

# The Poetry of Chen Dongdong 陈东东

Selections: 1983-1994

Chen Dongdong was born in Shanghai in October 1961, and has lived there most of his life. Chen was a frequent contributor to unofficial poetry journals throughout China during the 1980s, and he was one of the chief editors of *Tendency* 倾向 (1988-1991) and *South Poetry Magazine* 南方诗志 (1992-1993). A first officially published collection of poetry did not appear until the early 1990s, although Chen's poetry often appeared in officially published literary journals and overseas Chinese language literary journals throughout the 1990s. In 1996, Chen was awarded the New York-based Hellman-Hammett Prize, and he spent a few months in the USA as a result.

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## A Long Way Off [远离]

A long way off from the orange grove  
a long way from an orange grove in the moonlight  
far from the orange grove two bluebirds fly over  
and far too from the orange grove slapped by the sound of waves

A long way off from the orange grove  
a long way from an orange grove where the river forks  
far from the summer's orange grove  
and far too from the other orange grove that tosses in the wind

A long way off from the orange grove  
far too from sunken stones and flames'

## A Horse in the Rain [雨中的马]

In the dark you pick up a musical instrument that's handy. You sit serenely in the dark  
the sound of a horse comes from the far end of the room

This instrument is out of fashion, shining in spots  
like the red freckles on a horse's snout, flashing  
like the top of a tree  
the first blossoming of the cotton rose, startles a few thrushes into flight

The horse in the rain too is doomed to gallop out of my memory  
like the instrument in the hand  
like a cotton rose opening in a warm fragrant night  
At the other end of the corridor  
I sit sedately as if it has been raining all day

I sit serenely like a flower that opens at night  
A horse in the rain. The horse in the rain too is doomed to gallop from my memory  
I've picked up the instrument  
and softly play the song I'd like to sing

**From No. 11 Middle School to Nanjing Road, Thinking of a Greek Poet**  
[从十一中学到南京路，想到一个希腊的诗人]

The free air of the Aegean sea a stretch of bright blue  
at the end of the strand, an old man still loves the sea  
still feels the Greek sun  
on a rock, a naked woman sings softly  
full-figured, a season of summer as smooth as a pebble the rise and fall of waves  
on account of this he will not put pen to paper ever again  
seventy-nine years of age  
he strokes his rough chest

Now I walk out of No. 11 Middle School  
and see a clear sky above the Nanjing Road summer passions mean to drip  
all over the street the faces of girls are beautiful  
like birds, vehicles swoop low past their sides  
moving on, I turn into another large street  
yearning to smell a breath of the sea  
resplendent black rock on the reef  
the wind turns the book of poems into a torch

## Lamp Lighting [点灯]

Shine the lamp into a stone, make them see  
the shape of the sea in it, make them see  
ancient fish in it  
you ought to make them see the light too, raised high on a mountain  
a lamp

The lamp should also shine into a river, make them see  
living fish, make them see  
a soundless sea  
you ought to make them see the sunset too  
a firebird fly up from the forest

Light the lamp. When I use my hand to block the north wind  
when I stand in a narrow gorge  
I think they will crowd around me  
they will come to stare at my words  
like lamps

## On the River Watching a City [河上看城]

In the night's dim light a dog's eyes are like lamplights  
fifty pairs of dog eyes  
fifty pairs on the same face  
they're also like a city of lights  
flashing out from the weeds into the river

I arrived on this bank many years ago  
I sit on a stone  
thinking of that boat moored against the flow

Every night, that dog opens its eyes  
like a city of lights  
fifty pairs of dog eyes will mesmerize you

I sit in the wind  
watching the reeds rise higher than the moon

## The Bus comes out of the Mountains [汽车出山]

The bus comes out of the mountains, the hot air rises  
did the years that grew in those black stones also have, overlooking them  
a hawk, attracted by a snake  
plunging straight into the sea

Today this bus is far from flying birds. The driver has urgent business  
and drives the bus heaving like a river stag  
in those years when serpent-neck dragons traversed rivers, were there also vigilant  
eyes, closely following their prey  
waiting for a gun's report

One night  
ahh, one entire night  
a whole night sitting serenely under a tree  
will I think back on the bus that appeared out of the mountains

## The Light of Summer Days [夏日之光]

These are cool reeds, this is refreshing water  
this is a coarse sun, a huge outdoor sun  
this is my temporary home, the stay of a half summer  
this is my poem  
a poem for you to read out loud

This is an intersection, glossy vehicles, and faces moist  
as a season of black cobblestones  
this is a tree throbbing with the sound of cicadas, the shade that remains of afternoon  
and blinding glass  
this is the roof that shuts out the bright sun, a shark resplendent  
the shape of a returning sail  
this is a naked body behind heavy curtains, short dull hair  
a golden left leg  
a flock of swifts assembles in the middle of the street  
this is a day to go out to see the sea, a day to sit alone  
a day to speak softly  
this is a day for a cool reed mat, the water's in your hand  
on the wall behind you appears  
a poem

