

Maghiel van Crevel

# Language Shattered

Contemporary Chinese Poetry  
and  
Duoduo

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MAGHIEL VAN CREVEL

Research School CNWS  
Leiden, The Netherlands  
1996

CNWS PUBLICATIONS  
VOL. 38

CNWS PUBLICATIONS is produced by the Research School CNWS, Leiden University, The Netherlands.

Editorial board: M. Forrer; K. Jongeling; R. Kruk; W. van der Molen; J. de Moor; F.E. Tjon Sie Fat (editor in chief); W.J. Vogelsang; W. van Zanten.

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CIP-DATA, KONINKLIJKE BIBLIOTHEEK, DEN HAAG

Crevel, Maghiel van

Language shattered : contemporary Chinese poetry and Duoduo / Maghiel van Crevel. - Leiden : Research School CNWS. - (CNWS publications, ISSN 0925-3084 ; vol. 38)

Also publ. as thesis Rijksuniversiteit Leiden, 1996. - With ref.

ISBN 90-73782-52-X

Subject heading: Chinese literature.

Cover design: Nelleke Oosten

Cover photograph by Ralph Burgess

Printing: Ridderprint, Ridderkerk

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ὅσον οὖν δυνατόν, πειρατέον μὴ ἐλλείπειν  
ΠΛΑΤΩΝΟΣ ΣΥΜΠΟΣΙΟΝ



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## PREFACE

There was poetry before there was Chinese. As a student of sinology I had little trouble deciding to read the 1920s symbolist Li Jinfa rather than, say, international law. And when I first lived in Beijing, instead of translating, say, Li Jinfa's work into Dutch I ended up translating Dutch poetry into Chinese, in close cooperation with the Beijing poet and translator Ma Gaoming. In perhaps a hundred all-day sessions, as instructive as they were fun, we produced the *Anthology of Modern Dutch Poetry (Helan xiandai shixuan)*, which came out in 1988. Through negotiation and argument over ways to respect both the Dutch originals and the rules of Chinese – as expounded by Ma and other poets – I learned about certain aspects of contemporary Chinese poetry. Back in Holland, I continued to translate, now trying to respect both the Chinese originals and the rules of Dutch.

In 1989 I translated some of Duoduo's poetry, which was difficult but worth it. His oeuvre also offered possibilities for academic research, both from the angle of literary criticism and from that of literary history: Duoduo's career as a poet reflects the vicissitudes of poetry in the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the past decades. He was involved in underground poetry scenes during the Cultural Revolution, in the late 1960s and early 1970s; in the 1980s he slowly but surely became a prominent Experimental poet; since 4 June 1989 he has lived in exile and gained a substantial audience outside China. In 1991 I obtained a four-year position at the Leiden University CNWS Research School, to write analyses and interpretations of Duoduo's poetry.

After studying in Beijing in 1986-1987 I had brought back a few poetry anthologies. In the next few years I had deepened my acquaintance with the Chinese mainland poetry scene, through existing sources as well as personal encounters and correspondence. As an employee of the Research School, I did additional fieldwork in 1991 and in 1993-1994. On these trips I visited poets and critics in various parts of China and collected materials for what began to look like an archive of contemporary Chinese poetry: official and unofficial magazines, anthologies and individual collections of poetry, manuscripts, audio and video recordings, more or less scholarly works of criticism, letters, interviews and photographs. Primary texts remained my point of departure but I found this poetry's history fascinating as well, more so than a short introductory chapter could show.

So I wrote a long introductory chapter instead, on what had happened in the 1960s and 1970s. It became even longer after I expanded its scope backward to the 1950s and forward to the 1980s and 1990s. Eventually I found to my glee that I had really written four chapters, not one: they constitute Part I of this book, on the history of PRC poetry. As such they justify calling Part II – on Duoduo's poetry – a case study. If literary history and criticism can be combined to the benefit of both, I hope that Part I and Part II balance and enrich each other.

Now for what I did *not* do: two things which could have been in a book such as this but aren't in this book.

First of all, the word *Chinese* in its title may raise some eyebrows once the reader finds that I limit myself to the People's Republic. There is Chinese poetry from Taiwan, Hong Kong and other places outside the Chinese mainland too. So *PRC Poetry* might have been more accurate than *Chinese Poetry*, although the danger of confusion with Chinese Communist "state poetry" remains. But if *Chinese* is saying too much, it is not misleading and it is a better-known word than *PRC*. As for calling this book *Language Shattered: Contemporary Poetry from the People's Republic of China and Duoduo*, I did not consider that an option.

Secondly, a case study of a poetic oeuvre could include the tracing of literary influence. In the case of Duoduo's work one would think of Western Romanticism, Symbolism and Modernism, while neither the formidable tradition of classical Chinese poetry nor Chinese literature from the first half of this century should be overlooked and even works of Socialist Realism might be of interest. But while echoes of voices foreign and Chinese, modern and classical are scattered across Duoduo's work, they add little to my appreciation of his poetry. I don't mean to say that his oeuvre is *sui generis*, but I believe it need not be anchored in a foreign or native tradition to secure the reader's interest. Consequently, I have not tackled the questions of influence and of Duoduo's place in "world literature".

Outside the inner circle of specialists and students of Chinese literature, the history of contemporary Chinese poetry is largely unknown. Not because it is uninteresting – it is both terrible and wonderful – but because it has been hard to get at, for political and linguistic reasons. Much the same goes for this poetry itself. And insofar as it *has* been made known to non-Chinese and non-specialist readers, it has too often been simplistically presented as a chronicle of contemporary Chinese politics, cast in the mold of Art.

This book is intended for a broader audience than the inner circle. Its aims are twofold, somewhat contradictory and best captured by the phrase *language shattered*, from a 1985 poem by Duoduo: to show what Chinese politics has done to Chinese poetry, and what Chinese poetry has not let Chinese politics do to it.

Leiden, October 1995

MAGHIEL VAN CREVEL

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people contributed to this book, in more or less visible ways. To a few whose help must remain invisible even on this page, I have privately expressed my gratitude. Fortunately I can publicly thank the others.

I am most indebted to Wilt Idema, Lloyd Haft, Michelle Yeh and Piet Gerbrandy. Four different manuscript readers offering criticism from their respective angles, they share the qualities of scholarship, thoroughness, empathy and reliability. Their feedback has gone into every chapter of this book.

Jaap Oversteegen was kind enough to discuss with me his work on literary criticism and its applicability to my field of interest. James Liang answered many of my linguistic queries. Michel Hockx, Anne Sytske Keijser, Koos Kuiper, Tony Saich and other colleagues at the Leiden University Sinological Institute, the participants in the 1992 workshop on modern Chinese poetry held there, those in Wendy Larson's 1993 AAS panel on Chinese Modernity and Literature, and Xie Mian, Zhang Yiwu and other scholars in the Chinese Department of Peking University all commented on formal presentations of work in progress.

Outside academe, poets, critics and readers' help in collecting sources and undocumented information was invaluable: A Qu Qiang Ba, Bai Hua, Chen Dongdong, Chen Zihong, Da Xian, Daozi, Guo Lusheng, Hei Dachun, Huang Xiang, Jin Geng, Lin Mang, Ma Gaoming, Meng Lang, Mo Fei, Nanfang, Shen Rui, Song Lin, Tian Xiaoqing, Wang Jiabin, Wang Yin, Xi Chuan, Yang Lian, Yu Gang, Zhai Yongming, Zhang Langlang, Zhang Zao, Zhao Ye, Zhao Zhenxian, Zhong Ming and Zou Jingzhi; Mark Adams, Karin Ahlman, Michiel Buitelaar and Clorinde Lambert, Chantal Chen-Andro, Peter Hoffmann, Iwasa Masaaki, Tiziana Lippiello and Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg. In this respect I am especially grateful to Duoduo, and to Bei Dao, Lao E, Mang Ke and Tang Xiaodu.

During the research for and the writing of this book, from June 1991 through May 1995, the CNWS Research School provided me with excellent facilities. Through Jeroen Wiedenhof's and Marc van der Meer's guidance I was reconciled to the use of brain-deadening machines for writing.

I thank my parents, Hans en Koojje van Crevel, for analysis and music.



## Part I

### THE LITERARY SURROUNDINGS

The first part of this book is about the history of poetry from the People's Republic of China, not about that poetry itself. Poems will appear only rarely, as examples.

Chapter one describes the literary climate in the 1950s and 1960s, and the orthodox poetry it generated. Both in response to orthodoxy and under the influence of foreign literature in Chinese translation, in the late 1960s and early 1970s an underground circuit of Experimental poetry took shape. The story of this underground poetry is poorly documented because of political repression at the time, and has until now not been told in a systematic manner. Chapter two fills in this blank, which those familiar with PRC history will rightly associate with the Cultural Revolution. Chapter three outlines developments in Experimental poetry after it came above ground in the late 1970s. Chapter four contains notes on Duoduo's life and his career as a poet, situating him and his oeuvre in their literary surroundings.





## Chapter one

### ORTHODOX POETRY IN THE 1950S AND 1960S

*"Literature is art. As art situated in some particular time and place, in some particular culture, literature may help create or reflect (usually both) the cultural and political climate of the times. (...) This does not make literature into politics, nor does it even make it primarily political. In this century, literature has been conflated with politics by many governments or political factions that wished to control literature in their own interests. When it was so conflated, the results were usually disastrous both for literature and for the writers who created it. We must regard this as evidence of political interference with or control of literature, not as proof of the ultimately political nature of literature itself."*<sup>1</sup>

Michael S. Duke

*"It is not because a book 'hides' a political intention that totalitarianism condemns it. On the contrary, it is because the regime is totalitarian that any book always presents for it a political dimension (...)"*<sup>2</sup>

J.-F. Revel

Unfortunately the study of PRC literature often involves PRC politics. I tend to stress the ugly sides of the Chinese leadership. Consciously so: Mao Zedong and the Communist Party of China (CCP) have not been without their merits for the Chinese people, but I cannot think of any justification for what they did to literature. Clearly, under certain circumstances – in war, for example – literature can become the means to a political end. But it is hard to see why its subservience should continue after the circumstances have changed, and such "politically correct" literature be the only literature, and it is difficult to accept that cultural policy should be implemented at gunpoint.<sup>3</sup> Hopefully this explains some of my bias against orthodox PRC poetry, which boasts great numbers of more enthusiastic readers – but when reading it, I keep having to think of everything that could *not* be written.

---

<sup>1</sup> Duke 1993: 64.

<sup>2</sup> Revel 1976: 61, quoted in Leys 1978: xxi.

<sup>3</sup> It seems opportune here to refer to one of Mao's (1968, vol. 2: 512) most basic and characteristic sayings: "From the barrel of a gun comes political power."

## CHINESE POETRY AND POLITICS

While politics influences literature everywhere, the systematicity and thoroughness with which it does so in China are exceptional. After the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) the primacy of ideology in literature has been far from self-evident or unopposed, but during the first three decades of Communist rule politics was definitely in command.<sup>4</sup> Chinese politics has traditionally attached importance to literature, perhaps for utilitarian rather than for aesthetic reasons. In Mao Zedong's hands this tendency became extreme. The new, totalitarian power structure made it possible to implement cultural policy with unprecedented effectiveness.<sup>5</sup>

Traditional Chinese poethood derived meaning from the expression of what the ruler's subjects would have had to say about the way they were ruled, had they been poets themselves. Accuracy in representing the people was an automatic consequence of the poet's sincerity. Outspokenness could force the poet onto a collision course with the ruler, and noble intentions in voicing admonition or remonstrance – even if indirectly, through poetic imagery – could entail a fall from grace. In this respect traditional Chinese poethood was political in nature.<sup>6</sup> Literary writing was a skill tested in the imperial examinations taken by all aspiring government officials and statesmen – statesmen wrote poetry and poets were statesmen. Early in the twentieth century the examinations were abolished, shortly before imperial rule came to an end (1911), and the phenomenon of the statesman-poet grew rare but did not disappear. Mao Zedong is a shining example.

Thus, Chinese poetry and politics have always had to do with each other. In modern China, especially in the People's Republic (1949-), their relationship became increasingly intense and conflictive. Poetry and poets were usually on the receiving end. The Chinese writer Lu Xun (1881-1936) had few doubts as to who told whom what to do:

"All literature is shaped by its surroundings and, though devotees of art like to claim that literature can sway the course of world

---

<sup>4</sup> In this book, *Cultural Revolution* refers to the decade 1966-1976, ushered in by what will be called the *Cultural Revolution proper* (1966-1969), terminated by the death of Mao Zedong in September 1976 and the downfall of the "Gang of Four" shortly thereafter.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Goldman 1967: 1; Siu & Stern 1983: xiii; Link 1984: 17; Boorman 1963: 19; Hsu 1975: xi; Nathan 1985: ch. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the *Introduction (Inleiding)* in Idema 1991a: esp. 7-12.

affairs, the truth is that politics comes first, and art changes accordingly."<sup>7</sup>

With equal mercilessness he outlined the fundamental conflict between poetry and politics:

"The statesman hates the writer because the writer sows seeds of dissent; what the statesman dreams of is to be able to prevent people from thinking, and thus he always accuses the artists and writers of upsetting his orderly state."<sup>8</sup>

In the early spring of 1942 Wang Shiwei, who has remained unknown as a writer other than for his tragic fate – he was denounced, cast out, psychologically destroyed, incarcerated and beheaded – drew a similar picture, albeit less cynical than Lu Xun's:

"Some who think highly of themselves as politicians smile sarcastically when they speak of artists. Others who pride themselves on being artists shrug their shoulders when they mention politicians. But there is always some truth in objective reflections: each would do well to use the other as a mirror. They should not forget that they are both children of old China."<sup>9</sup>

#### LITERARY OPPOSITION AND THE YAN'AN FORUM ON LITERATURE AND ART

Wang Shiwei was among a group of left-wing writers – including Ai Qing, Ding Ling, He Qifang and Hu Feng – who had joined the Communists after the Long March and the establishment of their wartime capital in Yan'an. These writers had the disturbing habit of pointing out social abuses such as the leadership's elitist tendencies and the inequality of men and women. They also testified to artistic ideals incompatible with Party discipline. The latter point soon became frighteningly clear, during the *Forum on Literature and Art* of May 1942, part of a large-scale Rectification Campaign started in February. The Forum was organized at a time when the Communists were fighting for their lives against the Nationalists and the Japanese,

<sup>7</sup> From a 1929 lecture entitled *Some Thoughts on Our New Literature*, quoted in Meserve & Meserve 1974: 5.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Leys 1978: xix.

<sup>9</sup> Wang 1942: 178.

and could not afford to tolerate internal intellectual opposition. At the same time, it was intended to discipline literature and art so as to serve the revolutionary cause as effectively as possible.

The Forum was the first systematic formulation of CCP cultural policy and the point of departure for its implementation. Two talks by Mao Zedong shouted down all other contributions, and were throughout the following decades invoked as the ultimate authority in dealing with literature and those attempting to write it.<sup>10</sup>

In his *Introduction* on 2 May, Mao presents the Forum as an exchange of views between the Party and its "workers in literature and art", on the relationship between literature and art and on general revolutionary work, but he sets strict limits to the discussion. After stating that the newly arrived writers and artists have not yet integrated with the masses, he elaborates on concrete problems. First of all, writers and artists should take the position of "the proletariat and the broad masses of the people". Depending on their subject matter, the attitude desired of them varies: they must "praise" the masses of the people, "unite with" but "criticize" the allies in the United Front, and "expose" the enemy. The audience to be addressed consists of "workers, peasants, soldiers and the revolutionary cadres". To understand and familiarize themselves with this audience, writers must work hard; to become revolutionary writers, they must seriously undertake the study of Marxism-Leninism and society. Mao ends his opening speech by inviting others from the Yan'an community to express themselves.

During the ensuing debate, which in its entirety has received not a fraction of the publicity given to Mao's talks, he must have seen his worst fears confirmed. Such is obvious from his *Conclusion*, a second address of the Forum, on 23 May. This long, aggressive speech foreshadows the repression of virtually all creative writing outside the fluctuating but always narrow definition of political correctness in the PRC.

Mao first dwells at length on the intended audience. Fortunately, "this problem" has been "solved" by Marxist predecessors: again, Mao stresses that literature and art are meant for the masses. He adds that Yan'an writers and artists pay lip service to that truth, but that in practice they consider petty-bourgeois intellectuals more important than workers, peasants and soldiers and look down upon the latter groups. The only remedy is for artists and writers to "go among the masses". To serve the

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<sup>10</sup> The "Yan'an Talks" can be found in Mao Zedong's selected works, in Chinese and many other languages. For the Chinese text I have consulted Mao 1968, vol. 3: 804-809, 809-835. In a thorough and enlightening study of the *Talks* and their significance as literary theory, Bonnie McDougall (1980) has charted differences between the pre-1953 and post-1953 texts, as well as editions and translations of the *Talks*. Other useful sources on the *Talks* are Fokkema 1965: 3-11 and Boorman 1963: 21-24.

masses in the best way possible, popularization of literary works should take precedence over the "raising of standards"; in literary and art criticism, political criteria must overrule artistic ones. Mao's modification that artistic quality is still indispensable to revolutionary literature and art is gratuitous. So is his assertion that literature and art exert great influence on politics, meant to mitigate the part that really matters: literature and art are political in nature and subordinate to politics. It is from this axiom that Mao proceeds when he rebukes comments solicited in his earlier speech. He concludes that in literary and art circles, there is a serious problem of "incorrect work styles" and self-willed separation from the masses, listing as specific problems idealism, dogmatism, illusions, empty talk and contempt for practice. Ironically, Mao cites the – conveniently dead – individualist Lu Xun to arrive at the closing words to the talks that would make individualism a heresy:

"All Communist Party members, all revolutionaries, all revolutionary workers in literature and art should follow Lu Xun's example and be 'oxen' for the proletariat and the broad masses of the people, bending their backs to the task until their dying day."<sup>11</sup>

### *The Setting*

Sources and circumstances combined to make Mao Zedong express the opinions summarized above. A conspicuous influence was Soviet literary doctrine, notably Lenin's early (1905) views on the subject. But Mao neglected to point out that Lenin had primarily discussed propaganda and party publications, and had elsewhere sharply distinguished those from *belles lettres*:

"There is no disputing that literary work lends itself less than anything else to a mechanical equalizing, to a leveling, to the rule of the majority over the minority. Nor is there any disputing that in this matter it is absolutely necessary to guarantee the greatest freedom to personal initiative, individual tastes, thought and fantasy, form and content."

Before Mao, Soviet theorists had also glossed over this crucial warning by Lenin and applied his words to creative literature. Mao's indebtedness to the Soviet example included the concept of Socialist Realism, officially advanced at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934:

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<sup>11</sup> Mao 1968, vol. 3: 834.

"Socialist realism is the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism. It demands of the artist the truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development. Moreover, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic representation of reality must be linked with the task of ideological transformation and education in the spirit of Socialism."<sup>12</sup>

Mao's "de-personalization movement"<sup>13</sup> and the dictates of Socialist Realism present a sharp discrepancy with Lenin's apology for *belles lettres*. This is partly explained by the political reality of the time.

Mao's *Talks* were written during a war, when Communist survival was uncertain, and they were directed at the danger of discord within the ranks. More generally, they were a product of the politicized world that China had become since the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Opium War had awoken the country to its backwardness. Continued adversity – defeat in the war with Japan of 1884-1895, for instance – and attempts at reform led up to a period of political upheaval and social change from the early years of the twentieth century onward, with the 1911 Revolution and the 1919 May Fourth Incident as demarcation lines between the "old" and the "new". In line with the *Zeitgeist*, the "literary revolution" of 1917 was politically motivated: its advocates proclaimed the replacement of classical written Chinese by a language closer to the vernacular, because the former was incomprehensible to everyone but a tiny intellectual elite. Similarly, a fundamental issue in debates raging in literary circles throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s was the opposition of "Art for Art's Sake" and "Art for Life's Sake". When the fate of China itself seemed at stake, could its writers afford aloofness from worldly affairs, from "life", in other words: from politics? With an acceptable degree of simplification, the answer to this question is: no, they could not. Some were especially willing or unwilling to view their art as connected with their own or anybody else's politics and literary works do not always match their authors' theoretical stance. But on the whole, from the 1930s onward the relevance of a literary work came to depend more and more on its being socially *engagé*. After the outbreak of hostilities with Japan in 1937, things reached the point at which writing literature divorced from the national cause was just not

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<sup>12</sup> Lenin's statement and the definition of Socialist Realism are quoted and commented upon in Fokkema 1965: 9 and Boorman 1963: 17 respectively. This account of Mao's interpretation and adaptation of Soviet literary influence is based on Fokkema's (1965: 8-11) and Boorman's (1963: 16-18) lucid discussions. See also Ragvald 1978: ch. 4: a discussion of Socialist Realism highlighting another comment by Lenin on *belles lettres*, rather more bigoted than the above; McDougall 1980: 8, 19, 25; Hsia 1963b: 227-229, for Liu Xuewei's 1949 "view from within".

<sup>13</sup> Hsia 1963b: 237.

done. In 1942, when Mao Zedong further constrained literature and prescribed the exact measurements and nature of *engagement*, he was capitalizing on a trend that had existed for more than twenty years.<sup>14</sup>

But the circumstances at the cradle of the Yan'an *Talks* amounted to more than contemporary history. They involved the traditional Chinese regard for the written word, including creative writing. In this respect the CCP set traditional Chinese priorities and Mao's was a traditional Chinese mind. And Mao was a poet; he may have ascribed greater powers to literature than others,<sup>15</sup> and felt both a strong wish to use it and a strong need to control it. That he locked horns with the writers was no coincidence.

### *Consequences for Writers*

Mao's reaction to the writers' opinions comes across as disproportionate and vicious, especially since "the dominance of one man's voice"<sup>16</sup> immediately had the status of a law on cultural life. While the *Talks* emphasized that the reality at the time of writing was that of civil and international war,<sup>17</sup> they helped determine the cultural climate in China for decades afterward, when war had long been over and the CCP was in total control of the country. This would be mind-boggling if it were not for the personality cult around Mao, taking shape during the Rectification Campaign of which the Forum was a part,<sup>18</sup> and for "class struggle". Inseparable from Mao's charisma and his style, the latter concept made for a politicization of Chinese life well into the 1970s, after foreign forces had ceased to do so.

Implemented by the Communist government, cultural policy based on the *Talks* brought sanctions against those who dared oppose it or could be said to have done so in the past. The 1942 perpetrators of literary opposition immediately came under fire. Most of the writers involved made public self-criticisms and conformed. Wang Shiwei showed no repentance; he had to run the gauntlet and live through the

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Haft 1983: ch. 2 (esp. 24-25) and 4 (74-75); Hsu 1963: xix-xxi, xxxv; the *Introductory Essay* in Berninghausen & Hutters 1976; Link 1984: 1-3; Hong & Liu 1993: ch. 1, sect. 1. An outstanding general work on poetry from the Republican era is Haft 1989; the *Bibliographical Note* (xi-xii) can at this writing be supplemented with Yeh 1991a and 1992a; Xie 1993a.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Fokkema 1965: 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> Hsia 1963b: 232.

<sup>17</sup> Mao 1968, vol. 3: 810.

<sup>18</sup> Hsia 1963b: 233.



psychological warfare of a quasi-trial before disappearing from public view.<sup>19</sup> The Yan'an Forum and its aftermath thus marked the first in a series of large-scale and highly visible political campaigns against writers, which for many culminated in persecution. Literary works and their authors were attacked, "struggled against", execrated and made into focal points for sometimes nationwide attention, much like the Hate rituals in Orwell's *1984*.<sup>20</sup> Many writers were sent to labor camps or imprisoned; some were hounded to death, driven to suicide, even executed. Literature and writers were objects of criticism and worse things, but the campaigns – kill the chicken to scare the monkey – were also a vehicle through which the leadership addressed phenomena in society at large, and they were instrumental in factional battles. Writers and intellectuals would be stimulated or provoked to express themselves, usually to be denounced and silenced right away. Only in the 1980s did this pattern show signs of disappearing.<sup>21</sup>

In 1949 the Communist armies triumphed in the Civil War. On 1 October Mao Zedong proclaimed the People's Republic from Tiananmen – the Gate of Heavenly Peace – in Beijing. The CCP swiftly came to control what was published and sold, or otherwise distributed, throughout the land. If writing could not entirely be kept in check, what was written beyond the pale could still be kept from being read.

Literature was subject to far-reaching control, but the authorities also attached extreme importance to it. The literary history of this period can therefore to an unsettling degree be written as a function of political events. This is a basic assumption in Kai-yu Hsu's monumental English anthology of PRC literature.<sup>22</sup> From the *Preface*:

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<sup>19</sup> The story of Wang Shiwei and of his 1947 execution, still shrouded in mystery, is a blueprint of the cruel fate of Chinese dissidents under Communist rule for decades afterward. Authoritative sources are Dai 1988 and 1994 and Cheek 1984. See also Benton 1982b; Leys 1977b: 123-127; Goldman 1967: ch. 2; Link 1992: 144-149.

<sup>20</sup> Orwell 1949.

<sup>21</sup> Merle Goldman (1967) has written a perspicuous, chilling study of what she calls "the conflict between the party and revolutionary writers" in the 1940s and 1950s. D.W. Fokkema (1965) has thoroughly researched the same period to establish "what is meant by 'literature' in China" from 1956-1960 and to assess Soviet influence; his work is exemplary for structured and meticulous scholarship. Kai-yu Hsu (1975: 24) gives the most succinct outline of the recurrent "pattern of attack" on writers leading up to political campaigns. Simon Leys (1977b: ch. 6) calls Mao's Yan'an *Talks* "the death warrant of Chinese intellectual life" and cultural policy from the 1940s through the 1970s a "war against the mind", providing ample evidence for his views. Two impressive sourcebooks on intellectuals' (*zhishi fenzi*) relationship – in the literary realm and elsewhere – with the Communist regime are Goldman 1981 and Link 1992. Harry Wu spent two decades in labor camps for expressing dissenting opinions; motives for his crusade against human rights abuse in the PRC can be found in Wu & Wakeman 1994.

<sup>22</sup> Hsu 1980.

"The Yen'an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942 firmly established the inseparability of Chinese literature and politics. Since then, whenever political aims and emphases have changed, the direction of literature has changed accordingly. This relationship between literature and politics in the People's Republic of China dictates that any representative anthology of contemporary Chinese literature must also reflect the political fortunes of the writers and their works. Thus, the readings in this volume have been selected and organized in relation to the major controversies that have shaken the politico-literary scene in China since 1949. Most scholars in the field agree on the utility of this approach in the study of modern Chinese literature."

Indeed, Hsu has the translated texts preceded by a detailed, 14-page *Chronology of Major Events Relevant to PRC Literature*.<sup>23</sup> Other authors on the subject have outlined these events too. Background would hardly be the right word here: clearly, political history determined the essence of almost four decades of Chinese Communist literature.

