETINGS

It's the coldest of times
it's the warmest of times

AAA----CHOOO

How do you do
glad to meet you
and share with you
my flu

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

under the reign of fears and suspicions
guns stare out the darkened windows
their twinkling sights
all aim at the deep hollow eye
of the insomniac night

Don't Move!

on the screen
Hollywood's heroes
engage in a ferocious fight
bullets streaking in the air
chant on and on and on
the sacred 2nd Amendment

TO ARGUE WITH THE BREAD

it's useless to argue with the bread
he would say aren't there
better things to do
than worry about those loafers
who won't work for a living
they deserve to be starved

I say what do you expect them to do
if there is no land left for them to plough
and they don't have seeds or fertilizer

He says it's their own fault not to have a rich daddy
who would send them to the Ivy League
assure them a comfortable life
besides
he can't bear the thought of their dirty hands
touching him

so there's no point in arguing with the bread
instead
find a time when you are hungry
bite and swallow him
before he has any chance to open his mouth

FORTUNE COOKIE & LUNAR CALENDAR

-- for Wilda and Ed Morris on their 50th wedding anniversary

I'm the lucky one, I claim.

My fortune's open, full of choices.

-- Fortune Cookie, Wilda Morris

Yes, you're very lucky indeed.
Your fortune's open, your future
will be full of laughter, love, joy, friendship,
health, happiness, peace, and prosperity...
like today.

According to my lunar calendar,
today is a good date for meeting friends,
a good date for starting a courtship,
a good date for getting married,
a good date for groundbreaking,
a good date for building a house,
a good date for taking in a pet,
and an especially good date
for writing love poetry.

If you don't believe me,
read it yourself the message from the lunar calendar
for this magnificent date is reserved especially for you.
After having eaten so many red-hot Szechwan shrimps,
cracked open so many crispy tasty lucky fortune cookies,
and written a whole book of sweet and sour poems
at China Chef,
I'm sure you can read Chinese,
can't you?

A FORTUNE COOKIE

-- for Wilda's 80th birthday

*I'm the lucky one, I claim.
My fortune's open, full of choices.*

-- Fortune Cookie, Wilda Morris

Yes, you're very lucky indeed.
Your fortune's open, your future
is full of laughter, love, joy, friendship,
health, happiness, peace, and prosperity...

As this fortune cookie is made of poetry
it is guaranteed to remain fresh and tasty
from now to eternity.

THIS LITTLE BIRD

with an unadorned voice
not too high not too low
in front of my window
twitter tweet
twitter tweet

informs me
today
is my birthday

SOME KIND OF HUNGER

it has nothing to do
with the squirmy stomach
or the drooling mouth

a glance
a smile
a musical note
a poetic line
a cloud
or a flower
can fully satisfy it
and make it happy

no need for a feast
no burping
no potbelly

THE AFFLUENZA SOCIETY

For us
the door is always wide open
to a heavenly rehab center
not a hellish prison cell

IN GOD WE TRUST
but
IN GOLD WE TRUST
even more

1. Accepting the defense's claim that "affluenza," or the defective parenting by wealthy parents whose nurturing deprives their children of a sense of accountability for their misbehavior, a Texas judge sentenced a wealthy 16-year-old boy to 10 years of probation and a "time" of treatment in a \$450,000 a year facility for his drunk driving spree that caused four deaths and additional injuries.
(2013.12.12)
2. A \$5K reward has been offered by the U.S. Marshals Service to find the infamous Texas 'affluenza teen' who is suspected of violating his probation and possibly fleeing the country.
(2015.12.20)
3. US 'affluenza' teenager Ethan Couch arrested in Mexico - BBC News (2015.12.29)

NELSON MANDELA

after spending so many dark days
under the White Man's sky
he decides to besprinkle
even the darkest night
with starry smiles

THE NIGHT BANQUET

-- witnessing a car accident in Beijing on a dark night

In such a hurry to attend an all-night banquet
with music and dance
he raced his motorcycle
on this gloomy, narrow street
as if riding on the clouds

Suddenly a crisp pop
I thought he was knocking at the door upon arrival
but in fact he was greeted
by the Death Coach
darting from the dark

Hold it
he's still moving

THE WORLD OF SMOG

from the small window of the plane
he tried hard
to adjust his focus
but was unable to make any sense
of the hazy poetry

until he was awakened
by the cough of an eight-year-old girl
and realized
it was in fact an obscure postmodern art
painted with the black mist
spewed from her lung

* Due to air pollution, an 8-year-old girl has become the youngest known lung cancer patient in eastern China. -- Chicago Tribune, 2013.12.29

2014

FLYING A KITE

it's hard to tell
who's
 pulling
 whom

all we know is
once the string
breaks
what goes with the wind
is a dream
 of flying high
 and far

SNOW

for the sake of this heartwarming
brilliant white
one needs to endure
the teeth-chattering
cold

EXCLUSIVE SCENERY

destroyed all mausoleums
historic and cultural relics
to set his mind
at rest

so he can now collect all the glory
with his body
also at rest
in Tiananmen Square

A FALLING LEAF

ever since leaving its branch
this leaf
floats

&

 swirls
like a drunken vagabond

knowing
despite its lightness and gracefulness
it's destined to drop
to the ground

TO ARGUE WITH TIME

there is no way you can argue with time
even if you turn all his hands counterclockwise
he will just keep ticking rushing forward
leaving you way behind and breathless

then at a certain midnight
in a desolate little town
you see him sitting atop a luminous tower
with stars in his eyes

clang... clang...
 clang... clang...
 clang... clang...
clang... clang...
 clang... clang...
 clang... clang...

one after another
pounding heavily on your heart
followed by a dead
silence

now is your perfect chance to argue
if you can still open your mouth

TO ARGUE WITH THE SKY

don't ever think of arguing with the sky

when he darkens his face
amidst thunder and lightning
there is no chance to interrupt
but when the rain stops
the clouds are lucid
and a gentle breeze is blowing
you too are calm and light of heart
then you'd wonder

what's there to argue about

A WET KISS

-- for my grand dog Coco who recently passed away

with eyes closed
he habitually stretched his right hand
over the bedside
to feel for the soft fur
and her panting
warm breath

but was startled
by a frigid hollow
that snapped his eyes open

he saw his stupefied hand
stuck in the middle of an ever-expanding emptiness
waiting
for a warm
sloppy kiss
that never came

LUCK

it was my pure luck
opening the curtain early in the morning
I saw a couple of squirrels
chasing each other
on the sun-drenched snow
the backyard dead in the long winter
suddenly became alive

it was their pure luck
upon emerging from their winter slumber
that a pair of twinkling eyes appeared
behind the open curtain
capturing their innocent vivacity
and rendering their brief adventure
into a poem

SONG OF NAMELESS FLOWERS

rose, violet, gardenia, honeysuckle,
names given to us arbitrarily by humans
have absolutely nothing to do with us

the child who kisses our face
knows nothing about our names
yet he is a thousand times more lovable
than those
who after passionate admirations
would cut us without hesitation
to please their mistresses
or masters

AIR POLLUTION

each casual
particle
now becomes
a giant black meteorite
roaring straight
towards you

BUTTERFLIES

translucent wings
open and close
open and close

do you feel
my cool and rhythmic
breathing

TO ARGUE WITH ONESELF

the biggest problem
in arguing with oneself
is the role orientation

after all
who should put on the red face
the whiteface
or the blackface

CHIMNEY

with a belly full of thick, foul smoke
it remains bold and self-confident

saying
be it black or white
a cat that can catch mice
is a good cat

HOMESICKNESS

too far from home
eventually all become

orphans

* astronomers recently found some stars without any orbit. They speculated that it was possible that they were revolving around some very distant stars.

A LAS VEGAS STORY

Coming out from the smoky casino
after losing his shirt
the old man with bloodshot eyes
was thrilled to find
the setting sun
brilliant and round
on the horizon

eagerly he grasped his last chip
and threw it
into the black hole
of the universe

A NIGHT IN ICELAND

1
here
even dreams
are transparent

one small step
and you walk
right onto
tomorrow

2
your eyes still burn
with today's passion
lingering on the western sky

in the east
tomorrow
already shows its white belly

* on the day of our visit, sunset was at around 2 a.m. while sunrise around 4 a.m.

