

Gu Cheng (1957-93): Selected Poems

Translated from the Chinese by Isham Cook & Zhao Shufen
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Little Flowers' Faith

On a road of rocks
There floats a patch of little flowers

They return the cold reception of the rocks
With golden smiles

They believe
In the end, the rocks will germinate
And smile coarsely
Showing the kind teeth
Between the sunlight and the tree shadows

1971/6

Photography

The sunlight
Flickers in the sky
But is soon blotted out by dark clouds

The storm washes
The film of my soul

1979/6

Shadows of Hills

Out of shadows of hills
There looms an ancient knight
Holding the rein of a courser
Roads are disappearing around him

He becomes a relief
And diverse stories
A fiend today
An angel tomorrow

1979/7

In a wink of the eye

In that erroneous age, I had such “illusion”:

I believed
And never averted my eyes

The rainbow
That swam in the fountain
Gently eyeing the passersby
In a wink of the eye—

Changed into a lump of serpent shadows

The chime
That rested in the church
Quietly chatting away the hours
In a wink of the eye—

Changed into a deep well

Red flowers
That shot into blossom on the screen
Greeting excitedly the spring wind
In a wink of the eye—

Changed into sanguinary blood

For the sake of belief
I strained my eyes wide

1979/11

After the rainfall

After the rainfall
A watery plain prairie
And silence
Insects beat no longer their wings

On the land where the purslane
Swells pain
The beach louse pursues the quivering waves

The petals, rubicund, azure
Clutch to the broken brigs
Foams are reselling the stolen colors

The distant young willows
With hair adhered
Saw for the first time
Why it was unhappy

1979/12

A Snowman

In front of your door
I piled up a snowman
To speak on behalf of the clumsy I
For my long waiting

You took out a lollipop
A sweet, sweet heart
And buried it in the snow
Saying, so would it be happy

But the snowman did not laugh
And was silent until
The scorching sun of the spring
Melted it clean

Where is the man?
Where is the heart?
Beside that little puddle of tears
There are only honeybees

1980/2

Bubble Shadows

Two free bubbles
Rise from the deep of the dream sea...

The cloudy silver fog
Disperses in the breeze

I like a child
Clutch tightly to the blurring you

Trying vainly to bring bubble shadows
Back to the land of reality

1980/6

Commentary

Someone bade the poet to comment on
His unfortunate poems

The poet replies:
You can go to the trade fair
All the products there
Are provided with commentators

1980/6

Sense

The sky is gray
The roads are gray
The buildings are gray
The rain is gray

Through such ashy gray
Walk past two children
One ponceau
One viridescent

1980/7

Curves

A bird swiftly swerves
In the high wind

A lad stoops
To pick up a coin

The grape vines' winding palpus
Because of fancy

The sea waves' surging ridges
Because of recoil

1980/8

Solace

Green, green wild grapes
And a small yellowy moon
Mom is worried
“How can I make jam?”

I say:
Don't add sugar
For there hangs a sweet, sweet
Red sun
On that morning fence

1980/10

Resume

I am a sad child
Who has never grown up

I walked
Out of the north grassy marshland
Following a whitish road, I walked
Into a city bestrewn with gears
And into narrow lanes
The wooden canopies. Every low heart

Continues the green story
In an impassive mist

I believe my audience
—The sky, and
The waterdrops splashing over the sea
They will cover up everything of mine
And that unsearchable
Grave. I know

Then, all grasses and flowers
Will crowd around
And kiss gently my melancholy
At the instant the light darkens

1980/10

We go in search for a lantern

We walk so far
To look for a lantern

You say,
It is behind the curtain
Encircled by alabaster walls
Wild flowers transplanted from dusk
Will change into another color

We walk so far
To look for a lantern

You say,
It is on a small station
Gazing at the wild grass around
Letting the train pass quietly by
But taking mild memory away

We walk so far
To look for a lantern

You say,
It is just by the sea
Beautiful as the kumquat
All those children who love it
Will grow up in the morning

We walk so far
To look for a lantern

1980/11

Evasion

Through rocks that respectfully stand
I walk towards the seashore

“Speak!
I understand all languages of the world!”