A bird's-eye view shows unceasing turmoil: campaigns aimed at intellectuals and writers as well as political developments in themselves unrelated to literature. These two categories are often hard to disentangle, but both tend to straitjacket creative writing and sometimes silence it. Thus, starting from the 1942 Yan'an Forum, there is an endless "dynamism" in literature, imposed and orchestrated by other forces than its authors.<sup>24</sup> Some examples: the War against Japan (1937-1945), the Civil War against the Nationalists (until their 1949 evacuation to Taiwan), the Korean War (1950-1953); Land Reform (shortly before and after 1949); ongoing Rectification Campaigns in literature and art throughout the early 1950s, manifest in a recurrent demand of writers to "learn from the proletariat" in factories, farms and the army (from 1952 onward); attacks on writers and critics, prominent targets being Feng Xuefeng (1954), Hu Feng (1955) and Ding Ling (1956); the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957-1958), with writers and critics like Ai Qing, Ding Ling, Feng Xuefeng and Liu Binyan among its innumerable victims; a renewed attack (1958) on erstwhile Yan'an scapegoats such as Ai Qing, Ding Ling, Wang Shiwei, Xiao Jun; a campaign to promote folk songs, part of the "accelerated buildup of socialism" leading up to the Great Leap Forward (1958-1959); campaigns against revisionism (1958, 1960); the Campaign for Socialist Education (1962-1965), including the intended all-out reform of literature and art - "strengthen the revolutionary line, oppose revisionism"

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<sup>23</sup> Hsu 1980: 12-25.

<sup>24</sup> The following enumeration is based on Hsu 1980; Goldman 1967; Fokkema 1965.

– advocated by Mao and his wife Jiang Qing, starting in 1963 and culminating in the virtual death of the arts during the Cultural Revolution proper (1966-1969). It is easy to see how these events could have a bearing on literature in the PRC, whether by do's or by don'ts.

Now and then there was a relative relaxation of control: in 1953, in 1956, and notably in 1956-1957, when the slogan "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom, Let a Hundred Schools Contend" persuaded intellectuals and writers to speak their minds freely. When they did so in good faith, their criticism of CCP rule was unexpectedly serious; the Party reacted fiercely, with the drive against "Rightists". In 1961-1962, when Mao had temporarily lost some of his clout in ideological matters, the pressure on literature lessened too. Finally, there was a cautious revival of literature in the early 1970s, which largely consisted of reprints of pre-Cultural Revolution works, but by then a paralyzing terror reigned in literary circles.<sup>25</sup>

On the whole, repression and tolerance can be seen to alternate; there is much more repression than tolerance. At the bottom of this pattern lie two mechanisms. First, the authorities exact absolute obedience and frequently make expertise subordinate to ideology, but cannot do without intellectuals and writers' cooperation altogether. Secondly, the oscillation of slavery and freedom reflects the ever-changing balance of power within the leadership.<sup>26</sup>

Already in 1941 the effects of Communist discipline in the cultural sphere had become manifest in Yan'an: little was written. Marxist-Leninist demands of literature did not seem to inspire writers. Since it was inconceivable that Marxism-Leninism was the problem, the conclusion was that the writers suffered from "dogmatism" and concentrated on the letter, not the spirit, of ideology. The Yan'an Forum failed to spur literary production – perhaps because, afterward, writers were too deeply immersed in "study" or because control was too strict to allow publication of what they did write. Mao must have considered wrong literature more harmful than no literature.<sup>27</sup>

With an eye on what Communist cultural policy thwarted and prevented in Chinese literature one could say that a natural forest was turned into a wasteland. Should one focus on what that policy advanced and encouraged, the image of the wasteland can be replaced by that of a tree nursery. The latter is consistent with a Maoist worldview, in which man is highly malleable. Whether Maoist man's

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<sup>25</sup> See Kai-yu Hsu's (1975) report on his literary fieldwork of 1973.

<sup>26</sup> These power relations are outside the scope of this discussion. I am aware of the nebulosity of terms like *the authorities*, *the leadership*, *Communist rule*, even *the Party* or *the CCP*. They are simplifications by nature. I have not tried to specify them more than by stressing the major role played by Mao.

<sup>27</sup> Hsia 1963b: 235-236, 240. See also Benton 1982b: 172.

expression – man's expression after it has been subjugated to the Maoist view of literature, to be more precise – can be called creative is open to doubt. Creativity is not what first comes to mind in connection with official PRC literature or literary criticism until political changes in the late 1970s. Writers and critics were not to blame: their subject matter and the molds in which to cast it were compellingly handed down from on high.

#### LITERARY DOCTRINE IN THE 1950S AND 1960S

In 1953 the Chinese Communist cultural czar Zhou Yang promulgated that literary production in the PRC was to take place along the lines of Socialist Realism.<sup>28</sup> The socialist part is self-evident: literature was supposed to be political in nature and subordinate to politics, and the Chinese leadership professed to practice socialism. The realism part requires doublethink: it did not at all mean "the truthful representation of reality", but a beautified version thereof.<sup>29</sup> The safety net in the Soviet definition is the phrase *in its revolutionary development*, and to avoid misunderstandings the representation of reality is linked with "ideological transformation". Since a characteristic of Socialist Realism is its concern with "life as it ought to be",<sup>30</sup> *idealism* would make more sense than *realism*: Socialist Idealism? Or perhaps the ambition "to combine the ideals of tomorrow with the reality of today"<sup>31</sup> could have yielded a compromise: Socialist Idealist Realism? The sky is the limit for ideological jargon, and PRC cultural policy is no exception. Even after the application of doublethink, Idealist Realism harbors too blatant a contradiction to be more than a joke, but such was the demand made of Chinese writers under the yoke of Socialist Realism.<sup>32</sup> Their dilemma, incidentally, is reminiscent of that between political and artistic criteria for literature and art – artistic criteria were asserted but never clarified in Mao Zedong's *Talks*.<sup>33</sup>

Idealism flourished, to the detriment of realism. In 1958 this tendency was institutionalized in the new slogan for a policy made extreme but fundamentally unchanged: The Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism. The term, presented by Zhou Yang as Mao Zedong's, suggests little regard for

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<sup>28</sup> Fokkema 1965: 36-42.

<sup>29</sup> For the international debate on realism and Socialist Realism, see Fokkema 1965: 127-132. For doublethink, see Orwell 1949: 212-218.

<sup>30</sup> Boorman 1963: 18.

<sup>31</sup> Link 1984: 7.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Fokkema 1972: 75-76.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Hsia 1963b: 246-248.

objectivity other than the type found in Maoist ideology. Still, Zhou felt the need to insist on the compatibility of realism and romanticism.<sup>34</sup> In fact, the "truthful representation of reality" became ever more difficult to discern in the revolutionary and romantic clamor of the Great Leap Forward, a campaign aimed at impossible economic progress by a collective effort of the will.

After this product of Mao's misguided vision had ended in disaster, the early 1960s saw a brief relaxation in the intellectual and cultural realm. Temporarily, "middle characters" in literary works were an item for discussion: people of credible proportions, ordinary human beings with weaknesses as well as strengths, an alternative to superhuman heroes or subhuman villains. But the tenets of literary doctrine remained the same, and before long idealism prevailed over realism again. In 1964 the theory of "middle characters" was denounced and during the Cultural Revolution "three prominences" were advocated: positive characters should stand out from the crowd, heroes should stand out among the positive characters, and superheroes should stand out among the heroes.<sup>35</sup> So much for realism, socialist or revolutionary.

#### THE RESULTANT LITERATURE; POETRY

In a perspicacious survey of the first three decades of PRC literature and performing arts, Bonnie McDougall notes that

"there was hardly a single work of written literature produced in the 1950s and early 1960s that had a genuine claim to literary distinction"

and that the Cultural Revolution proper yielded no more than a small number of undistinguished works.<sup>36</sup> Unless one believes that literature should be manipulated in the interests of politics, her appraisal is depressingly correct.

What else can be expected of "creative writing" by writers told what to write and how to write it? The only way out is to cease writing altogether, as a disconcerting number of Chinese authors under Communism did.<sup>37</sup> Until the late 1970s subject

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<sup>34</sup> Zhou 1958: 35. For the origins of the new theory – it was another "offshoot of Soviet literary theory" and not at all Mao Zedong's, but the alienation which eventually led to the Sino-Soviet split in 1960 made this a hard point to concede – and its implications, see Fokkema 1965: 196-202.

<sup>35</sup> See Link 1984: 14-17.

<sup>36</sup> McDougall 1984b: 280, 292.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Hsu 1975: 165-168 and the introductions to the poets in ch. 4.

matter was bound to reflect the political concerns of the day. In his above-mentioned anthology, almost a thousand pages long and covering thirty years, Kai-yu Hsu must conclude that PRC literature from 1949 to 1979 knows the following major themes: the Communist revolution up to 1949, the land reform experience, the Chinese Communist participation in the Korean War, the socialist reconstruction of the country and the continuing need for socialist education of the masses – in other words, that "Chinese literature is political propaganda".<sup>38</sup> The do's: what to write, were flanked by don'ts: what not to write. This observation by D.W. Fokkema is an illustration of the don'ts:

"Chinese literary doctrine (...) overlooks such basic experiences as yearning for love and fear of death. Lyrical expression of love as such is considered intolerable."<sup>39</sup>

This is the arrogance of a Power protecting its subjects from life itself.<sup>40</sup> It is understandable how this would leave writers at a loss for words – that is, as far as "romantic", politically irresponsible love was concerned. Love for the Communist Party, the Chairman, the Motherland was another matter altogether, and its lyrical expression was encouraged. Intimacy of feelings was thus transplanted from the private to the public sphere.<sup>41</sup> This terrifying attempt at all-encompassing control was more generally manifest in the refutation of anything "incomprehensible", ambiguous, elusive – in short, of anything uncontrollable. It is reassuring to think that the act of reading takes place in the privacy of one's own skull, and that the forces of irony may turn what appears controllable against its controllers, whether or not by the author's design.<sup>42</sup>

Ideology did not limit itself to subject matter; it went on to claim the territory of poetic form.<sup>43</sup> With the politicization of Chinese life, "national forms" for poetry had been an issue for debate since the 1930s. In his study of Bian Zhilin's life and work – Bian's high regard for matters of form eventually made him clash with PRC dogma – Lloyd Haft writes:

<sup>38</sup> Hsu 1980: 1 and Hsu 1975: x.

<sup>39</sup> Fokkema 1965: 273. This statement is made as a comment on the years 1956-1960, but it continued to apply for almost two decades afterward.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Fokkema 1965: 38.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Chen 1966: 402-403, on the usurpation by politics of traditional terms of kinship and endearment.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Hsia 1963a: 115-116.

<sup>43</sup> On the question of poetic form in the PRC, see Hsu 1975 (ch. 4) and 1984; Haft 1983: ch. 5; Chen 1963.

"Though the phrase 'national forms', over the years, was to mean many things to many men, the common denominator seemed to be the notion of purely Chinese forms as opposed to forms that had been influenced, however slightly, by Western models (...).

In the context of poetry, the truest attempts to write in 'national forms' were to be seen (...) in consciously stylized imitations of 'folk' poetry produced toward the end of the war [with Japan] and thereafter (...)."44

In Communist China, the demand for patriotism in poetic form was in keeping with the imposition of subject matter. The alleged proletarian origins of popular ballads and ditties known as Folk Songs made this native Chinese form an even more appropriate medium for the desired message, although its formal properties such as fixed numbers of syllables per line demanded a usage rather unlike that of "the masses". In 1957 the native aspect of PRC poetry was enhanced from an unexpected angle: that of classical poetry. Bearing in mind the CCP's avowed distaste for elitism, it is hard to see where poems in classical Chinese fit in at this point. The explanation is simple: they were Mao Zedong's. Their publication was a further setback for the advocates of the pluriform "cosmopolitan" poetry written in China since the "literary revolution" of 1917 and known as New poetry.<sup>45</sup>

As a literary counterpart to the Great Leap Forward in industry and agriculture, the leadership launched a nationwide mass-poetry campaign promoting New Folk Songs in 1958.<sup>46</sup> While the New Folk Songs invoked the legacy of the traditional folk songs, their newness lay in their ideological content and the class background of their authors, preferably workers, peasants or soldiers. The New Folk Songs were pitted against Chinese examples from the era of slavery on the one hand, and against New poetry – "incomprehensible" and "Westernized" – on the other; they were made the flagbearers of the Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism. Absurdly, Mao's classical poems, blatantly different from what the rest of the country was supposed to write, were cited as models. While the Great Leap was an economic fiasco, in poetry the prescribed boom in production did take place. But if the quantity of Great Leap poems is undisputed, their quality is not.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Haft 1983: 76.

<sup>45</sup> See Hsu 1975: 166-167 and Haft 1983: 88-89. Mao's poems were published in the inaugural issue of *Poetry (Shikan)*, January 1957.

<sup>46</sup> See Zhou 1958.

<sup>47</sup> See Fokkema 1965: ch. 6 for the ideological and theoretical background to Great Leap literature. Hsu 1980: part 3 provides numerous examples in English translation. Chen 1966 and Haft 1983: ch. 5 focus on poetry of the Great Leap.



From a safe distance in space and time, such a comment is easy to make. But it draws support from a 1958-1959 controversy over poetic form involving the major "cosmopolitan" poets He Qifang and Bian Zhilin.<sup>48</sup> They had their doubts about the monopolization of poetic expression by the New Folk Songs, and the courage to defend New poetry publicly against all-out repudiation. Had not the debate withered in 1959 they might have gotten into serious trouble, all the more because of their shady "intellectual" past. But when the Great Leap fell through, the campaign for poetry by the masses was quietly defused.

In the early 1960s the goal of making China a "poetry country" and "everyone a poet"<sup>49</sup> had been abandoned. But in 1963 Guo Moruo, the famous one-time "cosmopolitan" poet now figurehead of PRC cultural life, still called for "nationalization and massification"<sup>50</sup> of poetry: ideology had hardly loosened its grip. During the Cultural Revolution, from the second half of the 1960s onward, that grip once more became so tight as to stifle official literature altogether, attempts to reanimate it notwithstanding.<sup>51</sup>

Three renowned poets from the Communist era up to the 1970s are Li Ji (1922-1980), Guo Xiaochuan (1919-1976) and He Jingzhi (b. 1924).<sup>52</sup> They established themselves as poets in the 1940s, after the "cosmopolitan" era had come to an end but before the frenzy of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Their works and reputations have proved less ephemeral than the time- and place-bound products from those days.

An exemplary poem from the first decade of PRC literature is Li Ji's *The Red Kerchief* (1954):

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<sup>48</sup> A detailed account of the controversy can be found in Haft 1983 (98-114), an authoritative monograph on Bian Zhilin's life and works. For He Qifang and his writings up to 1942, see Ho 1976 (translations, with an introduction, by Bonnie McDougall; materials dealing with He's later career are listed in the bibliography).

<sup>49</sup> Zhou 1958: 34, 38.

<sup>50</sup> Guo 1963. English translation in Hsu 1975: 32-35.

<sup>51</sup> See McDougall 1984b (292ff.) for an identification of the scarce cultural products of the Cultural Revolution proper. Fokkema 1972 (ch. 8 and 9) shows their relationship to Maoist cultural policy on the one hand and to traditional Chinese views of the nature and function of literature on the other. The appearance (both reprints and first publications) of about four hundred collections of poetry between 1972 and 1975 shows a certain cultural relaxation in those years (McDougall 1978: 80).

<sup>52</sup> Selections from their work in English translation, as well as Chinese sources and other bibliographical data, are provided in Hsu 1980. Extensive anthologies of their work in Chinese are Li 1982; Guo 1977; He 1979.

A lorry driven by a girl  
 Skims across the Gobi sands;  
 The kerchief on her head is red;  
 Red as the dawn in desert lands.

The lorry flies across the Gobi  
 Swiftly, as if it went on wings;  
 On the girl's face a faint smile plays,  
 And as she drives she softly sings.

Her eyes are fixed upon the road,  
 She grips the wheel with steady hands;  
 But her heart has taken wing and flies  
 Straight to where the derrick stands.

To the oil-well's young team leader  
 Her heart is flying true and straight,  
 As if she could already see him  
 Anxiously look out and wait;

Anxiously look out and wait,  
 Leaning from the derrick-frame,  
 For the expected drilling-rods  
 And also the glow of the kerchief's flame.

A lorry driven by a girl  
 Skims across the Gobi sands;  
 The kerchief on her head is red;  
 Red as the dawn in desert lands.<sup>53</sup>

Socialist reconstruction of the country takes precedence over the lyrical expression of love. The young team leader needs drilling-rods, and the girl delivering them presents no more than an afterthought.<sup>54</sup> By the way, between these two "red-faced"<sup>55</sup> youths an affinity transcending the derrick-frame would not raise any eyebrows as long as they kept their priorities straight. If a Freudian angle would

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<sup>53</sup> *Hong toujin*. The translation is Yuan Kejia's (Yuan Ko-chia [sic]), in Li 1957: 6-7. For the original, see Li 1965: 26-27.

<sup>54</sup> Here, Yuan Kejia's sanctioned translation is more austere than the original, presumably for the sake of rhyme. Literally, l. 20 runs: *and also for the girl with the red kerchief*.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Hsu 1980: 2.

make the derrick and the drilling-rods phallic symbols, it seems doubtful that in 1950s China they were read as such.

Before Li Ji wrote this and other "oil poems", his epic ballad *Wang Gui and Li Xiangxiang* (1946) had brought him widespread acclaim. *Plunge into the Fiery Struggle*, from the poem series called *To the Young Citizens* (1955), is one of Guo Xiaochuan's claims to fame. He Jingzhi temporarily shared in the immortality of his protagonist in *The Song of Lei Feng* (1963), a mythologized model soldier with an unshakable faith in the Party and Mao Zedong and held up to the Chinese people for emulation.<sup>56</sup> Guo and He count as representatives of Political Lyricism, the canalized mainstream in the first two decades of PRC poetry.<sup>57</sup> With hindsight, Political Lyricism seems a logical product of the subservience of Chinese literature to politics in general, and of Soviet examples – Mayakovsky, more than anything – daubed with Maoism in particular.<sup>58</sup> Its eulogies of unending, glorious "revolution" and the concomitant idols are patriotic to the point of being chauvinist and so uncomplicated as to insult any reader's intellect. They are truculent and bombastic, full of sloganizing and predictable bigger-than-life imagery – indeed, "unencumbered by (...) profundity, effective mainly in terms of the propaganda impulse".<sup>59</sup>

Kai-yu Hsu's anthology is PRC literary history written as a function of political events. From the mid-1960s onward the Cultural Revolution intimidated and destroyed literature, and even heralds of prevalent ideology such as Guo Xiaochuan and He Jingzhi fell silent. This justifies Hsu's approach in a sad, paradoxical sense: for those years, he was left with little to write.<sup>60</sup> Michelle Yeh is another authoritative anthologizer of modern Chinese literature. Limiting herself to poetry, she covers the period from the 1910s into the 1990s and includes Chinese poetry written in Taiwan in her research and translations.<sup>61</sup> She takes a literary rather than an historical point of departure – "intrinsic elements of the poetic art"<sup>62</sup> – and in

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<sup>56</sup> Chinese titles of these poems: *Wang Gui yu Li Xiangxiang*; *Touru huore douzheng*; *Lei Feng zhi ge*. See Li 1982, vol. 1: 1-55 and Li 1954; Guo 1977: 9-16; He 1979: 366-426. I know of no English translations of *Touru huore douzheng* and *Lei Feng zhi ge*.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Hong & Liu 1993: ch. 5 and Wang (Guangming) 1993: ch. 2.

<sup>58</sup> In Hong & Liu 1993 (189), influences on Political Lyricism are retraced to "[Chinese] revolutionary poetry from the 1930s by [authors associated with] the League of Left-Wing Writers and from the War of Resistance with Japan" and to "19th-century Western Romanticism, especially Soviet revolutionary poets".

<sup>59</sup> Meserve & Meserve 1974: 17.

<sup>60</sup> Hsu 1980 contains 93 pages of poetry from the period of Socialist Education (1962-1964) and 10 of poetry from the Cultural Revolution (dated 1964-1970). Of the latter, two are taken up by Mao's work.

<sup>61</sup> Yeh 1991a and 1992a.

<sup>62</sup> Yeh 1991a: 2-3, see also 13-21.

contrast to Hsu does not set out to give a year-by-year, author-by-author account of what politics in mainland China chose to pass off as poetry until the late 1970s. As a result, orthodox PRC poetry is virtually absent from Yeh's anthology. Literary history written as a function of political events yields hundreds of pages of orthodox PRC poetry, but orthodox PRC poetry is the one thing on which two excellent books written from the vantage point of poetry itself barely dwell, while charting literary developments with demonstrable continuity across borders in space and time. It is as if Chinese poetry written under strict Communist rule were a foreign body in an otherwise coherent tradition.<sup>63</sup>

Important aspects of the view stay the same from different angles: between the early 1940s and the late 1970s literature in mainland China was the prisoner of politics. But having been assigned a major role in the remolding of society, it was never allowed to disappear from sight. Instead, it was first chained to the wall and then told to dance, in an endless contradiction between coercion and a demand for "creativity".<sup>64</sup> The Cultural Revolution was the one campaign too many: it made literature come to a total standstill.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> I am aware that the subject of Yeh's research, a modern Chinese poetry heavily influenced by non-Chinese examples, could also be and has been called "foreign". A view of social consciousness in PRC poetry as a "native" quality linking it with classical Chinese poetry calls for qualifications: in classical poetry, such consciousness was manifest not only in eulogies – whether sincere, opportunist or inspired by fear – but also in admonitions of the ruler. Also, social consciousness provided but one of many possible orientations in poetry.

<sup>64</sup> This image is not intended as that of an escape artist constricted by choice, as a challenge to versatility.

<sup>65</sup> Simon Leys (1977a) has shown that the so-called Cultural Revolution had little to do with either culture or revolution. It was a power struggle within the Chinese top leadership between Mao Zedong *cum suis* and his political opponents, and openly advertized as such. Through demagoguery, intrigue and the abuse of loyalties, different groups in society – students and workers, for example – were played off against each other, resulting in many instances of armed conflict. Under a veritable reign of terror, political persecution spread like wildfire. Chinese daily life was affected to an unprecedented degree. The political and economic chaos in the late 1960s was ultimately curbed by the People's Liberation Army, but intense repression continued until 1976.

## Chapter two

### UNDERGROUND POETRY IN THE 1960S AND 1970S

During the clamor of the Cultural Revolution things were not entirely what they seemed.<sup>1</sup> A small number of young people were quietly laying the groundwork for a turbulent phase in the history of PRC literature: the emergence of Experimental poetry in post-Mao China. Michelle Yeh has defined this poetry:

"Although [it] embraces many distinct styles, advances divergent aesthetic views, and is far from a monolithic movement, on the whole it embodies a conscious departure from the official Communist ideology and a vigorous search for an alternative discourse beyond the pale of the dominant discourse."

Yeh sets Experimental poetry off against the literary Establishment, which accommodates

"poets (...) whose views on poetry conform closely with the political-literary orthodoxy, although they do not necessarily hold positions in the Communist Party or espouse the official stand."<sup>2</sup>

In the present context, *post-Cultural Revolution proper* might be an acceptable alternative to *post-Mao*. For in Beijing, Experimental poetry started being written in the early 1970s, although it was not until the end of the decade that it became widely known and accessible.

The earliest of these writings began to surface after the rise of Deng Xiaoping and the political thaw of 1978. This time, neither silence nor unanimity camouflaged the clashing of opinions. Occasionally the regime resorted to well-known methods from the past for dealing with non-conformist literature, intimidating authors and banning their works. Still, Experimental poetry was unique in that it triggered a veritable debate in the official press. For once the outcome did not seem a foregone conclusion. At least part of the reason must have lain in the nature of this poetry: apparently it inspired more than indifference in its readers. All the same, the relaxation of the political climate was a *conditio sine qua non* for its very circulation. Mere literary worth is no guarantee for attention, least of all in a totalitarian state. The Chinese authorities could in the late 1970s still have eradicated these writings from the official circuit, but they chose not to.

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this chapter has appeared in *Modern Chinese Literature* (Van Crevel 1995b).

<sup>2</sup> Yeh 1992b: 379.

The controversy was touched off in 1979 by poems soon habitually labeled "obscure", initially in a sneering reference to their alleged incomprehensibility. Obscure poetry is the first distinct style within Experimental poetry if one allows for some generalization, for the part is no more monolithic than the whole. But Obscure poetry's departure from official Communist ideology is plain for all to see. It decried the arranged marriage of politics and literature – which is not to say that it could not be about politics. The Obscure poets wrote in free verse, full of non-standardized and therefore polyvalent imagery. They were strongly influenced by foreign literature and displayed an emphatic and in official PRC literature unheard-of desire for individualism and self-expression in all aspects of their work: a literature no longer willing to be a servant to politics or, more broadly speaking, to ideology, to a canonized Truth with no alternatives.

This chapter reconstructs aspects of underground literary activity in and around 1960s and 1970s Beijing. This activity culminated in the birth of Obscure poetry and long preceded its first publication in 1978, in the unofficial magazine *Today*. Obscure poetry is more than reflections on the Cultural Revolution which happened to take the form of writing, and the Obscure poets were not simply victims of history. Ironically, the anti-cultural and anti-foreign havoc of the Cultural Revolution gave them access to foreign literature, which was crucial for their development as poets.

#### UNDERGROUND LITERATURE AND THE ACCESSIBILITY OF TEXTS

The term *underground literature* (*dixia wenxue*) as used in the PRC may refer to straightforward and not necessarily literary indictments of the ruler as well as to innocuous love poems. It is a catchall for texts produced – handwritten, mimeographed, photocopied, printed etc. – and distributed through other than official, government-sanctioned channels. Over the years it has come to cover heterogeneous writings: some would get their author in political trouble if made public, others have remained officially unpublished simply because no one in a position to publish them found them interesting enough.

But the matter of a text's accessibility in the PRC is more complicated than a binary opposition of official and underground, and the very concept of publication is blurred. Well into the 1980s it was entirely within the power of the Communist regime to restrict the circulation of a given document. A degree of information control is likely to exist in any society, as a consequence of different groups' conflicting interests: the leaders and the led, for instance. Still, it is not in all

societies that information control extends into the realm of literature.<sup>3</sup> In the PRC it definitely does, in more subtle ways than the banning or burning of books. Literary works viewed as subversive to the Communist cause are sometimes translated into Chinese and printed, but in limited editions and "for internal distribution" (*neibu faxing*) to a designated readership only.

This institutionalized inequality could express distributors and privileged readers' contempt for the general public, by enjoying what they forbid others to enjoy. Alternatively, it could be motivated by the need to increase knowledge about the enemy camp but apprehensions about the enemy's unmediated encounter with one's own troops. Foreign works of literature, for example, seen as reflecting their place and time of origin, have frequently been made into objects of criticism to serve as a foil to ideologically healthy art.<sup>4</sup> Of course works singled out for criticism attract readers dissatisfied with the orthodox supply. Incidentally, people supporting such works can avail themselves of this mechanism: going through the motions of criticizing a text is one way to make sure it is read.

Either way, the public nature of such "publications" is shamelessly kept in check: money can't buy them, status or personal connections can. Between blacklisted books and government-approved bestsellers, various levels of accessibility exist for literary texts in the PRC. With the relaxation of cultural policy and the gradual commercialization of the publishing business since the 1980s, this inequality has lessened but not disappeared.

For present purposes, *underground literature* denotes texts written after the establishment of the People's Republic, not earlier works that had to go underground in 1949. To further limit the scope of a term sometimes resorted to too easily: for many texts circulated after the 1978 thaw, *popular* or *people-run*<sup>5</sup> (*minban*) are more adequate descriptions than *underground*. But in the 1960s and 1970s *underground* meant secret, illegal – although legality would have been hard to define, especially during the Cultural Revolution – and dangerous.

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<sup>3</sup> Perry Link's (1983: 1-28) *Introduction: On the Mechanisms of the Control of Literature in China* is a lucid essay on the workings of as well as the motives for propaganda and censorship in the PRC up to 1981.