STILL LIFE #5

on a white plate
three red strawberries
holding their breath
watch a poet

now in deep thought
now scratching his head
now with eyes wide open
now smiling

write a poem
of strawberries

TIMELESS CAPSULE

-- for Nancy Jean Carrigan

after blotting out the last star
from the dark sky
she cast aside her paint brush
and walked away
without glancing back

knowing full well
the best memories of her life
have been safely stored
in her poetry her painting her sculpture
as well as the loving hearts of her family and friends

boundless
timeless capsule

WHY I WRITE POETRY

I don't know why I write poetry
all I know is that writing poetry makes me rich
enjoying -- not possessing
the ever-expanding universe
without fear of inflation

in the sky --
white clouds
singing larks
whispering wind
the tender moon and twinkling stars

on the ground --
mountains hills plains gullies
lush green red brown yellow
oceans streams lakes ponds
splashing gurgling burbling
the blooming flowers
the vacillating leaves
children's innocent laughter
cats dogs chickens ducks birds
jumping chasing croaking singing
all are parts of my life's fortune

of course, there too are
ferocious dark clouds
harrying eagles
howling storms
withering flowers
roaring guns
and piercing screams
the shadows that lend dimension
to poetry and life

In fact, I don't write poetry
poetry writes me

LIGHT AND SHADOW

young at heart
all morning the playful sun
just keeps
opening his eyes
squinting
closing his eyes
opening his eyes again
and enticing the poet
to write a poem
of life

LONELINESS #1

immersing in the illusive neon lights all night
escorted by flickering shadows big and small
shouting and jumping with admiration
the light-headed man is now
alone
on a lightless path

in the vast universe
only the half moon
looks down upon him
with her pitiful eyes
as he stumbles along
dragged forward
by his own obscure shadow

LONELINESS #2

the days with you
I don't feel lonely
the days with poetry
I also don't feel lonely

the days with you and poetry
I certainly don't feel lonely

and in the days without you and poetry
I simply prick up my ears
listening for the approach
of your poetic footsteps
and forget all about loneliness

DIARY #1

in the deep of a winter night
the running account
of a bygone era
suddenly gushes forth
trickling and gurgling

on the bank of a clear stream
among singing birds and blooming flowers
a little hand is luring me
to join up and walk together
into the almost forgotten
landscape

DIARY #2

like the most loyal pet
it would never get tired
of your dull
daily running accounts
nor blush nor be shocked
at the naked secrets
pouring out endlessly
from your heart

by the same token
neither can you expect
its warm back pressed against you
nor a praise
from its drooling tongue

TO ARGUE WITH THE SUN

you can't even shake off your own shadow
that he casts upon the ground
trying to argue with the sun
is rather overreaching

all he has to do
is to ignore you
or shut his eyes if you persist
leaving you completely in the dark
desperately trying to get hold
of yourself

BLACK SCREAM

the louder the scream
the taller the invisible wall

so they write their silent protests
in dried blood
on their raised palms
and chests

I CAN'T BREATHE!

NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

all the old resolutions and catastrophes
fall with the crystal ball
in Times Square countdown
----5--4--3--2--1--

0

YES

0

the best number
to start the new year

a shiny newborn balloon
pure and innocent
rises with joy amid magnificent fireworks
carrying new wishes
and hopes

2015

LISTENING TO BEETHOVEN'S THE PASTORAL SYMPHONY

as soon as I put on my earphones
the world that is about to burst
suddenly becomes tranquil
no more anguish cries from caged refugee children
no more angry screams of "I can't breathe"

the conductor's baton is now in position
the sun shines brightly
flowers bloom
ears open up
all waiting for the arrival
of the blissful first note
uncontaminated
from the deep
of the universe

TO ARGUE WITH THE MIRROR

it looks me straight in the eyes and says
as long as you mimic
my every word every frown and every smile
there's really nothing to argue about

TO ARGUE WITH A MOUNTAIN

there is no point in arguing with a mountain
sitting cross-legged
he looks like a lofty sage
or a merciful saint
regardless of your passionate arguments
he remains silent and motionless
as if in meditation

occasionally you hear something in the air
but find out it's only the hungry cry of an ape
or a hollow echo of your own voice

NAMELESS AND ALONE

-- to the terrorists

whatever you do
please do it in your own name --
not in my name
not in your relatives' or friends' name
not in your clansmen's name
not in the society's name
not in the human race's name
especially
not in God's name

in this life
in this world
in this universe
especially
in heaven
you will be forever
nameless

alone

AT THE FROZEN WINDOW

shooting up
from an empty treetop
three mystical crows
like three black arrowheads
penetrated the vast whiteness
of the winter morning
and landed on the neighbor's
rooftop

awaking from hibernation
my unblinking eyes stare
at the makeshift stage
waiting for Spring the Magician
to scoop up those three black dots
and toss out with a flick of the wrist
a riot of color
all over the mountains and plains

MONSTERS

jumping from the realm of myth
a flock of knife-wielding
headless monsters
roam the wilderness
of the 21st century
and vow to decapitate
anyone who is carrying
on his or her shoulders
a head

AFTER VALENTINE'S DAY

CLEARANCE SALES
BUY ONE GET ONE FREE

you smiled
and turned off the TV

our love is priceless
and wears well
no need for spares

WINDOWS

no window is big enough
to hold the panoramic views
of the world

so smart human beings
convert all sceneries
into virtual images

on the streets
 at the beaches
 on the mountains
 in the wilderness
the only scenery that remains --

people standing
 walking
 sitting
 squatting
 reclining
all stare at the tiny windows
in their hands

CLOUDY WITH OCCASIONAL RAIN

he has been searching
for a familiar silhouette
bright and lively
on the gloomy sky

but all the while the sun hides behind the thick clouds
the wind holds its breath and the rain walks on tiptoes
they simply follow the script of the weather forecast
and play their roles

on the big screen of the sky
a tedious daytime soap opera of life
without climaxes or anticlimaxes
drags on all morning

finally he decides to switch the channel
by repeatedly blinking his eyes
but is surprised to find himself
an indispensable part
of the play

A PIPE DREAM

in the deep of day
a pipe
lets out a yell
jumps to its feet
drains and shakes off
all crude oil
and sewage sludge
before turning itself
into millions of tiny translucent tubes
that connect all human hearts
to the universal refinery

with a long sigh
of relief
it lies down
and continues
its pipe dream

MAGNETISM

seeing that a tiny piece
of magnet
can hold back
time

he suddenly understands why
white clouds on the sky
breeze in midair
grass and flowers by the roadside
green leaves and singing birds on trees
and the neighbor's babbling baby
all seem to slow down
his pace

* A nearby magnet was found to slow down the clock
in our garage.

TO ARGUE WITH THE MOON

it's quite a challenge to argue with the moon
unlike arguing with the sun
you must control your temper
not to flare up easily
be gentle
more gentle
as if you are arguing with your own mother

knowing
no matter how it turns out
she will always smile
stretch out a hand
and gently stroke your hair

sleep well
my child
you have to get up early in the morning

TO ARGUE WITH THE STARS

It's impossible to argue with the stars
so many mouths --
a word from the east a word from the west
so many eyes --
a blink here a blink there
there is no way for you to respond

Better to just shut your mouth
and patiently wait
(wait all night even light years if necessary)
sooner or later
one of them is bound to start yawning and become dopey
nod its head and plunge from the sky
raising a cosmic exclamation

At that moment you can open your mouth
and utter
a victorious cry
that only you can hear

TO ARGUE WITH A PENCIL

it's pointless to argue with a pencil
wearing a rubber hat
like a shrewd politician
he would erase his fanciful promises
made only a moment ago
and leave not a single trace
for you to pick on

and that's not all
when he senses the situation is desperate
he would take a tricky fall
to reenact the heroic farce
of a warrior severing his arm

and announce solemnly
the argument has ended
no winner or loser

THE LEADING ROLE

He runs to the door
vaults into the saddle
and gallops across the prairie
toward the burning sunset

the last scene
of a western movie
is rehearsed every night
over and over
in his dream

just to reassure himself
that he still plays the leading role
when he awakens
in the morning

FIRE AND ICE

-- for the homeless Middle East refugees

another proof
that the earth is round

after escaping from the burning sky
and parched earth
the homeless refugees found
on the other side
of the globe
the sky and earth
are also burning

with cold-blooded icy flames

DUST TO DUST

--- In memory of Glenna Holloway

I see a strand of poetic gems
coming out of the urn
twinkle in the bright autumn sun
before falling into the open arms
of the earth
that thirsts for love
and nourishment

graceful and elegant
unhurried
a real lady from the South

BLOOD MOON

it turns out that the moon is just like us
flesh and blood
all coming from Mother's womb
full of pain
and joy

what makes her different
is that every few years
she goes back to the womb
of the Cosmic Mother
to be reborn

the baptism of blood
let her in billions of years
still bright and young
as ever

* This year's Mid-Autumn Festival and Supermoon Lunar Eclipse (Blood Moon) both occurred on the same day (September 27, 2015).

