

# The Poetry of Han Dong 韩东

Selections: 1982-1995

Han Dong was born in Nanjing in 1961. After graduation from Shandong University in 1982, he began work in Xi'an, where he edited his own small unofficial poetry journal (*Old Home* 老家) and contributed to the then more influential *Same Generation* 同代 out of Lanzhou in Gansu province. Upon returning to Nanjing in 1984, Han contacted old contributors to *Old Home* and poets he had met via correspondence through *Same Generation* (such as Yu Jian and Wang Yin), and began to edit a new journal, *Them* 他们. The first issue appeared in early 1985 and was followed by four more editions until 1989. Over the next four years, Han devoted much of his energy to learning to write fiction (two examples of which can be found here). *Them* reappeared in 1993, with a further four editions until 1995. In 1998 this was followed by an officially published anthology of *Them* poetry. Today Han continues to write both poetry and fiction, and contributes to the *Them* website at [www.tamen.net](http://www.tamen.net) where new issues of the *Them* webzine have been appearing since summer 2002.

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**The Mountain People [山民] (April, 1982)**

As a child, he asked his father  
"What's beyond the mountain"  
Father says "Mountains"  
"Beyond that"  
"Mountains, more mountains"  
He says nothing, looks into the distance  
This is the first time the mountains have wearied him so  
He thinks, I'll never be able to walk out of these mountains in this lifetime

There's a sea, but so far off  
He'll only live a few dozen years  
So before he'll be able to get there  
He'll die on the road out  
Die in the mountains

He feels he should take his wife with him  
The wife will be able to bear him a son  
When he dies  
His son will be full-grown  
The son will also have a wife  
The son will also have a son  
The son's son will have a wife too  
He stops thinking about it  
Sons also tire him

He only regrets  
That his ancestors never thought as he  
If they had, he'd be the one to see the sea

## About The Wild Goose Pagoda [有关大雁塔] (1982)

What more can we know  
about the Wild Goose Pagoda  
Many people hasten from afar  
to climb it  
to be a one-time hero  
Some still come to do it two  
or more times  
The dissatisfied  
the stout  
all climb up  
to play the hero  
then come down  
and walk into the street below  
gone in a wink  
Some with real guts jump down  
leave a red bloom on the steps  
That's really being the hero  
a modern-day hero

What more can we learn  
about the Wild Goose Pagoda  
We climb up  
look around at the scenery  
then come down again

**You've Seen the Sea [你见过大海] 1984**

You have seen the sea  
you have imagined  
the sea  
you've imagined the sea  
then seen it  
just like this  
you saw the sea  
and imagined it  
but you are not  
a sailor  
you imagined the sea  
you saw the sea  
possibly you also liked the sea  
at most it was like this  
you saw the sea  
you also imagined the sea  
you do not wish  
to be drowned by seawater  
just like this  
people are all like this

**The Gentle Side [温柔的部分] (March, 1985)**

I've experienced the lonely life in the countryside  
It has shaped the gentle side of my nature  
Whenever feelings of weariness come  
there'll be a gust of wind which frees me  
At least I'm not that unaware  
I understand where food comes from  
See how I spend my days impoverished till the finish  
and am able to sense joy in it  
And picking up the old habit of late to bed and early to rise  
is still as familiar as a hoe to my hands  
It's just that I won't be harvesting anything anymore  
can't repeat each of those detailed movements  
Here forever lies a true kind of sorrow  
Like a farmer who weeps over his crops

**Everything is as it Should Be [一切安排就绪] (November 7, 1985)**

Everything is as it should be  
I can sit down and admire it all  
or pace back and forth  
in the rooms  
This is my home  
From now on I'll feel this way  
In the bedroom  
my wife's boats flit in and out  
The four walls are promptly brightened  
by van Gogh's ripe sunflowers  
The names of four good friends should be written  
on four chairs  
for their sole use  
They come  
to play cards until sunrise and cock crow  
Sometimes it's quiet  
As at dusk  
All doors and windows open  
Another room can be seen  
from this room  
a beautiful table cloth  
a book  
All bring joy to my soul  
yet I always suspect they are not for me to use