<sup>4</sup> This is a mirror image of Link's (1993: 4) observation that in the 1960s much of the funding of modern China studies in the American academy was actuated by similar considerations.

<sup>5</sup> The former translation is problematic because *popular* (as in Chinese *liuxing*) can simply mean 'widespread' or 'liked by many', and because in the context of Maoism it leads to association with things like "popularization of art" (cf. words like *renmin* 'the people', *minjian* 'among the people', *minzhong* 'the masses of the people', *dazhong* 'the broad masses').



The distinction between underground and popular or people-run literature was made early on by Bonnie McDougall in an article on the question of dissent literature in China:

"Underground literature refers to privately circulated literature that is hidden or at least withheld from the authorities; (...),"

whereas

"(...) popular [or people-run] publications (...) differed from underground literature in that [they were] openly circulated, often in printed form though not through official channels."<sup>6</sup>

Obviously, *underground* and *people-run* are no mutually exclusive terms: a considerable part of the literature in the people-run publications of 1978 and after had hitherto of necessity remained underground.<sup>7</sup> Here, the common denominator for underground literature and people-run publications will be *unofficial* (*fei guanfang*).<sup>8</sup>

If Experimental poetry as defined by Yeh is extended into the past to cover more than post-Mao writings, it stands to reason that every Experimental poem from the 1960s up to 1978 would qualify as underground literature. But the converse of this statement is untrue, for not all literature from those years labeled underground, at the time or afterward, can be called Experimental. Suffice it to note Yang Jian's definition of underground literature during the Cultural Revolution, rather different from McDougall's:

"'Underground literature' denotes works from the period of the Cultural Revolution, written by the masses of the people among the people, and reflecting the essential reality of life in [Chinese] society at the time of the Cultural Revolution. Regardless of the author's standpoint or association with any group or faction, as long as the work can truthfully reflect one aspect or another of life during the Cultural Revolution, and was written among the people

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<sup>6</sup> McDougall 1979a: 57, 64.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. McDougall 1979a: 65.

<sup>8</sup> McDougall (1979a: 64) uses *unofficial literature* differently, as another term for people-run publications. *Fei zhengshi*, as used in the Anhui Poetry Paper (*Shige bao*) of 30 September 1986 (quoted in Hong & Liu 1993: 438) and by Ouyang Jianghe (1993a: 197) is problematic, since it also means 'informal'.



and popular with the people, this kind of writing falls well within the scope of 'underground literature'.<sup>9</sup>

If only because of its clandestine nature, it is impossible to determine exactly when underground literature in the PRC began to be written. It does seem likely that the implementation of Mao Zedong's narrow-minded view of literature has consistently generated dissent, publicized or not.<sup>10</sup> Such writings initially hardly questioned or endangered the validity of the political system, but their existence did show dissatisfaction with the monotony of Maoist literature.

Well-known changes in the political climate of the late 1950s explain why it was around 1960 that the first underground activities with any degree of organization unfolded. The disastrous outcome of the Great Leap Forward had caused doubts as to the infallibility of the Chairman and the Party, and undermined support once offered by writers and intellectuals. People were receptive to heterodox influences with respect to ideology and essential tools for propagating it: literature and art. Moreover, the Maoist faction had had to surrender some of its policy-making power to the pragmatists. This resulted in a relaxation of the near-total control the Party had in the 1950s come to exercise over intellectual life, and in a hint of leniency in the cultural sphere. Much of what was to happen in the 1960s would simply not have been tolerated in the second half of the 1950s.

Although it is by no means exclusively a Beijing phenomenon, unofficial poetry in the PRC has for decades had one of its liveliest centers in the capital; whence the geographical focus. In Beijing, developments dating back to 1960 eventually discharged into the outburst of Experimental poetry of the late 1970s.<sup>11</sup>

#### PLAYING A FORBIDDEN GAME: ZHANG LANGLANG AND THE SUN'S COLUMN

Ironically, members of the earliest identifiable group of underground poets in Beijing<sup>12</sup> had in 1958 started writing at the request of officialdom, during the Great

<sup>9</sup> Yang 1993: 5. Yang's wording is not altogether consistent with a fair amount of materials included in his discussion. There was probably a sound reason for the mobilization of some orthodox jargon: the wish to publish his book in China, which perhaps also prohibited the numerous quotes from Bei Dao's early poetry and prose from being accompanied by their author's name.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Goodman 1981: 11-17.

<sup>11</sup> This account does not claim to include *all* poetry-related activities in the city.

<sup>12</sup> The following outline of underground poetry in Beijing in the early 1960s is based on Zhang 1990 and additional information kindly provided by Zhang Langlang in personal communication (June 1993); Yang 1993; my fieldwork.

Leap Forward and the concomitant poetry drive. Zhang Langlang (b. 1943<sup>13</sup>) became acquainted with CCP demands for orthodox literature as a teenager: he was lectured for "youthism" (sic) (*qingnian zhuyi*), since in one of his poems he had failed to mention the Party, the Chairman and the Three Red Banners.<sup>14</sup> For the thrill of secrecy among other things, Zhang continued writing in fashions other than those prescribed by superior order. In 1959 he got to know Guo Shiyong (b. 1942), son of Guo Moruo and said to belong to a literary club which "of course met secretly".<sup>15</sup> This was Zhang's first, casual acquaintance with a phenomenon soon to be known as underground salons (*shalong*). Afterward, Zhang and his friends started reading foreign poetry in Chinese translation – he names as early influences Éluard, Lorca, Mayakovski, Neruda and Whitman – and before long they had formed their own club which met for poetry readings, usually at Zhang's home. This club must have enjoyed a certain fame, for in 1962 they were invited by students of the Central Institute for Industrial Art to hold a poetry recital. The composition of their recital shows PRC authors' early familiarity with foreign literature, which has perhaps not been duly recognized: the first half of the program consisted of foreign poetry in Chinese translation, while during the second half, Zhang and his friends read their own poems. Only after this performance did they make up a name for their troupe: they christened it The Sun's Column (*Taiyang zongdui*), a military title reminiscent of Communist rhetoric.<sup>16</sup> To their minds, their literary endeavors were a pleasant pastime and had nothing to do with politics. But all the while these young poets had been aware that their undertakings were off limits, that what they were playing was, in Zhang's words, a forbidden game. In 1963 Zhang enrolled at the Central Institute for Fine Arts. In a meeting on the campus of Beijing Normal University, The Sun's Column was formally founded. Plans included a monthly salon for reading poetry and holding private art exhibitions. Once the poets were strong enough as a group, they would reveal themselves to society.

None of this materialized and the club disbanded of its own accord. This may have been due to the news that all members of Guo Shiyong's club had been arrested after alleged plans to flee to France. Guo *cum suis* had not attempted to draw a clear line between cultural and political interests. They did write poetry, but the issues addressed in their political debates included the contradiction they perceived between socialism on the one hand and class struggle on the other, the outcome of the Great Leap Forward, and the nature of authority – clearly of a much less literary nature

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<sup>13</sup> Zhang was born in Shaanxi province, but the family moved to Beijing in 1949.

<sup>14</sup> The General Line for Socialist Construction, the Great Leap Forward and the People's Communes.

<sup>15</sup> Zhang 1990: 64.

<sup>16</sup> Helen Wang translates *Taiyang zongdui* as The Sun Brigade (Zhang (Langlang) 1994).

than those occupying their colleagues of The Sun's Column. When Guo and his troupe were apprehended, it was for "grave problems of a political nature". Guo Shiying was sent to do labor in the Henan countryside. In April 1968 he was "persecuted to death" by Rebel Red Guards.<sup>17</sup>

From 1964 onward the political climate became less and less conducive to underground literature. This did not keep Zhang from partaking in newly formed salons, at the homes of high-level cadres whose children took an interest in literature. In 1965 they started making a magazine which featured poetry as well as visual art. Handwritten, the single original copy of each of the seven or eight issues produced was passed around and copied out by the members of an obviously limited audience. The magazine did not have a name: each issue was given a title by its editor. Under Zhang's editorship the cover showed iron bars, with the Chinese word meaning 'freedom' (*ziyou*) shining through in red. Zhang's claim, made for 1962, that literature and politics were unrelated would not be tenable for the mid-1960s.

In April 1968 Zhang was taken into custody, among other reasons for his part in setting up The Sun's Column and for holding secret meetings. After a week's detention on campus he escaped; when taking leave of his friends, he jotted down "faith in the future" in the notebook of a fellow poet. Within two months he was tracked down in Hangzhou, arrested once more and taken back to Beijing. During his interrogation at the Public Security Bureau, The Sun's Column was called a counter-revolutionary organization. All members' writings were confiscated; Zhang spent the next nine and a half years in jail. Only 1974 an official verdict was passed, labeling him an active counter-revolutionary. He was conditionally released in December 1977 and rehabilitated in April 1979, when the 1974 verdict was nullified for lack of evidence.

Zhang's drily written, gripping account of the rise and fall of The Sun's Column ends with the sad observation that he is "a poet without poems",<sup>18</sup> expropriated by the police. In spite of his 1979 rehabilitation, the *corpus delicti* remains classified information to this day. Recalling his own and his fellow poets' writings, he distinguishes between political poetry, prevalent in the official circuit of the 1950s and early 1960s, and other types of poetry, especially works written under the influence of foreign literature in Chinese translation. He is convinced that his political poetry, unambiguously referring to and not always singing the praises of Chinese society, caused the severity of his punishment.

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<sup>17</sup> This account of Guo's underground activities and their brusque termination is based on Zhang's (1990: 64) and Yang's (1993: 90-92) writings. The latter devotes a separate section to Guo's "small group".

<sup>18</sup> Zhang 1990: 67.

## RIGHT FORM, WRONG CONTENT: GUO LUSHENG (SHIZHI)

After the youngest member of Guo Shiyong's club, Mou Dunbai, had in 1965 been released, he had got in touch with Zhang Langlang; Mou's home had become a new center of underground meetings. There, Zhang Langlang met Guo Lusheng<sup>19</sup> (b. 1948). In the first few years of the Cultural Revolution, Guo became a widely read underground author, whose writing brought him fame and trouble as early as his teens, when he was branded a "rightist student". In handwritten copies his poems, written between 1967 and 1969,<sup>20</sup> circulated in Beijing and other parts of the country; they were brought along by Beijing students sent to the countryside. During the Cultural Revolution his poems thus traveled through Hebei, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia and Yunnan.<sup>21</sup> Guo himself spent two years (1968-1970) in a Shanxi farming village. Afterward he briefly worked in a factory; in 1971 he joined the army, which he left again in 1973. Traumatized by a number of personal experiences during the Cultural Revolution, he has since then lived alternately in mental hospitals or at his parental home in Beijing.

Unlike Zhang Langlang's work, a fairly large number of Guo's poems have survived. Of some several versions exist, as a result of the vagabond life they led in the late 1960s. Since professional facilities were hardly accessible to underground literature, copying them by hand was the only way of reproducing them. Inevitably mistakes and wilful changes occurred. In the second half of the 1980s his poems found their way into the official press, in anthologies and in two individual collections of his poetry published in 1988 and 1993.<sup>22</sup> The 1988 collection has *Faith in*

<sup>19</sup> In the mid-1970s Guo adopted the pseudonym Shizhi. It was under this pen name that his poetry was published in the official circuit. I refer to him as Guo Lusheng only, for that is how he was known during his prime as a poet, and his pseudonym has in Chinese literary circles been unable to eclipse his real name. Biographical data given in the following passage come from Shizhi 1988; Zhu 1991; A Cheng 1991; Lin 1992; my fieldwork.

<sup>20</sup> In personal communication (December 1993, March 1994), Guo confirmed that he has kept on writing to this day (Cf. Shizhi & Hei 1993 and other sources listed below), but his later work has failed to make an impact comparable to that of these three years.

<sup>21</sup> Shizhi 1988, in a note on the author preceding the poems.

<sup>22</sup> Guo's poetry was first officially published in 1981, when two poems appeared in *Poetry (Shikan)* # 1: 10. A number of anthologies containing poems by Guo are: Lao Mu 1985a; Zhou 1986; Liu 1988; Chen 1989; Wang 1991; Tang 1993a. An English translation of one of his poems (*Faith in the Future*) appeared in *Chinese Literature* (Summer 1991: 155-156). Shizhi 1988 is a separate book of his poetry. This contradicts Wolfgang Kubin's (1993: 82-83) claim, in an otherwise acute and accurate passage on Guo, that "[he] is perhaps the only Chinese poet viewing his own products with unchanging skepticism and to this day declining to publish them". Shizhi & Hei 1993 is a joint anthology of Guo's and Hei Dachun's poetry (including some of Guo's later work), preceded by an essay on Guo's life and works by Lin Mang (1992). The book is a manifestation of an observable "Guo Lusheng revival" in the PRC in recent years, affirmed by a section *On Shizhi* in the reestablished review *Explorations in Poetry (Shi tansuo)* 1994 # 2

*the Future* (*Xiangxin weilai*) for its title, as does Guo's most famous poem. Zhang's final words as an underground poet, before his writings were taken away, were thus preserved in Guo's equally underground poetry and later even made it onto the cover of an officially published book, as if Guo had set out to be the next torch-bearer of non-orthodox poetry. In 1989 Guo was still aware where the famous phrase had come from; it had been no coincidence.<sup>23</sup>

Guo's poetry is arranged in four-line stanzas and mostly employs end rhyme. It is strictly organized on the formal plane and at times song-like, sounding like the lyrics to popular ditties. His diction is a blend of vernacular Chinese and solemn, literary expressions, but not linguistically experimental. The imagery in his poetry is conventional; it can hardly be called idiosyncratic, let alone "obscure". Many of Guo's poems are narrative in nature: they tell stories with clear internal coherence along the lines of everyday logic, and do not strike their reader as fragmentary or mysterious in any way. Sometimes the author links an image with what he intends it to represent, within the space of the poem; this procedure tends to break the poem's spell. Guo is at his strongest when he avoids making these asides, leaving the imagery to itself and to the reader. Straightforward and naive as his poems may seem, they frequently contain the seeds of subversion, depending on the allegorical value ascribed to them.

A case in point is the 1968 poem *You Love Each Other*:<sup>24</sup>

That you love each other is not in spring;  
luckily, you young and true companions  
have no graceful face of flowers, and thus  
will know no painful parting.

That you love each other is not in summer;  
unlike lotus flowers meeting in a stream,  
duckweed in the end must bid farewell,  
as the torrent of life rushes on and on!

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(Lin 1994a and Shizhi 1994, the latter being Guo Lusheng's recollection of the writing of two of his most famous poems) and by the attention Xie Mian (1995b: 8-12) pays to Guo in his comprehensive articles on contemporary poetry. Guo's status as a "buried" or "neglected" poet in the 1988 unofficial magazine *Black Hole* (*Heidong*) is an early indication of this trend, taken abroad in Ouyang 1993b: 237, Qi 1994a: 190, 193-194, Xiao 1994 and, most convincingly, Cui 1994. Tang Xiaodu (1993c) has in his usual lucid way written on some poems Guo composed after 1983, and compared them to his early work.

<sup>23</sup> Zhang 1990: 63.

<sup>24</sup> *Nimen xiang ai*, Shizhi 1988: 15-16. My translation.

That you love each other is not in autumn;  
 not in fields and gardens laden with fruit,  
 or like withered leaves picked by autumn winds,  
 deeply entangled with the autumn rains.

That you love each other is in heartless winter;  
 the ocean of fate is frozen with the thickest ice,  
 but no one has the power to stop  
 the warm current of feelings dashing ahead under the ice!

*You Love Each Other* presents romantic love as not dependent for its fulfilment on cliché backdrops like spring's charm, summer's languor or autumn's ripeness and decay. Instead, love is situated in winter and proves able to hold its own. The grim cold in which it does so – the world around the lovers – is made visible by the frozen ocean of fate, an image as depressing as it is measureless. But the poem ends on a note of optimism: below the bleak surface, a warm current of feelings continues to flow. And since winter is bound to be followed by spring, the cold must be temporary: in other words, enmity to love is a trait peculiar to this season.

First, Guo perpetrates the crime of youthism that Zhang Langlang had been accused of ten years earlier. He neglects to eulogize the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and Chairman Mao, and *You Love Each Other* lacks jubilant portrayals of socialism. What is more, mentioning romantic love other than in a derogatory manner was out of step with ideology in 1968 and in itself a heresy. To make matters worse yet: without any complicated antics on the part of the reader, the poem can be felt to breathe dissatisfaction with the contemporary state of things. The vastness of the image of the ocean of fate implies reference to more than a personal situation; consequently, its grimness implies criticism of those in charge. Their power is defied by the suggestion of its transiency: winter cold.

This elegant hint of subversion is not uncommon in Guo's work; nor is his exculpation of romantic love and romantic sorrow, and of individual feelings in general. It seems reasonable to assume that underlying this discontent was the reign of terror during the Cultural Revolution proper. Such a relationship, between historical circumstances and Guo's subject matter, is sustained by references in his poetry to the extra-literary reality of contemporary China: to leaving Beijing for the countryside, to a comrade-in-arms from the Great Northern Wasteland – perhaps a fellow city youth, sent to Heilongjiang – and to the contours of the Gate of Heavenly Peace, other parts of the poem intimating that Mao Zedong is on the balcony



reviewing the Red Guards' parades.<sup>25</sup> Guo's occasional bitterness or anger<sup>26</sup> seem induced by what he considers excesses of a correct doctrine, not fundamental flaws. Especially poems from 1969, *de facto* the end of his writing career, show an unremitting trust in the Party in spite of the suffering it has inflicted on the people it claims to represent. More than once Guo invokes a bright future to justify today's ordeal.<sup>27</sup>

When Guo's writings finally appeared in anthologies, they were sometimes presented as products of a school of Obscure poetry or as typical of a generation of Obscure poets,<sup>28</sup> by categorizing and commentary or by the poems' place within the structure of the book. In an anthology edited by Zhou Guoqiang (the poet A Qu Qiang Ba), there is no mention of schools or generations, although the book's title does lump the sixteen contributors together as "Young and Modern".<sup>29</sup> Guo's (Shizhi's) poems come first, and the editor's note explains why. Giving Guo this prominent position is "a glance back at history", since Guo wrote his poems during the Cultural Revolution and his fellow poets' work stems from a later date, mostly the early 1980s. In conclusion, the editor states that Guo's poems have inspired and influenced his younger colleagues' writing. In another book – a specimen of the fascinating genre of "dictionaries for the appreciation of poetry" (*shige jianshang cidian*) – the commentator, Chen Chao, concedes that Guo's work may not be "Obscure poetry" in the true sense, but stresses its influential role as a precursor of Obscure poetry.<sup>30</sup> This gives grounds for Guo's inclusion in a chapter entitled *The Obscure Poetry Group*, but does not justify his curious assignment to the twelfth position within that group, way down in the rank and file. Tang Xiaodu, in his preface to a third anthology of Obscure poetry containing poems by Guo (Shizhi), mentions him in the same breath with the most famous Obscure poets but later calls him "one who went before".<sup>31</sup> All three anthologists are aware of Guo's special status in their *tableau de la troupe*, but fail to point out what distinguishes his poems from Obscure poetry other than when they were written.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>25</sup> These three examples come from *My Last Beijing, Seeing off a Comrade-in-Arms from the Great Northern Wasteland* (*Songqu bei da huang de zhanyou*), and *Feelings on Village "# 11"* (*Nongcun "shiyi" shuqing*), in Shizhi 1988: 31-32, 28-29, 36-37.

<sup>26</sup> See Shizhi, *Anger (Fenu)*, in Zhou 1986: 7.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. *Faith in the Future* and *Until We Meet Again*, Shizhi 1988: 26-27, 34-35.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Chen 1989 and Tang 1993a.

<sup>29</sup> Zhou 1986.

<sup>30</sup> Chen 1989: 293.

<sup>31</sup> See the editor's preface in Tang 1993a: 1-16, esp. 2, 16.

<sup>32</sup> Tang Xiaodu did do so in another, unofficial publication (1993c).

In fact Guo's poetry has little in common with its surroundings in these volumes, and the reason for its inclusion is an extraliterary one. Guo's poetry of 1967-1969 could not be published when he wrote it, i.e. during the Cultural Revolution proper. But as underground literature it was tremendously popular with the rusticated city youths,<sup>33</sup> and led many of them to try their hand at writing. In time, some became poets themselves and in that capacity lived to see an age of political relaxation, starting in 1978; by the mid-1980s, their Experimental poetry had become a controversial but accepted phenomenon. After it had gained a foothold in literary circles, editors and publishers taking stock of the new trend may have felt obliged to pay homage to its all but forgotten predecessor, even though Guo's oeuvre was out of tune with the novelties of the day.

The association with Obscure poetry may have been facilitated because poems by Guo were in 1979-1980 published in the unofficial magazine *Today*, later seen as the main breeding ground of the Obscure poets.<sup>34</sup> According to Bei Dao, then editor of *Today*, the editorial board was aware that Guo's (Shizhi's) poems were foreign bodies in the magazine, so extraliterary reasons may have played a part in their publication to start with.<sup>35</sup> That his poems in the late 1960s and early 1970s prompted others to take up the pen is beyond doubt, but artistic affinity between Guo and his successors is hard to prove. One of his commentators claims, not unreasonably, that the first two lines of Bei Dao's poem *The Answer* hark back to the beginning of Guo's *Fate*,<sup>36</sup> but *The Answer* is one of the first poems Bei Dao ever wrote – its earliest draft dates from 1972<sup>37</sup> – and in no way representative of the rest of his oeuvre. Although Bei Dao was impressed with Guo's poetry at the time, no appreciable literary influence can be deduced from this single resonance.

<sup>33</sup> Duoduo (1988: 166) names a number of clandestinely circulating books and manuscripts that made the winter of 1969-1970 an exhilarating season for Beijing youths on furlough from the countryside; e.g. Guo's poems, translations of foreign literature and Chinese underground novels by Bi Ruxie and Gan Huili.

<sup>34</sup> Guo's (Shizhi's) poetry appeared in *Today* # 2, 3, 4, 5, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Personal communication (June 1993).

<sup>36</sup> Wang 1991: 840. The Chinese titles are *Huida* (Bei Dao 1987: 25-26) and *Mingyun* (Shizhi 1988: 1) respectively.

<sup>37</sup> In its unofficial publication in *Today* # 1: 31 (1978) and in its official appearance in *Poetry* 1979 # 3: 46, the poem is dated April 1976; it has understandably been assumed that it was written in reaction to the Tiananmen Incident. But in an autobiographical piece (1990: 67) Bei Dao gives 1972 as the year of its creation. His initial post-dating of *The Answer* had political reasons: *Today* came out just after the 1976 verdict on the Tiananmen Incident had been favorably reversed. Qi Jian (1994a: 197-198), presumably on the basis of original notes or manuscripts, cites 15 March 1973 for the completion of a poem by Bei Dao called *Let Me Tell You, World* (*Gaosu ni ba, shijie*): an early version of *The Answer*.



Chinese poetry circles display respect *vis-à-vis* Guo. Their esteem is manifest from his inclusion in anthologies otherwise containing works of a later date – commentaries invariably underscoring his influence on the next generation of poets – but also from the deferential tone in which poets and editors reminisce about the youthful grand old man of Experimental poetry<sup>38</sup> and from the reverent way they treat him in person.<sup>39</sup> A closer look at Guo's prestige establishes his status as a transitional figure between Socialist Realist and Obscure poetry, and to some extent enervates the myth of his literary influence on the next cohort of unofficial poets.

For describing or judging poetry in anything like a comprehensive manner, a distinction between form and content is far from satisfactory. But for the purpose of explaining Guo's popularity it provides a useful point of departure. Guo wrote an easily recognizable kind of poetry, adhering to current aesthetic standards and akin to Guo Xiaochuan's and He Jingzhi's work. Using conventional language, trimmed into stanzas of equal length to tell rhyming, song-like stories, he stayed well within the bounds of orthodoxy where form was concerned. At the same time he made personal feelings the content of his poems and eschewed sanctioned or mandatory subject matter like the glorification of Chairman Mao. In short, he made use of a well-known medium to deliver an unknown message – unknown, that is, to "the revolutionary masses", but not to Guo's actual readers. The latter were city youths with serious objections to the hackneyed heroism they had been told to worship, and with a strong interest in personal feelings.

Several sources confirm that the attraction of Guo's poetry in a lackluster age lay in its expression of personal feelings and in the sincerity accredited to those feelings, not in any innovation of the poetic medium *per se*.<sup>40</sup> Duoduo mentions "the purity of Guo Lusheng's early lyrical poetry" and situates a revolution in form in Chinese poetry after Guo's heyday; Chen Chao praises "the sincerity of feelings" in Guo's *This Is Beijing at 4:08* but says it does not surpass traditional poetry on the "artistic" level, i.e. in the formal domain; Wang Bin calls *Fate* traditional because the author trusts in his personal feelings and conscience to express sincere emotions, and does not stoop to the writing of obsequious poems in the service of a transient political reality; Wang Jiabin, implying that sincerity is a criterion for "true" poetry, states that *Faith in the Future* is not at all "modern" in form but differs from other, contemporary and earlier "false" poems because "it is blood, not water"; Bei Dao

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<sup>38</sup> For example, Yan Li's account of a meeting with Guo in 1985 (Xu 1985: 75-76); Duoduo (1988: 166) calling the purity of Guo's lyrical poetry unrivaled; Bei Dao (1992c) recalling the deep impression left by a friend's recital of one of Guo's poems.

<sup>39</sup> Observed several times between 1987 and 1994 during fieldwork in Beijing.

<sup>40</sup> Duoduo 1988b: 166-167; Chen 1989: 294; Wang Bin in Wang 1991: 840; Wang Jiabin in Wang 1991: 846; Bei Dao 1992c; Lin 1992: 3; Tang 1993c: 104; Zheng 1994: 3; Song 1994: 123.

has stressed that as incorporating personal feelings in poetry was forbidden and unheard of at the time, it was exactly this aspect of Guo's poetry that gave it its appeal; Lin Mang and Tang Xiaodu simply call Guo's poetry "traditional", meaning in form; when Zheng Xian writes of Guo's resistance to tradition it is a resistance "of the spirit"; Song Haiquan's statement "(...) my soul was stirred not by his poetry's form but by its content" could hardly be clearer.

An innovation of the poetic medium *per se* did take place with the advent, soon afterward, of Obscure poetry and counts as one of its distinguishing features. Still, Guo's work is time and again declared to have been a forebear of or even a major influence on Obscure poetry. The image of an index finger – the literal meaning of Guo's pen name Shizhi – pointing the way seems appropriate enough, but in view of sharp differences between Guo's work and that of his immediate successors, *inspiration* seems a better word than *influence*.<sup>41</sup> His poethood was as important as his poetry, because he reclaimed the Chinese poet's traditional right and duty to voice sincere thoughts and emotions; even – and especially – if displeasing to the ruler's ear.

The observation that Guo was no Obscure poet does not detract from his significance as a prompter of Obscure poets. It clarifies the connection between Guo and the next generation of Experimental poets: that is to say, it serves to reduce that connection to plausible proportions. True enough, Guo broke one of the rules of Socialist Realism by writing about personal feelings incompatible with current ideology, and as a result acquired popularity with the generation that was to bring forth Obscure poetry. But casting his poems in as straightforward and formalized a mold as he did, he himself never came close to being an Obscure poet. His designation as one is symptomatic of Chinese poets and critics' love of categorization. Guo Lusheng had one foot in both camps: his work is a distinct and unique stage in the development of modern Chinese poetry.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Zhou (1986) and Chen (1989) both speak of inspiration (*qifa*), but the former pairs it off with influence (*yingxiang*), thereby blurring the picture, and the latter proceeds, as reported earlier, to relegate Guo to a puzzling twelfth position in his list of Obscure poets. Wang Guangming (1993: 50, 52) introduces Guo as "a poet of enormous influence". An exception is Qi (1994a: 194), who does not speak of influence, nor of Obscurity; she simply states that Guo "inspired and encouraged a number of even more remarkable poets".