AN ENCOUNTER

-- taking a morning walk in the park

looking into each other's eyes
we exchange amorous glances

this is pure love
I blurt out joyously

how do you know
she is looking at you
my wife asks

because I am looking at her
I exclaim

evidently our conversation is Chinese to her

under the tree full of autumn sun
holding a nut in her hands
and raising her fluffy tail
this beautiful squirrel
with her big eyes wide open
quietly looks at us
no, at me

AS MY FINGERS COMB YOUR HAIR

as my fingers comb your hair
light combs the clouds
wind combs the hills
creeks comb the plains
birdsongs comb the woods

all seem so easy
and natural

yet I know
they all want the other to stay a while longer
or say something
but are afraid to disturb

please stay still
while my fingers comb through your hair

GOODNIGHT

she carefully enters the word
goodnight
into her online message
and dispatches it to lonely customers
who have paid the fee of one yuan

just like delivering take-out orders
to the sleepless
hungry customers
a bowl of steamy Wonton Soup

and of course there's always a free
fortune cookie
that says
"tonight you are going to have a sweet dream
of people everywhere
all saying the word *goodnight*
to you"

* A girl in China has been sending out online message with the word "Goodnight" to lonely customers who pay her a fee of one yuan.

BEYOND THE REALM OF TIME AND SPACE

the poet hauled back
from beyond the realm of time and space
a bunch of leftover junk
scraps of words
which won't be mentioned in human history
or win the Nobel Prize

but he knows well
that these unremarkable materials were used
when God created the universe

SEARCHING FOR THE LIGHT

to cast the shadow of his life behind
he searches day and night
for the light --
the sun
the moon
the stars
the flickering fireflies
even dim street lamps

yet we discover
his real focus
is on the bright hot star
of poetry
beyond all these sources
especially on those nights
when the sky and earth are covered
with thick clouds and heavy snow
and there is a power outage

HOLIDAY

when gunfire and bombs
light up the sky
laughing and singing
turn into screaming

we know there must be a typo
in the word
HOLIDAY

is it
HOLLOWDAY
or
HORRORDAY

yet deep in our innocent minds
we know it's
HODAY

for we already hear
the approaching joyous laughter
of Santa Claus
HO... HO... HO...

2016

HOME

with wings
anywhere can be home

yet all these starving refugees can do
is to drag their tired feet on the ground
and watch the shadows
of a flock of flying birds
while fiercely swallowing
their dry saliva

BEAUTIFULLY SERENE

the flower outside my window
blooms quietly under the morning sun
beautifully serene

the serene beauty
a beautiful little poem

BLANK SPACE

1

turn the TVs the radios the computers and the cell phones off
let the overloaded ears eyes and hearts
breathe a sigh of relief
and give the smothered day
some breathing room

2

turning off the TV
no more screaming bullets
no more yelling campaign speeches
no more bloody red pale green gloomy blue murky black
only the snowfield outside the window remains
sunny and bright

WRITING POETRY

knowing
the small eddies in the pond
the gentle ripples on the lake
the gurgling streams
the torrential rivers
the billowing seas
all start with a drop
of water

with a smile on his face
the poet
puts down on the paper
his very first
word

STILL LIFE #6

bloated by surging passions
a lemon
lies restlessly on a plate by the easel
watches the hand of an artist
frozen in midair
unable to decide
where to start his painting

a still life

THE TRUMP WALL

Built at the border of our hearts
this wall of the 21st century will grow
drawing nourishment from all dark corners
of human nature
to become the Great Wall
of America

Hold it!
are you trying to come in
or get out

A SHRIEKING BABY

-- at the scene of Brussels' terrorist attack, 2016.3.22

1

this piercing cry of the baby
is a long long umbilical cord
stretching between old and new hatreds
the black holes waiting to devour
the entire human world

hopefully the midwife
will wake up in time
and snip it
before it's too late

2

rising from the smoke and rubble
of hatred
a siren wails
leads the ambulance
that carries wounded humanity
toward
the emergency station
of the universe

hopefully
it will arrive
in time

LITTLE GRASS

awakened by another herd of refugees
the grass became panic and wanted to join

but Mother Earth clutched its feet
and would not let go
which made it wonder
was she trying to show love, mercy,
or simply selfish desperation?

MORNING NEWS #1

again
they are shouting
screaming
cursing
lying
campaigning
to be the laughing-stock
of the universe

disgusted
he reached for the remote
yet on second thought
decided to leave the TV on
just to remind himself
of the good news

no worse disasters struck last night
no hijacked airplanes
no bloody terrorist attacks
no devastating typhoons
no eruption of volcanoes
no earthquakes
no

MUHAMMAD ALI

a heavy blow
the whole earth shook violently once again

isn't he suffering from Parkinson's disease?
how could he be back in the ring?

it was the dying man
throwing all his weight
at human conflict and social injustice

his last punch

A CYCAS TAIWANIANA IN BLOOM

after several decades of silence
the *Cycas taiwaniana* is finally
in full bloom

she says it can no longer contain its loneliness
you say it's the manifestation of a burning passion
he says it's showing the chaotic world
its middle finger

I say
the *Cycas taiwaniana* is in fact a poet
this is a poem it has cultivated for decades
to let people chirp and tweet



START FROM HERE

--for my 80th birthday

80 annual rings of poetry
80 roadhouses

each stop has its scenery
each stop has its characters
each stop has its love stories
each stop is a new starting point with a new direction
now all are waving and calling

come! come!
start from here

LAKE TAI

this is the place!

patrolling back and forth in space
the universe designer
finally let go
of a most precious meteorite
hurling it towards
the brightest spot on earth

bang!

millions of years later
I can still faintly hear
its lingering sound
amid the chanting of a group of poets

picturesque scenery
giving birth to great talents...

* according to a recent research report from the Department of Earth Science of Nanjing University, Lake Tai, a large freshwater lake in the Yangtze Delta plain near Shanghai, China, is an impact crater of a meteorite.

NIGHT-BLOOMING CEREUS

knowing
this short moment
is her entire life
she opens each petal
at a deliberate pace
and blooms every second
into
eternity

FIVE EPIPHYLLUMS BLOOM TOGETHER

five epiphyllums
bloom the short night
into eternity

no time to monopolize the limelight
no time to envy each other
they all concentrate on the creation
of a splendid little poem
in their short life



FRIENDSHIP

you wave your hand
without glancing back
walk towards the horizon
becoming a tiny dot
and disappear

with a heavy heart I turn around
yet find you right there
by my side

FLYING

-- for a famed 12-year-old girl writer in China

from hearing the word flying
to
thinking of flying
to
longing to fly
to
learning to fly
to
flapping her wings

she finally
soared high into the sky
amid the applause and cheers

that was when she realized
the immensity
of the universe

A ONE-WAY ROAD

on the seemingly endless road
one car after another
each carries its own load toward some destination

trapped in the traffic
there's no way of passing
or turning back
he stares straight ahead
waiting for a glistening crossroad
to rise up
are we there yet?

IN FRONT OF THE BUDDHA

by the time he bowed and put his palms together
thinking of how to start his prayer

the merciful Buddha had already smiled and said
I know I know

JET LAG

all night he stayed awake
staring at the darkness
trying desperately to pick up
things left behind by the soaring jet

sunlight
singing
laughter
friendship
love
and time

at dawn homesickness suddenly struck like the smog
all day long he struggled to keep his eyes open
half asleep
half awake

NEW YEAR

divide the endless stream of time into

years
months
days
hours
minutes
seconds

put them into a long string of firecrackers
light it
and watch it flare up

PRAIRIE

the boundless open field
of mind

no dark forest
only scattered trees

here
grasses flowers rabbits mice all know well
the closer to the ground
the more vigorous the vitality

even the aloof wind knows
in order to be able to stroke the hair
of his lover the earth
he must bend down

gentle and more gentle
tender and more tender

VOLCANO

1

knowing he could no long bear
the surging passion
she pecked tenderly on his cheek
like a bird
with pointy lips

immediately
flame soared
and the world turned upside
down

2

seeing the wounds and scars
humans had caused on his body
he shook uncontrollably
and finally opened his mouth

boom!
to let out his burning anger

THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG

in spite of the global warming
there won't be any melting soon
of the cold-eyed stare
that you gave me the other night

ICEBERG

it started melting
from its heart

our cheering and hailing
puffing hot air
are nothing but a passing breeze

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GLOBAL WARMING

a heart as cold and hard
as an iceberg

our warning hot air
is nothing to him
but a passing breeze

SONG OF REFUGEES

following the grey clouds
(neither white nor black)
a flock of tired feet
each dragging a bleeding heart
drift from one country
to another
in search of a shelter
that has not yet been torn apart
by hatred
and bombs

ODE TO THE SNOW

every flake
has its own life
and halo

they stick together
just to let the world know
what Snow White looks like

and if you ask
those little kids and dogs
rolling in the snow
they will all exclaim
JOY!