**This Gust of Wind [这阵风] 1986**

A wind blows into my room  
like a small hand  
it strokes me  
and reaches beneath my shirt  
like another cheek it's  
pressed tight to mine

Blowing over my room  
it comes from outside the window  
a direction identical to that of clouds  
but even farther

It comes to comfort me  
from the farthest place  
coming to console my lonely solitary life  
pressing tight up to my face  
it tells me  
it fell from the sky  
as if it were long long ago  
for a time my whiskers flutter  
my long hair flies  
and my soul exits via its apertures

Thank this wind

No matter if I am lying flat  
or soundly sleeping  
it's all like a small stretch of open country  
Ah, thank this wind  
for softly breezing by

**Your Hand** [你的手] 1986

Your hand placed on my body  
you go to sleep at peace  
and because of this I cannot sleep  
its slight weight  
gradually grows into lead  
the night is very long  
your position does not change a bit  
this hand ought to signify love  
possibly it has yet another deep meaning  
I dare not push it away  
or startle you awake  
when I grow used to it and like it too  
in dreams suddenly you take back the hand  
and are oblivious to all this

## The Sleep of Women [女人的睡眠] 1986

Sleep has the function of beautifying  
In accordance with this principle she  
lies down now on the bed  
at my angle I can only see  
a white eardrum amid the black hair

A woman asleep is surely lovely  
unlike when she has eaten her fill  
or she's hungry  
on your bed wrapped in a quilt  
using it to calm your fragile life

They're always leading your thoughts on like this  
more real than tears  
they certainly don't dream of you  
but may answer your call at any time  
and afterwards continue to sleep soundly in another position

It's more important than displaying flesh  
don't worry they'll fatten  
perhaps the facts were always so  
So much fat  
then so much love

**A Woman I Don' t Know [我不认识的女人] 1986**

A woman I don't know  
is my old lady today  
without a sound she passes with me through the city  
bears a mute son for me  
the mountain she walked out of  
I know nothing about

She's my old lady  
surely one day she'll open her mouth  
tell me of matters in the mountains  
but possibly I'll die whenever that happens  
she'll swallow the words she's not finished saying  
and set off back to the hills

It looks like I must live very long  
live until even that mountain dies  
dead without a trace or shadow  
and the woman who walked out of the mountain  
won't age

**For the Dusk or For Sorrow [致黄昏或悲哀] March 22, 1986**

Again the dusk arrives like this  
it sticks to the glass  
its appearance already not as lovely as the last  
I watch it earnestly  
of the things that move me only you remain  
but I cannot leave the window to let you in  
the sad face is outside the window  
but I can't let it come in  
I want to let it stay in silence  
its eyes still keep their sorrow  
I'm so familiar with this end of sadness  
like the dog-ears in a book  
in the places where my hand folded the corners  
are passages I've read  
today I'm unwilling to open it  
don't welcome it in  
so that you won't be with no place to hide  
    among the sound of my curses

**I Hear Cups [我听见杯子] (1988)**

At this moment, I hear cups  
A series of exquisite sounds  
monotonous, detached  
At their clearest  
formidable or faint  
The city, at its brilliant core  
needs some of this luster  
Placed on a table  
some shadows are needed  
to heal their wounds  
The undulation of water, the dispersal of smoke  
They're used to the postures of night  
Purity and charm  
are still their estate  
they still have a one percent hope  
to lead a pure life  
In the distance true darkness howls  
but the cup still chimes  
clearly, intensely  
Held in a hand

**A Paean to a Horse and the Sunlight [马和日光的赞歌] 1988-1989**

White sunlit sand and stone  
on the main road, shows everything already prepared  
people, animals, livestock all emerge out of a black dot  
grow hands and feet, bodies and wheels  
beneath the sun a horse hurries along  
its mouth can't reach the green grass at its side  
its tongue does not crop leaves in the dust  
with the shadow of a branch the locust tree is on its back  
the four wheels behind it all run away  
in its original spot dust billowing as big as a house  
the horse head stretches out through a window with no frame  
Is a horse of another time the same horse  
The same open country, same road  
no branches of any kind or identifiable white clouds  
the main road lies clear at a glance, the horse motionless in its original place  
four legs like four match sticks standing straight  
I see this scene from the face of the moon  
at the same time it also remembers me in the large icehouse  
at a certain time, on earth it is a quiet noon  
and the motionless summer makes a burnt offering of a plough horse  
on a crackling tobacco leaf