The sea laughs
And shows me
Birds that can swim
Fish that can fly
And sands that can sing

And speaks nothing
On the eternal oppugning

1980/12

Self-Confidence

You say
Believe no more in fatality
Examine no more the dactylogram
Clench the small fists
And believe no more

Narrowing the eyes
You walk solely through the leaves-covered road
And let the leisurely wind
Be surprised behind

You walk proudly
All has been decided
You walk
As if there follows behind
A child
Who dare not cry in dismay
His name is Fate

1981/4

Don't saunter there

Don't saunter there

The night is darkening
A swarm of starlets are quietly dispersing
Enclosing the colossal withered trees

Don't saunter there

The dream is too deep
You have no feathers
Life cannot gauge the depth of death

Don't saunter there

Go down the mountain
Life needs repetition
And repetition is the road

Don't saunter there

Bid farewell to despair
And to the valley in the wind
To weep, is a kind of felicity

Don't saunter there

The lamplight
And the fresh flowers beside the cornfield
Are jiggling the curtain of the dawn

1981/4

My poem

My poem
Is never written on the parchment
Nor ever erodes
The stele and braze
Still less may it
Scratch a finger trace
On gloomy golden leaves

My poem
Is only a wind
A gust of limpid wind
It rises from beneath
The down of the returning wild geese
Quietly skims over
The tent of the dreams
Of some patient
And flies over the flame core of a hyper-pyretic
Changes it illusionary
And makes it pellucid
And descends ceaselessly
On the verdant wilderness of the west outskirts
Clean as spring snow
Dissipating

1981/6

My heart loves the world

My heart loves the world
Loves, and on a winter night
Kisses her gently, like a pure and clean
Wild fire, that kisses all the grass
The meadow is warm, at the end of which
Lies an ice lake with perches slumber at its bottom

My heart loves the world
And she melts, like a frost flower
Into my vein of blood, and she
Flows, kindly, from the sea
To the high mountains, flows
Brushing the eyes blue and morning red

My heart loves the world
I love, and with my blood
Draw for her sketches, lovely profiles
The beads of corn and stars no longer sparkle
Someone is tired and averts the head
Averts the head toward an advertisement

1981/6

We write

We write
Like the warm searching for the path among the pinecones
Move the chessmen piece by piece
Sometimes with none

Concentrating on biting one word
It is rotten
There is the moldy fungus inside
Then bite away another

We failed to drive the cart
To the pine woods on time
The pine seeds fall to the ground
And cover the whole ground with pinecones

1981/6?

Walking in the Rain

The gray clouds
Cannot be washed clean
So we hold up an umbrella
To smear the sky

In the floating of the night
There are stars
That seem orbitless
And distant or close from time to time

1981/6?

Sometimes

Sometimes the motherland is
A huge bird's nest
Sparse branches of the north
Embosoms me
For me to see the sun
And fills my basket with love
For me to love the sunshine's feather

We sleep in palms
Like little birds
And dream about each other
All around is blue air
In autumn
Yellow leaves are drifting about

1981/6?

Do you still remember that river?

Do you still remember that river?
That so cunningly winds
With small leaves we covered our eyes
And then, saying not a word
We walked for a long time
But failed to make out
Where she's from
In the end we found
A lovely small lantern
Quietly bathing in the river

Now there is no flower at the riverside
Only a small road
Sheer white, like a segment of woolen thread
Reeled out of a big snowball
The dark-skinned tree

Was transfixed onto the snow
By the magic of the winter
Even across the water, they did not forget
To rebuke each other

The water, still runs on
And sings songs that no one understands
When none is nearby
She comes from a warm place
And fears no cold
She gently breathes
As if the sky through the tree branches
Were frosted glass
Upon which she is to paint

I cannot paint
I can only write letters on the snow
And write down whatever you want to know
Come quickly, or else
The letter will melt
The recently knowing flower will steal it away
And give to the abominable bumblebee
Then the honey will go
And only a small lantern remains

1981/7

Perhaps, I shouldn't have written the letter

Perhaps, I shouldn't have written the letter
My eyes shouldn't have spoken either
I was tied to the rock
By the colossal life
And had to bear the thirst of dreams
The estimating voice
Of the auctioneer creeping on my body
I am to be decided by the world

I am to be decided by the world
But I have never decided the world
I make arduous efforts
Only to strain the string as it seems
I shouldn't have written the letter
I shouldn't; please don't read it
Keep it in the flame
Till the coming of the long night