<sup>42</sup> Wolfgang Kubin (1993: 82-83) has recognized this, briefly touching on Guo's distinguishing characteristics: his role as a precursor of famous contemporary poets, the regulated form and personal content of his work and his implicit violation of the rules orthodox literature adhered to. Yang Jian (1993: 81 and 87-95) pays Guo due respect by the sheer number of pages devoted to him, but in the chapter title associates him with a "formal revolution" (*xingshi geming*) and hardly notes the crucial role personal feelings play in his poetry. Cf. Qi's (1994a: 194) curious statement: "(...) the appearance of Guo Lusheng caused a revolution in the form of poetry". Wang Guangming (1993: 50-51) shows Guo's significance in a brief and balanced sketch of his writings.

## CHASING BOOKS (PAO SHU): UNDERGROUND READING

Guo Lusheng was something of a prodigy, attending underground meetings with Zhang Langlang and others when he was sixteen or seventeen years old. He swiftly came up to the mark, becoming a popular underground poet before he had turned twenty, and this early maturity as a poet gave him a head start on his contemporaries. An example: Bei Dao has recounted how hearing Guo's work recited deeply impressed him and was among the reasons that he started writing poetry himself.<sup>43</sup> Guo had been widely read for years when Bei Dao began to write in earnest. Not until the late 1970s would the latter's poems reach a substantial audience. But the generation gap between these two authors is figurative: Bei Dao was born nine months later than Guo Lusheng.

If for Bei Dao and others, later associated with Obscure poetry, Guo's work was a source of inspiration rather than a literary influence, the acquaintance with foreign literature in translation was crucial for their development as poets.<sup>44</sup> The scarcity and one-sidedness of literature freely accessible during the Cultural Revolution might lead one to assume that Experimental poetry of the early 1970s originated in a literary vacuum, with the poets' personal lives as its sole source.<sup>45</sup> Obviously, what they lived through in those years of upheaval provided raw materials for writing – but for the course their work was to take the importance of foreign influences can hardly be overestimated. The late 1960s and especially the early 1970s saw a paradoxical situation: ideological repression had been whipped up to a fever pitch, declaring virtually everything but the political canon and sanctioned products of the Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism out of

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<sup>43</sup> Among others in Bei Dao 1992c.

<sup>44</sup> The following passage, on underground reading, is based on Bei Dao 1990, 1992b, 1992c and 1993a; Duoduo 1988b and 1992a; my fieldwork.

<sup>45</sup> In early Western scholarship on the subject (for example, Malmqvist 1983: 60-61), such a supposition is plausible. There was initially no abundance of sources to complement it with a foreign-literature component. An exception is the interview with Wu Mang, editor of a 1975 anthology of underground literature, quoted in one of McDougall's pioneering articles (1979b: 82). From the late 1980s onward, Duoduo, Bei Dao, Zhang Langlang and others have made their memories available in writing as well as in spoken presentations, interviews etc., and necessitated a nuancing of the picture: cf. Button 1992: 223 (note 5). Xiaomei Chen's (1991: 144-145) contentions that "the so-called 'Western modernist influence' was not historically relevant to [Obscure poetry's] emergence nor to its subsequent development", and that "the majority of [Obscure poets] had little opportunity to read about Western modernist literature" have become untenable – which is not to say the poets "understood" (cf. 159) such literature any better than Chen suggests. In literary circles in China, it has for years been common knowledge that underground poetry was fathered by more than just the socio-political background of its authors (cf. Chen 1994: 159; Gan 1994: 149, 150; Song 1994: 137, 143). Still, Yang as late as 1993 hardly mentions the influence of foreign literature, and at one point (1993: 335) explicitly states that during the Cultural Revolution, except for a few existing official novels, "one could not lay hands on anything to read".

bounds, but it can safely be stated that its victims were reading more heterodox literature than ever before. Ironically, the Party's narrow and rigidly enforced cultural policy had been at the root of the choice of some of the translated works and the high quality of the translations. The havoc of the "Ten Years of Chaos" gave an unintended audience access to these works.

For decades, the Party's policy as regards literature and art was an unstable compound of dogmatism and leniency; only in the 1980s did the latter truly get the upper hand. In the 1950s the cultural climate was much harsher. Several authors, some associated with the Nine Leaves School<sup>46</sup> (*Jiu ye pai*), e.g. Mu Dan, Chen Jing-rong, Yuan Kejia and Zheng Min, found themselves left with little room to exploit their talents and turned to the translation of foreign literature into Chinese. According to Bei Dao, these translators produced texts of uncommon artistic quality, and in a "quiet revolution" profoundly altered modern Chinese literary usage between 1949 and 1966, i.e. between the establishment of Communist rule and the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>47</sup> This was due to linguistic imitation as well as to the need for a "new language" able to do justice to foreign originals. The result, later called the Translation Style (*fanyi wenti*), was in Bei Dao's words "neither Chinese as known so far, nor a foreign language, but something in between". From the safe haven offered by translation, these authors were to influence generations of writers to come. They were not free in their selection of originals, and language in the PRC was being reshaped by a formidable propaganda machinery. But within the scope of what was ideologically permissible – mostly works of Russian and Soviet literature and left-wing authors from other parts of the world – literary translations were produced, e.g. works by Lorca, Mayakovsky and Neruda. Editors and translators used what little space they were conceded, interpreting the rules to the advantage of art where they could.

While Bei Dao perceives the Translation Style as strongly innovative at the time, Edward Gunn's work shows that just about all foreign-inspired stylistic innovation had originated before the 1930s.<sup>48</sup> But Bei Dao's and Gunn's points of view are not irreconcilable. First of all, Bei Dao proceeds from a limited set of translated texts, including poetry, in assessing changes in his mother tongue. Gunn focuses on prose writing and, especially for the Maoist era, addresses the dominant body of native Chinese fiction – for instance, Zhao Shuli's work. More importantly, Gunn also

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Hong & Liu 1993: ch. 8, sect. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Bei Dao 1993b is a French translation by Chantal Chen-Andro of Bei Dao's paper, which in Chinese has remained unpublished so far. In Trumbull 1994: 961, it is curiously called a "manifesto". The Translation Style can be encountered in Chinese literary criticism much earlier, e.g. Yu 1988: 490.

<sup>48</sup> Gunn 1991. This statement is found on 64. See also Pickowicz 1977: 371-374.

states that "a number of innovative features are found more readily in the texts of successive decades". In short, the Translation Style had been in existence long before Bei Dao and others of his generation encountered it. So had the "Europeanization" (*Ouhua*) of literature: imported ideologies and Isms, subject matter and formal properties like poetic meter as well as the transplantation of aspects of foreign grammar and vocabulary. Whatever their origins and their age, Europeanization and the Translation Style now once more made themselves felt with far-reaching consequences.

Furthermore, between 1961 and 1966 many works of foreign literature, meant for high-level cadre circles, were translated "for internal distribution".<sup>49</sup> After the color of their cover, many were popularly called Yellow Books (*Huang pi shu*).<sup>50</sup> They included pieces spectacularly at odds with the prescriptions for orthodox literature. Some examples: *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett, *The Outsider* by Albert Camus, selected writings of T.S. Eliot, the memoirs of Ilya Erenburg, Eugène Ionesco's *The Chairs*, Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac, *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne, J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and the movie script of *Casablanca*. Literature, literary criticism and theory from various quarters were also made available in anthologies. Titles such as *Reader in Modern American and English Bourgeois Literary and Artistic Theory* and *The Bitter Fruit: Intellectuals' Revolt behind the Iron Curtain* – Chinese translations of English translations of writings by Soviet and Eastern European authors – further indicate the distance between what was prescribed for the ordinary Chinese reader and what the prescribers read themselves. The fact that not a few of these books were officially "presented for criticism" (*gong pian yong*) increased their readers' curiosity.

Arguably, the Yellow Books' immediate *raison d'être* was a shift in the cultural leadership's policy with regard to translation. In the PRC's first decade the ideological criteria for foreign literature were looser than for native Chinese works, and allowed for the translation of "bourgeois" books from capitalist countries. But the political climate radicalized, and in 1960 the regime's watchdog for literature and art, Zhou Yang, demanded an ideologically motivated and "correct" choice of works

<sup>49</sup> An illuminating source is the *National Comprehensive Catalogue of Publications for Internal Distribution (1949-1986)*, which of course is itself "for internal distribution" (*Quanguo neibu faxing tushu zongmu (1949-1986)*: 324-327 and 352-365). The Zuoqia Press in Beijing played a major role in the "publication" of these classified translations. Several reprints and new editions would appear in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

<sup>50</sup> Besides the Yellow Books, "Grey Books" (*Huipi shu*) and "White Books" (*Baipi shu*) came out as well: translations of political theory and philosophical works, and translated filmscripts. According to Bei Dao and Duoduo (discussion during the *Workshop on Modern Chinese Poetry: Bridges in Space and Time*, Leiden University Sinological Institute, June 1992) there were more than a hundred titles in all.

to be translated into Chinese. As a result, in the first half of the 1960s publicly available translations were largely from Third-World literatures and the influx from "bourgeois" parts of the globe sharply declined. The sudden luxuriance of the Yellow Books filled the gap – for the happy few.

Freely accessible and classified texts combined, a huge and varied body of foreign literature was translated into Chinese during the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s: an endless list of Russian and Soviet works, literature from African, Asian, and Latin-American countries, Western Classicism, Romanticism and Modernism, works of the Beat Generation, the Angry Young Men and of less easily pigeonholed authors who qualified because of their political convictions.<sup>51</sup> The last category brings to mind discrepancies between various "leftist" ideals and the brand of "leftist" reality practiced in the PRC, not to mention the fact that the effect a work of art has on its readers is difficult to foretell or control, whatever Ism its creator advocates and whether it is praised or condemned. One group of readers in their encounter with foreign literature found little to reconcile them with the cultural state of affairs in the PRC. Among them were several of those later labeled Obscure poets.

This generation of readers had been born in the late 1940s and early 1950s and would eventually be called the Old Three Classes (*Lao san jie*): they were high-school students who under normal circumstances would have graduated in 1966, 1967 and 1968,<sup>52</sup> but whose formal education had been terminated when schools and universities closed with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. Adolescents, they were susceptible to what is now known as an extreme case of political manipulation by Mao Zedong: his call to arms of the Red Guards. Many of them plunged into the battles unleashed by the power struggle in the highest echelons; those with the wrong class background had to bide their time until the rise of rival Red Guard factions gave them a chance to get their share and partake in the turmoil of class struggle and revolution, and of "linking up (*chuanlian*) to exchange revolutionary experiences", i.e. traveling throughout the country to meet with their peers. For a period of roughly two years, many youngsters in the PRC were masters of their own

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<sup>51</sup> See Eber 1994, a detailed article identifying and periodizing PRC translation work up to 1979. It is in the same article (esp. 47-48) that Irene Eber notes the 1960 policy shift in the realm of translation. A quick survey of books of American, British, French and German poetry – the Soviet case is, precisely because of its political orientation, less interesting here – as catalogued in the Beijing Archives Library (Beijing banben tushu guan) confirms Eber's observations. While in the 1950s translations included poetry by Longfellow, Whitman, Byron, Keats, Shelley, Aragon, Éluard, Goethe and Heine, in the 1960s little was added from these quarters.

<sup>52</sup> Alternatively "Old Four Classes", enlarging the group by one cohort (e.g. Wang (Guangming) 1993: 50).



fate as never before, even though the Red Guard movement was more strictly orchestrated than they would have cared to believe at the time. In 1968, when the frenzy and disruption of the Cultural Revolution were pushing the country toward an economic crisis, Mao summoned educated urban youths and older members of the intelligentsia to go "up to the mountains and down to the countryside". They were to go and live in rural areas to familiarize themselves with the life of the poor peasants.

It was hardly possible to decline the request to uproot oneself. But the Rustication Campaign cannot be equated to a punishment for having gone to school, as has been done in many superficial reports in Western media. Young people born and bred in Communist China had incessantly been exposed to propaganda and indoctrination. They left their homes filled with revolutionary fervor, determined to realize the Maoist ideal of becoming one with the masses. But once they had settled in their new environment, they were confronted with glaring discrepancies between what they had learned to believe about PRC society and what they now saw for themselves. Not only did The People – hungry and disinterested in all but the necessities of life – look different from the way they had been advertized; it also proved harder than anticipated to integrate with them.

Members of this generation had as Red Guards been catapulted into a position of political status and power, only to be relegated to what they saw as a dead-end situation, bogged down in the lowest strata of society. Their rustication had an unforeseen effect: adversity and disillusionment caused the first cracks to appear in the worldview they had been taught to embrace. The way they were sidetracked into the countryside showed that the Red Guards had been pawns in power games played on a level beyond their reach. Among members of their generation, a hitherto unthinkable feeling of having been betrayed by Chairman Mao took root.

This crisis of faith was a consequence of the Cultural Revolution and especially of the Rustication Campaign. First, the anti-establishment fury of the summer of 1966 had exempted this generation from attending school, in many cases of the duty – or the right – to respect and obey one's elders in general. Secondly, their relocation away from the cities had barred them from the political arena but made them less malleable to official exegesis of battles fought there and to ideological control. As a result of the drastic, often painful changes in their lives and because they had the chance to appraise these changes themselves, many came to regard official reality – government propaganda – with understandable skepticism.

At the time, official reality was an extremely politicized affair, and it was politics that had given the Red Guards the reasons for a short-lived euphoria. During the Cultural Revolution proper they had engaged or been engaged in political debate and action, and been under the impression that their frenzy had a purpose, that they had

a say in what their future lives would look like. When their emancipation proved a mirage, their skepticism went beyond the political events of the day to include the entire subject of politics, its everyday manifestation in Chinese society as well as political theory. Turning away from Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, and seeking new outlets for their intellectual powers, they looked to literature; in a world where countless books had been banned, even burned.

Ever since Mao's 1942 Yan'an *Talks* the Party had used literature and art as tools for propagating and implementing its policies. In the wake of contemporary politics Communist cultural policy became tainted, as did the texts it had spawned: PRC literature to date. The dictates for literature during the Cultural Revolution and the unsettling experiences of the city youths made the system turn against itself. Losing one's faith in one thing creates space for faith in another, and those with literary leanings started looking for alternatives.

They found them in places ranging from classical Chinese literature to the French Symbolists, and from Guo Lusheng to the Theater of the Absurd. Roughly from 1970 onward, a number of urban "Young Intellectuals" (*zhishi qingnian*, educated youths) sent from Beijing to the countryside began to read anything and everything they could get their hands on, as long as it was not part of the canon of orthodoxy. After an initial interest in philosophy and political theory – which perhaps reflected the abundance of Isms in PRC society – their attention shifted to literature. Guided by curiosity rather than by schoolteachers, they forayed into their native literary history, reading classical Chinese fiction and poetry, and works by different authors from the Republican era (1911-1949). Simultaneously, foreign literature became a much-wanted commodity, all the more because not a few works – the Yellow Books – were "for internal distribution" and hard to get. Along with these translations, a few Chinese underground works were in circulation among them: poetry as well as fiction, the latter genre mostly on how the Cultural Revolution had traumatized the educated while reshuffling their lives.<sup>53</sup>

Communist rule in cultural matters had inadvertently nurtured extraordinary translators. In an analogous way, the havoc of the Cultural Revolution gave disillusioned Red Guards and their classmates access to works of foreign literature incompatible with the campaign's anti-intellectual and anti-foreign hues. The Yellow Books had been intended for an audience of privileged readers such as CCP high-level cadres. But in the Cultural Revolution proper, many such people's homes were raided for objects associated with the Four Olds – old ideas, old culture, old cus-

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<sup>53</sup> Introductions to various works of underground fiction can be found in Yang 1993 (esp. ch. 2, also ch. 7, for underground fiction written during the final years of the Cultural Revolution).



toms, old habits – like foreign-made luxury goods and books other than the ones prescribed or tolerated. Their children often complied with peer pressure rather than practicing filial piety, and stole from their parents' personal libraries. Of the Yellow Books which ended up in the Red Guards' hands, many were never destroyed but avidly read by youngsters who officially despised them. In view of the repression of those days, their reading must be considered an underground activity. The texts were classified information, and worse things than a reprimand could befall one discovered reading them. Nevertheless, the Beijing youths having tasted the forbidden fruit were not about to relinquish it. For them, reading foreign literature became a passion.<sup>54</sup>

Before setting eyes on the coveted texts, they had to make efforts seemingly unrelated to the act of reading. This was mainly a matter of availability: many works of foreign literature – especially those "for internal distribution" – had come out in small editions, and under the circumstances reprints were inconceivable; and only a fraction of the existing copies filtered down into the underground circuit. Since there were great numbers of aspiring readers, literally having to queue up for having one's fun was not at all exceptional. The book's proprietor would set a time by which one had to make way for the next in line, or return it if one had been allowed to take it away. This could necessitate hurried or partial reading. Because technical means for text reproduction were in short supply, the only way of multiplying texts was to write them out by hand. Underground readers collected their favorite poems in "notebooks" (*chaoben*), compiling idiosyncratic anthologies of world literature. Even entire novels were copied by hand.<sup>55</sup> The activity needed for acquainting oneself with heterodox writings was known as "book-chasing" (*pao shu*).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> This was noted early on by McDougall (1979b: 82), quoting Wu Mang's explanation of the presence of foreign literature and culture in his 1975 anthology of underground literature from the PRC: "Wu Mang's reply was that pre-Cultural Revolution China had published many works of foreign literature and that many students were familiar with foreign culture. The Cultural Revolution, he claimed, actually had the effect of widening the readership of foreign literature, since the Red Guards, far from destroying libraries, confiscated books to form their own underground libraries and discussion groups. 'The fervor with which the Red Guards devoured books had to be seen to be believed.'"

<sup>55</sup> McDougall's (1979b: 85) summary of the second of Ding Wangyi's serialized articles on underground literature in the PRC touches on the practice of copying out foreign works by hand for underground circulation and names a number of works thus made more widely available.

<sup>56</sup> Michelle Yeh (1993: 280) translates *pao shu* differently: "The books were in such high demand among the youngsters that as soon as one was done reading a book, he or she hopped on a bike and delivered the book to the next person waiting in line, giving rise to the expression 'running a book'." Wang (Guangming) (1993: 53) restricts his use of the expression to the term *book-chasers* or *book-runners* (*pao shu ren*), "those who administered the books' circulation and lending", implying an improbable degree of organization. My understanding of *pao shu* and its rendition as *book-chasing* are based on fieldwork data. I find *run*, as in *drug runner*, too altruistic: it focuses on getting the stash to someone else.

## FROM READING TO WRITING: THE BIRTH OF OBSCURE POETRY

The underground procuring and consuming of literature in Beijing in the early 1970s was not unperturbed reading done in the proverbial easy chair. But undoubtedly dangers and difficulties of book-chasing added to the excitement felt by underground readers when first confronted with works from beyond the pale. During their adolescence in the late 1960s, they had been able to read little other than what was permissible by Cultural Revolution standards; calling them deprived readers is no exaggeration. One can imagine the stir caused by the marvels of modern foreign literature when it burst upon the underground scene. Its readers were in no position to create even a semblance of structure or completeness in this newfound undertaking, and of necessity read in a chaotic and fragmentary manner.<sup>57</sup> But this did not keep them from feeling a strong sense of discovery and from suspecting there might be an alternative to cynicism: foreign literature had opened up new vistas. For some, whose lives it was to change profoundly, it turned from an object of passive appreciation into something requiring active involvement. This became manifest, as it had in the 1960s, in more or less organized gatherings for the exchange and recital of texts: salons for literature and art. Here, works of foreign origin – not only literature, but music too – were collectively enjoyed and discussed. These meetings also provided a stage for early Experimental poetry, written by members of a generation that had grown up "under the red flag" but then been exposed to examples from abroad. Bei Dao<sup>58</sup> (b. 1949), Mang Ke<sup>59</sup> (b. 1950), Duoduo<sup>60</sup> (b. 1951) and other established contemporary Chinese poets have recognized the importance of foreign literature in starting off and shaping their literary careers.

Foreign literature brought along more than artistic inspiration and influence, as Duoduo has described in a passage on his first attempts at writing modern poetry. Works of art can represent a world view, and the one emanating from Baudelaire's poetry collided head-on with the glorification of Mao during the Cultural Revolution:

"My boyhood was but a gloomy thunderstorm...' In 1972 I first read poetry by Baudelaire. Well then, had *my* boyhood been but a

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Wang (Guangming) 1993: 53-54. Note 1 on 53 is an interesting example of the contents of a "notebook" from the early 1970s.

<sup>58</sup> Pseudonym of Zhao Zhenkai. For convenience's sake I only refer to him as Bei Dao, the pen name he adopted in 1978.

<sup>59</sup> Pseudonym of Jiang Shiwei. For convenience's sake, I only refer to him as Mang Ke, the pen name he adopted in 1978.

<sup>60</sup> Pseudonym of Li Shizheng. For convenience's sake, I only refer to him as Duoduo, the pen name he adopted in 1982.

note in the eulogy for Mao Zedong? While we sang each day: 'Chairman Mao is like the sun', Baudelaire said: 'The sun is like a poet'.<sup>61</sup>

Duoduo has called his introduction to Baudelaire's work a decisive impulse prompting him to start writing. There was of course more to it than Baudelaire: the well-written Chinese renditions of Baudelaire's poetry, the prevailing skepticism with regard to PRC literature and the fact that this reader of Baudelaire's poetry had a bent for creative writing. But the anecdote shows that foreign literature widened aspiring poets' horizons as to what one could say and – among other things, thanks to the Translation Style – how one could say it in Chinese.

Foreign examples had "enlightened" modern Chinese poetry before; Baudelaire is a case in point.<sup>62</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s prominent authors and translators had displayed an interest in foreign literature sometimes bordering on zealotry, and resulting in many introductions and translations.<sup>63</sup> With the increasing politicization of the Chinese literary scene, "Europeanized" or "cosmopolitan" literature was charged with elitism early on, and became anathema after Mao Zedong's 1942 Yan'an *Talks*. Thus, this strand of literary development had been severed<sup>64</sup> and the underground poets of the early 1970s had been disconnected from what would under other circumstances have been their native literary heritage.

In incorporating foreign elements into Chinese poetry, they would indeed re-invent the wheel many a time throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Yet it is hard to believe that their ignorance of literature from the Republican era was total,<sup>65</sup> if only because books and stories must have been preserved in personal libraries and memories. Perhaps they are unwilling to be viewed as heirs to an interrupted development, and forced to surrender their uniqueness in reforming Chinese poetry. At any rate, they have not emphasized – and sometimes trivialized or denied – their knowledge of what may sweepingly be called the first Modernist phase in Chinese literary history.

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<sup>61</sup> Duoduo 1992a: 102-103. My thanks go to Petrus Hoosemans, who supplied me with the titles of the poems Duoduo refers to: they are *L'Ennemi* and *Le Soleil*.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. the concluding paragraph of Bien 1985. Sources on the subject with a wider scope are Lloyd Haft's (1983) monograph on Bian Zhilin and Gregory Lee's (1989) on Dai Wangshu.

<sup>63</sup> On Chinese interest in foreign literature, see McDougall 1971 and 1977. Further examples are the catalogue of translations published by The Commercial Press, the most influential publishing house at the time (*Shangwu yin shu guan tushu mulu, 1897-1949*): 198-201 and 217-235, and the 1958 *Catalogue of Western Books Translated into Chinese during the Past 100 Years (Jin bai nian lai Zhong yi Xi shu mulu)*: 232-324.

<sup>64</sup> Certain linguistic developments were irreversible and in fact endorsed by orthodoxy. See Gunn 1991: esp. 50ff. and 137ff.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Wang (Guangming) 1993: 53.

It was in the early 1970s that members of the Old Three Classes from Beijing set themselves to the writing of modern poetry, e.g. Mang Ke and Bei Dao in 1970, Duoduo in 1972. At the time, "writing was even more dangerous than reading".<sup>66</sup> Underground fiction, mostly on the darker sides of the Cultural Revolution, was produced too:<sup>67</sup> a spectacular story is that of an underground novel by Gan Tiesheng burnt by its author as soon as it was finished, after he had read it to a small number of friends. Practical reasons help explain poetry's prevalence: poems tend to be shorter than fiction and therefore easier to memorize, hide and circulate in secret. In the late 1960s these youngsters had briefly tried their hand at classical poetry.<sup>68</sup> What they wrote in the next few years was to some extent defined by what it was not: it was not classical poetry, and it was not Socialist Realism or the famed Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism. But even if coupled with their fascination for foreign literature, this description *per exclusionem* is incomplete, and in need of two additions.

First: this poetry reflected that the Cultural Revolution was the none-too-ordinary backdrop to its authors' lives. They grew up in an environment of extreme ideological repression and unpredictable, explosive violence; the disruption of their personal lives and of societal order caused an *Umwertung aller Werte* in their minds. In their most formative years this gave them food for thought, perhaps raw materials or even the motive for creative writing. They had felt uprooted, confused, betrayed, alienated; they had been confronted with barbarities, physical and other. But with the well-known horrors of that time came other, less undividedly negative but equally startling experiences. Written with hindsight, Duoduo's personal account of growing up during the Cultural Revolution stresses the double-sidedness of life for a Beijing youth in the late 1960s: simultaneous with repression and violence, the existing degree of anarchy made unprecedented freedom possible. Bei Dao has remarked that he reminisces about those years with mixed feelings: his memories evoke a blend of love and hate, of the scourges of Red Terror on the one hand and the excitements of

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<sup>66</sup> Bei Dao 1990: 67.

<sup>67</sup> See Duoduo 1988b; Bei Dao 1992c; Yang 1993: 76-79, 166-174.

<sup>68</sup> McDougall (1984b: 295-296) associates the revival of classical poetry in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the ubiquitous circulation of Mao's poems and, ironically, the anti-Confucian movement of 1973-1975. Mao's poetry occupies a unique position in contemporary Chinese literature: in days reverberating with endless sloganizing in favor of popularization and against elitism in the arts (the late 1950s), the Chairman had no qualms about publishing his own none-too-easy writings, intricate in form and laden with allusions to classical sources. Different authors on the poet Mao Zedong and his work are listed by McDougall (1978: 122, note 78).

adolescence, set free from parents and teachers' authority, on the other.<sup>69</sup> This combination of horrors and blessings would appear to constitute an abundance of stimuli, and makes it a tempting assumption that poetry was a channel for giving personal expression to the overall upheaval.

