

Contents

John Yau , Introduction	12
Wang Ping , Preface	21
Che Qianzi	
Hand-copied Paperback	35
Chen Dongdong	
Snow-Covered Sun	43
Finally	45
He Zhong	
The Vast Land	49
When We Walked into the City	50
You Come from Far Away	51
The Cold Spirit of Snow	52
The Last Bottle of Good Wine	53
Missing the Encounter	54
Spring That Is Beyond Definition	55
High Land	56
Under a Tree	57
Flowing Water	58
The Past Is a Cup from My People	59
Jia Wei	
Edge	63
Black Rails	66
Scene A	67
Liang Xiaoming	
Individual	71
Since the Creation of Words	72
Permission	74
Liu Manliu	
Mayfly's Journal	77
Autograph Book	80
As I Search for a Language	83
To Poets	86

Meng Lang

Exile Admonition	95
This Age Has TB	96
A World	97
Settling	98

Mo Fei

From "Words and Objects"	101
The Sound of Chopping Wood	102
Stuck in Place	103
Coins Flung in Four Directions	104
Young Prophet	105
This Is Not the Last	106

Mo Mo

Betrayal	109
Gluttonous and Hungry	111
Sold Out	112

Tang Yaping

Just Call Me by My Nickname	115
Black Night	116

Wang Jiaxin

Iron	119
Words	120
Railway Station	121

Wang Ping

Syntax	125
Of Flesh and Spirit	126
Crossing Essex	128
No Sense of Direction	130

Wei Se

From "The String of Beads, Fate"	135
Tibet	137

Xi Chuan

For Haizi	143
Books	145
Birds	147
Bats in the Twilight	149

Xue Di

Interplay	153
The Passage to Heaven.....	154
Nostalgia.....	155

Yan Li

From <i>Serial Poetic</i>	159
---------------------------------	-----

Yi Sha

When the Train Crossed the Yellow River	167
Neighbors	168
That Year	169
The North Wind Was Blowing.....	171
I Write What History Cannot Write	172
This Fall This Year	173

Yu Jian

In Praise of Work	177
The Fence	178
I Overheard Them Talking about the Source of the Pearl River	179
Power Outage.....	180
Thank You, Father	183
Mouse	186
From "The Brown Notebook: Rejecting Metaphor"	188

Zhai Yongming

Café Song	191
Proof	196
End	197

Zhang Er

Raindrop.....	201
Chinese Honey.....	202

Zhang Zhen

Poetry	207
Revolution	208

Zhao Qiong

Hidden Arc.....	213
Doubt	214
Punctual Arrival	215

Zhen Danyi

To Autumn	219
Poem.....	221

Zou Jingzhi

The Meridian Gate	225
The Wheat Reaper.....	226
To Die in a Sitting Position	227
Burning the Red Soil	229
The Well of Imperial Concubine Zhen	230
What's in My Heart.....	231
Old Bowl.....	232

Notes on the Translators	233
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Snow-Covered Sun

Bits of broken glass on snowy ground,
frozen red stones,
on a white night the flowers that bloom indoors—
all these are branches in your hand.

Naked, she faces your yard from the valley,
arms soft as the river,
breasts, full buttocks, sweet belly, V stroke
of dark hair—
all these are branches in your hand.

The snow-covered sun
hangs on the trees
like a five-year old's watercolor.

In your yard she dances,
collarbones shining,
ankles shimmering like the moon,
scented sex between lips and tongue—
all these are branches in your hand.

The snow-covered sun
burns like a red stone,
like a glass children gaze through
at the clouds.

CHEN DONGDONG

Swaying petals,
white night on snowy ground
winter stiff as plastic sandals—
all these are branches in your hand.

The snow-covered sun
sheds its cold light
on her bare feet.

Missing the Encounter

You passed by me along the riverbank.

I said "Traveler, please look back!"

You looked back, and passed by me along the riverbank.

Again you passed by me along the riverbank.

I said "Traveler, please look back!"

You looked back, and passed by me along the riverbank.

Mayfly's Journal

Poetry aches and freezes.
Melancholy narrator below the waterline,
foam's masterpiece,

I turn my back on the memories,
the dangerous fish in the distance,

days in dark seclusion,
oblivious to the grinding of fish teeth.

They can't hear the bad news
about my vanished poet-brothers.

Water, gigantic
curves, dizzying.

Who will notice the body's double trembling,
breathing like a thread, like an ant.

Finally, born in shame, the first pair of wings.
Another pair!

Lightly I shake my wings
and take off,

writing my name on the surface of the water,
tremendous dream under a lotus leaf's shadow.

I pass over the land
and the market of cattails

LIU MANLIU

like an insect kindergarten
or the grand ball of the white lotus.

I accept the beautiful scenes along the shore
as a consolation.

First trip without the help of a machine
into a multiple world.