In “Riding on Wine” Pavilion, Sitting Alone, How Should We Read Ancient Poems  
[独坐载酒亭，我们应该怎样读古诗]

On the river mist locks in a solitary sail. Dawn enters the temple  
large red stones damp satiated  
like leaves the autumn frost has left stained  
the wind blows flowers fall  
like a robin in the hands of shadows stagnant  
all this  
these were all his lines of poetry. During the Song dynasty<sup>1</sup>  
the sea fell and you saw mountain stones, an arid season  
city buildings in a pall of dust

But I've passed through a night of heavy rain  
on the red stones  
green leaves like countless fish  
near death, soaked by the weather plump and new  
and at this moment tree bark is still rough, floating in the pond  
unlike anything  
looking across the river, the after-noon Riding on Wine Pavilion sits silently clinging to the mountain  
in the midst of all this  
I see a flock of fierce birds calling and ripping at the river's heart  
wings like knives  
we must have thoughts like knives too  
in Riding on Wine Pavilion  
Su Dongpo's<sup>2</sup> lines are no more of use  
I sit alone and begin to learn to use my own eyes  
to see how high the mountain how small the moon

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<sup>1</sup> 960-1279 C.E.

<sup>2</sup> 苏东坡, also known as Su Shi 苏轼, poet, 1036-1102 C.E.

## Words [语言]

The rock's shoulders unfold, the wings of birds and warships unfurl  
the sun drones like a gold beetle  
by chance it enters a white hall  
farther away, a red pleasure boat approaches slowly  
like another midsummer dusk  
in my eyes, between my fingers  
table salt glimmers  
and that slice of memory deep in the brain's sea  
now edged with green, a voiceless song and dance at the far end of the corridor  
when the cloud cover finally breaks  
schools of fish are drawn toward turrets by the sea  
colorful lights will suddenly engulf all branches in flame  
illuminating the words of you of me

## The 1960s [六十年代]

A red guard crosses the street at an angle. The squad of spear-brandishing men  
really looks as if they are iced-over dirt beside a river  
the drought star rises, eases open the door and looks in  
at seven dead birds  
bloody necks, traces of summer on black feathers  
from here on I pay attention to people's faces, lips of dim night light  
the meek glances identical to a black goat's  
from now on I know why wind-breaks must be rebuilt  
granite is solid  
beech trees keep close watch on the sea of salt blood

Seven birds buried in moonlight  
closely I look into each surrounding face as it watches

## Reading Paul Aluya [读保尔 爱路亚]

Sometimes the imagination is a piece of ice a feather  
a warm March wind a thawing breeze  
sometimes between rhythms a hat twitches  
a red glove a pair of dancing slippers leap  
so much sea smell sea color  
mountain smell mountain color  
so many sounds laden with peace laden with love  
sounds of the imagination of grapes and lemons  
at dusk poetry's like a shard of ice  
like a quiver of feathers a pair of red dancing slippers pirouetting everywhere  
against a blue and orange backdrop  
is Paul Aluya so long as he has breath in him  
subject to the caresses of a warm March wind a thawing breeze a red woman  
Paul Aluya until his last breath  
sometimes a pair of blackbirds on entering the dreamlands, the singer is alarmed  
he sees an eye climb onto a collar bone  
a group of girls walk out into the moonlight

## A Poem [诗章]

I love the trees and the lambs when I am beside the body of the earth  
a pocket full of stars and every kind of water that flows under stones  
over the body of the earth  
what I love is dirt itself the outskirts of the village  
I'm waiting  
for a woman bright eyes white teeth she'll come up beside me  
what I love is the sight of her a wild goose lagging behind in a westerly wind  
that blue heart of hers a massive glacier  
a towering mountain range that I love is  
the lute strings' seven shades of sound  
life's seven defeats the seven bulls  
the seven deserts  
what I love is the female sex and pomegranates by the side of a camel  
what I love's the sea and schools of fish men and lions  
I'm beside reeds  
what I love is white iron houses the fresh fragrance of flowers in all seasons  
a patch of standing snow a tune that tells of life

### Fragments #3 [断章之三]

I was born into a bleak 1961 I've seen the knife blades of the streets twist into the autumn light  
how many times I've reached out my hand to the trees in darkness  
trees of death and that whole other side of the sun and its greenery

I was born into a bleak 1961 under the ancient eaves of August I move covertly  
like the sad declining years of memory  
I see dismal scenery  
I've touched the coldest constellation  
the sun that capsizes the carts  
and turns fish to ice I've seen the bats circle, signals of suffering