**Only a Stone and the Sky [只有石头和天空] 1988-89**

Only a stone and the sky  
a brown stone the sky  
of course is blue  
light is behind the painting's surface  
the part in shadow demonstrates  
the artist's greatest skill  
a beautiful shadow between the thighs  
on a huge stone  
I think behind should be the sea  
also something more

The artist ardent for stones and sky  
only paints stones and sky  
I think there is nothing  
simpler  
nothing makes people happier

## Festival Days [节日] 1988-89

Two fish being dried in the wind  
a minor ordinary event in the night  
before the festival  
but morbid thoughts make me  
depict the details  
two fish drying in the wind

First I pick up the knife before this  
I killed ten thousand fish  
I want to speak the day of the festival I see through fish eyes  
a string run through their mouths  
I hear the hitherto unheard of  
shouts of fish  
fish that have lost their scales  
on hooks side by side  
Winter sanitizes the bodies  
on the glass door their black forms  
one large one small  
swaying on the back sundeck

Two fish dried in the wind  
I know this food makes me vomit  
during festival days everybody's allowed to do  
the same

**Despair [绝望] 1988-89**

Now we can't see her face  
we won't see it later either  
several reasons could make her despair  
she could pick one out easily  
use it to prop up her body  
In this world what is produced more than anything  
certainly not a moment in a day  
afternoon six o'clock, she goes to sleep on my bed  
outside the window a child released from school uses her name  
to call another child  
like sesame sprinkled over baked bread, they will seize the world  
car horns urge on this sort of pungent sleep  
on the street wheels come and go unfeelingly  
in an untidy room her body turns  
her hand rests on the edge of the bed  
one childish hand searching for another  
that last untamed line finally disappears  
I say, street children should go back onto the street

**The Nanny [保姆] 1988-89**

The nanny is also a child  
they stand side by side  
that stretch of childhood sunlight too  
I hear the wind howl  
because of my bursting in  
an adult is rudely leaving  
a child turns to look at the tops of his shoes  
work places, automobiles, the inconceivable world  
that day the shadow of a giant  
writhed on the ground  
the children refused to walk on  
standing as straight as the sunlight  
squinting, they don't speak again  
don't search for parents  
they will inherit this world  
the nanny is its manager  
when the other child grows up  
it gets a job in her factory

**Between These Two [两项以内] (May 7, 1989)**

I must accept the day which follows sleep  
After getting used to it I must return to the night  
Between these two I must choose successively  
The pendulum resounds within the cramped interior of the clock

Whether more or less, matchsticks are aimed at the side of the box  
Clothing styles change, but there won't be another size  
Wine is poured from a bottle into a cup and then set on a flat surface  
Because blue ink disgusts me, a pen has sucked its fill of blue ink  
And the blood that flows out is seen as purple and red  
Inside darkness I have entered into a smaller darkness

I compare the length and breadth of the earth  
Vehicles always drive on the right, and return on the same road  
The sky's height and the ocean's depth  
A sage said: The flying bird's shadow on water is simultaneously a fish  
I persist in splitting hairs at the tip  
It's still the hair that comes to life on the scalp

**Today [今天]** (June 8, 1989)

Today and in similar situations

A person uses his legs to stand between a table and a chair

Within the preordained order I run into myself

The mirror is so bleak, without depth

surmounting the smooth, clear boundaries

Everything embodying emotions has yielded already

There's a mechanism in the brain narrating all the incident's details

precisely and calmly, like scrapping the enamel off an incisor

.....

