

The Poetry of Hei Dachun 黑大春

Hei Dachun was born in 1960 in Beijing. In the early 1980s, Hei and other local poets and artists founded the Yuanming Yuan Poetry Society 圆明园诗社 on the site of the ruins of the original Summer Palace (known as the Yuanming Yuan in Mandarin Chinese, and translated as the Garden of Bright Circles in this collection). As the lyrical voice of the bohemian poets and other artists who gathered there, he was a contributor to unofficial journals published in Beijing and was famed for his poetry readings. In the early 1990s, a group of younger poets and artists moved into the Garden and Hei was a frequent visitor. He continues to write poetry and give recitals.

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Green Island [绿岛] 1983

-- for Haiyun

1

Green Island, when you are in twilight,
I drink sweet potato wine alone.
When a pair of eyes like fisherman's fires drift over from the other shore,
I do so want to kneel and beseech the white waves,
to recite the poem I cannot spew out,
with a boundless roar!

2

Big sister, will you take me for a drunk?
Don't be that way, I've just drunk a couple of tears.
If you can't understand my love,
then take off my belt and string me up!
Long ago, I fantasized how this beautiful moment would be,
me on the beam of your home, in a woodcut that never rots.

A Poem for the Baiyang Marsh District [白洋淀的献诗]

I'm going to leave this village at the head of the big marsh-lake
Mama, the little boat says: Tonight there'll be wind and waves
when a mist drops like a sail and floats out over the surface of the river
a sigh like an iron anchor heaves up from deep in my chest

Ai! At each gathering of fate I have the luck to be there
but I can never wash away the heart of spades' card
I'm so like a small humped shrimp without the least life experience
its thousands of feelers struggling in the unreal waterweeds

I'm going to leave this village at the head of the big marsh-lake
Mama, I never won that thin weakling of a girl
when she raised a glass to toast at a fisherman's banquet
she appeared every bit a brave he-man

Mama, I always miss out on the good times in the prosperous seasons
The fishnets wistful, beautiful and barren
above the six reeds in the wind like six guitar strings
like the broken reeds and six broken guitar strings

I'm going to leave this village at the head of the big marsh-lake
Mama, I lie on shore sticking out a wooden stake entwined in tired fingers
this night's the last when all China's children will shut out the stars
this is the most barren and open country, ever opened up behind me

Hey! This patch of parched corn once had a green past, too
just as my green spring once dreamt of covering the earth of this nation
Today, thin and yellow, this old corn patch can't find one drop of water
like me, faded away incomparably under the glare of the sun

I am about to leave this village at the head of the big marsh-lake
Mama, I want to row a fast boat back to your heart shaped like an island
there, how often did you look sadly forward to the foreshore of a life I float over like a duck
your dew white tears will fall on my green lotus-leaf palm

Often I brag to you: I am a big big poet
all the kind people will publicly acclaim me
A! On the road home to see you how often did I also look sadly forward
to a laurel of lotus resting in my green lotus-leaf palm

Faded Cherry [退了色的櫻桃]

In a dream, I see you walk out of a mountain col
I see your eyes sunk deep
like a cherry on the ground plucked
by the frost that grows white fingernails in the sky

In a dream, I see you walk out of a mountain col
Can I still reach out as I used to: Hey! Hello
or will I occasionally bump into you in a neglected orchard
need I say a word: I'm back! You faded cherry

Beautiful Married Lady of the Orient [东方美妇人]

1

In the night, like a massive black ink drawing when I sprinkle dreams of white dew,
through the trunk of a red pine hidden within me the surge of power
makes the dance movements of black brambles swaying in the wind overflow, into overlapping sounds,
and lying headlong in my belly a fierce handsome beast sings of human nature

In the night as in a massive black ink drawing when you bare an orange moon
it's the peony the peony unfurling heavily pleated petals that parades your aching wound
lets the formidable aura of the jewelled gold-painted sword hanging at my waist spread a changeless
and common custom
And a limbless infant of the yellow race yearns for the fatherland beyond the reach of his body

2

A! Beautiful married lady of the Orient

A! The ruler who rules over the sleeping lion and the meekness of night's dim light
in your age of maple leaves ablaze, Garden of the Bright circles, high autumn sky crisp air
the weight of a pair of peaches bends down the arm I extend into your bosom

A! Beautiful married lady of the Orient

A! Ruler who embodies the sumptuousness of silk and emeralds
on your body that burns like white wax, Garden of the Bright Circles, a fascinating waste
long gown of flame slit high up the leg of a marble pillar

3

Even though your child plays with your breasts door knockers under a red lacquer smile
he's incapable of finding the ruins in the fields are the palace halls in your heart, crumbling
but as soon as I let in the softly climbing creepers of your lingering affection
with my footprints I will lay the bricks for the wall of the Forbidden City, and walk round and round it.