Occasionally I pluck lute strings and hairs I take my lead from  
the snows in the deep winters and spring sometimes the pillow  
lays my head on a river of words  
facing a window of thick mist  
out of newly spilled blood stamens stones flowers the shoulders of pines  
I was born into a bleak 1961 my clothes are filled  
with fine flames of sand  
I was born into a bleak 1961 in the sad shouting  
I learned to make memory  
I saw the god of darkness in the vast wilderness the god of hatred  
the dark curly-headed god of lost hope  
I was born into a bleak 1961 headed from one hunger into another

## The Studio [画室]

Ridges of ice tower above. Through it  
mountain ridges become red blue all colors  
fearless of frost, sour evil birds fly to and fro  
feathers black and bland  
as if they could take the place of the night

These three women stand right there  
young, plump  
the suns in their breasts are revolving celestial bodies  
between them is a jade-green earthen jar  
and a posy of gold lotus blossoms dances

And during this calm winter  
three women stand on a mountain top like a view of pagodas  
from those straight perfect stems  
deep gazes are carved by mountain chains of ice  
like votive lamps floating in mountain valleys

Their desires are laid out before them, their dance steps  
in the sunlight their pink shadows sway tawny daylillies  
fearless of the frost, sour evil birds fly to and fro  
feathers black and bland  
as if they have already taken the place of the gentle night

## 1 (a)

A face appearing makes me think of the horse you write about  
the face taking on the appearance of a green spring, your  
horse

Dead silence. Behind you in the background there are four scrawny dogs  
a leaf falls  
your face is a green horse

Again it is the season of the petal-fall, already you've been dead  
twelve years  
silence

A leaf falls. For the first time I see you clearly  
you have a glum face, it  
rears up surprisingly, like a green horse

Four thin dogs tag along at your heels  
a face has taken on the appearance of a green spring, your  
horse

I close the book and  
the door, silence  
heart gray, my thoughts as cold as you

## The Moon [月亮]

My moon is miniscule and bleak  
my Sunday piled full of books  
I'm sunk deep in various impossibilities  
and realize, the sea of time and desire is empty  
for ardent flames it's hard to burn long

The night sparkling  
how can I deliver this letter on into the dawn  
lonely words reflect upside down on the glass of the mirror  
like that bat  
hesitating as it flies back into the darkness of an enormous dream  
like an old record where the needle slides beyond hearing under the lamp

A water truck speeds on briskly, a piano cuts out  
the restrictions of spring  
my days scatter dust  
on the first page of the score I open for you  
a blaze of horses and shooting stars dazzle  
my flower garden is not yet decided on  
a frenzied plant mixes in with the music  
the scenario of my hallucination an innocent sunset  
my moon miniscule and bleak

The night sparkling, how can I deliver  
this letter on into the dawn  
I am sunk low in a Shanghai that has lost its luster,  
into a narrow loving  
I watch your looks fade daily

## The Fountain [噴泉]

All things are dedicated to the stream that keeps running, and a fountain  
ever sharper its blades of water cut loose the virgin body

A full reservoir of water! A reservoir secretly housing  
a huge fire and hot blood  
time spread around the fountain  
is not the same as memory  
or that dawning  
or the radiance crushed out under a bulldozer  
-- out of the water dawn breaks into spring  
a cold trill like the opening of  
a switch-blade

Death is in my hands, I've let go shows of emotion  
the cart-horse of darkness gallops over the dyke  
falling into every line of the yellowing love song  
the tearful eyes imagined, under the fountain  
in delusions briefly happy  
now pressed out by a denseness of the day

Driven out by the denseness of day! The fountain fires  
a different barrage of light  
a motor boat crosses the lake  
Oh bleak water reservoir  
the virgins obey the order to step into the bath  
their chaste bodies  
patted and turned over and over

## July [七月]

Once again the bat pulls its black wings back in and comes in  
again the walnut tree greets  
the summer trade winds  
at night like a new line of poetry the fountain in my breast  
and the sun is a hen –  
July its fiercest egg

In July the torch of delusion rises  
on a clear day in July millions  
rejoice!  
As though harvested by sickles, a lover  
walks on the boulevard beneath her, large loose white blouse  
two naked breasts wait for the heavy rain  
of my caress

Or on an abandoned building site  
in the dressing room of a great shapeless playhouse  
in the company of an anteater you push it open  
wider --  
in July life is full ripe  
whose hammer will strike?

The bat hovers over the deep of the orchestra pit  
the pockets of the walnut tree are full  
of firelight and ashes  
and the sun a hen  
when love spins like a fountain under high pressure  
and the sun is a hen --  
this July is its hottest egg, definitely.