But would poets like Mang Ke, Bei Dao and Duoduo not have written and continued to write if they had lived a peaceful, boring suburban life in a reasonable, stable society? There is no answer to such a question. An individual's history can hardly be known by anyone else other than as a résumé-like list of so-called facts, whose impact on the person concerned is hard to fathom. Furthermore, there is no proportional relationship between so-called facts as visible to one's fellow men on the one hand and literary output on the other. Even according to their most fanatical admirers, great poets do not always lead great lives; conversely, great lives do not always spawn great poets. There is no way of telling if and what this generation of poets would have written had they grown up under different circumstances, and the question itself is irrelevant. This qualifies Li Fukang's restrictive contentions that

"As poets (...) they are strangely inspired by the Cultural Revolution and may be said to share a peculiar psychological complex, which can be termed the 'Cultural Revolution Complex'"

and

"[their] poetry is a poetry of retrospection, which finds both its source and its natural end in the poet's memory of a particular historical period."<sup>70</sup>

Such a sweeping, collective treatment of poets with comparable backgrounds oversimplifies the picture of their poetry. It disregards a second complement to descriptions of what that poetry was not: differences between the writings of its various authors. To be sure, Mang Ke's and Duoduo's poetry were and are more alike than either one's work and that of any Tang dynasty poet or orthodox Revolutionary Romanticist. But that does not justify lumping their poetry together as the mere spin-off of contemporary political events. Chronicling literary history in terms

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<sup>69</sup> Duoduo 1992a and Van Crevel & Van Toorn 1990: 124. Recent years have seen the appearance of a number of works (e.g. Gu Hua's *The Scholars' Garden (Rulin yuan)*, Jung Chang's (Zhang Rong) *Wild Swans*) on the concrete effects of the primacy of ideology on everyday life – of the political on the personal – in China. They show a similarly complex picture of life in the PRC, in which repression is often hindered and countervailed by the resilience, invention and humor of the repressed.

<sup>70</sup> Li & Hung 1992: 94, *Translator's Introduction*.

of times, places or schools of writing to identify trends transcending the individual is not without its dangers. It is convenient and for academic and educational purposes necessary to generalize, but desire for order can lead to unwarranted extrapolation and to the superimposing of theory on data.<sup>71</sup> Again, this is not to deny or trivialize similarities in the work of, for example, the three poets mentioned above. It is to stress that a treatment of literary texts requires more than an examination of the environment in which they were written.

### *Mang Ke*

Mang Ke was the first to develop an individual and mature mode of expression in Experimental poetry written in and around Beijing in the early 1970s.<sup>72</sup> His earliest poems date from 1970 and found their readers in 1971 among his friends. Mang Ke employs a simple vocabulary, precise and sometimes repetitive wording, and a limited number of recurring images. In a blend of common sense and fantasy, powers of Nature such as day and night, the sun and the wind, are personified and endowed with human or animal attributes like eyes, hair or the ability to cry. They have ambiguous but intimate relationships with the protagonists, usually denoted by personal pronouns. In free verse with inconspicuous but frequent rhyme and rhythm, his poetry is distinguished by its flowing diction more than anything else. Together, these features make for a sophisticated naivete in his poetic oeuvre.

The above remarks reflect an impression left by almost two decades of poetry. Notwithstanding their brevity, these two stanzas from the 1973 cycle *Sky*<sup>73</sup> may serve as examples of Mang Ke's early work:

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<sup>71</sup> In his treatment of modern Chinese poetry in the first half of this century, Lloyd Haft (1989: 6) has negotiated this problem with particular clarity. Concluding his argument he states: "But if neither the 'chronological' nor the 'schools' approach is a secure guide, how are we to determine the main stream, or points of importance, in the development of modern Chinese poetry? The answer may be that the question itself is wrong: that there is no reason whatsoever why a 'main' track should need to be identified at all".

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Soong & Minford 1984: 185: "Mang Ke is considered by many to be the founding father of the movement (...)". I have made similar observations during my fieldwork.

Mang Ke 1980 is his earliest book of poetry, published in the unofficial circuit. Both Mang Ke 1988 and 1989 are collections of his poetry from 1971 to 1986, with a fair amount of overlap; the latter is the more extensive of the two. Neither of these books includes the long poem *Time with No Time* (*Mei you shijian de shijian*), which appeared in *Toward the Future* (*Zou xiang weilai*) vol. 3 # 4 (1988): 130-143. During the 1980s and after, Mang Ke's poetry has been widely anthologized and translated into several languages.

<sup>73</sup> *Tiankong*, *Today* # 1: 28-30. The version included in Mang Ke 1988: 8-11 and Mang Ke 1989: 9-11 shows slight differences with this first publication. The translation is mine.

1

the sun has risen  
and dyed the sky  
into a blood-smearred shield  
(...)

7

whenever I pass before you  
why do I always feel shame  
I must have grown old  
I walk with a cane now  
youth gone by falls into my hands at last  
I walk with a cane now!  
sky  
where are you chasing me  
for you  
I exhausted myself

*The Baiyangdian School of Poetry*

In January 1969 Mang Ke was among the Young Intellectuals from Beijing who heeded Chairman Mao's call and went to live in the countryside.<sup>74</sup> He was one of a group of eight classmates and acquaintances, including Duoduo. They were not forced to go or allocated to a particular place by superior order; there would probably have been pressure to leave the city had they not done so of their own accord, but they wanted to go themselves too. One of them was well connected enough to arrange their registration in Da Diantou, one of the beautiful fishing villages in an area of rivers and lakes called Baiyangdian, in Hebei Province, which hosted many Young Intellectuals from Beijing and Tianjin. Life in Baiyangdian was far from luxurious and involved hardships such as a near-permanent insufficiency of staple food. But the city youths were materially better off than the locals, who were afraid to call the Rustication Campaign launched by the Chairman into question. According to Mang Ke, they assumed every single one of the city youths came from a high-level cadre home and treated them with corresponding respect. Since the city youths lacked skills needed for fishing, they worked in the fields or did odd jobs

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<sup>74</sup> The following passage, on Mang Ke's, Duoduo's and Genzi's sojourn in Baiyangdian, is based on Duoduo 1988b and on my fieldwork.



around the village; Mang Ke in 1975 became the local schoolteacher. After the excitement over their new life had ebbed away, one by one and over the years they managed to have their household registration transferred back to Beijing. Mang Ke was the last to leave, officially not moving back to Beijing until 1976. During their sojourn in Baiyangdian, their proximity to the capital enabled them to go home on a regular basis, which was not a matter of course for all Young Intellectuals who might have wished to do so. For some who went back to Beijing, "home" by now meant the pros and cons of living by themselves: their parents had been sent away for reeducation in cadre schools.

Apart from Mang Ke, two more of the eight Young Intellectuals since 1969 registered in Da Diantou started writing poetry in 1971 and 1972: Genzi<sup>75</sup> (b. 1951) and Duoduo. Genzi's parents had a large and varied personal library, and compared to his peers he was a man of wide reading. His literary career was fiery but short-lived: in 1971 he wrote *The Month of March and the End*, a poem he is to this day remembered for by his contemporaries,<sup>76</sup> but two years and a few long poems later he would put down the pen never to pick it up again. Mang Ke and Genzi had gone to school together in Beijing and now extended their friendship into the realm of poetry, becoming each other's readers and critics. Their friend and classmate Duoduo recalls first being startled and enraged by their poems, which seemed to flout all the rules for modern Chinese poetry as he perceived them.<sup>77</sup> But his anger turned into enthusiasm over his friends' work, and in the summer of 1972 Duoduo began writing Experimental poetry himself. His work was to change tremendously in later years, and his earliest poems are not representative of what in time became his individual style. But they do contain elements that have remained typical of his writing into the 1990s, such as his idiosyncratic usage and his physical, bodily images.

By 1972 writing poetry occupied an important position in Mang Ke's, Genzi's and Duoduo's lives and in the personal relationship they had. Through their shared interest and place of residence they had become involved with each other's work. Mang Ke and Duoduo even agreed to exchange "yearbooks" of their poetry every New Year's Eve. Their prolonged and intensive contacts are reflected in the early examples of their art: all three wrote their poetry in free verse but with some concern for the aural aspects of their language; for imagery they drew extensively on

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<sup>75</sup> Nickname of Yue Caigen; he later changed his name to Yue Zhong. For convenience's sake I only refer to him as Genzi.

<sup>76</sup> Duoduo (1988: 166) quotes extensively from *The Month of March and the End* (*Sanyue yu mori*), which otherwise remained unpublished until it appeared in Tang 1993a: 123-127. Yeh (1992b: 380-381) discusses it in her succinct account of the germinating period of Experimental poetry.

<sup>77</sup> Duoduo 1988b: 167.



the natural world, often personified; they employed an original and private symbolism, as Michelle Yeh has aptly put it in her comments on Genzi's verse;<sup>78</sup> their poetic voice sometimes bordered on grandiloquence, alternated with humor and agility especially by Mang Ke.

During the years of the Rustication Campaign, some Beijing youths now living in different places managed to stay in touch while on furlough in the capital or by paying visits to other Young Intellectuals' new homes. Fledglings in literature later to become well-known authors associated with Obscure poetry such as Bei Dao and Jiang He<sup>79</sup> (b. 1949) visited Baiyangdian, not only to enjoy its famed scenery but also to exchange materials and views on poetry. Mang Ke in turn made trips to call on faraway Young Intellectuals as well. For not only in Baiyangdian was Experimental poetry being written: others, often with comparable histories, were doing the same thing elsewhere. In the scarcely documented literary history of those years Mang Ke, Genzi and Duoduo together can be encountered as the Baiyangdian School of Poetry (*Baiyangdian shipai*) or even the Three Musketeers of Baiyangdian (*Baiyangdian san jianke*).<sup>80</sup>

There are – and perhaps should be – no fixed criteria for identifying "schools" in literature, so the absence of manifestoes, organized and collective recitals or an anthology of Baiyangdian verse is no reason to challenge the Three Musketeers' status. Mang Ke's, Genzi's and Duoduo's work did indeed display affinity, among other things in its implicit rejection of PRC Establishment writings to date. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the Baiyangdian School of Poetry ever possessed the degree of cohesion or organization suggested by Pan Yuan and Pan Jie.<sup>81</sup> It is hard to see how the School could have "consisted of several major writers" and "enjoyed a certain following" in the early 1970s, when its alleged members had barely begun writing. It may have assumed these mythical proportions years afterward, when underground poetry from the Cultural Revolution began to surface and its history became an item of interest. An example of its retroactive importance is the special section devoted to the "Baiyangdian Poetry Community" (*Baiyangdian shige qunluo*) in a 1994 issue of the leading official review *Explorations in Poetry* (*Shi tansuo*).<sup>82</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Yeh 1992b: 381.

<sup>79</sup> Pseudonym of Yu Youze.

<sup>80</sup> Yang 1993: 3.

<sup>81</sup> Pan & Pan 1985: 200-201.

<sup>82</sup> In May 1994 the editorial board organized an excursion to Baiyangdian, with several one-time Young Intellectuals among its participants. The same year's final issue (1994 # 4: 119-164) contains seven contributions on what is, in an introductory piece by Lin Mang, officially renamed the "Baiyangdian Poetry Community" (Lin 1994b; Song 1994; Qi 1994b; Gan 1994; Bai 1994; Yan 1994; Chen 1994). This Baiyangdian special – particularly Song Haiquan's piece – provides interesting reminiscences and

Unfortunately, the image of a closely knit group of city poets determined to write while forced to live a straining farmer's life needs to be adjusted. It appears that there was in fact no literary activity to speak of in Baiyangdian.<sup>83</sup> For one thing, Genzi and Duoduo in the early 1970s spent most of their time in Beijing. Although they were still registered in Baiyangdian and regularly went there, they were virtually living at home again. Only Mang Ke to some extent managed – or was willing – to take root in the village, but in winter he would go back to the capital too. Beijing had remained the nerve center of cultural life in the region, and it was there that the Baiyangdian poets did most if not all of their actual writing. It may no longer be possible to retrace who first thought and spoke of a School or of the Three Musketeers, and there is no need to deny the special relationship between the budding poets Mang Ke, Genzi and Duoduo. But all in all, the invention of the Baiyangdian School of Poetry may amount to no more than the observation that among Beijing's early Experimental poets were three classmates who had moved to the same village and all wrote poetry, or to no more than a joke that later began to lead a life of its own.<sup>84</sup>

### *Bei Dao*

The imposition *post hoc* of orderliness on the underground poetry scene is illustrated by the claim, made by various critics, that Bei Dao was one of the Baiyangdian poets, backdating a period of close cooperation he was to have with Mang Ke in the late 1970s.<sup>85</sup> The two first met in Beijing in 1972, three years after Mang Ke had moved to Baiyangdian and Bei Dao had been put to work in a less charming environment: a road construction site in the Hebei mountains. In 1970 work had

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musings, but it strikes me as historically incorrect in that cohesion, size and importance of the "Community" are exaggerated. Moreover, it is "in a broad sense" expanded to include not only Guo Lusheng but also poets living elsewhere who visited Baiyangdian, and thus made into an orderly if early manifestation of Obscure poetry (Qi 1994b: 147 and Chen 1994: 159, 164).

<sup>83</sup> I conclude this on the basis of my fieldwork, especially interviews with Mang Ke, Bei Dao and Duoduo.

<sup>84</sup> The latter hypothesis draws support from the popularity in China of the image of the Three Musketeers. An example: since the late 1980s, the Dutch soccer players Marco van Basten, Ruud Gullit and Frank Rijkaard, at the time all playing for AC Milan, have borne a similar epithet in Chinese sports journalism: *The Three Musketeers of Holland*, while there is little reason to view them as a School of Soccer distinct from other outstanding Dutch soccer players. And there is no need to stray this far from the subject to find examples, for Qi (1994a: 190) names another Three Musketeers within the small world of the 1960s and 1970s Beijing literary underground: Bei Dao, Cao Yifan and Shi Kangcheng.

<sup>85</sup> Pan & Pan 1985: 200-201 and Hong & Liu 1993: 403. The latter source makes Guo Lusheng an inhabitant of the village too.

been moved to the outskirts of Beijing, giving Bei Dao frequent chances to go into town and meet with kindred spirits. Bei Dao recalls that he and Mang Ke held incongruous views on poetry at the time of their acquaintance. Although they were in the same camp – that of beginning, Experimental poets from the Old Three Classes dissatisfied with the Establishment supply in literature – their work showed sharp differences. The private, self-willed, fairy-tale world and the flowing diction of Mang Ke's poetry have little in common with the solemn voice speaking in Bei Dao's 1972 poem *The Answer*<sup>86</sup> and its political and philosophical overtones:

(...)  
 Let me tell you, world,  
 I – do – not – believe!  
 If a thousand challengers lie beneath your feet,  
 Count me as number one thousand and one.

I don't believe the sky is blue;  
 I don't believe in thunder's echoes;  
 I don't believe that dreams are false;  
 I don't believe that death has no revenge.  
 (...)

More than two decades after its conception,<sup>87</sup> *The Answer* is in its defiance of Power still the most renowned Experimental poem, and one of few pieces known to a larger audience than the specialized readership for this type of literature. Bei Dao would later abandon exclamation marks and address himself to the individual rather than to the world, but two lines from this heroic, naive poem remain useful to summarize aspects of his poetics. Not to believe that the sky is blue is a refusal to put on a show of good weather, to deny one's gloom: it represents a wish to confront Evil and call it by its true name. Simultaneously the speaker's solidarity with dreams shows an instinctive resistance to Evil. In this reading the sky, not at all blue but overcast, stands for the unjust but incontrovertible world of reality. Dreams cannot be realized but are worth striving after. Unwillingness to see them as false

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<sup>86</sup> *Huida*, Bei Dao 1987: 25-26. The translation below is Bonnie S. McDougall's (Bei Dao 1988a: 33). McDougall recognized Bei Dao's talent early on and spared no effort to introduce his work to Western readers, through literary translation (Bei Dao 1988a and 1991) as well as scholarly writings (McDougall 1985). She comments on *The Answer* in her *Introduction* to Bei Dao 1984: 13 and in McDougall 1985: 231. I first outlined my reading of the two stanzas quoted here in the Afterword (*Nawoord*) to Bei Dao 1992a.

<sup>87</sup> Bei Dao has confirmed (personal communication, June 1993) that he made changes in *The Answer* before publishing it but that the two best-known stanzas, quoted here, were part of the poem's 1972 version. This is consistent with "evidence" supplied by Qi Jian (1994a: 197-198).

gives one the right to create beauty on an individual basis, oblivious of one's daily surroundings. The need to do so is painfully clear from Bei Dao's oeuvre, which cannot be said to look on the bright side of life.<sup>88</sup>

### *The Golden Season of the Early 1970s*

According to Bei Dao, the darker sides of life under political repression did not keep the underground poetry scene from living through "a golden season, when schools of thought and currents [in literature etc.] clashed".<sup>89</sup> As in the case of the Baiyangdian School of Poetry, intellectual and cultural life denoted by this phrase were not formally structured. *Schools of thought and currents [in literature etc.] (sichao, liupai)* may not be the most suitable terms to describe the lively underground circuit that emerged in the early 1970s – clashes occurred beyond a doubt, just as alliances were formed, especially in winter, when many Young Intellectuals came home from the countryside. The generally used *salons* seems a better word for the scattered gatherings of heterodox art lovers taking place in 1972 and 1973. Their underground status ruled out systematic documentation, making it by now a near-impossible task to establish when and where they were held, or even to decide what made a salon a salon and distinguished it from artistically flavored drinking bouts or unforeseen all-night conversations on the nature of poetry.

Memories of one of these salons have been put on record by Duoduo,<sup>90</sup> albeit fifteen years later: the 1972 salon around Xu Haoyuan, in which Experimental poetry in various stages of its development appeared on the boards. Xu Haoyuan had belonged to the first cohort of Red Guards and been in prison for writing a poem allegedly containing attacks by innuendo on Jiang Qing. After Xu's release she became the moving force behind a group of youngsters with a strong interest in Western culture, many of them poets or painters.

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<sup>88</sup> Bei Dao 1980 is the earliest collection of his poetry, published in the unofficial circuit. Zheng (1994 and personal communication, May 1994) mentions a privately stenciled collection (ca. 100 copies) of the same name preceding it as early as 1974 or 1975. In the PRC, no official collection came out until 1986 (revised edition in 1987), while many of the Chinese texts had already appeared in the American bilingual edition Bei Dao 1984. Bei Dao 1988b is a Taiwanese pirate edition based on Bei Dao 1986. Bei Dao 1993a, published in Hong Kong, contains poems from the late 1980s and the 1990s, many of which were first published in *Today*, reestablished outside China in 1990. Bei Dao's poetry has been translated into numerous languages and widely anthologized. English translations are Bei Dao 1984; 1988a; 1991a; 1994.

<sup>89</sup> Bei Dao 1990: 68.

<sup>90</sup> Duoduo 1988b. The following passage, on underground salons for literature and art in Beijing, is based on this piece and on Yang 1993: 95-96, 103.

Among the participants was the poet Yi Qun<sup>91</sup> (b. 1947), who had his heyday between the piping times of Guo Lusheng and the advent of the more radically Experimental poets. Yi Qun's *On the Hundredth Anniversary of the Paris Commune* displays an orthodox revolutionary spirit not readily associated with underground poetry, but the importance of his work lies in its form: free verse. Right after Guo had cast his personal feelings in a well-established mold, Yi Qun did the opposite, helping to pave the way for the later Obscure poets. His other traceable "representative work" (*daibiao zuo*) is *Chang'an Avenue*: twenty-some lines of grief over a lost love, in free verse and truly vernacular language. The personal feelings in *Chang'an Avenue* are much more candid than those in Guo's poetry, but Yi Qun's work has been less able than Guo's to stand the test of time and has by now all but disappeared from view.<sup>92</sup>

One need only think of the Yellow Books and translations in general to see that the free verse form cannot have been dependent on Yi Qun's mediation for reaching Experimental poets. But he was among the earliest to employ it in original Chinese poetry, and it was indeed the form of his work that left Duoduo deeply impressed when he started attending Xu Haoyuan's salon.

### Genzi

Genzi and Duoduo had not come there as poets but in their capacity as amateur singers; both hoped for a professional career in music but only Genzi would see his dream come true. It was not long before he made his claim to poethood as well, with immediate success. In late 1972 he had outshined Yi Qun as a poet and become

<sup>91</sup> Pseudonym of Yi Xiqun. When he published in *Today*, he also used the pen name Qi Yun.

<sup>92</sup> Apparently, Yi Qun stopped writing right after the Xu Haoyuan salon days. The inclusion of four of his poems in Tang 1993a seems motivated by historiographical rather than literary considerations. It is one of many examples of regard for completeness and systematicity in the series Xie & Tang 1993. But whereas Guo is given a seat of honor – an ample selection of his poems is presented early in the book – Yi Qun's seniority does not earn him such prominence, perhaps because by 1993 he was not part of or associated with the literary scene any more.

*On the Hundredth Anniversary of the Paris Commune (Jinian Bali gongshe yi bai zhounian)* is quoted in Yang 1993: 95-96. *The Paris Commune (Bali gongshe)* printed in Tang 1993a – following a first, unofficial, publication in *Today* # 3: 12-13 (1979) – is an entirely different poem, of which a variant version, presumably copied from personal notes, is included in Qi 1994a (1995). It is difficult to ascertain how faithful either poem is to what Yi Qun presented in Xu Haoyuan's salon, but the latter comes across as more mature and balanced writing. *Chang'an Avenue (Chang'an jie)* was included in the first official publication of Yi Qun's poetry 23 years after it was written: Tang 1993a: 264-265. This text shows minor differences with the version Zhao Zhenxian was kind enough to copy out for me on the basis of personal notes from the early 1970s still in his possession, and with the one published in *Today* # 3: 13-14.

a central figure in the salon where poetry was concerned. Considering the acclaim of his peers, one may with hindsight regard Genzi's prime as another indication of the rise of truly Experimental poetry, after Yi Qun's work and shoulder to shoulder with Mang Ke's. But soon an end was put to Genzi's halcyon years: in the summer of 1973 he was sought out and questioned by the police and some of his papers were confiscated. Apparently some miscreant had sent his poetry to the Public Security Bureau or alerted them to its heretic nature. The authorities solicited an expert opinion from an employee of the Research Institute for Chinese Literature of the Academy of Sciences, who judged that Genzi's work was harmless and thus preserved him from further danger. But the incident made him abruptly stop writing.

### *Duoduo*

By this time, Duoduo was coming into his own as a poet and gaining some recognition, after he had compiled a first collection of his poetry. When seen as part of an oeuvre now spanning more than two decades, his 1972 and 1973 poems are no typical examples of the style that would in later years ensure his significance as a poet. But his voice is recognizable from the start, as in the 1972 poem entitled *When the People Stand up from Their Snoring*:<sup>93</sup>

singing leaves out the bloodiness of revolution  
 August is like a cruel bow  
 the poisonous son walks out of the peasant hovel  
 carrying tobacco and a parched throat  
 beasts of burden are blindfolded with barbarous blinkers  
 on their haunches hang blackened corpses like swollen drums  
 until the sacrifice behind the fence blurs slowly too  
 in the distance, troops come marching again under clouds of smoke...

In Duoduo's later work the influence of Communist lingo – e.g. *the people, the bloodiness of revolution, sacrifice* – steadily declines, but in *When the People Stand up from Their Snoring* and other early poems it is still visible. Violence, explicit or implied, and the human or animal body have remained component parts of his poetry throughout. Conspicuous features of Duoduo's work are its capricious, headstrong

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<sup>93</sup> *Dang renmin cong ganhan shang zhan qi*, Duoduo 1989a: 1. The translation below is mine.

wording and imagery, sometimes making his words intractable or incomprehensible but often producing worthwhile surprise and shock in the reader.<sup>94</sup>

Duoduo never got the chance to present his poetry at one of the meetings organized by Xu Haoyuan. In 1973, just as he was getting into his stride, the salon disintegrated. The uncanny interest the police took in Genzi's poetry was the writing on the wall: it harbingered a worsening political climate that would soon paralyze Experimental poetry, right when underground poets in Beijing were quickly growing in number.

Mang Ke, Bei Dao, Yi Qun, Genzi and Duoduo were of course not alone in their undertaking, but each of these five poets actively partook in the Beijing underground literary scene of the early 1970s, and three were to become prominent authors and leave their marks on Experimental poetry. They would continue to do so after it freed itself from its underground status in the late 1970s and became known as Obscure poetry. They – and others – had written many an Obscure poem long before there was the remotest possibility of publication, underground, unofficial or official.<sup>95</sup> It was in the early 1970s of book-chasing and salons that the seeds were sown for the controversy of a decade later.

#### ZHAO YIFAN, UNDERGROUND COLLECTOR

A central figure in the underground literary scene in Beijing between roughly 1970 and 1974 was Zhao Yifan (1935-1988).<sup>96</sup> Born into a family of Party intellectuals, he had become exceptionally knowledgeable in the field of Chinese characters and character reform; he was a proofreader for new editions of classical literature and for language reference books. Apart from his linguistic interests, he also occupied

<sup>94</sup> Duoduo 1988a is a collection of his poetry officially published in the PRC, but the unofficially published Duoduo 1989a presents a more comprehensive and representative picture of his work. Since 1990 he has published his poetry in *Today*. Duoduo 1989b and 1995 are collections of his poetry in English translation. Since the late 1980s his poetry has been widely anthologized and translated into several languages.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Goodman 1981: 19, 37; Yeh 1992b: 380; Xie 1993b: 3; Wang (Guangming) 1993: 56. The absence from this discussion of "others" like Jiang He is also motivated by the limitations of source materials, and in no way meant as a value judgment of their art.

<sup>96</sup> Information on Zhao Yifan has been taken from the following sources: Bei Dao 1990 and 1992c; Yiping 1992; Yang 1993: 81-86, 295-298, 427-428; data collected during my fieldwork. Yang (1993: 83) correctly mentions Zhao's year of birth as 1935 but contradicts himself in the epilogue to his book by stating Zhao was 57 years old when he died, which would mean he was born in 1930 or 1931. Yang's book is full of inaccuracies: see, for instance, the epilogue section on Yue Zhong (Genzi), Mang Ke and Duoduo (428).



himself with literature and during the Cultural Revolution built up a colossal collection of underground manuscripts.

At the time of his involvement with the underground scene, he was still a fervent believer in Communist orthodoxy, but this did not entail his support for official cultural policies during the Ten Years of Chaos. Crippled from childhood, Zhao managed to cover great parts of Beijing on crutches, going out to the universities to copy out wall-posters and political pamphlets from different camps during the Cultural Revolution proper. In the early 1970s he accumulated a wealth of underground literature, charting developments in poetry and fiction in a meticulous inventory. Most underground literary authors belonged to a younger generation than his, but he was able to establish personal connections with them and gain their trust, because he was a generous lender of books and contributed to their initiation into foreign and out-of-bounds literature. Simultaneously, i.e. much earlier than most people, he took their own writing seriously. He circulated photographed copies of their poetry and fiction among kindred spirits, sparking off literary friendships between underground authors previously unknown to one another. Years later, when publication of these manuscripts became possible, his personal library turned out to include texts long ago lost by their authors and readers, or destroyed for fear of political repercussions.

His professional friendships existed on a private, not an organized or collective level and as such did not constitute a real salon: he did not arrange or host poetry recitals.<sup>97</sup> But as a collector and a distributor of underground literature, Zhao was unrivaled in Beijing.

One can imagine the shock wave that must have gone through the underground circuit when in January 1975 Zhao Yifan was arrested, his house searched and his collection confiscated by the police.<sup>98</sup> Not only had a mainstay of underground intellectual life been removed; the police had put their hands on formidable amounts of incriminating evidence on many a young author. Zhao's painstaking efforts to document underground literature now turned into a weapon in the hands of the authorities. As in the case of Genzi, they requested the assistance of men of letters

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<sup>97</sup> Yang's (1993, ch. 3) terms *salon* and *salon life* (*shalong shenghuo*) appear to denote personal ties in underground literary life rather than planned gatherings for recital etc. His claim that Zhao "presided over" or "directed" a "salon for literature and art" is contradicted by Bei Dao 1992c and Yiping 1992.