Even though tied to the neck of your husband there's a specimen butterfly
how can he become the stone-carved hawk guarding over the whimpering of your snowy night
but like a pirate scaling your heart as soon as I climb up out of your foaming cup
I'll pull down the peak of its cap and wipe a drop of the sad Pacific off the cliff

Every Day Drunk All Day [每天每一醉]

1

Mama, I'm going.
I'm going to ride the soaring immortal crane of white lightning,
and go to the Big Dipper Tavern where lights burn bright all night, and drink deep!
Mama, look at that moon gate, one side of it opened wide by the stars,
the other closed tight by the moon goddess who stole my heart. I want to propose!
I want her to have the crystal ring of the bottle's mouth,
I want to ride on her toad's back overgrown with breasts,
and kiss over and over again.
Mama, I want to drink the red
into the eyes of the white rabbit¹

2

A! The islands of the immortals in the sea of paradise, diaphanous fanciful.
So many rooves of glazed-tile so many jade balustrades.
Flicking manes, the white horses of waves come pounding in,
Master Li Bai, long long have I waited for you!

Drink up, old drunkard, you're only two score and eight thousand years old!
Drink, while green spring is still in your grip, lift your cup!
Each and every day, drunk all day!

A fallen camel,
bequeaths me its thirst.

3

Hey you, stupa, are you dizzy?
But if you turn that bell up,
the wine won't spill.
Hey you, tree, will you fall if you take a stride?
But the green won't spill.
You too, clouds lit by the evening sun,
are you the red face I lost?
But it's still you, like the pale rooster's crest fallen
blood splashing everywhere from the wound of the setting sun

¹ The rabbit and the toad are creatures said to live on the moon.

Summer Like A Single Day [夏天好像是一天]

Lying leisurely on a rattan chair
a peach is as fuzzy as sleep to my eyes
when a fluffy pomegranate tree suddenly covers the secluded courtyard
I wake like a fruit splitting open: the summer, like a single day

I sit up, and the sweltering heat opens out through the dark brown dusk
over the fragrant locust tree grove of my infancy I slowly ponder
By the hedge, who made the thin-lipped axe in the kitchen smoke quit singing
O, the earthen oven shimmering with the rays of light in the clouds, is baking the big great jujube of the
setting sun

In a flash, wind and rain, that pair of frank sisters carry an earthen jug belly-laughing between them
to the pine grove beyond the wall, and fete the wild roses forever flourishing on the branch
and me, I'm the crisp sound of a fan palm snapping, surreptitiously, a glimpse into the life of man
----- this slow dew-drop that still flashes past

I have only to have a care not to touch the mahogany tree as fragile as a naked woman
she will gush a storm of tears at me, so I quietly open the gate
because often late at night my drinking buddy, carrying a bottle, Shh!
my drinking pal finally, leisurely comes to call

Intonations of an Autumn Day [秋日咏叹]

Hazily drunkenly I roam a wasteland of autumn days
bearing a weariness and wistfulness as if out of another age
like the last time I heard the trumpeting of the gold chrysanthemum flood over the land
O, an afternoon as peaceful as silk, homesickness brewed from rice

The ancient, primitive, pure Middle Bloom is already long gone
I can never return to the intonations of the past in the great swamp
insect prayers in front of this brilliant temple of the sun in the sound of autumn
in my mouth a leaf of a plant of a previous age, I close my grateful eyes

My native land! I can only cleave tightly to the remnants of your fields and gardens
lingeringly I coil up inside the amber of your siesta dreaming
when over the distant lake's surface I hear occasional plaintive cries pierce and soar
it's a precious species of mountain magpie! Plume and feather dark blue

Only when I've drunk down the chrysanthemum wine and hit the road
distantly that parasol of a tree stands by the roadside like a friend who reads my mind
I look back once more: The sparse clump of yellow trees gradually dims
gently a breeze strokes my black silk garment left behind on a broken branch