## The Art Gallery [美术馆]

Delusion's painting, for one  
for you I arrange an invented landscape  
in the afternoon fish-shaped seas motionless  
a speed-boat opening a furrow in the silence

Seeds scream out from the womb of August  
the shouts are from dying souls  
to the left of a church, the disused gallery's dark top floor  
I open the summer-facing windows  
the invented landscape exists just for you

Constellations appear clearly in daylight  
the stiff fin of a blue whale stiffens  
I open the summer-facing windows  
the painting of my delusions  
for one  
your tongue opens a furrow in the eulogy of beauty

You pass through the largest shadows in this city  
you free your body from the ancient writings and the sound of bells  
you hear frenzied slogans too  
in the womb of August  
the seeds scream

In August's fermented spirit, invention can't complete  
the delusion, the gallery is covered by defeated dust  
in the air above it  
constellations move toward a single setting sun  
and a plane cuts a furrow into the dark

## November [十一月]

Under a dark sky, Shanghai's more alive than ever  
the appealing landmarks that I love dearly  
become more resplendent  
the massive flames closer to the dark  
Noise! The clamor is a better substitute  
the cracking of the dawn from cries of birds in lofty places

The Industry-and-Commerce Bank towers deep into autumn  
heroes make something out of nothing even more than before  
the burning thing, that burning thing  
the sermonizing and dying preacher, under a dark sky  
it's tiny to its mouth in the sea  
see the glass towers soaring out of the water

But I lose track of my body (in the streets and alleys.) Can't imagine  
what I actually am  
Shanghai's November yearns for beams of light more  
on the spire of the last tower  
the remnants of summer in the shape of sunlight  
a flock of swifts lights up mankind

## The Destroyer [否定者]

In the sky you appear above the awful city  
summertime your arms spread wide  
taking in a bird's eye-view of so many blazing streets

A head zooms down  
on either side great conflagrations lick up shadows  
it can't possibly catch fleeing thoughts  
but can prove  
a transparent body's about to arrive

Arrival, appearances  
with what kind of finger will you stir things up  
will you accept this  
when Love-Bathed Hall's morning-payer bell rings  
a couple of birds do their morning exercises around the spire

Can you accept it  
when a destroyer is born out of fire  
and intact stands for the moment on the eaves

The negator  
is honey or a tiny thorn  
coated in honey  
can you accept this

The destroyer  
is the sharpness of the thorn brought to the throat  
and the drop of agonizing blood within it

## Words About New Poetry [新诗话]

The light in the music has faded away entirely. Today  
there are only  
long-distance travellers  
hunting for love in dreams

... "Artists are finished  
they've lost their way." ...  
A train overturns  
a banquet of sleep under a viaduct

-- Wake up push open the window  
the children rushing off to school can't imagine  
that leaning out here watching them  
I'm still in the night before

By the deep well of the courtyard  
these ten years of exercises in verse composition  
are bound into a book  
swallows shuttle formless through it

And under the moon the Indian Ocean  
a torrid island nation  
the governor-poet is suddenly woken too  
barefoot he paces through the study

A Comedy [喜剧] (A series of 7 poems) 1993

1) Longhua [龙华, or "Dragon Flowers," the name of a newly developed Shanghai suburb]

(partial translation)

An incinerator deep in a cemetery. The unadulterated blade of a knife  
an exfoliating passion  
a finger ring like a platinum spider  
dangles on the fine line it unspools  
immerses itself in the bloody pool of fire  
on its way to snare a soul on the edge of a scream  
a cry for help that rips through the vocal chords and their sails

Longhua in September, the treetops above the dust clouds belong to autumn  
yet mourners in the procession are in their bare arms  
from the monument shadow to martyrs' concrete  
to the twilight scatter ashes. In the uproar  
the sun veers toward the satellite city of Minhang, and the shiny  
new electronics zone. And the judge in the air  
has already engaged the dead soprano soul of his choice

Darkness is driven forward by an engine, in the midst of so much extermination  
the vehicle can't be stopped. The mortuary lies across from  
a small abandoned park: one star shines on a deep dark empty hole  
baring the prospect of rot after death  
when he lifts her and sweeps past at an angle  
trying to surmount sorrow's holocaust  
they hear a muffled aria of thunder roll through boiling lava

.....

Two Selections from **Episodes** [插曲] (A 5-poem sequence)

1) At Swallow Rock [在燕子矶]

From Nanjing's Swallow Rock I look down on the river  
noon, a fierce wind is scattering clouds and shadows  
like a horse in hot pursuit of the day  
by my side, an insurance company girl  
I've known only two days  
bares a breast of bright sunshine

\*

In her office of large windows  
a phone rings urgently  
startling a probationary employee intent on a card game  
a freighting client can't find her  
just now her body's stretching toward  
a tranquility rarely found on the Yangtze

\*

An iron boat. Safety hats  
a rubber conveyor belt sprays coal  
on a small dock below  
a granule of death grows slowly large  
its solid core rust-stained  
its peach-skin surface has the fine hairs of erotic sensation

\*

The river's like an enormous python  
spots of cloud shadow roll on the water  
on Swallow Rock my hand takes hold of an iron railing and  
an old machine -- I point out to her

a flagpole amidst the green growth on the opposite shore  
what sort of daydream has climbed to the top of it?