Where an arm has been severed I become conscious of a severed arm

The real hand knocks against the form of a cup, only the form

Liquid has streamed through the interiors of plants or flower stems

The blank space is as large as fifty football fields

But can also shrink to become a cavity

Darkness is merely a negligent net

altogether without an objective to catch hold of

its only purpose to leak

I am isolated from appearances of all mutually imposed outcomes

A multitude of feet slide on glass

An enormous, sober sheet of glass and the sounds of sliding, falling

**A Metaphor** (June 11, 1989)

It's happened, beyond your expectations  
The barb cast out by the bush has sunk into my flesh  
And pulls at me with all its strength. In the flower's name I bleed  
Under circumstances completely unknown to you I leap above the surface  
Of the water very courageously. Having left the reality of water  
I will die separately on the beach after the fisher has left  
Ten thousand people search the deep, for you alone I uncover a pearl  
The heavyhearted child by boatside should be given this lifelong gift  
But she's already turned away and her glance sweeps the plain, leaving the moon to spread  
Her shadow toward me. The second line of waves will carry off the shell  
I'm not able to alleviate your sorrow with my death  
I see you searching with your back to me. Let me tell you --  
You, child who believes in that direction, imagine the planet to be round and the distance from it  
Ever increasing. Ever since the beginning I've pointed to me  
But no matter where you go  
I continue to sink into the mire

**Time [时间]** (August 29, 1989)

Time has been passing for ages  
For so long that a deep pit is left in the earth's surface  
It's impossible, but it fills up again and then levels out  
On the sand time piles up into a mountain  
and slides toward the sea  
Everything is foretold  
And now becomes a flat fact  
So much so that even the facts have slipped back  
becoming the history of one kind of genesis  
Time has been passing for ages

Ten thousand years, a million years or a few days  
Either longer or shorter  
"A very long time" or precisely  
as long as this sigh  
A germ says as much to a ray of light  
A stone to a new edition of a textbook  
A wan planet to a passing meteor  
Between universes, nothing is said  
Time has been passing for ages

When I speak to you of this three-second experience  
As I use ten seconds to write this sentence  
The clock has again returned to its starting point  
It rotates imperceptibly, but rapidly  
Time has been passing for ages

## **War Story** (October 18, 1990)

A kiss under a streetlight  
And so I get shot at by her mother from the building across the way  
Her father blows on a whistle shaped out of a bullet casing  
The elder brother, her only older brother, wraps himself tight in a bandage  
And so I get my tongue bitten off by her

A multitude of anniversaries follow  
I see sixty sunny days on the square  
Sixty times as many pigeons  
Sixty times as much bird shit

## **Bird Cages (March 25, 1992)**

Birdcages hang from tree branches by the side of the road  
The New Village old men are nearby  
Pecking away at the checks on the chessboards  
A hunched old man equals one bird  
A triumphant old man two birds  
Three birds is a newly married old man  
His duck of a wife can be considered a bird too  
In China, housewives like cats  
Men raise dogs  
Old men lift birdcages every day  
Children are wild beasts to start with  
Birds of prey likewise perch outside the birdcage  
And under the parasol trees those bird fanciers and imitators  
Put up with piss and shit as if they were snowflakes

**Closed Eyes [没睁眼睛] (July 12, 1992)**

Mother signifies an abundance of food  
drinking traditional meat soup as the snow falls

A blizzard signifies horses racing wildly  
elder sister being boiled in oil over the fire

Danger bursting through the door signifies father  
staid little brother moves his line of sight  
from the window

Already at the dinner table  
To not exist means not to have opened his eyes

**The Bird Hunter [大鸟的人]** (December 19, 1992)

Ten thousand small birds perch in the bamboo grove  
The bird hunter only shoots the outermost  
The sleepy bird hunter is never awoken by his gun's report  
Dream shadows gather up the earth's lingering warmth  
The plastic bag by his foot is stuffed with prey till it glows  
Full like an external stomach  
The hatred which the one-eyed man lines up behind the sight  
is the other eye pecked out by a hawk  
He comes everyday, harvesting at a fixed time  
as if sparrows originally grew from bamboo shoots  
Enough are dropped by lead pellets and his rifle barrel  
At the same time downing bamboo, leaf after leaf  
In the gloom of the grove no form of wicked wolf appears  
The joy of hunting holds no danger  
After the vented wrath there's the sadness of a wintry scene  
Drifting snowflakes, like birds, their tiniest feathers  
Enter the grove, he also has a long walk  
to return home, a return to  
the dinner of sparrow soup, a night of crow

