

## Afternoon

### A Colleague Walking through the Shadows

This afternoon I was reading a letter from Oregon in my old room  
As I stood before the only window to pour myself a glass of water  
I saw him

This darkhaired man my colleague editor of a journal  
Passing between two walls of pebbled white stucco  
At a certain moment of his lifetime  
Between 3 and 4 o'clock in the afternoon  
The shadows cast by a cloudless sky  
Cut the white building into two curious halves  
Newspapers and filing cabinets in one apartments in the other  
This man was just then in the dark narrow passageway  
He took perhaps three or four steps  
He seemed a bit uncertain his heels made a clatter  
I noticed his bald-crown hesitating for no reason at all  
Sunlight tranquillity flooded the hour with peace  
This short man in a red shirt  
Hurried off through the shadows between the two buildings  
The letter in my hand almost fell to the floor  
This incident brought his whole life close to me for about five  
seconds  
He didn't know and I never mentioned it.

Yu Jian

Translated by Naikan Tao and Tony Prince

## Yu Jian

Yu Jian was born in Kunming, China, in 1954. He earned his living as a farmer in his earlier years, went on to obtain a B.A. in Chinese at Yunnan University in 1984, and is now an editor of a literary journal. He began writing poems in the 1970s. His first poems showed the influence of classical Chinese verse, but he subsequently turned to free verse as a result of reading modern Chinese poets and the works of such Western poets as Walt Whitman, T. S. Eliot and Robert Frost. His poems first saw publication in 1981, and since then his works have appeared in various literary journals and in several anthologies of contemporary Chinese poets. Two collections of his poems, *Sixty Poems of Yu Jian* and *To Name a Crow*, were published respectively in 1989 and 1993. Yu Jian is known for his personal, plain and vernacular voice in his early writing. He tends to convey his feelings and ideas through apparently realistic and commonplace details, for he believes that 'one can see the eternal in a cup or in a slip of sweets-wrappers'. He has been striving to bring a new voice into contemporary Chinese poetry.

The Eagle's Soliloquy  
(from the sequence 'Celestial Burial')

'Now, whatever funeral rite they would perform for the man,  
he goes towards the light.'

(*Chandogya Upanisad*, IV, 15)

They call me the god of death, the god of devastation  
No door can withstand these black waves  
I perch in every shadow in the twilight  
With the first summon I impatiently scoop:  
Towards shattered skulls, limbs, hearts  
Agonised faces torn off like sheets of paper  
A smear of dark red splashed up by the dawn

They call me golden-winged, auspicious bird  
Flutes and dances follow my long, eerie screech  
Bonfires flicker on sheer cliffs  
Ancestral gravels endure the blood-rush of my glance  
So powerful as a thousand ghosts  
Ecstatic, I transcend the distance  
Between the rocks and the Last Day

The beauty of hovering! Leaping into

the beauty of a different wisdom  
An object of reverence free from care  
I only want to erupt in vigour  
A host of black butterflies descends toward the morning  
The purity of each death is exalted  
Dweller upon the summits, empty and silent  
Grasping—the whole earth is a foot-ring  
I spread my wings in its breast  
Pride. Elegance. Eternal life.

*Yang Lian*

Translated by Naikan Tao and Tony Prince

**Yang Lian**

Yang Lian was born in 1955. After high school he was sent to work and live with peasants in the countryside, as was the overwhelming majority of his generation. He

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did not return to Beijing until 1977, when he was employed as a writer by the entertainment organisation. His poems were published in the early 1980s, and he now has several collections, including *The Soul of Wilderness*, *Seclusion* and *Yellow*. He was at first known as one of the *Menglong* (or 'Misty') poets in the early 1980s, but he distinguished himself from most of his fellow poets by both the quantity and the evolution of his poetry. He has remarked that 'a mature poem, or an intelligent space, is a self-sufficient reality that the poet makes efforts to establish'. Although his multi-layered structure and historical perspective may remind one of the complex pastiches of Pound and Eliot, Yang is, after all, dominated by subjectivity and emotion. [Other translations of Yang Lian were published in *Literature and Aesthetics* in 1992 and 1994—eds.]

### Chest Hair

Ms U said

'When I opened his shirt

His chest was all hairy so I stopped'

But the great prairies of Texas grow on chests

What a wonderful Western!

To be a horse and run over them with fingers and lips

Hairy-chested men plant

Your grass on those chests!

Take one puff and you're instantly high

Let's plant devil weed!

*Shiraishi Kazuko* (1984)

Translated by Leith Morton

### **Shiraishi Kazuko**

Shiraishi Kazuko was born in Vancouver in 1931, joining the *Vou* poetry coterie in Tokyo under surrealist poet Kitasono Katsue. She studied film and theatre at Waseda University. Winner of the prestigious Mr Ho Poetry Prize, the Mugen Poetry Prize and the Rekitei Poetry Prize, she began her long and successful career with *Falling Egg City* in 1951. Her subsequent works include *Animal Poems*, *Seasons of the Sacred Lecher*, *A Canoe Returns to the Future*, and *Sand Clan*. Her work is translated into several languages. She is easily the best known internationally of Japan's modern women poets.