

# The Poetry of Lu Yimin 陆忆敏

Selections: 1984-1994

Li Yimin was born in Shanghai in 1963, and is married to the poet Wang Yin. Still a university student, she became well known on China's poetry scene in 1985 for the poem <An American Woman's Magazine>. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, Lu was not only a frequent contributor to Shanghai's unofficial poetry journals, but also Sichuan's and Nanjing's *Them* (in the two 1985 issues). Lu is known as a poet whose favorite topic is death, and is frequently cited as an acolyte of the poetry of Sylvia Plath and Ann Sexton. She has written very little poetry since the early 1990s.

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An American Woman's Magazine [美国妇女杂志] 1984

Look out from this window  
You know, you've all you could hope for  
under a blossomless tree, you watch  
the lively people

Braids coiled over the right temple  
parted hair falling over both cheeks  
ladies with stiff straight or mocking gazes  
You identify them, one by one

Which was once me  
was a day of mine, a fall day  
Who was a spring and several springs of mine  
Who? Who once was me

Continually we fall toward the dust or rush back and forth  
dictionaries under arms, turning to this page of death  
We clip and paste this word, embroider this expression  
disassemble its nine strokes and put it together again

People watch this bustling activity  
have watched for centuries  
they praise us for doing well, bravely, coolly  
they describe it in just this way

Whoever was once me  
You identify those people  
I stand before you  
having washed my hands of it all

**Sylvia Plath (1984)**

Right now I only feel a certain sadness  
It immediately wells up in the heart overflows the lips  
Right now someone's simply gathering in a thin wind  
    (her virtues have surpassed me)  
Thick clouds threaten to drip to slip and fall  
on the white stone surface of a twilight street  
I want to mourn for the entire forest  
in my softest voice  
    (a sound streaming with tears)  
sing her constant grin  
her fluttering smile

She died at thirty-one fully satisfied  
her corpse and soul  
are the purple berries sold on the curb  
her breath congeals in poems  
    becomes dark red  
Fine rain and burning lamplight  
melt into a grove of nighttime trees  
people all turn their heads to look at the pretty glittering forest  
She speaks loudly of death, thinks loudly of it too  
I see a purple sunset  
and think of their accidental deaths  
her shadow so distinct  
leans slowly toward my body

**On the Street I Quietly Shout Out a Line of Poetry [我在街上轻声叫嚷出一个诗句]**

In a dry white meadow I sing

..... a love song.

Hoo, a breeze a warm sun gentle flowing water

also fields clouds and sound

for a long time and far.

The sun has fused all passionate hopes

This is winter's start

The kindest mayors in the world

and their flannel overcoats

on chilly bleak streets

distribute warmth harmony and calm.

I stand alone, like yesterday

the specimen squirrel in the still life.

On the street I quietly shout out a line of poetry

in a wink it surges past the street's canopy of commercial jingles

leaving one with regrets.

Even if the young grass breaks

the joyous life of man

I've already sung a love song as dazzling

as Holy Communion's golden cup

My face's all red.

## Gently Dying in This City [温柔地死在本城]

A white-feathered pigeon decked out like a magpie flies close over the flat roof tops  
The black-feathered one made up like a crow follows soon after  
with a fine rope they lasso my body  
the ends held in their beaks they carry out drills and fill the air with shouts and laughter

I dance leisurely in their footprints  
chest quivering, skirt swaying  
my skin's dazzling full and round in the morning light  
and gives off an ever-strengthening fragrance of lychees

When somebody crosses the road, the flock carries me up  
people fight to see my dreamy eyes and arms  
I see myself made real swooping over the rooftop  
and sigh that the wall doesn't glow rosy enough and appears to go green

These children of mine will carry me home  
I suppose they'll set me down gently by a window and take the rope away  
Crow driving off magpie, magpie chasing crow  
I never wake again, as you can see, I die gently in this city

**The Plums Come Out and Summer Enters [出梅入夏] 1985**

Wandering around all day on your kneecaps  
your late-sleeping son plucks at a song without lyrics  
A few grains of dust lie idle on the sundeck  
I close my eyes  
stroking the child at my bosom

He appears all of two inches already  
Everyday toward evening he runs around on your chest  
climbs up on one arm and soon after  
climbs onto the other  
We pull down the awning with our arms  
and make him play under it  
These days, just these past few days  
somebody's been plotting against our son