**Woodworkers [木工] March 8, 1993**

Lying amidst wood-shavings in the woodshop the workers work  
no doors, no windows, no walls too  
only a golden three-sided work-shed of reed matting  
only sunlight, shavings and timber and  
the handles of farm tools already carved into shape  
no door, no window, no table stool or threshold  
no bed. Woodworkers eliminating woodworkers  
shavings covering the muddy earth

**The Silent One** [沉默者] March 27, 1993

In a dreary life I do not speak  
In a joyful life I do not speak  
I have a silent upper palate and a giant lower palate  
like a primeval stone crevice on a highland waste  
even during family holidays, between lips and teeth  
not even a green leafy word is exposed  
a stubborn stone lock on my mouth, a black-green light suffusing the round stone  
perhaps it's the mutual wearing down between two millstones  
as if brought by a ruminating animal over there from the mother  
I munch silence like the stone statue of a horse  
the shadows of white walls are a fodder my loneliness finds hard to swallow  
the sobbing woman who has covered her face is an aged mother to the silent one --  
she bore him out of garrulous chatter -- conscious of being injured  
OK, so let the room be flooded by my whistling sound as I sup soup

**The Lakeshore During a Holiday [假日湖滨] December 13, 1993**

Another holiday at the lakeshore  
an amusement park for oldsters and children  
behind hedges and trees, they move toward each other  
a full circle, finding itself

I walk up to the circle the children and oldsters compose  
they skirt the lakeshore. Perhaps I am  
that thing juxtaposed to the man-made hill in the green waves  
when I begin to move, so like a shrimp holding on to a rock underwater,  
up onto a clean porcelain plate with one leap

In this way a multitude of sister organisms  
don't merely meet on the picnic table  
the children and oldsters encircle  
the circumference that the little lake suggests, tightly

Before the birth of the delicious dishes I know  
several types of anonymous protein flew across the sky  
but fish have never been any aspect of it  
-- like later in the frying pan, that way  
it is more like the original shape of an exclamation mark: “!”  
duckweed is reckoned to be without nutrition also not a vegetable

On that joyful lakeside, the sun is also present  
a shuttlecock's flight interferes with the course of a planet  
on the lawn an old man suddenly slips to the ground  
blocked by the father, a child has no hope of reaching the grandfather  
so he inclines toward an even more helpless puppy

**For Ding Dang [致丁当]** December 14, 1993

Many years ago, my friend went to the South  
See how well this southern northerner  
adapts to life. The airplane flew-over the snow in the sky  
a second time my friend flew over  
the rooves of newly-marrieds on the earth  
"If you smack into a family's chimney  
simply take it with you as you fly"  
-- immortal words of his life experience in the South

My friend phoned me from Foshan --  
out of a hatred for speed  
"Either use the most endless of lives, and walk, like you  
or the quickest, from point A to point B as if  
I were at point B originally."

Dependent on a sheen and no-resistance won from the bodies of women  
O, that precipice on the edge of the abyss brimming with the delights of cogon-grass and skin

Slow down, my friend  
from North to South, like the migration birds might make  
is perhaps the laborious emigration of several generations

**The Mourning of a Cat [猫的追悼]** December 15, 1993

We buried the cat. We  
buried the cat's sisters  
We empty the paper sack  
We scatter dust

We carry iron shovels  
walk up onto autumn's mountain  
We move stones and  
take pleasure in the sun

We take a trip  
walk into the Peace Market  
a step further to the salted and dried goods counter  
in the buying and selling is a dead cat

In correspondence we tell you the news  
We overstate death, but when we  
reach this caliber of understanding  
we have fully recovered already

**A Drawn Prophet [鸭先知]** December 18, 1993

An unprecedented seventeen degrees below zero  
even in zero degree cold it continues to drop  
seventeen points. He doesn't wish to go to the warm South  
or up north, in search of the winter stoves  
just because two of autumn's parasol trees still tower in front of the window

The only job, his only job  
is to transform the thermometer that hangs like a gallbladder  
his only job to keep the blood in the glass  
from turning green. For this  
he used up his heat too early on