<sup>98</sup> Yang (1993: 295) and Yiping (1992: 230) incorrectly cite the year of Zhao's arrest as 1974. In Yang's book, this is inconsistent with the chronology of political developments outlined in ch. 11. Beijing Public Security Bureau documents issued after the confiscation of Zhao's archives are dated 1975. The accuracy of these documents has been confirmed by erstwhile acquaintances of Zhao (personal communication, March 1994).



to identify the political scheming undoubtedly hidden under the poetic surface. The experts' conclusion provided the key to what could, if compared with orthodox literature, only qualify as incoherent ravings: these inscrutable writings, presumably meant as poetry, had to be plagiarism of foreign examples. The experts may have been confirmed in their suspicions by the frequent – and often intentionally misleading – use of foreign-sounding names in underground literature, in the texts themselves and as pseudonyms of their authors.

When Zhao was arrested, it was for his alleged involvement with the Fourth International. His links with it had been deduced from a network of letter-writing which had sprung up around him in recent years: through the use of his library and through his personal introduction, many intellectually active young people got to know each other, sometimes building up friendships by mail. In their correspondence they did not limit themselves to appraising works of art but discussed politics as well. Their "organization", an inflated concept as used by paranoid political leaders, was termed the "Counter-Revolutionary Clique of the Fourth International", Zhao was branded the main culprit and an active counter-revolutionary, and apparently more than ten people were apprehended and convicted in direct connection with the affair. Zhao was charged with an impressive list of crimes: holding underground salons for literature and art; writing, collecting and circulating reactionary prose and poetry; establishing reactionary ties for vicious attacks on the central leadership and the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius; organizing the Counter-Revolutionary Clique of the Fourth International; maintaining illicit relations with foreign countries to overturn the dictatorship of the proletariat.

By the time of his release in November 1976, he had spent almost two years in prison and his health had deteriorated accordingly. Like that of many others such as Zhang Langlang, his ordeal became painfully meaningless when two years later a brief Public Security Bureau document flatly stated that all charges had been false and Zhao was rehabilitated.<sup>99</sup>

His collection had been returned to him after his release; the authorities had in the meantime been able to make facsimiles of anything they wanted. Bei Dao, for instance, was told by a friend that his file in the archives of the Public Security Bureau was enormous, chock-full of his "unripe manuscripts", long before any of them would be published officially or otherwise.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> *Conclusion to the re-investigation of [the case of] comrade Zhao Yifan*, copied out by erstwhile acquaintances of Zhao.

<sup>100</sup> Bei Dao 1990: 69.

Zhao's collection became extra valuable some years later, when underground literature surfaced in people-run and official publications. But in the 1980s, as Experimental poetry came to occupy its rightful place under the sun, progressive literary circles were less and less dependent on activists like Zhao and their interest in him dwindled. In 1982 he set up a private printing shop with the aim of issuing materials from his original collection. He was unable to handle the commercial aspects of his new occupation well: after his death in 1988, brought on by his poor health and constant overwork, creditors turned up and the business proved to have been a financial disaster. The tragic story of Zhao Yifan found an appropriate ending when a family servant sold off the greater part of his archives, including his collection of underground literature: as waste paper.

#### ENCIRCLEMENT AND SUPPRESSION: THE HUNT FOR HIDDEN LITERATURE

Genzi's brush with the authorities and Zhao Yifan's imprisonment were symptoms of intensified repression.<sup>101</sup> In the first half of 1974 literature and art once more became areas of interest for the ultra-left political faction associated with Jiang Qing, after its downfall in 1976 labeled the "Gang of Four". As customary in the PRC, works of art were used to create leverage in the struggle for political power, this time by the ultra-left attacking premier Zhou Enlai. The revived Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius now also entailed criticizing "the Duke of Zhou", and had as its aim to "consolidate and develop the great achievements of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution", thus heralding the turn of the tide: an end had come to the relaxation of political pressure following Lin Biao's fall from grace in September 1971. The people were urged to "beat back the resurgence of the black line of counter-revolutionary revisionist literature and art", and the past decade was hailed as the "pioneering age of proletarian literature and art" – a rather optimistic view of the cultural wasteland writers and artists had been made to inhabit. With the exception of the famous model operas monopolizing cultural life,<sup>102</sup> virtually all writing was branded "poisonous weeds".<sup>103</sup>

In this worsening political climate salon life in Beijing disintegrated. Close friends with a passion for literature could stay in touch, but the lively and large-scale underground cultural scene of the early 1970s crumbled. Its "encirclement and

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<sup>101</sup> The following passage, on the crumbling of the early 1970s underground literary scene, is based on Duoduo 1988b; Bei Dao 1992c; Yang 1993: 293-295.

<sup>102</sup> On model operas – or, to use Bonnie McDougall's "cumbersome but correct" term, revolutionary model theatrical works – see Fokkema 1972: ch. 9 and McDougall 1984b: 292-295.

<sup>103</sup> Slogans quoted in Yang 1993: 294.

suppression"<sup>104</sup> were complete when in the fall of 1974 Yao Wenyuan, one of those later labeled the Gang of Four, decreed the "ferreting out" on a nationwide scale of underground literature. Public Security officials were ordered to confiscate manuscripts wherever possible; work units and schools demanded that their members and students present any private writings and report on each other's underground literary activities. The investigation yielded a huge body of underground writings. Predictably, numerous active counter-revolutionaries were exposed and taken to task, Zhao Yifan being a case in point. The result was that underground literature became enveloped in fear. For years to come, it would once more be forced to keep a low profile.

#### TIANANMEN 1976: WHAT KIND OF UNDERGROUND POETRY?

Underground poetry in the PRC acquired true political significance on 5 April 1976.<sup>105</sup> In January Premier Zhou Enlai had died; although a memorial service was held, public lament by the masses was discouraged. All the same, the April festival for remembering the dead brought on widespread mourning for Zhou. Starting in the final days of March, Beijing citizens showed their grief on Tiananmen Square by covering the foot of the Monument for the People's Heroes with wreaths and poetry eulogizing the late Premier. As a politician, Zhou's image had been that of a paragon of reason and moderation, who had proved invaluable on several occasions of delicate diplomacy and countervailed representatives of the ultra-left. The people's expression of sympathy for someone who had been a rival political force to reckon with implied discontent with the present. Responding to the challenge, the authorities had the wreaths and poems removed and the Square cordoned off on 4 April, further angering their subjects. On 5 April the largest crowd yet forced its way onto the Square and came close to running havoc. In reaction to the regime's display of force, the people replaced the wreaths with new ones, again accompanied by poems in remembrance of Zhou and denouncing the current leadership. There was no public

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<sup>104</sup> Yang (1993: 291) uses the term (*weijiao*) in his chapter title. It is reminiscent of the fruitless annihilation campaigns the Nationalists carried out against the Communists during the Civil War. While in the PRC military terminology also tends to occur in connection with events not normally associated with warfare, *encirclement and suppression* does justice to the violent treatment literature and art have over the past half century suffered at the hands of the authorities.

<sup>105</sup> This discussion of the Tiananmen Incident and the "Tiananmen Poems" as an example of dissent and, more specifically, underground literature is based on McDougall 1979a: 53-55 and 1984b: 296; Seymour 1980: 7; Goodman 1981: 12-13 and 29-35; Siu & Stern 1983: xxxv-xxxvii; Bei Dao 1992c; Yang 1993: ch. 15; Hong & Liu 1993: 228-234.

address equipment, but the poems were openly recited on the Square and passed on orally line by line.

These events were no less than a political demonstration against the current leadership, albeit one that had not been planned or organized. The backlash was not long in coming: when the crowd showed its readiness for disorder and paid no heed to requests to leave, public security troops moved in at dusk and cleared the Square, scattering the demonstrators, reportedly killing some and injuring and arresting scores of others. On 7 April the events were officially labeled counter-revolutionary. Arrests continued after what came to be known as the Tiananmen Incident, ushering in a final wave of repression before the end of the ultra-left reign later that year.

### *No Experimental Poetry*

The crucial role of the poetry recitals on the Square is clear: they gave an articulate voice to widely felt grievances concerning the way China was being ruled, and increased the cohesion of the crowd and of its message to the authorities. But the poems of Tiananmen Square in April 1976 are part of political rather than literary history and must be distinguished from the Experimental poetry that underground authors in Beijing had been writing for some years.<sup>106</sup>

The great majority of the "Tiananmen Poems" were written along the lines of folk songs or well-known classical forms, and thus adhered to Establishment rules for poetic form. As indictments of the current leadership they were at odds with ideological prescriptions for literature and agitated against the same enemy as did Experimental poetry, but from a different angle, in a different style and with a different goal altogether.

The Tiananmen Poems are literature made subordinate to politics, in a bitter way echoing Mao's demands of the arts. And Chinese history goes further back than the Yan'an *Talks*: one can also categorize them as "Art for Life's Sake", as opposed to "Art for Art's Sake", a dichotomy stemming from the 1920s. Most convincingly, one can view them as a continuation of an age-old Chinese tradition: poetry as the upright expression of one's own and the people's feelings in the face of adversity,

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<sup>106</sup> Since it is impossible to reconstruct the exact content of the recitals in the Square, this passage is based on Tong 1978, an official collection published after the Incident's counter-revolutionary label had been removed. As McDougall (1979a: 53-55) has pointed out, the political hues of *post hoc* canonization of originally underground materials warrant certain doubts regarding their authenticity once they appear in a sanctioned format. McDougall's discussion includes a history of the various collections – official and other – of Tiananmen Poems in the PRC and in Hong Kong. See also Goodman 1981: 18, 34 and 28 (notes 44, 45) and Hong & Liu 1993: 230. For English renditions of the Tiananmen Poems, see Xiao Lan 1979.

literature as a venting of indignation at the ruler's aberrations.<sup>107</sup> The Tiananmen Poems are intentionally political, time- and place-bound literature: for their appreciation, they depend on the reader's knowledge of their historical *raison d'être*.

Authors of Experimental poetry, on the other hand, had been attempting to sever the self-evident connection between literature and politics, whether manifest in praise or blame. The Tiananmen Poems were written to commemorate an historical occasion; Experimental poetry was written out of an urge to write.

In 1976 both still qualified as underground literature by any standard, but the intrinsic overlap between the Tiananmen Poems and the Experimental poetry of the first half of the 1970s is negligible.<sup>108</sup> This does not detract from the added momentum the Incident and the Poems gave to the growing dissent in PRC society. To some extent Experimental poetry was one manifestation of that dissent, and in that sense the Incident provided support. But this would hold for any manifestation of dissent, whether expressed through the poetic medium or another. The Tiananmen Poems had no immanent literary importance for the development of Experimental poetry.

#### 1978: UNDERGROUND POETRY ABOVE GROUND

Less than two months after Mao Zedong's death in September 1976, an end was put to the reign of terror exercised by the faction associated with his wife Jiang Qing. Under Mao's appointed successor Hua Guofeng PRC politics showed inclinations toward pragmatism, away from the extreme repression of the Cultural Revolution. This course of events culminated in the comeback of Deng Xiaoping, which was confirmed during the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee in December 1978. With the beginning of Deng's rule and his commitment to reform, various aspects of society saw a degree of liberalization. In this changed political climate

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<sup>107</sup> Cf. McDougall 1984b: 296. Simon Leys (1978: xix) has in his usual apposite way outlined the continuity in Chinese literary history (from Qu Yuan to Lu Xun) of what he calls "the writer's *permanent alienation* from political authority".

<sup>108</sup> Within three years both would be part of the official circuit, albeit to differing degrees. For the fundamental difference between these two types of poetry, cf. You 1991: 35-36; Hong & Liu 1993: 234; Xie 1995b: 7. The connection between the Tiananmen Poems and Obscure (Misty) poetry suggested by Donald Finkel (1991: front flap) is fictitious (see chapter three: FOREIGN ATTENTION and chapter eight: RECEPTIONS BY OTHER READERS, *Translations*).

Experimental poetry could finally break its silence.<sup>109</sup> But not until the mid-1980s would it become an established, albeit controversial phenomenon.

A critical moment had been reached when in November 1978 the Beijing Party Committee reversed the verdict on the uproar on Tiananmen Square of two years earlier. Previously the Tiananmen Incident had been classified as a "counter-revolutionary incident"; now it turned out to have been a "completely revolutionary event",<sup>110</sup> a spontaneous expression of the people's feelings cast into the mold of poetry. Closely linked to the return of Deng Xiaoping, who had in 1976 been blamed for the incident and dismissed from his posts,<sup>111</sup> this official rewriting of history helped trigger the Democracy Movement of 1978-1979. Beijing underground circles in literature, but mostly those with an interest in politics, grasped the implications of the decision and began pasting up wall-posters to make themselves seen and heard. Starting in the final days of November they published a host of texts, among which was Wei Jingsheng's famous *The Fifth Modernization: Democracy and Other Things*.<sup>112</sup> That the posters would be torn off by the police, or else perish quickly in the outside air, helped motivate some authors to mimeograph the texts and distribute them as magazines. The display of posters and, from December onward, the distribution of magazines centered around a wall on Xidan Avenue in central Beijing that became known as Democracy Wall (*Minzhu qiang*). This location turned into a meeting place where a desire for political and cultural democracy was publicly voiced.

These activities were not wholly unprecedented. In early October a group of poets-cum-political activists called the Enlightenment Society (*Qimeng she*) from Guiyang had come to Beijing and left underground circles there awe-struck by putting up wall-posters filled with poetry and heterodox political slogans in the center of town.<sup>113</sup> The *Symphony of the God of Fire*<sup>114</sup> by the group's leader, Huang

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<sup>109</sup> On cultural developments during the Hua Guofeng interregnum (1976-1978) see Eber 1979. Some of the numerous sources on the political thaw of 1978 and literary aspects of the ensuing Democracy Movement are Seymour 1980; Bergvelt & Van Rappard 1981; Goodman 1981; Benton 1982a; Siu & Stern 1983: xiii-l; Nathan 1985; Bei Dao 1990; I have also made use of Bei Dao 1992c.

<sup>110</sup> Goodman 1981: 35.

<sup>111</sup> Nathan 1985: 10.

<sup>112</sup> See Seymour 1980: 47-69 for an English translation. Chinese sources are given in Seymour 1980: 284 (note 3 to section 2).

<sup>113</sup> See McDougall 1979a: 64-65; Seymour 1980: sect. 1, 15; Goodman 1981: 4, 44, 59 and 63; Nathan 1985: ch. 1; Zhu 1985; Bei Dao 1990: 70; Woodman 1993; especially Liu 1994. I collected additional data during my fieldwork.

<sup>114</sup> *Huoshen jiaoxiang shi*. Its title literally translates as *Symphonic Poem of the God of Fire*. The cycle's constituent parts were written between 1969 and 1975. McDougall (1979a: 64-65) notes its affinity with Guo Moruo's early work. In 1979 it appeared in the first issue of *Enlightenment (Qimeng)*, an unofficial publication by the Enlightenment Society totaling five issues. It is also included in the unofficial collection



Xiang (b. 1941), denounced the horrors of the Cultural Revolution, including the April 1976 suppression of the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, weeks before their counter-revolutionary label was removed. The slogans were pasted onto the hoardings around the work-site of Mao Zedong's mausoleum in Tiananmen Square on 24 November. They questioned Mao's infallibility and the launching of the Cultural Revolution, and deplored the depths to which the Chinese rulers had sunk from their glorious past. That these daredevils from the South were not arrested may have been because Deng Xiaoping had a use for them: the leniency displayed could rally support among intellectuals. It certainly encouraged Bei Dao and Mang Ke, who had been playing with the idea of making some of their own and their peers' work public by setting up an unofficial magazine for literature and art, together with the painter Huang Rui.

When the moment came that such an undertaking seemed no longer tantamount to a request for persecution, they were prepared. On 23 and 24 December 1978, five weeks after the reversal of the 1976 verdict on the Tiananmen Incident, they put up the opening issue of *Today (Jintian)* in about ten different places in Beijing.<sup>115</sup> *Today* was among the first to appear of a series of unofficial magazines founded in late 1978 and early 1979. From the start, its editors proclaimed it to be a literary magazine; in selecting contributions they championed the criterion of artistic quality. This made *Today* stand out among other magazines, most of which concerned

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Huang (Xiang) 1992: Vol. II: 184-208. This collection, updated to 1993, was scheduled to appear as an official publication with the Zuoja Press in October 1994, but apparently forbidden before it went to press. In late 1994 Huang Xiang went to court over the matter, at this writing still to no avail. Seymour 1980 (sect. 15) contains an English translation of parts of *Symphony of the God of Fire* and a commentary by Li Jiahua, member of the Enlightenment Society.

An officially published, extensive selection from Huang Xiang's poetry (including the cycle) can be found in Tang 1993a: 1-24, indicating a "revival" not unlike that of Guo Lusheng in recent years – Huang's poetry actually opens the anthology – but still largely in the unofficial circuit. Huang's mention in the anthology's preface as well as Xie Mian's (1995b: 8-12) discussion of his work in *Shi tansuo* indicate a recognition long overdue. The first of the six poems making up *Symphony of the God of Fire: Song of the Torch (Huoju zhi ge)*, had appeared in the official circuit over a decade earlier, in a 1982 issue of the Guiyang magazine *Brook of flowers (Huaxi)*.

In 1986, Huang *cum suis* brought out more of their poetry and poetics (*shixue*) in an unofficial publication (Huang 1986b) presented to Beijing's *Poetry (Shikan)* magazine's editors in a spectacular fashion: pasted onto the body of one of Huang's disciples. Huang Xiang's poetry was published in Chinese outside the PRC in Zhu 1985 and Huang 1986a.

Zhu 1985 and Woodman 1993 contain extensive biographical information on Huang Xiang.

<sup>115</sup> The following passage, on *Today*, is based on the original publications (see the bibliography) and on Goodman 1981; McDougall 1979a; Bei Dao 1990 and 1992c; my fieldwork. Xu (1985) and Zheng (1994) have touched on connections between *Today* and unofficial visual artists. Since it was doubtless the most important channel for the emergence of Experimental poetry, I will not dwell on any of the other Democracy Wall publications. For a systematic discussion of these, see Seymour 1980; Nathan 1985; Yi Mu 1986.

themselves more with the socio-political state of affairs in China. Later, *Today's* declared lack of involvement in politics would prolong its lifespan after other unofficial magazines had been forced to cease publication.

*Today's* editors throughout were Bei Dao and Mang Ke. Zhao Zhenkai and Jiang Shiwei had given each other these pen names for the same reason that had made them paint over their bicycles' license plates on 23 December: their personal safety. They were the magazine's founders, abandoned by others on the editorial board after conflicts following the appearance of the first issue, but the production of the magazine would have been impossible without the help of tens of volunteers. One of them was E Fuming (b. 1950), better known as Lao E, whom the Cultural Revolution had retrained to be a shepherd in Inner Mongolia for thirteen years. Back in Beijing, Lao E soon made himself indispensable for the practical management – especially the physical production – of *Today*. He had a knack for technical matters as well as views of literature compatible with those of Bei Dao and Mang Ke. Combined with his selflessness and modesty, these qualities started him on an after-hours and backstage career as a technician in Beijing underground and unofficial poetry circles. *Today's* first issue contained blank pages for interested parties to identify themselves or leave comments, but no editorial address for correspondence. From the second issue onward the editors openly solicited subscriptions and disclosed their whereabouts: the "office" was located at the house of Liu Nianchun,<sup>116</sup> in central Beijing: in the Dongsì area, 14<sup>th</sup> Street, # 76.

*Today* carried Chinese Experimental poetry, fiction, and essays as well as literary criticism, and translations and introductions of foreign literature. Naturally, a considerable part of the contents of its first few issues was selected from the large supply of "drawer literature" (*chouti wenxue*) – a popular term for manuscripts unpublishable for political reasons – written in preceding years. At the same time, the appearance of the magazine tremendously stimulated Experimental writing. A number of by now well-known Experimental poets first published in this mimeographed milestone in PRC literary history: Mang Ke, Bei Dao, Shu Ting<sup>117</sup> (b. 1952), Jiang He, Yang Lian (b. 1955), Gu Cheng (1956-1993), Duoduo.<sup>118</sup> Among the works it carried were poems famous to this day, like Bei Dao's *The Answer*,

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<sup>116</sup> Brother of the leading Democracy Movement activist Liu Qing, and himself a political activist to this day. On Liu Qing, see Benton 1982a: 135-156.

<sup>117</sup> Pseudonym of Gong Shuting.

<sup>118</sup> Yang Lian first published as Fei Sha, later under his real name (# 8 and 9 respectively). Gu Cheng's first publication was under a near-homophonous pen name (# 8), later abandoned for his real name (*Materials for Internal Exchange*, # 1 and 3). Duoduo used the pseudonym Bai Ye (*Materials...*, # 3).



Mang Ke's *Poem for October*, Shu Ting's *The Oak Tree* and Jiang He's *Memorial*.<sup>119</sup> Most of the poetry in *Today* was in free verse. It showed the influence of foreign literature, and a decided preference for the personal over the political, the private over the public, the individual over the collective – a preference for Art over Life, and no more talk of subordination of one to the other.

In an introductory piece to the first issue called *To the Reader*,<sup>120</sup> the *Today* editorial board welcomed the opportunity it had been granted by history but also stressed that their generation could wait no longer. They wisely cited Marx as having advocated diversity in spiritual life, and blamed the Gang of Four for its drab monotony in contemporary China. After recognizing the worth of literature from the Republican era – also an act of courage, for such literature had long been called "bourgeois" – they claimed that its authors had fallen behind the times and were unable to catch up with the new epoch that had started with the 1976 Tiananmen Incident. The task of reflecting that epoch in writing had thus come to rest on the shoulders of the young. The authors of *To the Reader* had high hopes: for a deepening of man's understanding of freedom of the spirit, for a rejuvenation of China's ancient culture. But in a crucial passage they pleaded for a "horizontal" look at the world across the Chinese borders, to complement an appraisal of the indigenous tradition.

At the height of its popularity the magazine had subscribers throughout the country. It appeared in editions of 1000 copies; a second printing of the first issue, in October 1979, ran another 1500. The price per copy varied from 0.40 to 0.60 yuan, depending on the cost of production. On 1 April and 9 September 1979, *Today's* readers, authors and editors formally gathered for an exchange of views. From April 1979 until December 1980, monthly *Discussion Meetings* (*Zuopin taolun hui*) were held, at which potential contributors presented their work; these have been remembered by Bei Dao as "the largest salons Beijing ever saw".

In 1979 *Today* organized two unofficial but public poetry readings, on 8 April and 21 October; on the latter occasion a special booklet was printed. Lao E was in charge of the sound systems, whose installation was not exactly a routine job at the time. Like the 1962 performance by Zhang Langlang's troupe, these happenings featured foreign poetry in Chinese translation as well as the writings of Chinese Experimental poets. They attracted large crowds, including not a few foreigners and of course the police. Although first and foremost literary events they obviously had political significance, for in 1979 it became progressively clearer that the regime's tolerance with regard to Democracy Wall and the mutinous tendencies it represented

<sup>119</sup> *Today* # 1 (1978): 31-32; # 2 (1979): 1-5; # 3 (1979): 1-12; # 1 (1978): 25-26.

<sup>120</sup> *Zhi duzhe*, in: *Today* # 1: 1-2 (1978, reprint in 1979).

had been conditional and temporary. On 29 March the most radical and vocal activist, Wei Jingsheng, was arrested; he was soon followed by many others. In view of the increased political tension, *Today's* April recital was almost canceled. When it had gone through, Bei Dao and Mang Ke briefly went into hiding. The second recital, on 21 October, took place days after Wei Jingsheng had been sentenced to 15 years in prison and more arrests had been made when crowds gathered around Democracy Wall to protest against the verdict.<sup>121</sup>

In December 1979 the authorities announced that Democracy Wall would be moved to a location in the suburbs of Beijing. Deng Xiaoping's leniency was coming to an end, quickened by critical voices' refusal to limit themselves to the past. People-run publications would from now on be subject to all kinds of regulations: authors would have to register and request permission for putting up posters. Under growing pressure, all magazines had ceased publication in early 1980, with the exception of *Today* and the politically oriented *April Fifth Forum* (*Siwu luntan*).

But neither *Today's* refusal to take a political stand nor the funds it had acquired from its subscribers could safeguard its existence in the end. In September the Public Security Bureau issued a first warning. It declared *Today* unlawful because it had failed to register, and ordered an immediate end to publication, circulation and sale. As a matter of fact, attempts at registering had remained and would remain without reply from the authorities. To invalidate the charge, the Today Group for the Study of Literature (*Jintian wenxue yanjiu hui*) was established. In a bitter quirk of history, it would compile and circulate *Materials for Internal Exchange* (*Neibu jiaoliu ziliao*) in October, November and December, printed in editions of 600 copies each. Superficially setting their own limits – "internal exchange" – these were in fact a continuation of the magazine, still publishing if no longer selling Experimental poetry. The first set of *Materials* closed with this act of bravery by the editors:

#### IN REPLY TO LETTERS FROM THE READERS OF *TODAY*

Recently, readers from all quarters have written to us, expressing their concern over the fact that *Today* # 10 has not, after all this time, appeared. Below is a note on this matter from the editors:

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<sup>121</sup> Wei was released in September 1993, fourteen-and-a-half years after his arrest, and once more detained in April 1994. Previously, numerous international appeals for his release had failed. Over the years, he has become the PRC's most bitterly famous political prisoner. In 1979 he was charged with leaking State Secrets regarding the Sino-Vietnamese war, in 1994 he was detained on "to be investigated for suspected new crimes" (*International Herald Tribune*, 15 April 1994); in 1995 he was formally accused of having wanted to "overthrow the government and the state" after his 1993 release (*NRC Handelsblad*, 22 November 1995).

1 On grounds provided by the 1951 Government Administration Council *Temporary Measure regarding the Registration of Magazines* and the regulations drafted in July of this year by the State Publication Bureau in the spirit of the relevant State Council documents, the Beijing Public Security Bureau claims that *Today* has not gone through the requirements for registration and may therefore not be published and circulated; otherwise, the magazine will be closed down and its printing and publication obstructed. We have been forced to interrupt the printing of *Today* # 10.

2 This interruption of our work is to avoid a major "situation" as well as possible financial losses. Also, bearing in mind that our country's legal system has its imperfections and the relevant legislation is in the process of being worked out, we exercise restraint and await a reasonable solution of the problem. We have delivered an application for registration to the department in charge, and sent an open letter to Beijing people from all walks of life, in a call for support for and solidarity with our demands.

3 We solemnly declare that we retain the right to resume publication of *Today* at any time. We believe that clause 45 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, on freedom of publication, gives us this sacred civil right. There is no question of *Today* being illegal; it is the legislation regarding freedom of publication that is imperfect. It is not that *Today* does not go by the law, it is that there is no law to go by.

4 In line with the aims put forward in *Today's* inaugural issue (see *To the Reader* in # 1), we continue our activities in the field of creation and study of literature. To this purpose, we have decided to found the *Today Group for the Study of Literature* and to recruit members for the *Group*. Its bylaws are to be discussed and passed at the *Group's* founding meeting. The *Group* will convene for discussion, reports, poetry recitals, printing and circulation of materials for internal circulation etc.