The Drunkard of the Garden of Bright Circles [圆明园酒鬼]

-- for my brother in poetry, Liu Guoyue

1

I'll never be able to forget this year
this year I cherish so many memories of my mom newly dead
Each time I see the gourd-ladle by the well I can't but think of her breasts like calabash full of wine
Every time I lean on the roadside trees on my tipsy way home I can't but think this way
When I'd just learned to walk it's certain I tightly gripped her arm this way
Today I'm a grown man but still walk wobbly on life's road and she never again beside me

2

All the year when I wake from drunken dreams
I don't feel that skull of mine anymore
As it turns out, it's already become an old copper-color earthen pot
and it's carried off to wasted fields and gardens against the bosom of an Asian peasant woman
rubbing gradually away, the pot's pattern is my land of dreams that will come no more
rubbing gradually away, the pot's pattern is my land of dreams that will come no more

3

This year I often drink from late night until dawn
from picking up the moon in my cup until I drink all the wine drops of the stars
Only, when I look at the withered and dry ginseng root in the bottle
it's like I see my bone after my death
Then, from the grave I extend that sour-date thorn
catch the clothing of passers-by, and talk with them of love of life and while I'm at it, of death
Then, from eye-sockets sunk as deep as the bottom of a glass I drip the final few tears
because I deeply believe that forever I'll be the drunkard of Spring
who spits out poetry as if spitting out flowers that choke people
in this dear land

When I Come Home in the Late Fall [当我在晚秋时节归来]

When I come home in the late fall season
flurries of falling leaves have buried the paths of my hometown
mountain peaks look like a herd of lost camels
chests ornamented by the setting sun's copper bell

Packing an empty bag, my heart unusually heavy
but coming back in the dusk I am a little more relaxed
this way, on the road people I know won't recognize
my ashamed look sinking into clouds at sunset

My eyes follow a horse-cart loaded to the top with stone
creaking as it turns into the bushes
impressed in the mud the wheel-track makes me remember
the road I've walked through in storms of wind and rain

Over the years I roamed around the rivers and lakes
I laid waste to poetry of field and garden unsuccessful in everything
From the sumptuous Oriental banquet where green spring is freely spent
I carry back the empty names glued to bottles of booze

So, I dare not approach my gate to home lightly
as if it was a cracked piece of thin ice
O my straw hut of a mother! I sigh
I am the lamp most wasteful of oil

No more is this the carefree age of infancy
coming home playful, grabbing biscuits from the oven as I please
Now, no matter how weary
I can't wriggle into the sheepskin jacket of my dreams

And so, like a thief afraid of making the least noise
I bow down and slip out of the fence's shadow
The solitary water press, like a crane
wallowing in the courtyard of days gone by

Only the night, that old driver who turns a blind eye
murmurs to me: your vagrant life is fixed by fate
because, when you come back in late fall
flurries of falling leaves have already buried your path home

Fourteen Lines [十四行] November 1991

-- for a friend going to Poland

Imagine yourself under a rosy sky
standing still, like a long-stemmed wine glass
our books of poems covered by a moonlight like dust
covered by dust like moonlight, decadent and aesthetic

Imagine yourself under a rosy sky
lost in thought, like a deaf statue
Where is the ancestral land we love? Where
can we play tunes of Poland ----- that black despair, white sorrow

Thoughts of home, weave a mat of straw in the distance
forgetful temple-hair white as snow, white as frost
only somniloquy revives the faded language of our modern age

A setting sun, the shouts are choked off
wave goodbye in autumn as we rush to build coffins and wooden monuments
two leaves drifting apart in the season of fluttering falls, and one long separation

Geese in V-Shaped Formation [人字形雁行]

A Poetry Sequence

A Pomegranate Tree [石榴树]

the footsteps of falling leaves cover the ground
the heavy burdens of parting everywhere you look

The Countryside You See [乡村即景]

grain after grain of starry rice
pecked clean away
O! The red-crown stretched-neck
Dawn

A Cicada [蝉]

the keen needle of a record player
a wheel of years ceaselessly spinning

The Mid-Autumn Festival¹ [中秋节]

this moon's well
draws up so many drifters' eyes

An Aspen [白杨]

standing lush
still standing on the wane

A Poet's Life [诗人生平]

in poverty a piece of gold trips me up

The Poet Shi Zhi [诗人食指]

like a rag
you wipe away dust, and are thrown away into it

The Garden of Bright Circles [圆明园]

in my love for the fatherland
you have a part
like the mutilated design
on a huge carved stone