\*

What sort of female breast brings forth a flower  
a set of lips, brushed lightly by the soft wings of water fowl  
her waist accommodates. Her  
briefcase lies idle on the grassy knoll above us  
the copy of the Rubiyat I placed in it heating up  
one line of a Persian poem fits Swallow Rock

#### 4) Unfinished [未完成]

An orange bus  
leaps out of a tunnel  
The old commuter wears a cap on his head  
When he sees the Huangpu River again  
there's music in his ear  
he transforms into a horse

\*

In the big office building the English left behind  
I spread out my paper, and decide to write poetry  
I want to write  
the substance of the bright winter before my eyes  
it's my habit to look out the window first  
at the dubious scenery

\*

I am on the third floor facing south  
and saw what  
the old commuter couldn't see  
on another stretch of the river  
like a pair of scissors the sunlight's trimming a horse's mane  
the horse head cocked high like the trigger on a gun

(These following 9 poems belong to an un-titled sequence)

### **The Deer [麋鹿]**

The deer is listened to attentively,  
pointed out and spoken of, its temples pinned  
full of autumn hills.  
A great river winds its way, reaching to the next  
remembered night.

In the wilderness the deer is at the high point of reverie,  
matching the sad stars in the sky.  
A prince sits down on a wheelchair, in his desolate palace  
there're only storks of bronze waltzing in the air.

Similarly start out from roses,  
until they turn to black iron and despair  
Two poets weave with their mouths,  
retell a season of illusions -- a labyrinth –  
every sort of twist, and a motionless moment.  
The feet are at hand,  
divided up on odd auspicious beasts and rare birds.

But the deer are like isolated cities far away,  
hidden deep in the prince's mutilated hills.  
The sounds of deer bells trickle down through the night, two poets  
listen closely and point to them.

## The Pagoda [塔]

The North geese cross the Yangtze, autumn once more  
withers and falls. A second time  
this autumn throws its spindly pagoda up,  
high, aimed at a far  
more satisfying form.

The brilliance of perception has been buried already.  
Bones, jewels,  
golden tiles.  
The artist's eyes are unearthing the artist's hands  
they daub ancient vistas and dreams.

At this moment the waves begin to roll again. The night tide light  
swells, drenches,  
attacks the birds circling the turret. In the courtyard trees pick up the sound of the wind  
and move, leaves fall to their knees,  
beneath the pen a setting sun vanishes.

The North geese roost, sentinels make their rounds.  
The shadow of the artist dissolves more quickly.  
Perhaps more pleasingly,  
a finger ring watches over this abandoned pagoda,  
until the sound of the river overflows its banks.

## The Bat [蝙蝠]

The bat belongs to a secret hour, flying around the flag of twilight.  
The bat's ears hear news  
of the harvesting of light,  
the curb of evening prayers, and the chime of bells,  
the penetrating hunger once again craves  
a direction, feathers, a voice to sing with, hung upside down  
among the gods of sleep and the sun.

The night's like a mountain quiet and vacant, stretched upon a sea of noisy conversation.  
In the belly of the fish, a buried army of ants,  
the flags hang limp -- a pensive soul  
takes leave of bolts of cloth and black lacquer ware,  
and returns to the long-dark city.

Water has flushed out the street, a lone light shines above the palace gate.  
The bat's ears lead out  
the spirits of peach blossoms and jade stones,  
the soul of a white-skinned courtesan,  
the bat's ears have passed through ceremonies --  
news of the harvesting of light, flying to a higher moon,  
it arouses a host of reveries in the dead --  
it takes on the face of a child, and flits back to the city of day.

## The Temple [寺]

Under hawk wings, an autumn temple –  
a frost of dew,  
a withered branch, a slow sound.  
-- in line with the water, the scenery,  
a traveller is moving from far away.

Whose mausoleum looks down across the river? The past radiance,  
reek of iron.  
A cold thought flies in on a night of intense feelings, one drop brings  
down all the rain with it.

One drop washes all stones. The hawk's wings graze us,  
cutting open a dark shadow.  
The trees and the pagoda absorb sun,  
the traveller follows the stairs into the temple.  
Fixes on several flower vases in differing styles,  
finds fault in one or two scrolls  
the dark characters.  
Lonely poems have waited long --  
in line with the water the scenery  
held silent at the awakenings of autumn.

## The Black Bird [乌鸦]

There's a new beginning over the peak. A black bird with a golden beak,  
bird symbolic of the sun,  
time and the state of the soul too.  
In the highest place, at the true destination,  
all you see is its flight.  
A whole landscape,  
a whole beauty with a season of decay added in.

Autumn is the western part of the labyrinth,  
the part that loves history in its declining years.  
Bearing its portents the bird slices in with its wings, secret dark  
gold-beaked messenger,  
surveying the entire scene, it stops on a pagoda,  
joined tight to the dusk before its eyes.

