

## Poems By Sun Dong

translated by David Perry, Oct 12, 2020

### Nostalgia

Use leeches, sex and hiking to treat mania  
Massage the soles of the feet and pore over texts to treat jealousy  
But nostalgia —

take it apart and put it back together yet it's somehow still stuck, imagine being  
subject to communal secrets, how  
to speak of a pillar of salt and not  
leave slackened time behind, let alone  
secrete it away all for oneself

Memories hasten atrophy, the cerebellum  
shall with its anger grind it all up  
into tiny little jokes, and speaking of dust

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the end shall deliver unto the dust its own people

## **Forced Adaptation**

Back then we'd find ourselves flush up against the piano in Shiwangfu  
sitting at the top of the steps to the stage, which later became the spot at Wuyuecheng where we  
shared steak and onion soup before it became the movie theater where we caught whatever was  
showing before that in turn became the Lizhi Building  
So we've seen that movie already and the building goes nameless now  
as we find ourselves mid-epidemic and recovery  
lurks within its own latency

And now we're home side-by-side frying up a few dishes  
to cram into the overstuffed refrigerator  
while downloading movies onto the computer while still watching  
theatrical scenes

Sometimes we even mix the place names up  
but maybe we don't  
really care

## Fixed Gaze

Spring in the Anthropocene  
You who'd scream to breathe, add a mask

Don't pick your nose or suck on your fingers  
No getting together and no making love  
Don't start rumors and don't spread rumors, get it?  
Got it?

The wind's fixed gaze through the barely slit blinds  
The webcam's fixed gaze from the top of the screen  
Shall my existence be fixed here in this instance, exist  
henceforth hereafter

Even more than the bedroom the kitchen resembles a classroom  
Packed tight with boundless desire  
Hung thick with all manner of torture implements  
Smash what's smashed,  
Cut what's cut,  
Roast what's roasted

The betrayal of déjà vu, in spring  
the flowers bloom and wither, the swallows return, life thrives  
in this divide-and-collide Human Epoch  
whose existence shall be fixed by whose gaze  
hereafter thereafter

## Thinking of O'Hara Mid-Epidemic

I thought of Frank O'Hara on the Lunar New Year  
I said to myself

Geological strata sink and shear into conflicting opinions, the problem an impossible knot  
My shoes still haven't broken in, one more phantom enemy  
The event is yet to happen, but

Frank O'Hara says  
*in a sense we're all winning*  
*we're alive*, though he died at only forty  
defeated by a reckless young couple

Defeated, we're alive, at least  
for now

Today, thinking of O'Hara again  
I have to admit that I'm defeated by him  
along with all the defeated who say  
in a sense  
we all lose

## **Balloon with a Bell Inside**

Day gave birth to night, night not fully formed yet  
like bodiless lacquerware, a wisp of black limning the horizon  
swelling, a pair of hands polishing it to a high finish

Inform those passers-by  
who overdraw from spring, that night itself gives birth to night,  
like a balloon with a bell inside, so loud in the midst of its darkness that the deaf could hear it all  
without themselves being able to form the slightest sound

Do you recall the bell, speaking in a dream city of sleepless nights  
one pair of hands polishing it to a high finish  
another letting spring rain fall from between palms pressed in blessing, the balloon slipping  
skyward  
ringing & ringing

## Winter

With every murder, you save someone  
Maybe 1.5 someones, or maybe vice-versa  
Nothing to be taken too seriously either way

At the very least, a man's birth murders a boy  
plus the 10% that goes  
to the girl in his body  
not to mention innumerable other bros, guys, dudes etc.

The Designer's inspiration comes from a passcode decoded from Libra  
5M>1M>5>1>1.5> pure randomness, the school motto like a prayer wheel in a zoo for advanced  
animals, or perhaps we are the enchanted ones  
How do we stop?

Each murder can save another  
Earth  
or maybe vice-versa

## **The Past**

Like an explosive  
spend the entire dream staring at me  
Maybe it can be implanted in the frontal lobe of the brain,  
stored in a clump  
of blurred shadow, look once more for a few  
German verbs to disassemble it

It must have eavesdropped on the timer, silently admitting  
its fictional urgency, in the midst of my serial image-making  
tick-ticking, a few irrecoverably lost forms  
reserving ample space for trauma, taking danger  
and locking it in freeze frame,  
tracking their movements  
and burying them within contentedness

A bomb  
tick-tick-ticking in deep water, as dolphins'  
heat flows through and bubbles up, the illusion falls  
slack just as the danger begins hissing.

## The Conversation

A kind of homogenized dreamworld  
I'm in the presence of a man who tempts me to open up  
and speak, as if  
one would actually *wish* to live gripped by silence  
the gurgling flow  
choked to a halt, throat clogged  
stagnant air caught within the correctness

Voice bound to be consumed  
One's person bound to be homogenized  
The conversation just won't let go  
"Really, just a casual chat"  
The face of his organizational power's thin layers compressed  
like toothed ferns  
permitting one to go on as one is dying to stop

In the ups and downs of the afternoon drowsiness gnaws wormlike  
in a sodden expanse, everything  
as should be, entangled in everything else

Give it a good think  
Just take a seat and turn transparent  
The hungry serpent begins to writhe  
Reach across the table and grab hold

Is it me?  
Wavering, I work a rotting spot in a tooth  
with my tongue, feeling out parallel lies,  
exploring the tunnel mouth

Did you or didn't you?  
Did I or didn't I?  
Well, then, just pick a number between 1-10?  
Am I done?

He points to a word  
It's such a pity that it's so problematic  
Don't tell me you haven't  
figured it out yet?

Evening's dark deepens  
I still haven't come around,  
crazy hat-wearing  
bitch  
They forget too quickly

## II

Conversation does not necessarily mean we speak  
Just like beginner's mind  
when things happen  
nothing also happens  
I don't know how to get you to listen, let alone understand

## III

Anyway, since you've already played  
your own self  
why not continue to play it?

## IV

About that chance encounter between you and that extinct bird  
What year was that?  
Of course something like that must have taken place long ago  
The extinct bird is not contained by time  
I feel that I'm going insane, Sir  
I'm going to rip all my hair out  
The faint stink of bird droppings remains

## V

The voice is so real  
The hands and feet seem so realistic  
The walls seem so realistic  
This conversation cuts through truth, reality and spreads throughout the brain  
The stream flows gently through dreamland and saturates it  
Are you or are you not?  
I am and I am not.  
Have you or haven't you?  
I have and haven't.



Sun Dong is professor of English literature at School of Foreign Languages, Nanjing University of Finance and Economics. Dr. Sun did her Ph.D. study at Nanjing University and post-doc fellowship at McMaster University, Canada. Her academic interests include modern and contemporary English literature with special focus on theater and poetry. Dr. Sun has published a monograph and over 20 academic articles in various distinguished academic journals in China, US, and Japan.