5 We are thankful for the support and concern of all subscribers, for public expressions of solidarity inside China and abroad. We will do our utmost to resume publication of *Today* as soon as possible, to fulfil the people's expectations. It is our hope that all subscribers grant the *Today Group for the Study of Literature* their moral and financial support.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> *Today, Materials... # 1: 24-25.*

In the *Group's* second set of *Materials* the bylaws were published. They stipulated that there was to be a membership fee, presumably because funds could no longer be obtained through sale of the magazine.<sup>123</sup>

But in December the police advised the editors that arrests would be made if they continued their activities, and *Today* went out of business altogether.

Nine regular issues of the magazine and three sets of *Materials* had been compiled and published. Also, four books in editions of 1000 copies each had in 1980 come out in what was called the *Today Series*: individual collections of Mang Ke's, Bei Dao's and Jiang He's poetry, and a novel by Bei Dao under the pen name Ai Shan.<sup>124</sup>

*Today* had been the first-ever unofficial literary publication in the PRC, and its appearance marked a watershed in literary history.<sup>125</sup> Not only did it take underground Experimental poetry from the stage of small-scale circulation of manuscripts to that of typewritten, reproducible texts meant for distribution outside the narrow circle of one's friends and acquaintances; it also served as the avenue through which Experimental poetry entered the official circuit. Already in 1979, some of the poems from *Today* appeared in *Poetry (Shikan)*, the most important official poetry magazine in the PRC, showing that this poetry's appeal might not be limited to an unofficial literary scene. More than anything else, this proved that China's rulers no longer felt the need or the power to exercise total ideological control over the literary world. Through *Today*, Experimental poetry had made itself heard and questioned the unquestionable connection between literature and politics.

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<sup>123</sup> *Today, Materials... # 2*: 30. The membership fee was not specified.

<sup>124</sup> Mang Ke 1980; Bei Dao 1980; Jiang 1980; Ai Shan 1980. Almost a decade later, the *Today* Editorial Board brought out the unofficial collection *Duoduo* 1989a.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Yeh 1992b: 379 and Xie 1993b: 1.

## Chapter three

### EXPERIMENTAL POETRY SINCE 1979

If the connection between politics and literature had been questioned, it had not been severed or even reduced to what artists interested in art *per se* might have found acceptable proportions. Cultural policy in the late 1970s held a promise of relaxation which would over the years grudgingly be fulfilled, but the 1980s and after still saw the familiar alternation of repression and tolerance. The adventures of Experimental poetry reflect this unstable climate. Still, tolerance had visibly gained on repression. For the years after the Cultural Revolution, as opposed to the first three decades of PRC literature, a literary history in which poetry is a function of political events would be seriously incomplete. One written from the vantage point of poetry itself, on the other hand, would have to deal with an overabundance of materials.

One need not even attempt to write a history of Experimental poetry since 1979 to risk drowning in texts. Research on selected aspects of the subject is enough to open the floodgates; the sketchiness of the following is a survival technique. In this chapter the focus remains on "the kind of" poetry of which *Today* was the first organized, large-scale manifestation.<sup>1</sup> If Beijing gets disproportionate attention, that should not make developments there seem intrinsically more interesting than what happened elsewhere. But it was in Beijing that *Today* appeared and although Experimental poetry found similar outlets in other places, Beijing has continued to generate poetic activity to this day.

#### WHAT IS EXPERIMENTAL POETRY, OTHER THAN WHAT IT IS NOT?

Because Michelle Yeh's concept of Experimental poetry is negatively defined, it accommodates different types of poetry: Guo Lusheng's naive spirit of resistance, Mang Ke's enthralling fairy tales, Bei Dao's noble indignation and Duoduo's headstrong nightmares are all "beyond the pale".<sup>2</sup> So are Gu Cheng's, Jiang He's, Shu Ting's and Yang Lian's work, to name four other early poets; so is the varied work of dozens of later poets, and so is the later work of the early poets. Against the backdrop of a literature which was for decades forced to stay within the boundaries set by totalitarian rulers, Yeh's "beyond the pale" is a fitting turn of phrase:

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<sup>1</sup> Where no sources are given for statements which are not common knowledge, they are based on my fieldwork. A brief introduction to contemporary trends in Chinese poetry and their origins can be found in Yeh 1993: 279-282.

<sup>2</sup> Yeh's (1992b: 379) definition is quoted in the opening paragraph of chapter two.

Experimental poetry from the PRC – often called *New Tide poetry* (*xinshi chao*) in PRC criticism – is that which is invisible from within the walls of orthodoxy.<sup>3</sup>

There are more gratifying ways to describe it, and Chinese and foreign critics have done so since the early 1980s, Michelle Yeh herself being one of the most knowledgeable, articulate and prolific authors on the subject. In the Chinese context, the essence of Experimental poetry lies in the individuality of its authors' works and in its pluriformity as a whole. A quick and none-too-nuanced review of turning points in the life of the Self in PRC poetry to date may be in order here. One: in 1950s and 1960s orthodox poetry, the first person is a "big I" (*da wo*) or "we": bigger not just than man but also than Everyman, ever more collective and faceless, in total subordination to a particularly dehumanizing type of politics. Two: in the 1976 Tiananmen Poems, the first person is faceless and collective too, but stands in opposition to contemporary rule, to the abuse of an authority that is otherwise willingly recognized. Neither "big I" is a human Self. Three: while the first person in Guo Lusheng's work of the late 1960s also protests against contemporary rule, it is not collective. But if this "I" is no longer faceless and indulges in heresies like romantic love, it is still rather nondescript: a humble, well-behaved, innocent moralist, a model character of sorts, unstained by any form of irony. Four: in Obscure poetry, political protest is aimed at the System itself, not just its excesses, and attempts are made to ban politics from poetry altogether. But to some extent, the very battle is fought on – and often *in* – orthodoxy's terms. If this Self is now and then an innocent moralist, it is far from humble or well behaved, therefore less nondescript and more of an individual than the Self in Guo Lusheng's poetry. Conspicuous imagery is among its distinguishing characteristics. Five, or a corollary to four: in the China of the 1980s, the Catch-22 that to reject politics is a political act steadily loses its validity. Irony makes its advent in a poetry called "newborn", treated later in this chapter.

In sum, the first outburst of Experimental poetry marked a rehumanization of the Self and the return of the individual, who had been made to disappear from Chinese literature in the late 1930s. Many subsequent trends and developments can be subsumed under these two tendencies, which grew stronger as the 1980s unfolded.

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<sup>3</sup> Trends outside those walls can in many ways be called experimental in the general sense of the word, i.e. 'tentative' or 'exploratory', but in the present discussion the term is used – with capital E – to denote a category in PRC literary history rather than characteristics of literary texts or the writing process.

## THE CONTROVERSY OVER OBSCURE POETRY

The changes following Deng Xiaoping's 1978 return to power affected Chinese society on all levels. Crudely summarized and in terms of the then prevalent slogans, they opened up China. Contact with the outside world was reestablished, while within the country's borders a move away from rigid, dogmatic uniformity was initiated. Literature was no longer required to be a mere vehicle for ideology, and important Maoist aspects of ideology were debunked. The new regime made an effort to woo estranged and intimidated intellectuals and artists, whose skills it needed for its ambitious modernization program. After their appearance in *Today*, specimens of Experimental poetry, e.g. works by Bei Dao, Gu Cheng and Shu Ting, were published in mainstream state-run magazines from 1979 onward. The poets' status was that of victims of the Cultural Revolution whose redressal had become official policy, which helped legitimize their writings.

Still, it would have been unthinkable for the entire (anti-)cultural heritage of Communist rule in China to vanish overnight. And indeed, in 1980 the leadership was intent on tightening the screws once more. In February of that year, a patina of broad-mindedness could not – and was of course not meant to – hide the gist of a lengthy speech by Hu Yaobang, Secretary General of the Party: after a frivolous interlude, it was now time for literature and art to get back in line.<sup>4</sup> Hu laid out a range of well-tried instruments to discourage overly enthusiastic writers and dismissed autonomy for literature in a familiar jargon: "healthy" literature's "social effect", its "model role" and the like. His speech represented not just the government but a considerable part of the literary Establishment, more or less rehabilitated but with fresh memories of its near-complete demise during the Cultural Revolution. The spirit responsible for literature's servitude to politics lingered in many minds.

Under these circumstances, the violent dispute following hints of official recognition for Experimental poetry did not come as a bolt from the blue. Intertwined with the issue of "Modernism" in contemporary Chinese literature,<sup>5</sup> an intense and protracted controversy raged between 1979 and 1984 and gave the first generation of Experimental poets their label of Obscurity. In the course of the debate works by Bei Dao, Gu Cheng, Jiang He and Yang Lian evoked both disdain and admiration. Shu Ting's work, less controversial and more widely read, was accepted by the Establishment early on and functioned as a go-between: her association with other poets who had

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<sup>4</sup> Hu 1980.

<sup>5</sup> On the issue of "Modernism", see He 1984 and Geremie Barmé's (1984) excellent introduction to the article. See also Pollard 1985, which focuses on the poetry component of the debate.



published in *Today* had a mitigating effect on the charges brought against them.<sup>6</sup> Although it caused authors and critics grave trouble at the time, in retrospect the discussion appears to have been instrumental in making Experimental poetry a recognized part of Chinese literary history.

The controversy over Obscure poetry (*Menglong shi lunzheng*) unfolded in the pages of authoritative literary magazines and national newspapers, as well as in local media throughout the country.<sup>7</sup> A 1989 collection of texts constituting the debate contains a guide for further reading which lists over 700 items;<sup>8</sup> if the following outline does no justice to the controversy's ramifications, it may serve to give an impression of what it was about, who some of its protagonists were and what positions they took.

The debate involved poets of older generations, literary critics – or, rather, critics publishing under the heading "literature" – and the Obscure poets themselves. The last group, insofar as they were given the chance to make themselves heard, were not about to question their own writings' quality or legitimacy.<sup>9</sup> Some of the older poets such as Gong Liu and Gu Gong displayed a benevolent if patronizing attitude.<sup>10</sup> While expressing bewilderment and anger, and offering "guidance", they took the new poetry seriously and searched their own hearts: could it be that the young poets were right in their low regard for orthodox literature? Had the older generation left modern Chinese poetry in such a sorry state as to be responsible for this deviationism? Not all older poets reacted in such a friendly manner. Zang Kejia and Ai Qing, for instance, could sadly be seen to fulminate against values they had once themselves pursued before an end was put to artistic freedom decades earlier.<sup>11</sup> Zang being a renowned man of letters, his contribution was especially

<sup>6</sup> These are five important poets out of many more whose work was discussed in the controversy. Because he would largely remain outside the official circuit until the late 1980s, Mang Ke is the only major *Today* poet conspicuously absent from this list.

<sup>7</sup> A detailed account of the controversy is outside the scope of this discussion. These are some of the numerous sources in Chinese and other languages: Shen, Chen & Yang 1985: 329-524; Tian 1987: ch. 1; Yao 1989; Wang (Guangming) 1993: ch. 7; Soong & Minford 1984: 179-270 (including Minford 1984); Palandri 1984; Pollard 1985; Tay 1985; Yip 1985; Yeh 1992b; Hoffmann 1993: ch. 2; Iwasa 1991: 1-138.

<sup>8</sup> Yao 1989. The fifty-page bibliography owes some of its length to its author's approach: Yao Jiahua takes the controversy in the broadest sense possible and extends it to 1988. A more common periodization is 1979-1984.

<sup>9</sup> See Zhang (Xueming) 1980; Gu 1983; Lao Mu 1985b. In its poetry section, rebaptized *Bai jia shi hui* (Meeting of a hundred schools in poetry), *Shanghai Literature* (*Shanghai Wenxue*) in 1981 gave Experimental poets the chance to air their views. Among others, Bei Dao, Gu Cheng, Jiang He, Shu Ting and Yang Lian availed themselves of the opportunity.

<sup>10</sup> See Gong 1979 and Gu 1980.

<sup>11</sup> See Zang 1980 and Ai 1981.



disheartening in its dogmatic bluntness. The critics, finally, were similarly divided. Of the many commentators who gave the new poetry the benefit of the doubt or actively supported it, the most influential were Xie Mian, Sun Shaozhen and Xu Jingya.<sup>12</sup> When the discussion was dragged from the literary into the political arena, the opposing side was to blame: Zhang Ming, Ding Li, Cheng Daixi, Zheng Bonong, Ke Yan, to name but a few.<sup>13</sup> But true criticasters of Obscure poetry would not consider politicizing the debate anything to be blamed for, as they were no believers in the autonomy of art to begin with.

What was the controversy about? "Obscurity" (*menglong*) was pejoratively used.<sup>14</sup> It outlived a number of alternatives: the new poetry was also characterized as "weird" (*guguai*), "opaque" (*huise*), and "incomprehensible" (*nandong*). Calling it these and other names was mostly an expression of anger at what was considered the crime of ambiguity. Images not reducible to an unequivocal and politically correct message were anathema in PRC literature, whose readers' competence had not been challenged in the past thirty years: this was a consequence of the much-vaunted primacy of "the masses". Thus, while Chinese Experimental poetry does contain dense and wayward imagery, the problem was as much one of reading as of writing. A hilarious example of the impatience with "obscure" poetry felt by orthodox critics is Zhang Ming's remark that

"these days, with all the people straining to spur on the Four Modernizations, everybody's very busy. (...) Of course, reading a good poem is unlikely to be as easy as having an ice-cream, but I certainly hope it does not have to be as difficult as reading books from heaven. All this guessing and nothing or very little in return (...) really is a waste of manpower and energy."<sup>15</sup>

Literature must express support for the prevalent political line, and imagination and imagery be disciplined accordingly. Failing to meet these conditions, the new poetry and its authors not only disregarded their official audience, but automatically came under suspicion of putting up smoke screens around harmful ideas – for under totalitarianism, not explicitly voicing support implies sabotage. If this poetry's

<sup>12</sup> See Xie 1980; Li 1981; Sun 1981; Xu 1983.

<sup>13</sup> See Zhang (Ming) 1980; Ding 1981; Cheng 1981 and 1983; Zheng 1983; Ke 1983.

<sup>14</sup> *Menglong* has been translated in various ways (see Yeh 1992b: 379). *Obscure* does full justice to the connotations of the Chinese term, with one caveat: *menglong* does not mean 'little known' and, by implication 'not prominent' (of a poet) or 'apocryphal' (of a poem). *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* gives *dark, vague, enigmatic, cryptic, ambiguous, equivocal* as synonyms of *obscure*.

<sup>15</sup> Zhang (Ming) 1980: 34.

message was politically correct, why would its authors feel the need for the tortuous detour of "obscure", "weird", "opaque", "incomprehensible" imagery? Combining limited reading skills and an extreme wish for control, its adversaries opposed something seen by many in this world as a trademark of good poetry: the original metaphor.

But there was more to the controversy than the new poetry's grossly exaggerated obscurity. Some of the orthodox critics were even more enraged by what they *did* understand, or thought they understood. Insofar as it was present in these poems, their authors' worldview differed sharply from the collectivist optimism imposed by Communist ideology. Even without the equation of lyrical subject and author, the author's responsibility for the subject would have given the critics ample leverage. But indeed, this poetry did not exude the official, "positive" outlook on life. Instead, it indulged in the "decadence" of self-expression and gave vent to all sorts of "negative" thoughts and feelings such as loneliness, cynicism and alienation.

Since these excrescences of capitalism were unthinkable in socialist society, this generation of poets had clearly fallen victim to corrupting influences from abroad. They slavishly imitated foreign models, especially "Modernist" tendencies – which had, it was stressed, long ago been rejected by the foreigners themselves.<sup>16</sup> From there it was but a small step to the inevitable appeal to nationalism: the Obscure poets were accused of forsaking the native tradition. While its defenders invoked examples from the 1920s and 1930s to legitimize the new poetry and its international orientation, its attackers even went to the trouble of condemning overly "cosmopolitan" poets of half a century back.

To explain the young poets' misguided state, their critics did complement the foreign factor with a Chinese component: the Cultural Revolution. They recognized that the Ten Years of Chaos might not have helped the development of a firm revolutionary idealism. Unruliness and rebellion would therefore have been forgivable had they solely been reactions to the Gang of Four's misdeeds. The problem was that the new poetry's spirit of resistance, even if disguised as indifference or aversion to politics, addressed more than the Gang of Four: it questioned the concept of man and his place in society as dictated by Socialist ideology. The scope of their skepticism distinguished the young poets from the older, "Returned" pre-Cultural Revolution poets (*Guilai zhe*).<sup>17</sup> Chinese politics and literature aside, the

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<sup>16</sup> In her interesting discussion of the Obscure poets' distorted impression of foreign examples, Chen Xiaomei (1991) takes a rather extreme position by what she herself calls a surprising claim: "(...) Chinese literary production of the 1980s – and particularly the critical debate on [Obscure] poetry – is based on and conditioned by a 'misunderstanding' of Western modernism" (143, my italics).

<sup>17</sup> For the "returned" poets, see Xie 1993c.

"Returned" poets and the critics' indignation had two other causes: a generation gap and the reluctance of any cultural establishment confronted with reformers.

Remarkably, the Obscure poets and their advocates anything but denied the charges, in some cases supplying the evidence themselves. It would have been suicidal to admit that their writings were veiled reactionary schemings even if they had felt so themselves, but for the rest they said much the same as their accusers. Their use of imagery was not intended as a ritualized game of hide-and-seek, but at times personal and capricious, partly as antidote to the hackneyed similes in orthodox poetry; they experimented with sophisticated literary techniques, unfit for "mass" literature; they decried the degradation of literature to a political tool, asserting its autonomy instead; they claimed the right to a spiritual life outside politics, to private truths and to self-expression; they discarded the orthodox Self – a faceless, expendable part of a collective, all-important whole – for a human, individual variant with loneliness, cynicism and alienation as only three of its many different thoughts and feelings; they named the mad terror of the Cultural Revolution as the backdrop to their youth; they acknowledged their indebtedness to foreign examples, albeit as a widening of horizons rather than a voluntary submission to imperialism. The difference with their adversaries was that they presented all this as necessary for a self-respecting modern Chinese poetry, not as crimes against culture and ideology. In other words: they did not plead guilty. No exercise in deconstruction is needed to see that Xu Jingya's abject self-criticism in the nation's biggest newspaper confirms rather than belies this point – even if foreigners "understand nothing of what really goes on in the Chinese poetry scene".<sup>18</sup>

This xenophobic sneer at outside observers: "certain people abroad" whom the Chinese rulers could not force to humiliate themselves in public, indicates the scope of the debate as well as its ideological significance. Its final, ominous stage took place in the context of a political campaign with as its resounding purpose the Elimination of Spiritual Pollution and Xu as the "target for all arrows".<sup>19</sup> From the fall of 1983 onward,

"(...) Obscure poetry was more or less marked as the root of all evil [in literature and art]. If hitherto the debate had been a game played according to the rules, the Party now decided to do away with those. From then on Obscure poetry vanished from the pages of all magazines, [and] the Obscure poets were subjected to grave criticism (...) and political intimidation"<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Xu 1984a; quotes taken from 408.

<sup>19</sup> Pollard 1985: 656.

<sup>20</sup> Bei Dao 1990: 75.

These are Bei Dao's memories. Although he is not a disinterested witness, the orthodox critics' record and PRC history to date only go to strengthen the credibility of his words.

But before long things took a turn for the better: early in 1984 the campaign against Spiritual Pollution was abruptly called off. The controversy had not been concluded – judging from the fundamental difference of opinions, that must be considered eternally impossible – but at least in the greater scheme of things, it was now terminated. True enough, "obscurity" and related items continued to be discussed, but as part of a slowly maturing, tentative literary criticism, not as empty counters in a political battle. In fact, over the years "obscure" had turned into a *nom de guerre*-like epithet, and it would go down as such in history.

Judging from its name, an unsuspecting mind might assume that the controversy had come within literary criticism all along. In reality it was one more instance of political interference with literature. The issue was not just literature but the Obscure poets' worldview and their proclivity to make it public; it involved the questions of literature's function in society and freedom of expression. With PRC history in mind, that is no great surprise. The controversy's importance lies in its outcome: by 1984 Experimental poetry had gained a modicum of acceptance by the cultural leadership and the reasonable assurance that it would not simply be stamped out. Its "victory" may be more indicative of changes in official ideology since the late 1970s than of this poetry's intrinsic qualities. But poets and critics' grasp of the historical moment was crucial.

#### DISCORD

The campaign against Spiritual Pollution was the last threat to the viability in China of Experimental poetry as a whole. To be sure, individual authors would get in trouble and their works be banned in the years to come – you can't have it all – but a wholesale return to the strictness of earlier days would have been hard to imagine. The genie had been let out of the bottle. As a consequence of the regime's insistence on control in all spheres of life, changing political winds still affected the literary climate, but less than before. The 1986-1987 campaign against Bourgeois Liberalization, for instance, did not seriously hamper developments in poetry or stem the flow of poetry publications. Likewise, the suppression of the Protest Movement<sup>21</sup> in 1989 left its traces in the literary world but did not herald a lasting change of

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<sup>21</sup> In using *Protest Movement* rather than *Student Movement*, *Democracy Movement* or *Peking Spring*, I follow Barmé & Jaivin 1992 (xvii).

cultural policy or even the eradication of specific types of poetry. From the mid-1980s onward Experimental poetry entered an era of pluriformity and proliferation, in official and unofficial circuits. As in 1978, hitherto unopened "drawers" must initially have been a major source.

As soon as the external battle had been won, internal ones flared up. Up to this point Experimental poetry could not have afforded factional strife or schisms, but once it had secured the official right to exist, the territory "beyond the pale" turned out to be the home of many tribes, of which Obscure poetry was only one. After the attacks by its elders it now drew fire from younger poets. The latter distanced themselves from orthodoxy ever further, in subject matter, poetic technique and language usage. Apart from that, it is difficult to see them as members of one and the same literary generation. If they have in China and abroad been presented as such, that is partly owing to the Chinese obsession with labeling groups and trends in contemporary literature,<sup>22</sup> and partly in reaction to the impact of Obscure poetry, from which the younger authors have wanted to dissociate themselves. Experimental poetry since the mid-1980s has sweepingly been subsumed under various headings: poetry of the Newborn Generation (*Xinsheng dai shi*), of the Third Generation (*Di san dai shi*), Post-Obscure poetry (*Hou menglong shi*) and others.

"Newborn" makes sense, as a vague indicator of change, and will be used here as no more than that; the "Third Generation" presupposes First and Second Generations in pre-Cultural Revolution poetry and Obscure poetry; but "Post-Obscure" is unfortunate. While a negative definition of Experimental poetry as a whole is motivated by the dominance of orthodoxy until the late 1970s, calling the varied poetry of this last decade "Post-Obscure" ascribes to Obscure poetry a power that it never had. The phrase "the Bei Dao's" (*Bei Dao men*) – who were, according to some, to be "overthrown" – is an example of this polarization in the second half of the 1980s. But the story is also that of rebellion followed by incorporation in the System and the scorn of the next rebel in line – and those who came after Obscure poetry may have felt jealous of the historic moment their predecessors had been granted. For it is more heroic to rebel against the dogma of a repressive orthodoxy than against champions of self-expression; fires are more appropriate by night than by day, so to speak.

In a historical perspective, what counts is that fire is more like fire than anything else, and the similarities between Obscure and Newborn poetry outweigh the

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<sup>22</sup> An example is Xu, Meng, Cao & Lü 1988, which in an overview of "groups in modernist poetry" (*xiandai zhuyi shiqun*) from 1986 to 1988 manages to distinguish more than seventy schools, currents, Isms and groups.

differences. The 1978 appearance of *Today* remains a watershed in contemporary Chinese poetry: those who came to the fore from the mid-1980s onward no longer had to break away from orthodoxy. Literature had become more than just a slave to politics, and its autonomy was the point of departure for new experiments. These were multifarious but confirmed Experimental poetry's basic orientation: a rehumanization of the Self and the return of the individual.

But that is not to say that all interesting developments had ended in the early 1980s. The last ten years have yielded scores of good poems which it would be impossible to write off as emulations of Obscure poetry. In the eyes of a reader unaware of the traditional maltreatment of literature in the PRC, many might even be alien to Obscure poetry. In other words: if Obscure and Newborn poetry are not viewed as deviations from orthodoxy but as literature in their own right, their differences outweigh their similarities.

The outline below suffers from simplification, because it focuses on points of contrast as clues to the demarcation of Newborn from Obscure poetry.<sup>23</sup>

#### OBSCURE VS. NEWBORN

The language of Obscure poetry had been shaped by two special kinds of Chinese: by Maospeak (*Mao wenti*), the language of orthodoxy, and by the Translation Style. If they were aware of this, that did not mean the Obscure poets were able to rid themselves of these influences. While their "obscurity" was exaggerated, it was true that their use of imagery was at times private and perhaps overdone, whether or not as camouflage for a subversive political message. As for the Self in their poetry, its first, gigantic effort had been to tear itself loose from the collective. But if systematic suppression of the individual is not taken for granted, reassertion of the individual is no more than a return to normality. From the orthodox "big I" to this "small I" was in fact back to square one, after thirty years. As a result many Selves in Obscure poetry are naive, innocuous, predictable to the point of being colorless: beyond their rehumanization and authenticity, they have little to offer. So it is, too, that the "small I" often addresses issues from the life of the "big I": the motherland, the fate of the people, history, injustice. Obscure poetry departs from orthodoxy in what it has to say about these things but not always in how it says them, i.e. with a proclivity for heroism. The difference between orthodox and Obscure heroism is that

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Niu 1986; Yu 1988; Tang Xiaodu's prefaces to Tang & Wang 1987 and esp. Tang 1992; Chen Chao's preface to Chen 1993; Hong & Liu 1993: 430-447; Wang (Guangming) 1993: ch. 9; Yeh 1992b and 1994a; Li & Hung 1992.

the latter fights for other causes, that it can be in the first person singular, that it is tragic and solitary rather than triumphant and in unison: it is a heroism of the minority, of the underdog. Obscure poetry resisted one type of ideology, but did not turn away from ideology altogether and much of it was definitely *engagé*. Its most famous line, quoted to the breaking point: Bei Dao's "I – do – not – believe!" is nihilistic only superficially, for those unwilling to see that what is not believed is the lie of orthodoxy. Obscure poetry attempted a reconstruction of meaning in the midst of Armageddon, it had a vocation and bespoke a Faith. Supporters, adversaries and impartial observers have explained it out of the reality of its authors' surroundings in their formative years: the tempest that was the Cultural Revolution. Aside from the question whether poetry needs to be explained at all, this larger-than-life, history-book type of explanation has acquired a disturbing monopoly.

*The Answer* has not been quoted to the breaking point for no reason: it is in many respects an archetypal Obscure poem. But by being overquoted, the example is in danger of replacing the category. A different example of Obscure poetry is given here: Mang Ke's *Sky*.<sup>24</sup>

1

the sun has risen  
and dyed the sky  
into a blood-smeared shield

2

the days have been banished like convicts  
no one goes to ask to me  
no one goes to forgive me

3

I have been exposed from the beginning  
covering shame  
with spittle

4

oh, sky!

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<sup>24</sup> *Tiankong, Today # 1*: 28-30. The version included in Mang Ke 1988: 8-11 and Mang Ke 1989: 9-11 shows slight differences with this first publication.



sweep away your illness  
clean off the Republic's earth

5

but hope has turned to tears  
fallen on the ground  
how can we make sure tomorrow's people won't be sad

6

I gaze at the sky from afar  
I belong to the sky  
sky  
you warn  
the world coming toward me!