Late night all asleep  
who knows if under a particular leaf  
I've laid away a piece of fruit  
Who knows if in a certain skirt  
I've hidden a few hectares of edible things  
Who knows if I will walk out from this street  
walk out from people enjoying the coolness  
arrive at a place  
and squat beside the glad waters  
wrapped in incessant chatter, the laughter and tears of the dark  
Until you find me  
arm around my shoulder listening with me to our son's  
gurgling song  
and with an arm around my shoulders go home

This is like frequent entry into dreamscape  
just like the dust static on the sundeck  
I nudge you awake  
Before the sky brightens  
I hide our son on this sheet of paper  
and from this thin paper make a magic box

**Die If You Can Die [可以死去就死去] 1985**

The paper hawk waits in the air  
its silk thread broken by the wind's force  
its body sways

On the sundeck an infant yearns  
to run in the garden  
he lifts a leg and sets off

On a mountain a traveler's foot  
steps out on the air  
and he drifts down with the waves

No need to dodge if a car comes  
no need to get up if the gas isn't off  
no need to look back if you swim out to sea

Die if you can die, just as  
you succeed if you can

## The Sand Castle [沙堡] 1986

A fish  
that's walked over a hill  
how does it pass its days  
if it grows hands, feet and thoughts  
an immortal soul  
is still nowhere to be had

Being an official is an honor  
you can ride on a horse  
you can find the source of the water

Why doesn't sand and dust soil you  
some flash bright  
some are sturdy like stars  
caught in hearts  
the nearest thing to an answer is beside the well  
but we've regressed  
and feel the chill of the water darkly

**Just Before the Wind and the Rain [风雨欲来] 1986**

That was during our most peaceful days  
we hadn't gone travelling for a long time  
no friends had come to the city  
to drink our bottle of wine  
someone sent a letter  
talked of his sales  
someone sent birthday greetings  
on a printed card  
you've sat on the swivel-chair for a long time now  
curtains covered in dust  
the sunlight's already left the room

I pass through our vestibule and hallway  
I raise my skirt across from you  
sit down  
and tell you quietly  
the cat's gone out back

**You Wake Up Early [你醒在清晨] 1986**

You wake up early  
drop into a seat by the window  
and drink from two cups of coffee on the table  
in the distance behind a net  
hangs a neighbor you know  
you're flustered  
but proceed to curb your concern and enjoy solitary pleasure

You talk of this business  
several years later in front of a cafe in another city  
you feel nothing  
you've written several deaths  
but have never had so little to say  
this isn't  
the arrival your body and mind usually welcomes

He was crazy, even crazier when dead  
you ruminate over fine porcelain cups and saucers  
shouldn't let yourself go crazy over him  
just think of him as the lunatic

**A Wound-Up Person [上线的人] 1986**

You're shot into a rare situation  
and look out at the people over whirling waters

Eyes shining blue lashes flashing  
Looking at you is the same as not  
germinating the chilly thought of travel beyond the stars  
Telling you isn't worth the trouble  
you're in the middle of it  
you're used to writing you  
you won't fall out of the tree  
and break your neck like a hapless bird  
you're already wound-up enough  
it's hard to learn to speak of feelings with your spouse  
you look a long way off at his hasty parting gesture

**A Wound-Up Tree [上线的树] 1986**

Some feet can cry  
some tears get in everywhere  
to the dark mysterious core  
The calm  
usually comes from complete self-absorption  
It's the heart pointing out wisdom's path  
to a jungle

More lonely than man  
carrying sense organs that burn like mountains  
the agility of beasts and the dizziness of dancing  
Projecting  
the feeling of the heat  
from behind it in a bright blue sky  
leaps out and encircles it  
a great swath of earth is folded  
into its wings

## A Marriage Contract [婚约]

In the study only the marriage contract flashes a noble luster  
previewing for you a dreamy auspicious time  
when it's brought out from among Buddhist scriptures and the classics  
yet another tragedy  
peels away from your body and sinks into a river of memories

The marriage contract has affected the passage of light and dark  
the air in the room has a yellow hue  
You allow this draft to remain high up in the closet  
and don't  
bury it deep in the mountains  
Autumn  
You're able to have done with this business  
and exchange views with people beyond the room

## **I Sit in a Car of Dreams and Glory [我坐在光荣与梦想的车上]**

I sit in a car of dreams and glory  
going to any old distant place

I pray in an unchanging position  
and wait in the one direction  
I'm like a roll of polyethylene to look at  
like a manic-depressive  
with a flat facial expression  
moving through crowds without their heat burning me