It's amazed at everything that has opened up, the beasts racing in the imagination,  
the blessed light,  
for itself it sees the blacker prophecy of the blind.  
The short tip of its tongue reaches to its extremity, and tells of classical and straightforward books,  
books  
where each nib has drawn blood.

-- a book is read, the snow flies --  
this bird perched alone in the decline of years, this last heartbreak deep in the labyrinth,  
undergoes the day and becomes a night,  
spread out from the point of termination.

## The Garden [花园]

Plants have training. Their desires have been regimented.

They look forward to the self-same afternoon.

Self-same afternoon,  
birds roost, leaves fall,  
leisurely the serene zither-master strums,  
six or seven people are getting drunk in the garden.

Six or seven people  
rehearse their roles as plants thick shadows, avoid bad news.  
In the depths of the ear, above a dream  
of lilies,  
the music partitions the autumn,  
Ji Kang hovers by. Mouths buried under snakes and bitter bamboo  
lust for alcohol.

The sound of chanting grows, closing fingers and hearts secretly.  
The plants recover together,  
bloom gloriously, open furiously,  
and conceive for the intelligentsia of long ago.  
The plants open a duct underwater  
and a letter drops into  
the gardener's hand.

## The Phoenix [凤凰]

In the afternoon, the light  
fixes on a single point, the wind  
has keeled over, the pear tree stands higher than the whole hill.  
A window facing the long dyke is open -- "Phoenix, phoenix,"  
a desire laps alone by itself,  
water and a soliloquy alone.

"I'm worn out already." "I've met my limitations once more."  
The pure heart cowers.  
-- refinement wilts, river beds turn black, the king-in-waiting  
avoids even the earnest hand.  
His gold ring slips off, his gold flame  
bites deep into the word imagined.

"Phoenix, phoenix," in an opposite world  
in palace halls of the past -- mysteries that perpetuate one's self,  
constellations in a composite glare. "Phoenix, phoenix" –  
the sighing of this written word rends his loneliness,  
under the window a book slaps my body.

Again at night he sees it in a dream.  
Pear trees talking on the other side of the hill.  
"Phoenix, phoenix," a luscious shadow covers  
the pure heart cowering inside him.

## The Mausoleum [陵]

The stones still persevere in the wind. The stones are bowed over,  
piled up and towering,  
intimating their final fate.

The scene decays by the day,  
this round, this tilting, this pointless rampart and pagoda  
they persevere, strive,  
defy a degenerating era, a dispirited and  
decadent time.

Flame is pure and simple in dreams,  
lighting up the days about to return.  
Flame gives heart to a thwarted generation, the last of them,  
the secret inheritors of a noble race --  
he resists further disease and decline,  
a maliciously cultivated rose,  
that sows stars and despair.

The scene decays by the day. The clothes are unbuttoned into the mind,  
exposing a labyrinth.  
Thought concentrated into stone, frozen stones,  
every succinct flame,  
every dull flame,  
has admitted the likeness to autumn  
of a person standing in the wind.

## The Balloon Fish [鰕鱼]

The female guest attends patiently.  
The source of the next generation.  
The fire in the next generation's ovens.  
The white master of the house makes a circuit and rises up out over the deep he watches  
the fish being turned back.

Their eggs flash in the darkest place,  
drawing down the roots of grass and high-flying birds.  
The white master has crossed the garden –  
autumn departs winter arrives,  
children already on holiday,  
fish-hooks multiply gently beckoning.

A balloon fish has brought news. The white master prepares  
his winter clothes. Takes in the books of the summer days,  
plants appropriate vegetables,  
the white master closes doors and windows, the children are learning  
to kill and to cook.

A balloon fish brings with it -- news.  
A female guest wakes under a light. Everyday she prays,  
everyday she chants,  
patiently she awaits another season,  
the white master's season for seeing off his guests.

## The Crack of Dawn [黎明] 1987

The stork builds its nest in a higher place  
-- stands upright, overlooking the dusk, and waits for a star  
to fall  
when dawn arrives, in a higher place young storks  
extend themselves, carry out a pure and dignified mating

And beneath the branch on which they perch, the dull green spit  
passes the tiny shadow of a glass tower on to the algae  
at the same time sending out the earliest sentinel  
a sunken-eyed young hawk, and the sound of bells  
before sunrise

Like this a singer awakes, a singer chants  
when dawn is split open like a bright tangerine by the night's light  
a singer will see himself clearly  
a singer will discover  
the speechless summer season has already entered his blood

## Unexpected Words [偶然说起] 1988

The crow-like locomotion of old-fashioned autos, the round glasses  
of old-fashioned people  
a telegram's text, paper, brass keys  
spines of old books gilded with gold  
lines of tiny characters portray the moon

An iron bridge stretches out  
in an earlier age  
I labour to guess the direction the water flows. On the riverside dike  
I start another sort of touching of autumn  
a figure of fine sand, the breasts of a jade blossom hairpin  
the lock's eye is slowly  
being opened by me