The thread on my tail
is there to maintain balance.

In my own sky
I rocket into tragedy.

A crash site
teaches the newcomers.

To begin like an apprentice,
to summarize like an expert.

Unconsciously I'm approaching eternity,
nearing multiplicity.

Oh humans, why are you so greedy?
Give me a day.

One day is enough.
Give me one day of eternity.

No need to get excited about beginning or end:
Measure does not exist.

Death is only the ritual
of leaving your life.

At twilight we fly in groups,
facing sunset together.

Circles inside circles,
the first and last days of a lunar month merely secondary.

A soul that is multiple enough
can hold anything.

No need to point at the sky and say
“This is a second”

or “a billion light years”:
The explosion is ongoing,

the cosmos in a moment,
all of us existing in this one fantastic shot, dancing.

Flying, too, is a performance,
but without an audience.

It is the ultimate affirmation,
proof that we deserve to be noticed.

To fly is to embrace this attitude,
to embrace the land and its inhabitants.

The sea. Pity for a grain of salt.
Our flight is without limits.

We live our lives as you take vacations—
in one day we mate, lay eggs, and die.

Tibet

When I saw him he was already gone. Right here.
 From here to there, strands of long hair
 flutter against the wind. Streamers of sutra.
 A beam of light flares, then dies.

Some snow is melting.
 Knees hurt?
 I'd rather fall out between hadas.
 Or tell stories with empty hands.
 See how darkness fills their eyes, melts in the mouth.
 Spirit above matter.
 Lotus and nectar on the pilgrim road.
 One step and you're no longer where you were.
 Mountain, water. Yak butter and zanba for my food.
 I want to raise my tent
 in a perfect place,
 but the rope is broken.

The snow is melting slowly, but there's no need
 to race against the day.
 No one values the treasure,
 which once stolen is too late to regret.
 The incense is still burning.
 What should those who lost their gods do? Guess!
 Sing and dance to your heart's satisfaction.
 We die of small wounds and are resurrected.
 A spider is spinning its web to the sound of sutra.
 Simple landscape in the thin air.

A horse takes you to the destination.
Horses have run away from the grasslands,
half of them already gone.
Not theirs but the riders' hearts are empty.
People circle and circle.

When I turn my head suddenly, he is not there.
Where is the road?
I get rich from selling beads.
I brought someone into his garden
and found a brass spoon in the village.
A blessing disguised or a curse disguised?
I drift along with my days,
the sun too big, too black.
In my sleep, people arrive.
Some will follow others till death;
they leave with the rich. Buckets of tears pour down.
When you disappear,
don't forget to take your shoes and your hat.

Words that float in the air cast blue shadows.
You look great in Tibetan clothes, like a banner.
The high land barley is no good for brewing beer anymore,
but we all smack our lips to praise its taste.
Om Mani Padme Hum.
If the place is fun, we'll settle down
and drink any tea that tastes sweet.

Damn! Why are you pregnant again?
The leaves are falling. So what's up?
Grab an instrument and let her try it.
His deformed face is smeared with tears.
"Wake up, wake up," says the baby.
I know him.

The day he was born, a huge mushroom popped up
outside the door.

On his left palm, the image of an eye.
Thinking she could no longer stay in this world,
his mother left.

Snow, why are you melting so slowly?
Waiting for good weather, they finally lost patience.
Only I remain, like this,
neither here nor there.

The swamp west of Lhasa used to be a killing ground,
ghastly at night.
I'm in love with the only language I know.
But where are my beads?

The man with the deformed head is still weeping,
but no one minds.
In this world, we can't retrieve even a single hair.
So we dream.

The Train Crossed the Yellow River

When the train crossed the Yellow River
I was pissing in the bathroom.
I knew I shouldn't—
I should be sitting at the window
or standing at the door,
left hand on hip,
right hand shading my brow,
looking far into the distance
like a great man—
at least like a poet—
pondering the river
or some moment in history.
Everyone else was doing it.
I alone stayed in the bathroom
for ages.
Right now time belonged to me.
I had waited a day and a night:
A stream of piss
and the Yellow River flowed on

In Praise of Work

I praise work
 I praise the worker
 The muscles bulge in his arms
 He swings a hammer to break coal
 He bends.
 A few sparks escape his rough hands
 and shoot into the furnace
 The fire brightens his face
 his anvil and his workshop
 To cast steel chains
 this is how
 the work begins

He doesn't need them
 He doesn't think of their future
 Just work a process of smelting and casting
 Hands and tools take over
 throwing steel bars into the furnace
 to become something else
 The abandoned plowshares and hammers
 emerge from the burning coal as new chains
 He is a surgeon
 extracting chains from scrap iron
 turning it into something useful
 His movements and expressions suggest nothing
 He is a system of
 muscles controlled by the work
 The motion of the tools moves his body
 the only meaning work