NEW YEAR

he strikes a match
to light his cigarette
yet suddenly turns the flame
towards the fuse
of a string of childhood memories

immediately
the sky is blazed with color
everywhere are blooming flowers
of a splendid spring

WATERFALL

the bigger the gap
the louder the voice

an awe-inspiring poem
of protest
not a single word
suffering from acrophobia

2017

MONA LISA'S SMILE

I know why you smile
I know why you always smile
at me

you want to see me
always smile
at you

END OF THE WORLD

since the earth is round
there's no such thing
as the end of the world

unless we somehow lose or pop
the balloon
that is full of love and compassion

turning the WORLD
into
the W RLD
a rugged terrain
where one can fall into any time

A SORE WINNER

he won the election
yet he is not satisfied
all the cheering and hailing came from the living
but few, if any, from the dead

so he vows to investigate
how many dead people are really dead
and how many living people pretend to be living

A CAGED BIRD

1

the door of the cage
is wide open

carrying its wings
the bird walks around
and looks up
at the sky

after flying through
many cloudy and clear skies
seeing many seasonal colors
it now ponders
how to fly to the virtual universe
with a pair of virtual wings

2

in this Internet Age
he realizes
the word "freedom"
is meaningless and irrelevant

at this moment
he uses his eyes
to open the virtual door of the cage
adjusts his pair of virtual wings
ready to shoot up into
the sky

GOOD MEDICINE

in herbal medicine
the bitter the better

yet as a poet
I find it's just the opposite

a gentle breeze
a sweet chirp
a blooming flower
a green leaf
an innocent smile
a lively melody
especially

a good poem a day
keeps the doctor away

THE FIRST FULL MOON

pour tears into homesickness
mix and knead
wrap up all the sesame seeds
of accumulated trivialities, worries and anxieties
to make an alluring
full moon

* according to Chinese tradition, in the night of the 15th of the first lunar month, sweet dumplings made of glutinous rice flour are served to symbolize family unity and happiness.

INSOMNIA

a hesitating voice
"hello, anybody there?"
escapes from a homesick dream
and soars into the sleepless night sky
hopping
from one star
to another

A SWEET DREAM ABOUT DONUTS

1

a sweet ring
of temptation

you must maintain
your gentlemanly manner
as if facing
a ring of plump lips
of your lover

never devour it
like a starving man

2

facing a perfect ring
of sweet temptation

eyes glaring
mouth watering
he ponders and ponders

where to start

THE NIGHTMARE OF A DONUT

after escaping from a table of overflowing calories
and incessant burping
the donut
flies in circles
looking for a good spot
to land

to his surprise he sees on the ground
a crowd of people
with raising arms
mouths wide open

no idea whether they are eager to grasp and devour him
or mistake him for a flying saucer
comes to take them
to the outer space

A WANDERER

tripping over his own
shadow
on the bumpy road

he can't help being ecstatic

under the moonlight
he is not at all
alone

MORNING SONG

tenderly
the man tells the brown tailed bird
pecking in the grass
every insect every worm in this backyard
is yours
you just take your time to enjoy

tenderly
the brown-tailed bird tells the man
standing on the deck
every dewdrop every tear on the grass
is hers
you just take your time to count

GLOBAL WARMING

I have reached a saturation point
on small talk
about global warming

the shivering old man
once again
declares

the only difference is
last time he was in the ice
now he is engulfed in fire

THIS YEAR'S FIRST DANDELION

I know you don't like snow or ice
and love to travel

returning from your roaming dream
you chose this brilliant moment
to make your appearance
just to surprise the poet
who has been shivering all winter
trying to write a new poem

BETWEEN US

leaves stroking
 branches touching
 vines intertwining
 hands holding
 hearts embracing
 no wall
 no boundary
 no prejudice
 no hatred
 no war

between us
 only
 love

SPRING

a warm drizzle
gently
awakens the earth

A LUNCH DATE

--to Al Chilenskaskas

in this morning's email
you wrote
*we haven't got together for quite some time
hope you are free on Friday the 19th of April
we can have lunch and chat*

I rushed to the recycle bin
to find the day that was torn off from my calendar
luckily it was still there
a blank page
no appointments nor engagements

now the question is
how to make the sun rise in the west
or make my watch run
counterclockwise

you know
according to my calendar
today is
May 12th

ALL TOO SOON

-- (response from Al Chilenskaskas)

Your poem reminds me of the month
Not April but of May
When we meet to have our say

For elders such as me
April is as good as May
To view the passing of the day
As an inner voice keeps repeating
All too soon, all too soon.

WIND AND LOVE

wind is invisible
yet one can clearly see its whereabouts
ethereal clouds
trembling flowers and grass
bouncing branches of trees
rattling windows
or signs flying and tumbling on the streets

love too is invisible
yet one can find its existence
in a kitten's meow meow
the wagging tail of a little dog
the joyous laughs of children
a warm greeting from a neighbor
or a friendly glance of a stranger
and above all
in a lover's pounding heart

THUNDERSTORM

from
sunshine and gentle wind
to
darkening sky
to
crashing and cracking
to
banging and booming
to
pattering and drizzling
to
clear sky
to
sunshine and birdsong

once again
God tried every sound
to awaken stubborn human minds
and
deafen credulous ears

A STRING OF GRAPES

each grape
has its own full and sweet life
waiting to be explored
tasted
and savored

as in a beautiful poem
every word's a pearl
not to be swallowed
in haste

THE BRONZE STATUE OF FLYING WINGS

With a flap of its wings,
it can reach the world from north to south.
The entire sky belongs to it

But it would rather stay here
with its back straight up and its feet deep
into the land where it belongs

Then use the takeoff posture
to inspire a pair of artistic eyes
and a poetic pen to describe
the eternal nostalgia of the universe

DOOR

what a wise guy
came up with the idea
of putting a door on the wall

though it might be convenient
for the law-abiding people like you and me
it leaves the wall-climbing heroes
with no place to display their prowess

*In China, many Internet users, nicknamed "Wall-Climbers", gain access to certain forbidden websites by using some special internet software.

UNFASHIONABLE SPLENDOR

on the blue sky runway
cloud models
young and old, men and women, fat and slim
are displaying formalwear of fur and silk
but mostly light and comfortable everyday dresses

a show especially designed
for those bright eyes
not addicted and stuck all day
to screens big or small

SONG OF THE EARTH

the mother earth
willingly lets a sharp knife
cut a long line
over her body

immediately
blood gushes out
and lives flourish

fishes and shrimps leap and flip
bees butterflies birds ducks and geese fly up and down
dogs lambs cows and horses hop and run
green grass and trees dance and swing
together they sing a chorus of the earth
vigorous and sweet
along the river running through it

A RIVER RUNNING THROUGH

birds flying in the sky
blood vessels winding throughout the body
lives passing through the world
all have their limits

only this river
keeps surging and surging
day and night

with a seemingly
inexhaustible
source

WHITE ORCHIDS

1
under bright sunshine
white wings
flap lightly
in the gentle wind

such a happy day
nobody is willing
to fly away

under the heavy storm
white wings
cling tightly
to mother's bosom

such a dreadful day
nobody has the heart
to fly away

2
white wings
open and close
open and close

do you smell
the fragrance
of her breath

MORNING NEWS #2

turning on the TV
immediately
all natural disasters and human tragedies
that have accumulated overnight
rush out
and darken the sunlit room

in a panic he presses the button
to shut out the world

but is unable to turn off
the howling gale
the roaring thunder
the booming bombs and explosions
the shrilling cries of babies
the dead silent blank stares

◦ ◦ ◦ ◦ ◦ ◦

PHOTOGRAPHY

No matter how fast the shutter speed is
A camera or even
The most intelligent mobile phone
Can only capture
A retreating shadow
of the past

SNAKE

nothing is more creative
than a snake

slithering a short straight road
into a brilliant poem
of surprising bends
and turns

GRANDPA, PLEASE SIT HERE

among the hustle and bustle
on the ferry to Gulang Island
I hear a sweet voice
"Grandpa, please sit here"
I look around
a young mother standing next to her little boy
who is playing with his new toy
asks me to take her seat

not a grandpa
nevertheless I sit down with thanks
and find the smile on her face
more beautiful
than the famous mountains and great waters
on our sightseeing tour

outside the windows
the distant view brightens
second by second

AUTUMN SCENE

even the wingless clouds
follow the wild geese
flying south

trapped in the earth
with wings all over its body
the tree keeps shaking and quivering
trying desperately
to join them