I was born into a bleak 1961, I saw dream worlds on the water  
moving leisurely  
I accidentally utter  
veins of feeling and memory scrutinized by me

## Reading a Copy of a 1919 Shanghai Paper [读 1919 年申报] 1988

On the river's left bank people talk and laugh  
cars sweep by like happy birds  
the paper is folded into a white mare

I feel it, I've seen it, the burial of black snake-headed fish under the iron bridge  
the black fish flash mournful scales  
passing out from under the bridge  
into the sunlight of late autumn a rustling flow of tears

I hear the sound of metal failing

Merchants so mad the corners of their eyes crack, leave shops behind  
go out in the streets and shout  
they also possess odd gill-fish as dark as snake-heads  
opening in the autumn night

My autumn hair stands on end in the wind, I've finished reading another piece of distant news  
the paper is folded into a white mare  
if it strides across the bridge  
amazed children will crowd around it

## Earlier Poets [更早的诗人们] 1988

The place you can reach with your hand, is music  
Their knees have all become stone, rough  
hard  
and a rainfall is as bright as a big fire

When the rainfall is quenched, the fall of leaves on both sides  
like a golden temple you can touch with your hand  
Earlier poets drop down amidst this  
like autumn's light  
quietly moored beneath a riverside tower

Earlier poets were intoxicated by the art of chess, attentive in the hand to hand fight  
in daylight and black nights that can be touched  
their kneecaps like waves of stone  
toss and turn  
beat on the street scene after autumn rains  
the earlier poets bend their bodies down, darkness the same  
can be reached by hand

**A Golden Peak [金顶] 1989**

The most peaceful high place is a mountain of snow, said to be heaven's  
bazaar, blooms like the womb and lips of flame  
the silent ponderous tree of Buddha already full  
whose fingers play softly, with a flip of the hand  
a smile and wisdom  
grasped in the spring

The girl with golden eyelids who has taken her vows  
approaches noon along a hillside path. She halts, inclines an ear  
understands the speechless sermon of the sun  
her shadow draws back  
into a fully round sphere. Around her the mountains grow  
wither and fall. Silver rooves. Flying birds. Light

Blooms like the womb and lips of flame, lizards await  
the alchemy of the summer season. A snow mountain is the most peaceful high place  
the noon hour reached by a daughter of heaven  
a background sound of bells is pealing out, the written is being read  
swallows twitter. Whose heart is serene, knows all  
and opens the first door for her

**In Sickness [病中] 1990**

In my sickness a garden, the camphor tree taller than an ancient cypress  
a nurse heavyhearted as a swan  
from the water to the bridge, from dense shadow to forbidden drugs  
I dream of flying in my siesta atmosphere  
-- the detained sun  
already has arranged a heavy rainfall for August

An important elder groans, startles the bright red finger-nailed  
lover: who soothes, washes  
massages and injects  
tears rollout of his obsolete sockets  
staunching the pain of roses and money

separated by a walkway, my body leans against a big window  
I bow my head to this hospital's sweltering vista of summer  
dark clouds gather from everywhere, pond fish float up  
a sick woman waits for a watering  
when my line of sight moves off the garden  
the first raindrop  
falls into the palm of the first to die

**Spring [春天] 1991**

Awaking over the city in spring, I slide down  
from the city's highest flag pole  
I pass through the gold lion bazaar of spring

I see dust  
    I see lanterns  
a bright-eyed fiancée's vast sea of a skirt  
in the wind  
showing off her elegant legs

The gold lion shines on the horses of the night  
its mouth spits out mangos and parrots  
the jade green man-god who drags it in  
a sword in hand  
in the springtime sky

In the springtime sky, city buildings still have dull rays of light  
shadows point to this fleeting noontime  
the birds are restless  
and fruit already split  
her clothes shed   the fiancée faints beneath the flag

I saw another poet sing  
I saw vulgar things in the spring wind  
the gold lion rises up above the airborne ash  
the jade green man-god  
who drags it in, a lamp in hand  
at the brightest moment

August [八月] 1992

In August I pass through the music room of politics, hear somebody  
practice repeatedly that high-spirited little tune

A helicopter throws down a shadow  
its upper body like that of a big dragonfly  
peeks out from the eaves of a suspended bird cage

I've already walked far, even exited the city  
I'm to jump up on a cement dam a hundred meters high  
the wind at my back  
still carries that high-spirited little tune

The two ears of a tulip, the ears of a four-footed beast in my fancy  
the ears of herring scales flashing  
already stopped up by the fingers playing

August, I sit down on the dam  
can look down at the ridge of the far-off music room's roof  
the helicopter almost at the level  
of my eyebrows: Can it ride  
the high-spirited little tune  
-- this seems something dragonflies like to do

## The Night of the Sea God [海神的一夜] 1992

This is precisely their night of joy  
the sea god's naked blue body is wrapped  
in the harbor's fog  
in the fog, a boat speeds toward the moon  
horse hooves shatter blue tiles