1981/7

A Criminal Case

Nights
Like flocks
Of masked men
Quietly come up
and go away

I lost my dreams
Only the smallest coin remained in my pocket
"I was robbed"
I said to the sun
The sun chases the nights
And is chased
By another flock of nights

1981/11

I design reunion

Vehicles stained with coal ashes
Wagging, roll through the middle of the road
We meet again

It is said that I grow old
And have forgotten how to leap and jump
The smile is like broken straw
And you, how to say
Eyes like a drop of golden honey
As healthy as to rule the world
And to shine on the morning sun and bread

The station lifts its arm
The longicorn lowers its tentacle

You ask me
What I am doing
I say, I am writing an allegorical novel
On the edge of a square
There are many steps
They are very irregular, like teeth
They are spoiled, the chinks filled with sand
My obligation
Is to stroll there
And to study the highway code
Of the ants on the cross

Of course such work
Is not much

Night approaches
Go; turn around
Let those red and green markets sing behind
The flowers that are to be extinguished
Are still encompassed by green grass
Warm, big cows are smiling
While injecting white milk into the dark night

Even after the soul has become quiet
Blood still has to flow over many years

1982/3

I will breathe like grass

I will breathe like grass
On a high river bank
The dark waters beneath my feet are inscrutably deep
As black as the back of a kind of siluroid

The distant water becomes transparent
Floating on and on toward the sands of the opposite bank
The heavens there are full of lures
The drowsy sun is at a rest

Further lies a green shining wood
That records every movement of the wind
Some lovely flowerets are always in the wind
But never a purple scarf tied tight

The ants are removing the sands
They are never troubled by love
The bumblebee sings at ease
And dedicates one song to all flowers

I will breathe like green grass
And tell the spring of the light dreams
I hope I can sing many songs
And will never let the only smile die

1982/3

Going against the stream

I am used to your beauty
As you to my heart
We sigh
In the twilight
And shine on each other

In the deepest of the sea
We dare to breathe
Very slowly
The foot we left in the shallow water
Has not changed into fish

It cannot swim
The winter breathes too
Whoever pushes open the window of the night
Will see
The sea is changing into a marsh

There is a northern palace
Where we can walk over the bridge
Or kiss fresh snowflakes
On the water
And then, lean closely against the wall

This warm wall
Like a little desert, a flame, a sun
The wall
I can hardly believe
It is you

I can hardly believe
That she is you
Years, years ago
Beside many shining pebble over there
She was you

She stands low
Heavenly light shines between her eyebrows
Colorful rain is drifting downward
The big organ lashes the other shore
I am praising God

1982/10

Come back home

I see your hand
Covering your eyes in the sun
I see your hair
Covered by your little hat
I see the shadow cast by your hand
That is smiling
Your little bike is put aside
Sam
You do not recognize me
I have been away too long

I went away
For I fear watching you
My love
Like the brittle glass
Is because I fear
On the steps you stretched your hand to me
Saying, "Pang"
You want me to take you home

When you are asleep
I see your tears
The white flowers you clutch in hand
I once beat you
You said such was my naughty daddy
You say, "Pang loves me"
And you know everything

Sam
You don't know how much I miss you now
We are separated by the sea
The water embraces your islet
Where there is grandma-tree
And your toys
How I long to hug you
When night encloses

Sam
I have one word for you
Sam I love you
This I speak only to you
No one else will ever hear
I Love you, Sam
I want to go home
You take me home

You are so young
Yet you know
That I will come back home
I will see you
And hold you up little by little
Sam, you are in the sun
And I am too in the sun

1993/9 (Sam—Samuel Muer Gu—was Gu’s only son. “Pang,” an affectionate term meaning “Fatty,” was Gu’s nickname as a child.)

Little Spring Song

I am alive in this world
Bearing my own heart
 Oh heart! My own heart!
 That resplendent fruit
 Once brimming with blood of the sun
I am a prince
And the heart is my kingdom
 Hey kingdom! My kingdom!
 I want to be up on the battlements
 Rotating a steel cannon
I want to tell that little witch
You won’t be able to walk out of this land
 Ah my territory! This land!
 In the early morning across the road
 I’ll throw bristly bushes in your way
Entrapping you in my heart
And then I will become the world
 Ha world! I will become the world!
 Surrounded by the blue ocean’s grin
 I shall exult in the dance of tempests

1993/10