Going Home Again [重归家园]
A Sequence

Chrysanthemums [菊]

Noon, when the sound of gold being scattered rises everywhere
I arrive in north China's hilly regions of withered plants
nobody can hurl rays of light at the sun
no one can make the big-maned lion turn back its head

Wild chrysanthemums, way-lay me! Female of riotous color
no matter if you are destroyed or reborn in a shimmering system of stars
only your bronze horn can wake the color blue
only your wide-brim hat can make its limitless approach to the sky's boundary

Beans [豆]

A kidney bean trellis, reddish-purple dark clouds of sunset
obscure my reclusive career as a wandering minstrel
The autumn wind, one gust pushing on another
stirs the fence into shivering like an ancient zither

For how long? A day or half a lifetime
the round marble table piled high with bean pods
In a dreamland, dark green filaments swirl up
as if ripped out of a letter from a former home

The Rain [雨]

Wind rips off leaf after dangling leaf of the parasol tree
like an almanac, the season already turned past autumn equinox
a stream pressed into a gorge swirling quick silver
measure's the northlands temperature after a frost

When thunder roars, a returning peasant woman wears a red scarf
her cheeks invisible I can only hear flashes of sound
until a blue flame flares out from the stove top
sizzling as it licks the dusky look in her eyes brightly

At night I hesitate, I hold my breath as I identify the tracks of
wild beasts and livestock mixed on the muddy road
a field of white sweet potatoes not yet sun-dried drying
in salty soil birthing moldy green freckles

As if reciting scripture, now the rain relates to the traveller
the secrets and changes of this hilly place
and the unchanging fate of farmers
bound by corn stalks to this piece of land

The Crane [鶴]

After we parted, my girl, the daytime sound of iron hooves grows weaker by the day
when bridled and looking back the horse's head resembled a bolt of silk of satin
and when my memory in a bee hive swirls painfully toward the foot of a mountain
the sun sets, unfolds droning copper strings like a harp

A flock of ducks floats and flies, like a rasping turntable
from the era of black bakelite scratched by starlight
from gloomy lakes and marshes, the nickel-white of the eyes of the drowned floats up
passing through pig-tail grass the fence of worries about home

In this night of sudden cold, whose fate will be guessed at
Who? often carries in their breast the nameless premonition of an animal
in the air you can smell an odor of rusting iron
like germs and sand, and sulfuric acid attacking out of the stars

So! Accept this sky of heavy November snows about to fall
just wait for the prolonged cry of green spring, then feathers scatter with a roar
your flesh decomposes: only your arm like a cane's neck props up your brow
reading vast white letters, you take advantage of the stove's blue flame

Autumn [秋]

-- from <The Home Garden Singer> [家园歌唱者], a sequence; poem #11

Cups shout orders at cups; wild chrysanthemums are on the lips of wild chrysanthemums
along the path long thin snake messages hiss --- diverging from the horizon
following me a whistle echoing over a radius of several miles
a dark blue hill, in unison cattle heads swish up

in the dusty haze of real life I make out poorly
but when I return to this orange midday dream, my sorrow turns to glee
the mysterious bright finger ring concealed among vine leaves reflects the light
from the river's other bank; from golden bamboo hedges laid out like flutes

We, this generation of our ancestral land's era of calamity and hidden damage
sisters of mottled bamboo; wandering minstrel brothers of sunflowers
today the buried are buried; the mad are mad
even some who were as yet unnamed fell like comets

Autumn! Why do you hold the wheat of apologies in your body
why is your chest adorned by the zhu-er herb sacrificed year after year on your bleak mountains and
great rivers
when you gaze long and hard at the far-off tomb encircled by black cypress trees
tear drops of amber pine sap slowly flow down your rough face

Joy and sorrow or glory and humiliation?! what else is worth misgiving
Guide me! plows made of the curved spines of my compatriots
no matter if I am the last romantic poet
or the first bare-foot pioneer returning to his myrtle-garden home

I will sing it all! on my oath I will sing
and when I rest, detailed accounts I will deeply bow
to the century with a foot in the grave
to the century gradually drawing in the orange setting sun
from between cracks in the bones of beasts and wheel spokes fanning out