LATE AUTUMN

watching from the window
fallen leaves swirling in the wind
round and round inside the fenced yard
he braces himself

perhaps they are not dancing the waltz
but rather a part of the refugee flow
drifting through the world
unable to find their way home

SUMMER

at long last
feet afraid of the cold
come out of shoes
one after another

on prairies
on beaches
on wooden paths
they passionately kiss
Mother Earth
while happily singing
the song of barefoot angels

SUNFLOWERS

with wide-open eyes
and long-stretched necks
they look all over the boundless plain
and the skies
for their longing sun

not knowing
the sun is right in their hearts
smiling warmly

2018

A WINTER WILLOW

now that all ponds, lakes and rivers have become frozen
and the bright-eyed birds, rabbits, squirrels, and children
have either flown south, in hibernation, or staying indoor
without these reflecting mirrors
the weather-beaten willow
sees no way
and no point
to dress itself up

but it knows its beautiful images
are stored safely at the bottom of the lake
and the heart of a young poet
ready to sprout
a riot of color
into dazzling poems
of spring

MOURNING

suddenly disconnected
hello hello
are you still there?

LIFE

witnessing a slowly forming miniature poem
he bursts out crying
and laughing

ENERGY CONSERVATION LAW

the scientists keep warning about
GLOBAL WARMING
the skeptics keep declaring
FAKE NEWS

now I understand why my body
feels warmer and warmer
while my heart
is getting colder and colder

FLORIDA HIGH SCHOOL SHOOTING

once again
I hear bang bang bang bang
bullets shooting out of an assault rifle
rip through innocent young bodies
setting off a series of wailing cries

once again
I hear clink clank clink clank
gold coins dropping into golden bowls
held by weapon manufacturers, NRA,
politicians and dealers
setting off a series of belly chuckles

WINTER SUN

no matter how hard you try
using all kinds of clouds
to disguise yourself
and drawing my eyes to look straight at your face
still I won't be fooled
to take you as the tender moon

even without the ceaseless bone-chilling reminders
from the north wind

ICICLES

without any doubt
these columns of gleaming spears
will crumble and disappear
with the icy kingdom they try to protect

before the arrival of spring

MORNING FOG

the loving mother
once again converted her rain of tears
into a misty fog

worrying about her only child
alone in a city far from home
might have forgotten his umbrella
on his way to work this morning

MARCH FOR OUR LIVES

the sky is still cloudy
yet I see sunshine
trying to break through
to shine on your young faces

yes
sooner or later this world belongs to you
but I understand
you want to hold this world in your hands now
before it breaks into pieces

* A [student-led demonstration](#) in support of [gun control](#) legislation.¹ It took place in [Washington, D.C.](#), on March 24, 2018, with over 880 sibling events throughout the United States and around the world.

WALDEN POND

*"...it is earth's eye; looking into which the beholder
measures the depth of his own nature."*

--Henry David Thoreau

Shhhh!
don't say a word
you'll startle the birds on the trees
and the fish in the pond

worst of all
you'll draw the attention of the noisy tourists
they will pour over by busloads
to look into your eye
that is now full of human waste
and measure the shallow depth
of their own nature

*Thoreau's Walden Pond Being Destroyed by Human Waste and
Climate Change--Pam Wright, weather.com, 2018.4.5

A POLITICIAN

the brighter the sun
the darker the shadow

that's why
he often proclaims

black
is
white

white
is
black

BIRD TRANSLATOR

in this spring morning
of sunshine and breeze
there's not even one single trace
of dark cloud
in the sky

listening to your chirps
I know clearly
without the help
of a bird translator
you are as happy and grateful as I am

* Dog translator app is now available to translate dog barks to English.

CITRUS

each one
is a perfect being
full of passionate
sweet juice
yet always keeps
its cool

you'll never see it
erupt
like a volcano

MORNING RAIN

lying on my bed I listen
to the lively little fingers
tapping on the roof
playing the concerto
of dream and reality

there's no other sound
not even the birdsong
that usually rises
at this time of morning
only an occasional breeze
sweeps by
at hint
of the baton

SUMMER CAMPS

snatching from the arms
of desperate parents
they put the crying kids
into cages
behind chain-link fences

essentially concentration
summer camps

*Fox News's Laura Ingraham says immigrant child detention centers are 'essentially summer camps'

PORTRAIT

let the brush
of time
paint over and over
the ever-changing background
and outlines
on the canvas of my heart

still
I'll use the softest line
and the warmest color
to put the final touch
at the corners of your mouth
and eyes

the eternal and everlasting smile
when we first met

Mona Lisa

RELEASE

all morning I watched helplessly
a bee
trapped between windowpanes
trying to escape

eventually it struggled through
a crack
and returned to the outside world

the sky opened up
grasses flowers trees
all stretched out
their welcoming arms

pleasantly surprised
I found I was the one
being set free

THE SUN

without reservation
he gives his love
light and warmth
to all universal beings --
big and small, tall and short,
pretty and ugly, crawling and flying,
active and inert, live and dead...

the dark graves on the ground
dug by those opaque minds
of envy, suspicion, hatred, and jealousy
have nothing to do with him

SHADOW

it never favors one over the other
regardless of skin colors --
white, yellow, brown, or black

not even the most discriminating eye
can find any bone
to pick with

THE KINGDOM OF POETRY

even the most powerful kingdom
has borders

yet this ambitious poet
wants to have a borderless kingdom
of the broad sea and unlimited sky
that has no ports of entry or walls
anyone can come and go
without a passport

a kingdom built with
alphabetic characters
white clouds and gentle breezes
red flowers green grasses and trees
chirping singing and shouting
of insects birds and children
and most of all
the limitless and shadowless
love

YOU ARE A HERO

-- in memory of Senator John McCain

after surviving a POW camp in Vietnam
you return to your country

YES! YOU ARE A HERO

after surviving the prison
of endless human hatred and conflicts
you return to Heaven

YES! YOU ARE A HERO

SMILE

on her stiff face
one can't even find a smiley line

the past winter must have been so severe
that spring is hesitant to show up
in her heart

ZION NATIONAL PARK

1
such a primitive
masterpiece

even the most avant-garde artist
can only stand there
dumbfounded

2
so original
so avant-garde

without a doubt
it's a self-portrait
of the divine artist

MORNING MAKEUP

all morning
in front of a mirror
she tried everything from her jewelry box--
diamond ring, bracelet, pearl necklace, earrings ...
yet was unable to recreate
her beautiful image

until she pulled from her memory box
a brightly blooming
genuine smile

A NAUGHTY OLD BOY

-- for my "old" artist friend, Mr. Huang Yong-yu

younger than a young boy
older than an old man

this naughty old boy
grasps a handful of sweets and bitters
joys and sorrows
from his long --- long --- life
puts them in his mouth
and chews with gusto

when he opens his mouth
the flesh-and-blood jokes spewed out
are so stunning
that the crowds don't know
whether to laugh
or cry

COO COO COO

it must be a childhood playmate
calling from outside the window
with a soft low voice
coo coo coo
waking me up early in the morning

a partridge
a dove
a lingering owl
or you
a tired wanderer on the earth
returned to play
hide-and-seek

PHONE CALL

ring ring ring

it must be a salesman
trying to sell something
or a politician
trying to sell himself

when I pick up the phone
I am pleasantly surprised
it is you
with a sweet voice
promoting friendship
and love

FLYING A KITE

the string
stretched tightly on both ends
by shrieking joy

nobody can tell
who is pulling whom

NEUTRAL AND TRANSPARENT

maybe
we should have a neutral spray paint
to make various skin colors
 white
 black
 yellow
 and brown
indistinguishable
so we can't discriminate
against each other

then spray on top of it
a penetrating transparent layer
to reveal the complexion
of each soul

EVERY GUST OF WIND IS A POEM

wind is invisible
yet you know
this gust of wind comes from Siberia
you can see glistening icicles
formed under the eaves right after its passing

that wind comes from the fields of springtime
the gently floating white clouds
the softly vibrating leaves
the chirping birds and insects
the laughing children
all carry some fragrance of flowers

that window-shaking wind
is to warn you
of an approaching thunderstorm

this moist wind comes from your heart lake
standing by its shore
your old lover is reciting with tears
the love poems you wrote for her
many years ago

yes
wind is invisible
but it uses all kinds of images
to let you feel its existence
and to comprehend its boundless
unpredictable poetic meaning and beauty