On my sleeve world affairs as changeable as clouds in the wind  
arrive slowly in autumn --  
In autumn slowly I drift down below the crag  
stand up and  
go into town to buy new property  
I'll darn a great stretch of dead silence

**The Red Structures of a Summer Resort in the Mountains [避暑山庄的红色建筑]**

17 July 1987

Blood red  
structures I come a long way  
for you I open up  
I arrive deep inside a magic elegant statue  
This trip hasn't been for nothing

I enter into high walls  
I sit on a slab of blue stone  
to my left a well, to my right a well  
I look often at a doorway sealed by wuchelm  
I scream quietly  
as if I've arrived in heaven  
I cry as I please  
as if I'd prayed to see it  
this obsolete overgrown burial mound  
is exactly like the remnants of my ancestor's days

The deep courtyards I'm in awe of  
the mire I'm close to  
the red wash on the walls of my building  
the yellow wash on its walls  
the white skull of a letter-seal in my boudoir  
the summer days received, stacked, collected in a blackened bronze mirror  
it still has no grave, nor have I death, crawling the walls

**April 10 [四月十日]**

The sunlight  
has almost sunk into the shade of trees  
Hunger, my guest  
carries a bright yellow costume  
a perplexed expression flashing in his eyes  
he rounds a street corner, enters my window

I signal my burly guest  
to sit, to not stare at me  
I raise a finger, signal him to listen closely  
to the music in the inner room  
I carry out a tray-full of fresh flowers, set out spoons  
and together with him enjoy their splendor

When a key rattles in the door  
I fly to it like a butterfly  
The guest is like a book  
forgotten on the sofa  
Just as I'm about to speak someone behind me  
catches hold of my hair

**April 20 [四月二十日]**

Rub my eyes  
a dazzle of sunlight  
behind the fog inside  
wheel upon wheel  
of mild suns

I have no way to reach the deep spot behind my eyes  
I can feel it without a mirror  
at the edge of my forehead scorching hot  
but day after day  
no boat or car comes near it  
through my body  
neither is there a secret passageway such as an artery  
and no submerged body sneaks along it

My tears are a blank sheet of paper  
remote from my eyes  
pinned tight to my back

**May 10 [五月十日]**

Beside the lush riverbank of my thoughts  
a clump of white hair bends with the wind  
when I comb it, at least three times  
fragments like ivory drop out from inside

Meticulously I preserve them  
in a delicate paper box  
on rainy days I wash and rinse  
moistening its segments with water  
on the carton's inner walls I paint mountains and rivers  
I make them  
appear to be placed on my crown

The other day, a big fire overflowed  
from the kitchen  
destroyed them in a flash  
I remember the basin I own  
It's been so long since I missed it

May 25 [五月二十五日]

A trove of treasured poems at the bottom of my heart  
yet not written for me  
I am not even familiar with their buildings and pavilions  
which road passes through  
or where there's a bridge

Aside from following the song to it  
I have no way of approaching  
the described life for my hand  
the song stops me like a wall  
I will never pass through the garden  
can't let my hair down    can't rock the boat  
nor dare I sit a while in a cafe  
it's impossible for me to arrive at those states  
because the song's sound reaches there before me

The song's sad sounds  
I have no way clearly to distinguish if it's actually me  
or the poems themselves  
who complain more of sorrow    who is more sad  
and how can I judge  
the songs of joy  
this group of poems I learnt by heart  
when I was young

**June 17 [六月十七日]**

I sit in a corner of the room, my back to the sundeck  
like a china figure baring the new sheen of a perfectly motionless state  
elderly cookies and grapes  
at hand, flavorless and dull

Just now I face my photo  
cherishing impressions of me  
searching for the place where I recently set my hand to it  
following my imagination  
pretty froth  
brewing blindly trickles down  
and within the apartment sings out with sound

I can keep this position  
for at least a few decades  
entertaining with old weathered offerings  
a folding chair touched by sunlight  
eyes shining open wide

**June 21[六月二十一日]**

At the center of a center there's a center  
this phenomenon is merely a lamp  
under the lamplight  
like a modern white dove I incline on the bed and sleep  
like drops of mother's milk sentences dribble from the corner of my mouth

In the quiet I only see your eyes  
they stick as close to the wall as paint  
I sweep the light over the westside wall  
between them I store long sleeves and a dance  
I clear off books on the desk  
like a red-hot iron sit cross-legged on top  
suddenly warm or suddenly cold