Precisely on this sort of night, the sea god's horse strides over  
a trident carelessly lost  
They can hear  
a bank of steam whistles roll and toss on the roof top  
the flesh of one must burrow more deeply into the other

When they get up, singing  
lift away the bed's unsleeping wool blanket  
rain and fog still adorns the dawn of the harbor  
the sea god, riding his horse, wants to find the steel trident  
that revealed his wanton night life

## The Demon Poetry [魔鬼的诗歌] 1993

Is the demon poetry already here  
the tragic form of the one-horned beast now appears  
Is the demon poetry already here  
in Shanghai in a skeletal tower  
constructed from a phantasm  
a bewitching braid grows an inch longer  
Whose hand pushes open the tinted glass window

Whose shadow dives straight down from the top floor to the garden  
and with a knife of darkness  
cuts away the feeble fountain in the dusk. The demon poetry  
Ah, is it already here  
In this waste I hear a sound of remorse  
Now who is it that incautiously  
opened the long-necked bottle that imprisoned a thunderbolt  
a lightning flash suddenly lights an oral cavity that grows sharp teeth

Is the demon poetry already here  
overloaded with dust the one-horned beast emits  
a baby's cry  
Is the demon poetry already here  
the hostess of female confinement reveals her dark door  
and the pungent Indian incense  
of the decadent tower, will change her into a butterfly or  
swooning she'll fall toward the soul's palace of spring

Suddenly the one-horned beast breaks through the iron-skinned spire  
leans out into the cloudy sky of the Shanghai moon  
Ah, is the demon poetry already here  
has it already come  
When I pass this night below the fountain  
when I look up and see the complicated patterns of celestial things  
when I even try  
to pick the toxic flames in the garden  
the demon poetry, has it already come

Is the demon poetry already here  
a turn in the stairs snarled in cobwebs  
turning on its light  
Is the demon poetry already here  
the breakfast dishes of the loosened braid  
locked in its cabinet  
as the hostess' sexual climax is just calming down  
the hostess' one-horned beast rises rapidly up  
Ah, the demon poetry

has it already come

That sound of remorse, has it come again too

**Written for a Persian Rug [为一幅波斯地毯而作] 1994**

A garden reveals its true form out of a Persian geometry  
the abstract rose receives life  
art will present a metered sea of stretched cloth with  
the fanned-out tail feathers of a peacock  
round wide eyes of ceremonies various and many

Art also makes a gift of time and silence  
wrapped up in its own beauty the big rug unrolls into a fabulous view  
art will present a metered sea of stretched cloth with  
gold and silver without limit  
tossing waves soft females

In poetry the Emir drinks to his heart's content  
showing off, the lamp a new moon lighting it up  
art will present a metered sea of stretched cloth with  
an opulent palace  
sinking into the design's dark repeated dusk

Art will make a gift of night shades and lonely stars  
the abstract rose receives life  
art will present a metered sea of stretched cloth with  
the love awakened in the breast of the weaver  
by the high note of the peacock's prolonged cry

## Constellations [星座] 1994

The syntax of stars tangles, their radiance tied in a dead knot  
October's libra tilt regulates  
birthdays and disease. It corresponds to the stomach  
it descends to the gentle belly of shades of night  
-- this suspended form  
trades its light with scorpios  
that shields its sparse public hair, like two different  
horoscopes piling together in a calendar

Like two similar desires  
a rainbow pointed out recognizably in the snake's  
splendor and zigzag,-- the poetry of sexual feeling  
sublimated during the days of enduring hunger  
a dazzling gold star arrives: The gold star  
keen, carves a mermaid's delicate scales  
but dusk and dawn, death and resurrection  
are run through by the goat and the lion and the ram

I hold a booklet of astrological signs  
from confusing prognostications to exact addresses  
the compass points at thirty-two positions  
at each position a big symbolic nude appears  
pigtails, flames, arrows and sexual organs  
want to demonstrate to me the course of my life and its  
mysterious meaning. -- A crutch supports faith  
a scythe reaps time, a comet knifes toward the magnificent

centaur, bad luck in the manner of blossoming double-edged sword  
inscribes darkness amidst green blood and burning alcoholic plasma  
-- the mermaid looks up at a sky full of stars  
she can almost see me, lingering in a garden  
ornamented by gemini, from the stone fountain  
entering in the halo where celestial bodies make a turn  
I search the index of a book with no borders, or in dreams I see  
a street car racing toward lyra and its next stop

My experience on earth is probably an inverted image  
appearing when lit by autumn's fast flowing Milky Way, because the stars  
hide away it is even duller  
vanishing in unreal cities I once set foot in  
yet the discovered artistry I keep  
inlaying the words on the zodiac of fate  
-- abiding by the laws of light in the night sky  
I speak even more constellational  
names