MORNING MAKEUP

all morning
in front of a mirror
she tried everything from her jewelry box--
diamond ring, bracelet, pearl necklace, earrings ...
yet was unable to recreate
her beautiful image

until she pulled from her memory box
a brightly blooming
genuine smile

THE TINNITUS SYMPHONY

at the very beginning
a bass horn hummed from the left ear
merging with the shrieking violin from the right
climbed to the mountaintop
then howling and roaring
together they rushed down and swept across the wilderness
soon they were scooped up and held in midair
waiting for the conducting baton
to drop

A FOGGY MORNING

misty sky
misty earth
misty eyes
misty mind
all help to form a charming
misty poem

suddenly
a scene on the TV screen
of yelling cursing crowds
with a clear dividing line
of

black and white
red and blue

tore the poem
into
pi e c e s

THE MORNING RIVER

lying on the bed of the earth
it stretches cozily
toward the horizon
and lets out
a BIG l...o....n.....g..... yawn

MOURNING THE PRESIDENT

The TV screens
full of mourning sounds
much louder and more moving
than any candidate
could have aroused
in a campaign rally

He thought
how wonderful it would be
if he himself
was the beloved one

THE COWBOY AND THE WEAVING GIRL

when crowded streets and skyscrapers
occupy all open fields
automobiles take the place of galloping horses
where can one find a cowboy

and when cars are driven by autopilots
the name of driver will become obsolete
in its place
will be a weaving girl
with eyes staring at her cell phone
fabricating a virtual mirage

* A Chinese love story between the Cowboy, a human, and the Weaving Girl, a fairy. They fell in love with each other, got married and had children, but were later forced to separate and became two stars across the Milky Way. They were allowed to meet on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month each year, when flocks of magpies come to form a bridge over the Milky Way.

2019

FAKE AND REAL

-- a politician's question

all news is fake

since everybody knows
my twitters are fake
my words are fake
my deeds are fake
my smiles are fake

why do you keep saying
my rage against fake news
is real

SUNSET AT THE SEASHORE

burning all day
trying to char every evil face on earth
yet at the last moment
he softens and relents
throwing the fireball
into the water

amid the sizzling sound
I see the entire ocean boil up
empty bottles, syringes, plastic bags, cups, and plates
all rushing into this big pot
from every corner of the world

and in a dark dining room
a lonely old man
lifting with a grunt
his plastic knife and fork

* A dead whale was found in the Philippines with 88 pounds of plastic bags and other disposable plastic products in its stomach. (New York Times, March 19, 2019)

ODE TO SNOW AND ICE

yesterday morning
when I was fighting with the new snow blower
our white neighbor across the street came over
and asked if we needed help
saying there were several idle hands
in her house

this morning
as we struggled at the stairs with a huge box
containing the snow blower to be returned
a young black man just walking out of the UPS store
rushed over and said
please let me help

without the freezing snow and ice
we would have missed the chance
to feel the warmth
of the world

VALENTINE'S DAY

he believes
love is not a pie
it won't diminish by sharing

everyone, big and small, young and old
his sweetheart, relatives, friends, neighbors and street people
birds, reptiles and insects
(including the mystical dragons)
grasses, flowers, trees, streams and hills
all are his lovers

and everyday
is
Valentine's Day

ICE TREES

they appear in full dress
to make early-rising eyes
sparkle

much more beautiful and tempting
than jade carvings
yet collectors can only covet them
from a distance

knowing there's no way
to make them cherished toys
or antiques

HIDE AND SEEK

when he was little
he enjoyed playing hide-and-peek
with the wind

even though he could not see it
he believed
it was hiding behind
a big tree

knowing well
that the mischievous leaves above
could not hold their breath for long
sooner or later
they would reveal its whereabouts
with a gentle smile
or a bursting laugh

LITTLE REFUGEES

eyes staring
at the strange heavens and earth
no sound
from their open mouths

yet I can hear every word
by the movement of their quivering lips --
cold, hungry, mom, hold me....

FOOTPRINTS

in order not to lose its way
an animal would occasionally turn around
to look at its own footprints

this lost man
turns his head at every tiny step
to look at his absurd footprints
scattered randomly around

as the footprints get shallower and shallower
his self-praise becomes
louder and louder

CHERRY BLOSSOM SEASON

the cherry blossoms on the tree say
you are beautiful
the girl under the tree says
you are more beautiful
the bird flying over the tree says
all are very beautiful

an overwhelmed passing poet
keeps repeating
I am beautiful I am beautiful I am beautiful

HUMANKIND

kindly humans
warm the globe
and cast imperishable bread
(made of plastic scraps)
upon the waters

so that ocean creatures
will never feel
cold and hungry
again

* A dead whale was found in the Philippines with 88 pounds of plastic bags and other disposable plastic products in its stomach. (New York Times, March 19, 2019)

RED ROBIN

hi!
sweating under the sun
while pushing my lawn mower
I smiled and greeted a red robin
that just descended on the grass not far from me

looking at me with startled eyes
it tossed its head from side to side
as if to say we don't belong to the same race
or even the same species
how come you know me?

I thought all birds have good memories
I said with a broader smile
don't you remember
not long ago we met
and became friends

in the realm of poetry?

BLACK HOLES

1
anything
material or immaterial
including the loitering light
once sucked in
can never escape

2
this young man
looking deep into his lover's eyes
wishes himself to be a black hole
to suck in her smiles
and the love embedded in her heart

3
staring deep into each other's eyes
these lovers
both try to find a black hole
to cast in their inexpressible love

ROBOTS UNION

seeing
the industrious, restless robots
take away their jobs
smart human beings
finally come up with a smart plan

working from 9 to 9
including Saturdays
(this is only a beginning)

see who is more robotic

*A big company in China is asking its employees to work from 9 to 9 everyday, including Saturdays.

A RING

in a sun-filled room
she searched with her bright eyes
every possible spot
yet was unable to find
her beautiful ring

tossing and turning all night
she got up
in the dim light leaked in through the window
and pulled open
her desk drawer

a sudden flash
she found the ring
laughed at her
from a dark corner

SPEEDING

crossing the ocean in summertime
what joy what joy

on a desolate superhighway in Maine
he was chasing the wind
riding the waves and soaring into the clouds

half a century later
he finally caught up

with his stunned
self

*Recently I was told that, to renew my driver's license, I would need a letter of clearance from the State of Maine concerning an unsettled case of speeding ticket issued in the summer of 1977.

FLOOD

as torrents of water
roll and crush
and the sky
stiffens its dark face
the narrow-minded dam knows
it's time to shut its gate

behind the flood
there will be gushing waves
of human tears

TINNITUS

ringing noisily
day and night
just to remind me
the world and I
are still alive

A BULLY

when bloody words spew out
of his pouting lips
we know
he is trying to sell
himself again

twisting truth into
fake news
and spinning scandals into
great tweets

this bully
the reality show host
is a master at inciting
a herd of lost lambs
to chase their own tails
in an endless circle

round and round
round and round...

YUANJI DANCE

rushing up through the feet
a steady flow of fresh vitality
coming from Mother Earth
eventually pushes out of the body
the stagnant air
— stale, insipid, musty, mildewy and stinking —
that has accumulated overnight
no, over the entire life

look
in the melodious music
bright smiles are blooming
one after another
on the faces of the dancers
who are getting younger
and younger
with every poetic move

*A mixture of martial arts, physical therapy, meditation, dance and qigong exercise.