Thoughts about the South Pole freeze over  
the poet wonders aimlessly about leaves falling before his eyes  
symptoms of frostbite appear on his inexplicable wound  
his eyes are injured by white walls because of errors in recognition  
the atmosphere thickens, cold zones come out in conversations

Ardently he says to himself: "Seventeen degrees below zero!"  
then in a high fever he imitates the shiver of leaves on a tree  
responding, parasol trees shed, the trunks remain  
after a bonfire of added branches and leaves  
charcoal on a broken wall draws in a prophet

**Coming Back Home [归来]** January 5, 1995

I've come back, from Shenzhen to Nanjing  
the day has not yet finished  
you can't say I don't understand time  
you can't say that sort of childish thing  
-- since I've prepared cottons  
and wear them home  
but, when night falls, the southern sun is within me  
not yet dead

I go to beat on friend's doors  
call them out onto the cold streets  
I stupidly say: Just above zero, in Shenzhen  
everything has only just begun!  
No one argues with me, they  
are used to silence  
on the marriage bed prolonging married life  
perhaps back to (baking) back, in search of common warmth

(Over the following month  
my heart was full of treacherous desires  
I joyfully shout -- "I've changed!"  
But it's only the chaos of the biological clock  
the time difference or changes in the schedule of work and rest  
in the dark a mysterious hand  
slowly adjusts)

More deeply I sink into the past  
as if falling from the sky, I continue to  
bore into the mud. Like a huge army winter comes deep in  
lays siege. So cold it makes even metal draw back  
but in the southland, the softest things blossom best  
like flowers, and sex organs  
wantonness relies on the sea and trade's smoky warm winds

I've returned to Nanjing  
I live in the neighborhood of ice, snow and frost  
like those sages of remote antiquity, in West Asia, the Pamirs  
in the neighborhood of snowy peaks and glaciers  
torrid zones cannot give birth to sages. I understand  
Jesus certainly was not a black man

I've come back, returned to Nanjing continue a kind of mid-way life  
between the sun and ice and snow, placed in  
the cold dark shadow of a room  
that warm cavern

far from eternity or moments of stimulation  
I'm like all mediocre yet painful existence  
just am

# Han Dong: A Chinese Poet

## INTRODUCTION

Han Dong was born on May 17, 1961, in the city of Nanjing, the capital of Jiangsu province, not far from Shanghai. As a child, his father, a well-known writer, was condemned as a "rightist" and he and his family were sent to the countryside to live with and learn from the farmers. Following Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s, Han Dong was able to pass the university entrance examination and entered the philosophy department of the University of Shandong in eastern China. Upon graduation in 1982, after teaching for two years in Xi'an in northeastern China, Han found employment as a teacher of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought at the Marxism-Leninism Institute in his hometown, Nanjing.

Han Dong's return to Nanjing coincided with the inception of what is now China's longest-lived "samizdat" [self-published] poetry journal, *Them* 他们. In 1993, the sixth issue of the journal was published after a hiatus of close to four years following its being banned (for the second time) in 1989. (The inaugural issue appeared in early 1985 and subsequent issues in late 1985, 1987, 1988 and 1989.) In its first three issues, *Them* not only published poetry, but fiction and theoretical literary essays. In fact, such well-known Chinese writers as Su Tong and Ma Yuan got their starts in the journal.<sup>1</sup> A final issue appeared in 1995.

Through all nine issues of *Them*, however, poetry was the main focus. The three mainstays and co-founders of the journal were Han Dong, Yu Jian, a poet from Kunming in the southwestern province of Yunnan, and Ding Dang who initially resided in Xi'an but now has lived in Shenzhen, on Hong Kong's border, since 1990.

While the varied techniques and styles of the poetry published in *Them* does not allow one to call these poets a "school", there is a common tendency toward a focus on language and themes found in the daily lives of the poets themselves and the ordinary mass of men of whom they write. Han Dong's attitude toward classical poetic diction and that of the poetry promoted by the communist party after 1949 are summed up in a dialogue between himself and another *Them* poet Zhu Wen, published in the 1992 edition of the Beijing-based unofficial journal, *Speech* [发言] (pp. 1-6):

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<sup>1</sup> Su Tong 苏童, <Memories of a Mulberry Field> 桑园留念, pp. 12-16; Ma Yuan 马原, <The Goddess of Lhasa River> 拉萨河女神, pp. 21-27.

