

The Sleeping Cat

Under the midday sunlight,
every pore in its body
relaxes, turning soft.
The fur on its belly
wallows like waves.
I've never seen a human
sleep so sweetly.
Even a three-year-old would clench
its fists in the dreams.
But a cat wouldn't.
Now, it's even more tender, relaxed.
Its forelegs curl
like human hands.
Its hind legs, straightened,
look much longer than its forelegs.
If it suddenly wakes up,
will it walk upright hereafter?
The sleeping cat turns into a
nervous,
anxious,
uneasy human being.

In You I Search

for my son

Anytime I turn around and see you,
I can't help
but gaze
as if watching
something mysterious, nevertheless amiable,
and search for my own signs
on every leaf growing out of your eyes.
Those *me*'s not easy to discover
are brightened up by you
one after another
like slowly emerging stars.
In you
I find a pile of *me*'s.
That makes me sometimes glad,
sometimes shy,
sometimes self-reproaching.
The part of you that belongs neither to me
nor to your mother
excites and confuses me
like a new invention by heaven
or a small secret
between you and the universe.
Under the sun
you look unreasonably fresh.

Her Moonlight

I'm totally uncertain about fathering a daughter
or watching her grow up.
I don't know what kind of process that would be,
as the moonlight streams through the window bars at night,
and spreads on the floor of the living room.
I'm steeped in her clear brightness.
She arrives as if just to let me know
there's such a watery light in the world
that shines on me
but doesn't belong to me.
Sometimes I'd look with wonder at my two-year-old daughter.
Each day I'm more attracted than the day before.
I hold her tender flesh,
kissing her almond face.
Such a moment
always makes me feel,
between her and me,
there's a distance more mystical than God,
more transparent than air.
This is a warm abyss
like the one between the sun and the moon,
between the moon and me.
I carefully try to perceive
yet it's impossible to grasp
the bright moon
in her soul.
She grows up fast, like the moon walking in the sky.
Her face changes every day
with a glow that goes beyond my palms,
covering the entire sky.
She'll vanquish me like vanquishing the night.

Harassment

She said,
Give me a hug.
I hugged her.
She said,
Hold me tight.
I held her tight.
She said,
You hold me so tight.
You're harassing me.
I released her.
She said,
I'm kidding.
Hold me.
I held her again.
She said,
Kiss me.
I didn't kiss her.
She said,
Close your eyes.
Let me kiss you.
She kissed me
on my lips
before I closed my eyes.
She said,
You harassed me again.
Then she shook off my embrace
running away in a fit of giggles.

Self-Portrait

Round and bald
is my excellent head
with a greenish shine.
A cone-shaped ridge lies in the middle
like a sterile rocky mountain
rising from the barren wasteland.
That hideous face of mine
as described in the rumors
is largely due to this part.
Bypassing my vast forehead
(my wife said
my forehead covers too much ground
or, in typographic terms,
there's too much blank space),
you will see
what Yi Sha called
"two gamecock's brows."
They make my face
take the shape of a gamecock.
Have they also
endowed me with a gamecock's fate?
Ten years ago,
people said I had "a monkey's mouth and cheeks."
Now
I have become "a large head and big ears."
A fleshy, greasy nose tip
has totally smashed my youthful dream
of possessing a handsome look.

Before St. Francis Xavier Chapel

I like those small chapels,
solemn but homely.
In Coloane Village, Macau,
the slim wooden door
of St. Francis Xavier Chapel
cuts the yellow wall
into two
butterfly wings,
warm and bright,
inducing me to enter.
The banner above the door
bears two lines
from the New Testament.
“I am the way and the truth and the life.”
After a minute’s thought,
I speak silently in my heart
“Sorry, these words—
I cannot agree.”

On Eternity

The train is running forward.
Now time is running forward too.
Is the running perpendicular
or parallel to ours?
How do they intersect?
Is there a policeman to issue a stop order?

Does time run faster or slower than us?
Would there be a crash
if it collides with us?
Who measures the speed of the running time?
Who is holding up a stopwatch
high above the sky?

Now the rivers are running.
Birds are running too.
No one has a finish line.
When we try to stop,
time, in high spirit,
calls us to hurry up.

Look where they are running to.
Jesus has run back to the manger.
The earthworms back to the soil.
The butterflies back to Chuang-Tzu.
Even the bull Lao-Tzu rode
has run back to Henan province.

We Push

The circulating red flag sticks to the upper right corner of the blackboard.
Big red flowers are attached to the teacher's head.
Good pupils hold golden trumpets in their hands.
Proud girls push out their undeveloped chests.

But we squat in line at the latrines behind the school.
With grass blades in mouth, we look to the blue sky.
We push. We push.

The spring riverbank belongs to the lads reaping grass for pigs.
The benches in the park belong to the couples in love.
The skyscrapers are the world of the successful people.
Beside the warm fireplace there is no place for a tramp.

But we keep silent at the pit latrines,
holding tight our bags, looking at our corduroy trouser cuffs.
We push. We push.

There are as many children flying kites on the square
as the wives and mothers unfaithful to their men at night.
There are as many men throwing up bile in the bars
as the girls covering half of their breasts with silk nightgowns.

But we sit on the narrow toilets,
gazing at the sallow-faced men in the mirrors.
We push. We push.

It's always so: those who appear on the street corner
are either mad- or policemen.
Always so: even the nightclub strippers would think
there is a golden road to heaven.

Always so: people wish good men a peaceful life.
Always so: once the weather gets clear,
we broaden our mouths to smile.

But in such weather we'll dash onto
the university platform with our poetry, reading together—
We push! We push!

Those Girls I Know

Working.

Working.

Working.

Why haven't I found a boyfriend?

Working.

I can't find a boyfriend.

Working.

I can't find a boyfriend.

Working.

Are all men blind nowadays?

Working.

Working.

Are all the good men dead?

Working.

Working.

Alas, go marry a tolerable one.

Working.

Working.

Working.

He earns so little,
even less than me.

Working.

Working.

Working.

Just divorce him
and look for someone better.

Working.

Working.

What if I can't find a better one?

Working.

Nowadays men all prefer young women.

Working.

I don't want a divorce.

I don't want a divorce.

Working.

Should I get a divorce?

Should I get a divorce?

Working.

He's so despicable.

A bastard!

Working.

Divorce.
Working.
Working.
Working.

Shaoxing Road at Dusk

At this moment there should be doves flying by but there aren't.
At this moment there should be tanks rolling by but there aren't.
At this moment, Shaoxing Road is shrouded in small-mesh wired netting.
I'm not referring to horror
but the quiet.
At this moment, Shaoxing Road seems
like a solidified cast iron block.

And I'm reading poetry in the café.

At this moment, on Shaoxing Road, there are children,
in groups, walking home from school.
They are just outside the window.
I need only reach out my hand
to touch those fuzzy cheeks,
bright yellow
as if covered with a thin layer of wax.

They are far from growing
into men or women while I'm
reading poetry in the café.

*He poured the coffee
Into the cup
He put the milk
Into the cup of coffee
He put the sugar
Into the coffee with milk
With a small spoon
He churned*

These lines by Jacques Prévert
are exactly what I'm
doing at this moment.

And outside the window, children walk by like soldiers.