FOUR BLUE EGGS

four bright blue
eyes
stare right at me

I know
it was I
who carelessly
knocked you down
from your comfortable nest

I know
at this moment
your mother
standing on the grass nearby
stares right at me
with eyes bigger than yours

waiting for me
to put her babies back
one by one
into the warm cradle

WOODS

a free state
no gates
no walls

every evening
flocks of birds return
to its welcoming arms

after a dreamy night
we see a white snake
and a clear stream
wiggle out leisurely
and enter the foggy world
that is brightening up
second by second

BRIDE OIL PORTRAIT

-- on our 57th wedding anniversary

anybody can have a pouting
or glaring moment
even in front of one's beloved lover

yet from morning till night
with a pair of bright eyes
and a sweet smile
you follow me to every corner of the room

the blossom
from our wedding 57 years ago
keeps blooming

*A painting by my artist friend Mr. Weiliang Zhao based on the
bride's wedding photo



COOKING

no matter how hard I tried to fry the stuff
it just didn't taste right

so I searched my fridge
and found a condiment bottle
that had been stored there for ages
and emptied the entire contents into the wok

when I tasted it again
my tears poured down like rain
unable to distinguish
the taste of life --
sour, sweet, bitter, or hot

A VISITOR

1
early in the morning
my wife awakened me
telling me there was a visitor
at our back door

I got up
and found a golden crowned kinglet
standing right outside the kitchen
looking up and down
left and right

maybe because of the sudden cold weather
or accidentally bumping onto the transparent glass door
this lost little bird
was looking for her mother
and their warm nest

I picked her up gently
and put her in a plastic box
giving her a small cup of water
and a piece of bread

shaking her head slightly

suddenly she opened her wings
and flew up toward the sky
yet hit the white ceiling

returning to the floor
she stood on the edge of the plastic box
looking straight at me
while I looked at her...

finally I picked her up and put her back
outside the door
leaving it wide open
to let her make up her own mind

before I could figure out what kind of cage to buy
or what poem to write for her
she was gone

2
I can totally understand
her choice

no matter how big our house is
to the one with a pair of wings
it's still a cage

3
I really would like to know
if she has found her mother
and her warm nest

too bad I can't think of any way
to convey my best wishes to her
but hope that she can find a leaf
to scribble down the messages with her beak
and send it to the wind that will carry it
to the front of our back door
the very spot where she was standing the other day

WOLVES

wolves are coming
wolves are coming

screaming for hours
yet we don't see any wolf

wait a second
isn't the one who is screaming
a wolf

HERE COMES THE RAIN

here comes the rain
the earth
that suffered the longest drought
cries with joy and open arms

here comes the rain
the earth
that experienced the severest flood
cries with woe and cringing arms

here comes the rain
here comes the rain

TUNNEL

can't bear to watch
people breathlessly climbing
on its back

the mountain
opens up
a little door
in its heart

NOT A DIRGE

-- in memory of our dear friend Michael Galati

I was told
that you left this planet
to start in another world
an eternal life
But somehow in my heart
I can still hear your laughter
and see your smiling face
When I open the volumes of your work
I see you standing right there on a platform
speaking to an enthusiastic crowd of listeners

Even if you are gone
I feel there's not much point
in writing a mournful dirge
because I remember these comforting words from a professor

*For one who has spent a fruitful life on earth
there's no reason to pity when he leaves this world
Do you think Beethoven and Shakespeare would feel unhappy
at the end of their lives?*

I see you are now joining their ranks
with a smile

2020

Year 2020

during this year
you'd better not
think one thing
say another
do something else

we can see right through you
with our perfect vision —
20/20

CLOUDY DAY

with a gloomy face
all morning long
the sky contemplates and meditates
but can't make up its mind

whether to cry out loud
or to give a brightening smile

A RENAISSANCE COUPLE

Now I realize
I am a Renaissance man
since my wife
is a Renaissance woman

She married well
I believe
and has been loyal to me
at least so far
and gave birth to two boys

But to tell the truth
I'd be more than happy to swap the fancy title
of Renaissance man
for a wonderful and lovely daughter

* There are various definitions of Renaissance woman on the Internet, such as "A woman who is interested in and knows a lot about many things"; "A woman who has broad intellectual interests and is accomplished in areas of both the arts and the sciences", etc. And according to an essay on bartleby.com: "...A Renaissance woman is supposed to marry well, be loyal to her husband and give birth to boys."

A CRANE AMONG CHICKENS

-- for a responsible political figure

you stood up for your faith
they just sat there
gazing at one another

you sat down
they all fell flat on the ground
with ashen faces

one day when you lie down
history will turn your heroic stand
into a pair of wings
and watch you fly joyously
toward the ever-brightening sky
of democracy

A TWO-WAY HIGHWAY

you have your starting point
I have my destination
this guy wants to see the rising moon
that guy wants to watch the falling sun
or
you look up to your god
and he bows down to his god

but as long as all obey the regulation
not recklessly blowing their horns
not exceeding the speed limit
nor crossing the center line
whether it's a passenger car a truck
a big car a small car
a blue car a green car a white car or a black car
all are parts of the moving scenery
of the world

FORTUNE COOKIE

just about to bite off
a fortune cookie
he choked
on a rising sense of fortune

in this world
not everybody can have a meal
not to mention
an after-dinner sweet

SPRING HIBERNATION

after a long, long icy winter
we anxiously wait
for an inspired naturalistic artist
holding a palette full of
light green dark green and a riot of colors
to paint a world of bursting joy

birds jumping and singing on the trees
squirrels chasing up and down back and forth
children laughing shouting and running
all are part of the moving scenery

suddenly
a devilish hand of COVIC sticking out from nowhere
spreads an invisible dark net
over the emerging beautiful scenery
causing a series of lockdowns
of homes, schools, stores, towns, cities, states, countries...

what follows is
the entire world being locked
into a nightmarish
spring hibernation

DEMENTIA

-- for an old friend

I am sure
you still remember

those happy good old days
we shared together
PANDEMIC DAYS

scissors! rock! paper!

seeing his right hand
can now play games
against his own left hand
and his two eyes
without any tutoring
can wink at each other

this homebound pupil
in the depths of loneliness
ecstatically opens his mouth wide
and sings loudly
a triumphant song
to himself

A PHOTO OP

this old veteran of reality shows
who has been playing money, women, power...
all his life
is now standing in front of a church
to play religion

not because he believes in God
but because he knows
there is a flock of shuttered eyes
waiting to take a picture
of the Bible clutched upside down in his hands
hoping to use it
as the quick admission ticket
to Heaven

ZERO

0
is not
an empty number

a string of balloons
rise steadily

and form
a brilliant scenery
BEFORE THE MIRROR

1
if I were you
I'd open my mouth
and laugh out loud

2
to make us both happy
I'll bring with me a big smile
next time I see you

3
no one likes to stand
in front of a broken mirror
looking for himself

4
there's got to be a multifaceted mirror
that reveals the wrinkles
of time

5
I didn't know sticking out your tongue
looked so ugly
even if it were only a prank

LABOR DAY 2020

1
the official yearly rest day
has become
an unofficial restless day

2
after many busy months
this is the official day
to take it easy

now after many restless months
this is the unofficial day
to take it uneasy

THIS BUTTERFLY

carrying on her back
the most beautiful masterpiece
produced since the beginning of time
she flies in bright sunshine
from one flower
to another

making the dazzling world
a moving art museum
admission free

MONKEYS

from dawn to dark
they stretch and swing their arms
from one branch
to another
making the whole forest
a free gym
full of horizontal and parallel bars
even triple bars

with skill trained in this way
no doubt they will become
the masters of removing and subduing demons
even without the breeding of immortal stones
or the enlightenment of Bodhi

WRINKLES

In a game of tug-of-war
this is the evidence
that you are not
as energetic and enduring
as time

KNIFE AND ANVIL

without our fighting and slashing

where would you find
a feast

LOVE

from the affectionate expression in your eyes
and your warm, happy smile
I could hear clearly
the words "I Love You!"

though you didn't even open your mouth

EARTHWORM

hush and rush
I don't know what kind of underground world
you are building

maybe it's a paradise
without natural and man-made disasters
day and night
you just make love to the moist soil
with your naked body
and soul

WHEN THE DOOR OPENS

we are anxious to see
the darkness tormented by nightmares
rush out
and a breath of fresh air
stroll in

we never expect to find
a spoiled old kid
who would continue his crazy dream
and refuse to get up

now he is purring his mouth
and shouting at a beam
of morning light

You Are Fired!

A GOOD OLD COUPLE

with the sweet juice of love
they nurture together
a happy and healthy life

and in order not to let the loved one
suffer from the grief of bereavement
and the following desolate loneliness
they both made up their minds secretly
never to leave the world
before the other

MASK

1

no matter how loud the thunder
or how bright the flash
you always put on a face
of sublime indifference

I'd really like to tear you open
to reveal the ugly truth
hidden beneath
flush with shame
tongue tied

2

with high imagination
they created
me
their idealistic
selves

as a matter of fact
what you see
is neither
them
nor
me

2021

YEAR OF THE OX

attaching
the dark
months
days
hours
minutes
&
seconds
of the year of the rat
to a string of firecrackers
and lighting it

rouse the newcomer
the year of the ox
to raise its hooves
and lead us
into a bright new year

DIMPLES

metal is too stiff
glass too brittle
so with warmth and tenderness
you cast on your cheeks
two sparkling mugs

waiting for him
who is not an alcoholic but loves drinking
to come over
and fill the cups with sweet juice of life

Cheers!