...Each writer gets his start from reading. Today, therefore, convincing and authoritative works are naturally translated works. We all feel deeply that there is no tradition to rely upon, the great Chinese classical literary tradition seems to have already become invalid. Actually this is in fact the case, with the exception of the 'great classical spirit', concrete works and the classics have already been cut off from us with regard to the written language. They are of no use to the writing of today. And the so-called spirit of the classics, if it has lost the immediacy of the written word, necessarily lapses into mystical interpretation and speculation. This point is not only obvious, but it is also gladly admitted to by all. In fact, we already have become orphans of literary tradition.

In search of solace, by coincidence everyone turned to the West. In order to strengthen oneself and also to 'move towards the world', how to graft oneself onto the Western literary tradition has become the direction of the efforts of very many poets today. Unfortunately, this effort can only be arrived at indirectly through translated works. In terms of written texts, we study translated works and afterwards write similar things imitatively. Later they must still be translated once again into English or other languages and promoted to the West in order to capture an 'international market' so as to remedy gaps in logic, poets have expounded an illusion: namely so-called 'cosmopolitanism'. They think of themselves as first being a member of the human race, only afterwards are they born into a particular nationality and use a particular language in writing. In my opinion this is merely a kind of moral defense and incapable of changing the [fact of their] isolation from the [Chinese] written language...

Learning from translated works is the same as learning from classical literature. It can be one of our sources of inspiration. We may speculate about and imagine the spirit, the interpretations and all the possibilities which lie behind the concrete written words...

If one remembers the poetry of Central and Eastern Europe in the wake of World War II and the advent of Stalinism, one can locate quite similar attitudes and approaches to language. Words out of the mouth of the Czech poet Miroslav Holub could also be those of Chinese poets like Han Dong: "We felt [modernism] as a counter-cultural movement, as a protest against the generalizing, solemn, official poetry. Against the poetic celebrations, all types of poetic celebrations. And we called it - our group, that is - the "Poetry of Everyday Life". But in more general terms - and not talking in terms of any literary group - there was the feeling that whatever you are doing represents the feeling of the guys in the street..."<sup>2</sup>

In the case of China and Han Dong, the period of cultural holocaust could be said to extend from, at least, 1937 and the Japanese invasion of China proper until the death of Mao Zedong and the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. Given this forty-year period, an attitude such as Han Dong's above can be more easily understood.

In 1988, Han began to turn his hand to fiction. Following the events of 1989, Han Dong was fired from his teaching position and was effectively forced to turn to fiction as a way to earn a living. (Han had indirectly encouraged his students to demonstrate on June 4, 1989, and took part in a small demonstration by Nanjing writers and poets the following day.)

Since 1991, Han has achieved something of a reputation and has seen many pieces of short fiction and several pieces of mid-length fiction published in numerous establishment literary journals in all parts of China. While several of his works are flawed because of his being 'forced' to write to live, several others, in particular his semi-auto-biographical pieces, exhibit great potential. Poetry,

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<sup>2</sup> From an interview with Daniel Weissbort, *The Poetry of Survival*, Weissbort ed., London: Penguin Books, 1993:

however, remains his main interest, although the improving quality of his most recent fiction may be an indication that he is approaching a balance between the two.

**Addendum:** In October 1994, Han Dong was one of eight fiction writers (out of 350 applicants) from all parts of China awarded a two-year position in the newly established Youth Literature Institute [青年文学院] in Guangzhou.

All applicants were 35 years of age or younger, and the winners will receive a monthly salary of RMB 1,200 Yuan (approximately twice the average monthly income of urbanites in China) for a two year period. The writers have only to meet the single condition that they spend at least two months of each year in Guangdong province.

Han plans to focus on writing longer fiction during this period -- novellas and perhaps a full-length novel. (Novellas are a popular form in China; a situation brought about by the penchant of several large establishment literary journals for this particular form.