Nearly summer, beside me I smell only the fragrance of cotton cloth  
lamplight    silence, I conjecture my hand as a leaf  
greenly extending to the black keys and bars behind the wall  
my parched spirit dimmed to a shadow  
living long in this room won't leave any odor

**June 24** [六月二十四日]

Two years ago  
a miracle fell onto my arm  
the strong light turned a tuft of my hair white  
my startled hand has stung for several years  
in my memory, its sound is  
like a wasp flying into the atrium of my heart

Later, I dug my heart's confusion into the dirt  
I bound up my long hair guarded my doors and windows  
not one lash of wind or rain hit me again from round the back of my head  
friends concealed their questions about it  
moved well away

Today, it's like a parcel  
still there by the head of my bed  
You've got to believe  
it has never been opened

**July 1 [七月一日]**

Beyond my sight  
wrapped in a dull blue blanket of mist  
not one ray of sun shines into the chamber of my heart  
through the wall the sound of tossing and turning after the food is cooked  
and me I've already died  
square pillars of ice are placed everywhere on the island

One or two human shadows  
sway in front of my bed  
they accompany me but stand off  
outside the room summer's hot air  
roasts me through the walls  
like a pretty pheasant my legs curl  
my hair steams  
and sizzles

Already I cannot flip through ancient classics  
and find a suitable word  
to answer people's laments  
But I hope you alone come forward  
Listen  
What will you say to me

**July 8 [七月八日]**

Love plays a skillful violin  
bypasses my garden and walks on to the mountain out back  
I herd bundles of thread  
in pursuit

He moves fast like a bird  
in the twilight I only make out his back  
and his fiercely gesticulating hands  
even though it's this way, I discover I benefit  
after I reach the mountain top

In the mirror  
my belly dangles down like a spider  
and slowly departs from my body  
carrying the dirt and dust he's already jumped down a gully  
the sound of the violin vanishes over the plain

July 12 [七月十二日]

Distinguished guests come in a flower-bedecked carriage  
they lift aside my door-curtain of silk  
and present me with the gorgeous movements of a dance  
I open the lunch box  
and find a slab of sausage and three crepes  
I stand behind a chair and watch their fingers get greasy  
and pass them cups brim-full of water

Early on I realized  
where the wrinkles on each of their faces were folded  
away, but still I smiled timidly  
the record I had long ago grown used to hearing  
I can't possibly play for them today  
I've tried many times already  
when the needle starts to slide  
I pass through transparency  
for me nothing is more difficult than this

But I know an unused secret formula  
I go around the crowd and the furniture  
and before the record starts to move  
I secretly use the needle to prick my index finger  
Music fills the room  
I only see the blood on my hand  
and don't see the thing under my skin

Slowly I turn my head back I succeed  
no trace remains of the roomful of guests  
outdoors sunlight everywhere  
the flower carriage is still parked by the house  
I walk to the record player again  
watching my two hands I listen to the entire song

**August 1** [八月一日]

An isolated shore standing silent by the seaside  
a cold wind blows my clothes  
how did I get here  
and where will I return to

For as far as my eyes can see  
I ride a small beast of imagination  
that rushes like waves between past and future  
From my pockets and gaps between fingers  
I lose ornaments, plates and cutlery  
and food into the form of dust  
I halt, get the idea of searching  
but their look has already altered

I have never seen a mid-night so pitch black  
the earth and sky stand stock still  
as if the moment before their joining is at hand  
only my white clothes have a luster still  
at this time I wish to become a statue  
this wish makes me young again

**September 30** [九月三十日]

Put a foot as big as a broad bean forward  
put on colorful rubber boots  
the sound of this puerile song  
drifts all along Nine-Rivers road

He won't look at, me, yet follows me  
he looks east to west absentmindedly  
but I can never lose him  
it's as if I emit a magnetic field  
that is conducted through his ears  
his attention never wanders from me

Birthing this child is more down-to-earth  
no need of exquisite elegance  
no need for a whitewash of tranquility  
no need of long natural hair  
my thoughts end here  
only bringing those into being can bring me peace

**October 14** [十月十四日]

I wake at the far end of pain  
under the light of the lamp still within its range  
in front of my table stand two or three stiff sticks  
soon also new admirers drop in thoughtlessly

But when I begin to walk again  
my tolerance leaves me ceaselessly  
my high-pitched voice  
spreads out through the corridor

The hand that supports my already broken head  
other cracked-up joints as well  
grow colorful streaks  
my pursuit of you has lasted out the year  
and now they have begun to come after me  
sitting my face to the wall