THEY ARE ALL WAITING FOR YOU THERE

--To Taiwanese poetess Ming Li

I know you love
valleys
streams
wetlands
trails
cattails, lotus flowers, reeds, and aquatic grasses
mountain trees, millet gardens, green grass,
and wild birds
the breath of the forest
silent green shade
the light cry of chicks
the chirping of insects
eagles singing in the distant sky
mountain pigs and flying mice
the deep blue pool water
ancient stories
painted sculptures on the wall
the song and dance of the Harvest Festival Tribe
the cheering of innocent children
the smile of an elderly person who has gone
through the vicissitudes of life

they are all there every day
open their arms
waiting for you

SHOES

dragged by a pair of roaming feet
through mire after mire
the shoes found themselves
mucked up
from head to tail

when they finally returned home
they found themselves
kicked out of the door
by the clean feet

A MOWING INTERLUDE

I love exercise
cutting grass and smelling its fragrance
under the beautiful sun and breeze
is an enjoyment

this morning when I was mowing my lawn
a young passerby stopped and asked me
may I cut the grass for you?

how much? I asked jokingly
he said: only \$20
I said: is this the amount
you wanna give me?

THE LITTLE YELLOW FLOWERS

waving in the breeze
the little yellow flowers in the yard
are not trying to draw your attention
or ask for your compliments
least of all they want you to pick up the scissors
cut them down
and decorate the vase in your living room

in bright sunlight
they dance
for they can't contain
the surging joy of life
knowing well
a few days
is eternity

THE GOWN

1

Putting on a gown
He suddenly realizes
He is a gentleman

Now the question is
Where to find
A lady in cheongsam

2

Putting on a gown
He unconsciously raised his head and chest
to become in his mind
the desirable gentleman
of fair ladies in cheongsams

2022

19 STUDENTS AND TWO TEACHERS

--Texas elementary school shooting, 2022.5.24

21 living lives
fall in a flash
and vanish

leaving behind
a black hole
to contain
the empty seats and classrooms
the mourning hearts
of their families and friends
the sympathetic hearts
of human beings
and the empty hearts
of the inhuman beings

A LITTLE GIRL'S SMILE

1

not a loud laugh
nor a ghostly chuckle
the smile I see
is from her innocent, pure heart
like a spring flower blooming
jumping out of
her sweet mouth
her brilliant eyes
and her dancing hands and feet

leading me
to a bright future

2

her mouth has barely opened
her eyebrows and eyes already start to smile
then her forehead
her nose
her ears
her hands and feet
eventually her whole body
even the entire room and the entire world
all start to smile

I totally understand
such a beautiful joy
from her pure heart
cannot be expressed
with her little mouth
alone

NON-FUNERAL

--Ukraine, 2022

his family, neighbors, and friends
all have run, jumped, or crawled away
to become refugees
leaving only
the uninvited gunfire
squeaking and howling
back and forth in the cold air

to make his non-funeral
less lonely

China/CHINA

my wife is an antique lover
every time we travel to China
she brings back some beautiful porcelains

once I went back to my hometown in Southern China alone
big and small childhood memories soon filled up my luggage
when I got home, I found I did not bring anything for her

when she asked me where her fine china was
I could only point to
my heart

WATCHING THE SUNRISE ON THE MOUNTAIN

Only at this height
can one see
the serene face of the world
after a full night's sleep

The clouds are so light
The wind is so gentle
there's not a single trace
of nightmares

A SLENDER LADY

1

Bang
from a waste dump
she jumps out

my childhood playmate
who has played hide and seek with me
for most of my life

no rouge or lipstick
not wearing gold or jade
elegant and graceful
making my eyes and heart shine at the same time
A Slender Lady

2

thank you
for making me suddenly
young and serene
in these dark plague days

3

dark clouds in the sky
haze on the ground
fog in my mind
all are scrambling to jump into
the cosmic waste heaps

waiting for a great artist
to sculpt
an eternal masterpiece



A slender lady, a sculpture made of scraps by William Marr

2023

MUSIC

Waking up in the middle of the night
He put his hand on the radio
Turning from one station to another
Tried to find his music

But found only
Sleepless noises

Perhaps
Silence is the purest sound
The most beautiful music

The air is calm
The world is calm
The ears and the eyes are calm
The mind is calm

OPEN UP

--for people suffering from depression

The world is a mirror
You laugh it laughs
You cry it cries

How glad!

Yet you hide yourself in a dark room
No mirrors no light
No laughs no cries

How sad!

*According to a news report, nearly 10% of Americans suffer from depression in recent years, with the mood disorder increasing fastest among teens and young adults.

LIFTING OF COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

holding up for three long years
behind the mask
finally goes the long breath

w-h-e-w -----

eyebrows relaxed
corners of the mouth uplifted
eyes shining brightly
a fresh torrent gushes from the depths of the soul

w-h-e-w -----

SMILE

trapped in masks for three long years
many people
can't remember how to smile anymore

should eyes be opened or closed
how about the mouth
and should the eyebrows and mouth corners
be lifted up
or pulled down

there's really no need to spend money
to find a smile consultant
just go outdoors
and look at the flowers
blooming with innocent smiles
from the ground that was once covered
with heavy snow and ice

* According to a news report, many people in Japan have found that after wearing masks for three years, they can no longer smile and must seek help from professional smile consultants.

WEATHER

we all have learned from an early age
how to reconcile and adapt
to the weather of wind and rain
putting on a hat
holding an umbrella
or hiding inside the house
and watching from the window
the passage of a storm

we would never expect to see
a bloody demon
suddenly pop up
in the sky of the 21st century
trigger splitting flashes of lightning
and hateful thunders
in so many hearts

a weather
no one can find any place to hide

SCENERY

-- In memory of my poet friend Lin Heng Tai

Scenery
 beyond
Scenery
 beyond
Scenery...

All waiting for your
Poetic finger
To point them
out
to us

* In memory of my Taiwanese poet friend Lin Heng Tai who wrote a poem entitled Scenery many years ago.

START FROM THE BEGINNING

-- for a poet friend with dementia

Sad to know that you have completely forgotten
the games we played together
the things we talked about
not to mention the poems
we wrote for each other

Now the question is
how to share the smile
you gave me when we first met
It has been blooming in my heart
and becoming lush everyday
I would love to transplant at least part of it
to your desolate brain

and let's start
from the very beginning

FIREWORKS FESTIVAL

every day is
their fireworks festival

with all kinds of weapons--
arrows
spears
cannonballs
missiles
and even nuclear weapons
from all directions
they light up the sky

to celebrate
the end of the world

HEAVENLY CREATIONS

One by one
displaying on her fingers
the collected
eye-catching treasures
of coral rings

But I saw right away
the unparalleled craftsmanship
that sculpted
those fingers

No need for sensational setup
of the colorful rings

2024

THE TAIL

Early in the morning
standing at the window
watching the sun rise from the east
along the arc of the sky
chase its own tail
hidden in the starry night

Early in the morning
standing at the window
watching a squirrel
chase along a circle
on the lawn in the backyard
its own fluffy tail

Early in the morning
standing at the window
shaking his head
he doesn't know which way
to chase the inspirational tail of a poem
that emerged from last night's dream

A DAMP MORNING

staring
at the red and swollen eye sockets
in the mirror
he turned on his hair dryer
back and forth left and right up and down

tried desperately to blow away
last night's soggy nightmares
the flooding rivers
the bloody wars

turning off the switch
the noise suddenly stopped
yet the slanting rain outside
kept banging on the window
tried to forecast
the day's mood

PLEASE LET ME...

Pushing a loaded shopping cart this morning
Out of a food market
And after unloading enough food for a couple of weeks unto my car
I pushed the empty cart towards the shopping cart parking lot
Suddenly I heard something like
please let me...
I looked around
And found a young lady
Who I guessed must be on her way to the food market
So, I thanked her and handed her the empty cart

Surprisingly, she didn't go to the food market
Instead, she took the empty cart
And pushed it toward the shopping cart parking lot
Then she entered and started her car
Waving to me and drove off
Leaving behind an invisible cart
loaded with human warmth
that I can enjoy for a long, long time

2025

CAT AND DAWN

The cat had been calling for spring all night
Finally became realistic
Licking its lips and rubbing its paws
Facing the east
An ever redder bloody fish belly

WALKING IN THE AUTUMN WOODS

When a small cold current came, the alert trees
began to shed their leaves
that were exposed to wind and rain
and their faces became stern

Only a few young trees
never having seen ice and snow before
still stood on tiptoe and craned their necks
with fresh and excited
green

IF TODAY

If today
There is no news in this world

The TV screens are blank
The lens cannot find any object to capture
The show-off mouths are speechless
The muzzles are silent
bombs refuse to boom

TV series have lost their plots
love and hate
will not entangle us

If today, ah
There is no news in this world