## Year's End [年终]

Remember this day  
wait for the next  
at year's end  
discover that I shuttle through a forest of days

I stand at the summit of sorrow  
I try to get into the spirit, but can't  
the breath of a brief rainy season drifts up  
Calm and happy  
a bird  
soars through the territory of the mundane

During the course of a lifetime it's for me not to  
light a solitary lamp  
to shine on the words in my heart  
They rise in a mist, are melted by the sun  
like black wooden combs, kindling the dresser  
spitting and swallowing blue tongues of flame

By noon, the air's full of miracles  
the enthusiasm of sacrifice returns again  
a boundless valley, a square, then  
poetry is produced, and spreads pestilence

My elder brother, the emperor, a spinning top  
whipped by children, suffers from the precision of his words  
on his face, I read  
the terrible facts of today

Since water that's run away returns  
lost souls will also turn back again  
flower vases will shatter, at dusk  
in fourteen-hundred years

## The Old Home [老屋]

Since I moved out of my old home  
the former building entrance  
has become a dark secret area  
over the years in my dreams exposing its perils

When I come back from far-off wearing a pretty cap  
traces of my fingers remain on the low-ish walls still  
From over where I lived  
comes what seems the sound of silk being clipped  
just as I experienced it in childhood  
I wish to become a bird  
to fly in at the window  
and smell fragrant memories

But when misfortune approaches  
when a suicide sits idly by my side  
I am restricted to  
its long dark corridors  
At all times in my dreams  
I'm never able to give up these rooms and go  
just like a sickly small beast

## Dreams [梦]

Gloomily I go back into the corpse  
its soft face looks gold again

Those poets who killed themselves  
carrying the lingering warmth of sleep  
live next door to us  
their souls breathe on the outer wall  
not far away

I hope I can be alone after I die  
there the earth is parched  
sun all year round  
and no flying bugs  
disturb the breathing of my soul  
And no people  
come to die in my death

## The Course of a Disease [病程] 1992

In the world of dust  
I'm stunned speechless  
Two birds fly out of the fault in my waist  
that's my broken-hearted kidney

It's my grieving kidney  
put aside death and lets discuss the funeral  
a flaccid yellow birthday is confronted with the prospect of anniversaries of death  
A romantic life  
some parts are not convincing  
When I'm silent  
on one side is a hill of sand overgrown with elfin pine trees  
on the other  
is black earth emerging from a river bed  
steel-armoured memories    breath like gossamer

Don't ask me  
the asking of questions has become a confusing situation

## Recall [检索]

Before, I studied  
in a clean library  
draped in sunlight baring a smile on my teeth  
I'd cut costumes out of books

Before, the framed type  
laid bare his heroic eyes in a graveyard out there  
Before, pitch-black debts  
glued together the footsteps of mine that come toward you

My former timidity is still the bright path forward  
former sacrifice still a portable snack  
former rest still brightens me up  
former sound still shines in bright spots

The greatest brilliance is from the waves in the heart  
the highest contribution is to take leave of it  
conversation is always a legal case kept in back-up  
like a soft surreptitious animated cat

## The Palm of My Hand [手掌] 1993

What's at the center of my palm?  
Could it be that I'm still holding your life?

The lines at its center  
possess folk songs that flow like river water  
If a stone tablet remains in a creek  
the water will submerge it  
just as a dream is annihilated in invincible sleep

Be careful of the branches of years  
growing in a direction I can't imagine  
In the shadows of my hand  
there's a small gray beast  
moving tearfully into the distance

## **A Reasonable Explanation of My Whereabouts [理喻行踪]**

Anticipate the props needed for a long journey  
before starting out  
Read aphorisms explain your whereabouts reasonably  
your arbitrary losing and forgetting arbitrary gifts  
You arbitrarily turn off all sound  
arbitrarily try many desserts  
Your eyes overflow with color and light  
as in a fairy tale  
slowly change direction because you see the unforeseen

When you're old  
these trivial dreams are realized finally

## Death is a Ball of Candy [死亡是一种球形糖果]

I can't just sit down, spread out the paper  
and talk about death  
Come on, first scribble the sky an orangey-yellow  
dispatch the pen, drink a few mouthfuls of stale soup

A life like a small well  
loaded with all manner of juices  
smelling of fish and vegetable matter the tidewater wells up  
a fragrant bitter-sweetness of tonics on wild display on the tip of the tongue

Death is an edible, definitely  
a ball of candy full up and happy  
from start to finish I've been thinking of my very first topic  
in a wink it's all been said