7

whenever I pass before you  
why do I always feel shame  
I must have grown old  
I walk with a cane now  
youth gone by falls into my hands at last  
I walk with a cane now!  
sky  
where are you chasing me  
for you  
I exhausted myself

8

who would not weave life into a flower basket  
but  
every trace of beauty has been swept away  
we are so young  
can our eyes be joyful

9

bring your warmth  
bring your love  
and in your green boat  
take me far from here



10

hope  
 please don't stray too far  
 your presence by my side  
 is all I need to be deceived

11

the sun has risen  
 the sky  
 that blood-smearred shield

Just like Obscure poetry, Newborn poetry first made its advent through unofficial channels. In 1984 Spiritual Pollution had become a matter of low priority; magazines and poetry collections outside the official circuit had mushroomed ever since. Poets mimeographed and circulated their writings throughout China, with Beijing, the province of Sichuan and the Shanghai-Nanjing area as centers of activity. While most publications were not really "underground", even if they were so called, it was only in 1986 that mainstream state-run magazines began to feature new trends differing from Obscure poetry.<sup>25</sup> But their acceptance in the official circuit was not followed by a dwindling of unofficial undertakings. Again, the pluriformity of Experimental poetry since the mid-1980s can hardly be overstated and it is only with some generalization that major currents can be discerned.

Michelle Yeh, complementing late-1980s PRC criticism with her own insights, employs a tripartite scheme followed here: the Roots-Searching School (*Xungen pai*), Stream of Life (*Shenghuo liu*) and Stream of Consciousness (*Yishi liu*). While distinguishing these three currents, Yeh stresses an overall continuity in Experimental poetry:

"(...) Poetry of the Newborn Generation (...) has more in common with [Obscure poetry] than would first appear. (...) First, they share essentially the same aesthetic consciousness expressed in the belief in the independent value and autonomous nature of poetry, the emphasis on the centrality of language, and the pursuit of creative freedom. Second, the three trends can all be traced to their predecessor; each picking up on a distinct aspect of the

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Niu 1986.

earlier poetry, they may be seen as a further development of, rather than a sharp break with, [Obscure poetry]."<sup>26</sup>

This is exemplary of Yeh's approach to modern Chinese poetry, which she presents as a whole with interrelated parts rather than as an accumulation of poems written in Chinese.

The connection between Obscure poetry and the Roots-Searching School is evident. It is personified by Jiang He and especially Yang Lian, who established contacts with poets in Sichuan later associated with the Search for Roots. Yeh introduces the Roots-Searching School as follows:

"[It] represents an effort to reinterpret the spirit of Chinese culture and to redefine Chinese identity in the modern world (...) to create 'modern epics' by employing imagery and motifs associated with Chinese antiquities. Ancient legends (...) and texts (...), as well as the sites of primitive cultures (...) and artistic treasures (...) provide some of the sources of inspiration for the archaic diction, archetypal imagery and allusions to primitive rituals, lore and myths in their poetry."<sup>27</sup>

Apart from Jiang He and Yang Lian, Yeh names Ouyang Jianghe (b. 1956), Liao Yiwu (b. 1958), the Song brothers (Song Qu and Song Wei, b. 1963 and 1964), Shi Guanghua (b. 1958) and Haizi (1964-1989) as poets of the Roots-Searching school.

In PRC criticism the imported phrase *stream of consciousness* has been used and abused in many ways;<sup>28</sup> there is no reliable connection with the Western Modernism of the *interbellum*. Perhaps the term invites juggling with, for all kinds of writing can be associated with consciousness. In Newborn poetry, Stream of Consciousness is something of a catchall. It accommodates diverse authors, whose work does not come under either Roots-Searching or Stream of Life. Yeh gives it the following parameters:

"The exploration of the stream of consciousness focuses on the emotional and psychological world of the individual, in particular those aspects that are repressed by society and culture. (...) a significant number of women poets (...) are noted for their original

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<sup>26</sup> Yeh 1992b: 401. Yeh uses the transcribed Chinese term for Obscure poetry (*Menglong shi*). Her article includes convincing readings of works by Obscure and Newborn poets.

<sup>27</sup> Yeh 1992b: 393-394.

<sup>28</sup> See Hagenaar 1992: ch. 3.

expressions in the same vein. Although the [Obscure poets] did not shun descriptions of negative feelings and thoughts, these younger poets show an obsession with the dark side of the human psyche, manifest in loneliness, ennui, anger, paranoia, despair, and, above all, death. (...) Often employing such surrealist devices as stream of consciousness, blending of the real and the unreal, and absurdist imagery, this poetry reveals a self that is deeply alienated from the world (...)"<sup>29</sup>

Clearly, Stream of Consciousness has several interfaces with Obscure poetry. While recognizing that the trend is shared by many authors and not at all strictly defined, Yeh lists the following authors: Zhai Yongming (b. 1955), Yi Lei (b. 1951), Lu Yimin (b. 1962), Tang Yaping (b. 1964), Zhang Zhen (b. 1961), Wang Xiaoni (b. 1955), all women poets; Liu Manliu (b. 1962), Meng Lang (b. 1961), Beiling (b. 1959), Xi Chuan (b. 1963).

But continuity between Obscure and Newborn poetry is easier to argue for the Roots-Searching School and Stream of Consciousness than for Stream of Life. Most of the opposition between Obscure and Newborn can be retraced to the emergence of Stream of Life poetry, as is clear from Yeh's characterization of this third trend:

"As a conscious reaction to [Obscure poetry], it shows some striking differences. (...) poetry of the stream of life is not interested in depicting the hero; it is more concerned with the everyday life of Everyman and Everywoman. (...) [It] more often employs the narrative mode (...) a prosaic, colloquial, nonfigurative language and a low-key, matter-of-fact tone. The experience typically found in this poetry is personal, trivial (...) If the speaker in [Obscure poetry] usually enjoys an omniscient point of view or embodies a transcendent 'I' (...) poetry of the stream of life prefers a more limited point of view, showing the individual as bogged down by limitations (...) and capable of self-satire and self-parody. The solitary tragic hero we encounter in [Obscure poetry] is replaced here by the antihero, usually a city dweller (...)"<sup>30</sup>

As exponents of Stream of Life poetry, Yeh names Wang Xiaolong (b. 1954), Che Qianzi (b. 1963), Han Dong (b. 1961), Yu Jian (b. 1954), Bai Hua (b. 1956), Zhou Yaping (b. 1962) and others. While it failed to relegate Obscure poetry to another era in literature, Stream of Life indeed was something else. Its declared preference

<sup>29</sup> Yeh 1992b: 394-396.

<sup>30</sup> Yeh 1992b: 396-397.

for the vernacular gave especially Han Dong and Yu Jian reputations for writing Speech poetry (*Kouyu shi*), i.e. poems in so-called everyday language. Of course "everyday language" in the PRC had not been more immune to Maospeak than literature and the press, and neither Han nor Yu littered their work with the anacolutha typical of real speech by mortals. All the same, their usage is simpler and less ornate than the Obscure poets'. As regards imagery, Stream of Life poets cannot be charged with "obscurity" or extravagance. On the whole, the Self in their poetry is one of flesh and blood disinterested in ideology, its nobleness substituted by common sense, sometimes baseness. Where Obscure poetry reconstructs, Stream of Life poetry deconstructs; where the former expresses a vocation, the latter displays cynicism. Faith has been replaced by Irony.

At first glance, Mang Ke's Obscure poem *Sky* and Han Dong's *So You've Seen the Sea*,<sup>31</sup> a typical Stream of Life poem, have something in common: both are contemporary Chinese poems with titles referring to major entities in the natural world. But that is where their similarity ends:

so you've seen the sea  
 you've imagined  
 the sea  
 you've first imagined the sea  
 and then seen it  
 that's just how it is  
 so you've actually seen the sea  
 and imagined it too  
 but you're not  
 a sailor  
 that's just how it is  
 so you've imagined the sea  
 you've seen the sea  
 maybe you even like the sea  
 that's how it is – at the most  
 so you've seen the sea  
 and you've imagined the sea  
 you're not willing  
 to drown in the water of the sea  
 that's just how it is  
 that's how everyone is

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<sup>31</sup> *Ni jian guo da hai*, Tang 1992: 65-66.

It is difficult to determine when the various trends within Newborn poetry emerged. Their existence in the first half of the 1980s tended and tends to be drowned out by the clamor of the controversy over Obscure poetry.<sup>32</sup> They came after *Today*, so much is clear; Stream of Life was partly a reaction against Obscure poetry. But irony replacing faith was not the end of the matter. In the late 1980s, Stream of Life irony was overtaken by a new faith: that of Xi Chuan, Chen Dongdong (b. 1961), Wang Jiabin (b. 1957) and others – in Yeh's tripartite scheme, they would be Stream of Consciousness poets – who reasserted poetry as a useless but meaningful, lofty, almost religious activity.<sup>33</sup> Crudely simplified, the difference was that the Obscure poets' faith was in Man, but the younger poets' faith was in Poetry: one step further from Life and closer to Art.

With the peculiarities of PRC literary history in mind, Newborn poetry is an extension and intensification of Obscure poetry. It has, in the Chinese context, taken individuality and the rehumanization of the Self to extremes. Many critics to date have explained the differences between the two generations as a function of their background. It is widely assumed that the Cultural Revolution was the motive force behind Obscure poetry and instilled in it a simple distinction between good and evil; a recurring comment on the Newborn poets' background is that it was *not* the Cultural Revolution, and that for them reality was more complex than the wartime truths of the Ten Years of Chaos. As for formal education, whereas the best-educated Obscure poet barely finished high school, many of the Newborn poets had the chance to go to university at a time when China was opening up to the outside world. Arguably the Newborn poets' bent for literary theory was in part caused by academic training and the influx of foreign texts. In the 1980s it became possible for the average PRC reader to build up a reasonable knowledge of world literature, no longer dependent on political correctness for its translation into Chinese. Aside from many anthologies and book-length translations, a number of specialized magazines for foreign literature have appeared since the late 1970s, not to mention regular sections devoted to the subject in other reviews, official and unofficial alike.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Tang Xiaodu's preface (1) in Tang 1992: 1-8.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Yeh 1992b: 401 and Hong & Liu 1993: 438.

<sup>34</sup> See Soong & Minford 1984: 41-43 for a noteworthy example: the officially sanctioned translation of works of Modernism. Some magazines specializing in foreign literature are: *World Literature* (*Shijie wenxue*), formerly *Translations* (*Yiwen*), published by Renmin wenxue chubanshe, Beijing; *Foreign Literature Quarterly* (*Waiguo wenxue jikan*), Waiguo wenxue chubanshe, Beijing; *Foreign Literature Review* (*Waiguo wenxue pinglun*), Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan chubanshe, Beijing; *Studies in Foreign Literature* (*Waiguo wenxue yanjiu*), Hubei sheng waiguo wenxue xuehui, Wuhan; *Foreign Literature and Art* (*Waiguo wenyi*), Shanghai yiwen chubanshe, Shanghai; *Translation Forest* (*Yi lin*), Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, Nanjing. For unofficial publications, see *The Poetry Scene* below.

The distinctions between Obscure, Newborn, Roots-Searching, Stream of Life and Stream of Consciousness poetry are one possible representation of Experimental poetry since 1979. Among the many views offered, it is one of the most workable.<sup>35</sup> All the same, some Chinese poets – Duoduo for one – belong in more than one category or in none at all, or first in one and then in another. This presupposes no more than a pleasant degree of chaos and the possibility of change within an oeuvre. But to some critics that seems unthinkable, especially as regards the Obscure poets.

### THE POETRY SCENE

In the past decade, Experimental poetry has known pluriformity and proliferation. After a series of anti-Establishment explosions – *Today*, the controversy over Obscure poetry, Newborn poetry and more – the dust has not yet settled. Among the debris good poetry can be found. And apart from the poems they produce, poetry circles present quite a spectacle in themselves.

Since the mid-1980s there have been a tremendous number of "Isms", "groups", "societies", "schools", "currents", "alliances" and "movements", self-proclaimed or perceived by others. A common denominator for different poets and critics is their Ismism (*Zhuyi zhuyi*).<sup>36</sup> Groups and individual poets have issued manifestoes and aired their views on poetry through articles, interviews and poems. If theory occasionally seems to precede practice and practice unable to live up to theory, that is not surprising in itself; such phenomena can be observed in other literary histories than the Chinese as well. But on the whole the theoretical side of things seems top-heavy.

This could be a consequence of Chinese poets' sudden acquaintance in the 1980s with huge amounts of foreign literature and literary theory. Once poets saw the damage done to Chinese literature in the PRC and the political dogma behind it, they tried to make up for decades of overdue literary developments within a few years. While "catching up" they were – willingly – exposed to all sorts of foreign stimuli, making their task even more formidable and confusing. Incidentally, the phrase *catching up* (*gan shang*) implies that literary development involves historical

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<sup>35</sup> In its absoluteness, also manifest in the one-on-one equation of Obscure poetry with the expression of the "Cultural Revolution complex", Li Fukang's (Li & Hung 1992) classification ("internal", "external" and "visionary") for what has here been called Newborn poetry does little justice to the complexity of the case.

<sup>36</sup> For an early impression, see Xu, Meng, Cao & Lü 1988.

necessity, that it is linear in nature; that any literature must somehow pass through successive stages in the history of what is seen as mainstream literature before it can really be on top of things.<sup>37</sup> At any rate, Chinese poets' response to the foreign factor has been more complicated than could be suggested by words like *imitation* or *rejection*: literary influence is an intricate matter, especially when it involves different cultures.<sup>38</sup> Still, Chinese poetry's rediscovery of foreign traditions does shed some light on the abundance of theory in the 1980s. As a rule, and certainly when one is dissatisfied with the current state of affairs, it is easier to offer prescriptions for good poetry than to write it. This is all the more so if one has at one's disposal examples from foreign literature, criticism and theory radically different from one's native tradition. Besides, theory had blossomed long before. The nature of True Modern Chinese Poetry has been a cause for debate throughout this century, with varying stresses on Modernity and Chineseness, and the theorizing of the 1980s is reminiscent of the two decades after the "literary revolution" of 1917.<sup>39</sup>

With the possible exception of Stream of Life-like circles, the contemporary scene is at least as interested in the Poet as in the Poem. Under orthodoxy the author is held accountable for a work's "social effect", and the condemnation of a poem entails the condemnation of the poet. In the Experimental poetry scene, the connection poem-poet is less immediate and self-evident. But while the autonomy of the text has become a familiar concept in contemporary criticism and poetry talk, the image of the poet as someone extraordinary, as a sensitive, *manqué* visionary has replaced the humble "worker in literature and art" of orthodoxy.<sup>40</sup> This is, for instance, manifest from the continuing hysteria over Haizi's suicide in 1989.<sup>41</sup> His poetic talent had revealed itself before he took his life, but his subsequent apotheosis as a poet is out of proportion and has at its root his young and tragic death. Moreover, while the act and the cause of suicide – the state of mind in which the deed is done, as opposed to "reasons" like blackmail, disease or depression – are incommunicable, voices in the Chinese poetry scene readily make the suicide of a poet into a "death for poetry" or "by poetry" (*wei shige er si*). Death by one's own hand then becomes the poem to end all poems and its unspeakable motives are swallowed up by poethood. It is conceivable that the struggle with Art leads one to kill oneself, but how are others to know?

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Offermans 1991.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Michelle Yeh's (1991b) rejoinder to Owen 1990.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Lloyd Haft's *Introduction* in Haft 1989.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Yeh 1991a: ch. II.

<sup>41</sup> A rare antidote has been provided by Xi Chuan (1994), in his sober *Afterword to Death*.



Like earlier remarks on poetry and criticism, these characterizations of the Chinese poetry scene are far from exhaustive or absolute. Pluriformity leaves room for divergence, and both excessive theorizing and Poet-worship have met with opposition, from within the scene and by outsiders.

Since the mid-1980s the publishing situation has remained unchanged in that official publications carry a broad assortment of Experimental poetry,<sup>42</sup> but unofficial magazines and books proliferate as well. The two spheres do not at all exclude each other and in fact overlap. Publishing through unofficial channels does not reduce one's chances in state-run magazines and can even be a stepping stone. Conversely, official publication in no way entails a sacrifice of the integrity of art. Orthodoxy has lost ground to heterodoxy but that dichotomy has become blurred, notwithstanding the regime's occasional relapse into ideological frenzy. This fading of the boundaries is illustrated by the material quality of some unofficial publications, produced with up-to-date technology and much more "professional"-looking than those of the late

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<sup>42</sup> Present in official magazines since 1979, Experimental poetry began to appear in book form in the early 1980s. Since then dozens of individual collections have appeared: by Guo Lusheng and the established Obscure poets as well as by many others of their and younger generations, often in series such as *Poetry by the Young* (*Qingnian shi cong*) and *Contemporary Poets* (*Dangdai shiren congshu*), published by Lijiang chubanshe (Guilin) and Renmin wenxue chubanshe (Beijing) respectively. Secondly, since 1985 anthologies have constituted a major channel for publication, especially for poets still without a collection of their own. Anthologies are not marginal, "extra" books in the poetry scene: rather than reviewing established trends, they point to new ones. They tend to come out in larger editions and to be distributed more widely than individual collections. Thirdly, books of literary history, criticism and the like have also come out since 1985, albeit in less overwhelming quantities than the anthologies.

Examples, without any claim to completeness:

1. Individual collections: Guo Lusheng (Shizhi 1988, Shizhi & Hei 1993); Bei Dao (1987), Gu Cheng (1986), Jiang He (1986, 1987), Mang Ke (1988a, 1989), Shu Ting (1982, 1987), Yang Lian (1985, 1986, 1989; these references taken from Yang 1990a: 75), Shu Ting & Gu Cheng (1982); A Qu Qiang Ba (1988), Bai Hua (1988), Bei Ling (1988), Daozi (1988), Duoduo (1988), Ge Mai (1993), Haizi (1990, 1995), Hei Dachun (1988, Shizhi & Hei 1993), Lü Dean (1988), Luo Yihe (1990), Ma Gaoming (1988), Meng Lang (1988), Tian Xiaoqing (1988), Tong Wei (1988), Weiwei (1988), Xi Chuan (1991), Xuedi (1988), Yi Lei (1990a, 1990b), Yu Gang (1993), Yu Jian (1989, 1993), Zhai Yongming (1988), Zou 1989.
2. Anthologies: Lao Mu 1985a, Guan 1986, Jiang (Jincheng) 1986; Yan, Gao, Liang & Gu 1986; Yu & Liu 1986, Zhou 1986, Tang & Wang 1987; Qi, Ren & Jie'er 1988; Xi Ping 1988; Xu, Meng, Cao & Lü 1988; Chen 1989, Liu & Wang 1989; Li, Zhang & Zhang 1990; Wan & Wen 1990, Niu 1991, Wang 1991, Huang (Zumin) 1992, Tang 1992, Chen 1993, Cui 1993, Jiang 1993, Tang 1993a, Tang 1993b, Wan & Xiaoxiao 1993.
3. Literary history, criticism etc.: Lao Mu 1985b; Shen, Chen & Yang 1985; Tian 1987, Yao 1989, Hong & Liu 1993, Wang (Guangming) 1993, Wu 1993, Yang 1993. *Nota bene*: of the anthologies listed under (2), Qi, Ren & Jie'er 1988, Chen 1989, Li, Zhang & Zhang 1990, Wang 1991 are "dictionaries for the appreciation of poetry", in which the poems come with commentaries by the editors; of course, these four books belong as well in category 3.

1970s and early 1980s.<sup>43</sup> The unofficial circuit has thus remained an important outlet for Experimental poetry by famous and unknown authors alike.

Most unofficial editors are poets themselves. They usually belong in the category of literary activists, but their readiness to spend time and money on the making of magazines is also motivated by the wish to be read as poets. Their efforts differ considerably in scale and ambition. Some publications are produced in editions of a few dozen copies only; their editors make no attempt to transcend the inner circle of friends and fellow poets. Others address themselves to a wider audience with a desire to entertain the unknown reader, to be part of and influence contemporary literature. But even for magazines which appear regularly in editions of several hundred copies, distribution takes place through a network of personal acquaintances, not through advertizing, subscription and sale. The reason is simple: as soon as a magazine can be publicly bought for a price printed, say, on the inside cover, it is an official market commodity and subject to government regulations – like the ones concerning registration which provided the pretext to close down *Today* in 1980. It is therefore common practice to present publications as "materials for internal exchange", explicitly stating that they cannot be purchased. Of course, the Chinese government needs no lawful grounds to exercise control and regularly interferes in the unofficial circuit even when it takes the form of private meetings and correspondence. In this era of reform and "emancipation of the mind", not a few poets have been arrested or otherwise harassed; for reasons of poetry, that is. In Sichuan there is a depressing tradition of poets being thrown in jail, perhaps because there are fewer foreign observers around than in Shanghai or Beijing – but in those two cities it has happened too.<sup>44</sup> Still, a pledge by the editors to remain outside the official literary market saves the authorities some face and can thus preclude immediate repression. In view of the intangible nature of unofficial literature in general and the Chinese poetry scene's sheer size in particular, any attempt at a complete listing would be doomed. In what follows, only a few well-known unofficial books and magazines will be listed, some featuring fiction and criticism too.<sup>45</sup>

*Today* was the first unofficial literary magazine and the most influential in the late 1970s and early 1980s. During those years university campuses all over China began to bring forth small-scale poetry publications, in all likelihood inspired and encour-

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<sup>43</sup> For example, the third issue of *Tumult: Chinese Poetry (Da saodong: Zhongguo shige)*, published in Beijing since 1991.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Xu 1992 and Van Crevel 1992.

<sup>45</sup> For each book or magazine, time and place of (first) publication are given, tentatively in some cases. The majority of the publications listed here have appeared more than once, some for years on end. More elaborate data on these publications, such as their contributors, editors, manifestoes and activities, readership, if and when they went out of business etc., are outside the scope of this discussion.

aged by *Today*; this "campus poetry" (*xiaoyuan shige*), a literary phenomenon which continues to exist, was the prelude to a blossoming of unofficial magazines. In the mid-1980s Sichuan Province, particularly its capital Chengdu, sported a host of unofficial publications. As early as 1982 the anthology *Forest Regrown* (*Ci sheng lin*) was produced; it comes across as a response to *Today's* – Beijing's – hegemony, carrying the work of Sichuan poets, the Guiyang poet Huang Xiang and others. An impressive collection from 1985 is *Modern Poetry Materials for Internal Exchange* (*Xiandai shi neibu jiaoliu ziliao*, with the English caption "Modernists Federation"), including Obscure as well as younger poets, many from Sichuan; without polemicizing, the preface does note the demarcation between Obscure and later poetry. 1985 further saw a magazine called *Make It New* (*Ri ri xin*), the title referring to Ezra Pound referring to Confucius. In 1986 two important publications came out: *Han Poetry: A Chronicle of the Twentieth Century* (*Han shi: er shi shiji biannian shi*) and *Nay Nay* (*Feifei*), both dominated by Sichuan poets and editors. Over the years the recalcitrant stand taken in the latter caused quite a stir in the literary world, but its poetry failed to live up to its theory. In 1985 three major magazines had appeared in the Shanghai-Nanjing area: *At Sea* (the city name reversed: *Hai shang*) and *Continent* (*Dalu*) in Shanghai, and *Them* (*Tamen*), closely associated with Stream of Life poetry, in Nanjing. With contributors from all quarters, these three and later publications bridged the geographical distances between various breeding grounds of Experimental poetry. Local networks have continued to exist, but from the late 1980s onward unofficial publications have accommodated poets from all over the country: the Hangzhou-based *Tropic of Cancer* (*Bei huigui xian*) (1988), for instance, and the Beijing-based *Tendency* (*Qingxiang*) (1988), a result of the meeting of poets from Beijing, Chengdu and Shanghai.

One more Beijing magazine from the 1980s merits special attention. First of all, it was a large-scale, well-organized and ambitious publication with on its editorial board resounding names such as Mang Ke, Yang Lian and the critic-poet Tang Xiaodu (b. 1954). Furthermore, it was to some extent a continuation of *Today*, called in an oblique reference to earlier days *The Survivors* (*Xingcun zhe*). *The Survivors* was published by a Beijing poets' club of the same name and came out twice, in July 1988 and early in 1989. As had been done by another and to some extent rival group of poets on 10 September 1988 – *The Night of Peace* (*Heping zhi ye*) – *The Survivors* also organized a grand poetry reading. It took place in the Central Drama Institute with Guo Lusheng as the senior participant. This was on 2 April 1989, ten years after the first *Today* recital in 1979, as if to mark the growth of a tradition within the unofficial circuit, or to stress the historical consciousness of those who had lived through the first revolt against orthodoxy. Members of the one-time *Today* group had indeed with a low degree of formality stayed in touch

throughout the 1980s, now and then convening meetings of the old guard. On 23 December 1988 another tenth anniversary had thus been celebrated: that of *Today's* first issue. On that occasion, for which both Bei Dao and Mang Ke had returned from abroad, Zhao Yifan was commemorated. Also, an annual Today Poetry Award (*Jintian shige jiang*) had been instituted; the first award was given to Duoduo. While he had never been structurally involved with *Today*, he was definitely one of the "surviving" generation of poets. In an atmosphere of mounting political unrest – China was witnessing the second popular demand for political reform in, again, ten years' time – the April 1989 recital was almost canceled by the Drama Institute. But the event had been widely announced, also in the Beijing foreign community, and perhaps because a last-minute cancellation would have made matters worse The Survivors were given the go-ahead. They read their poetry to a full house including the inevitable large numbers of policemen. The party planned after the recital was sabotaged in the simplest manner possible: after half an hour the electricity was cut off. Apart from the poets' introductions and their work, a booklet brought out for the event contained mottoes on poetry, including statements by the astrophysicist Fang Lizhi and Bei Dao, who were viewed as political dissidents by many. A few months earlier both had written and signed public appeals to Deng Xiaoping for the release of Wei Jingsheng. This connection with mutinous intellectuals may have added to a threat in the eyes of the authorities. Otherwise, their vigilance in the face of poetry that must be considered a marginal phenomenon in Chinese society<sup>46</sup> is hard to understand.

But then again, things had never been any different. Since 1942 Communist rulers' reactions to heterodox literature, no matter how marginal and harmless, had always been out of proportion. And not just to literature: two months later, on 4 June 1989, the world was shocked by the televised, brutal suppression of a televised, peaceful euphoria: the 1989 Chinese Protest Movement.<sup>47</sup>

#### *After June Fourth: Inside China*

June Fourth meant the end of the carefree Experimental poetry scene in the late 1980s. Control and censorship of official publications were reintensified, and the

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Introduction: From the Margin* in Yeh 1992a.

<sup>47</sup> In their anthology of Chinese writings, as diverse as it is solid, Geremie Barmé and Linda Jaivin "explore the social and cultural roots of the 1989 Protest Movement and provide a basis for understanding what has occurred in China since then" (xv). Because of its focus on Chinese cultural life and its extensive guide to further reading, Barmé & Jaivin 1992 is, in the present context, the most suitable sourcebook on the Protest Movement.

power of progressive editors dwindled as their fear of trespassing grew. They were right to worry: in 1989 and 1990 some high-ranking editors in the official circuit lost their jobs, not for reasons of incompetence but for their literary preferences and their connections with the unofficial circuit. Many planned publications were canceled or delayed. One obvious and painful off-limits topic for poetry, even by association, was June Fourth itself and all that had come with it, which had provided scores of poets with a bitter kind of "inspiration": the acute need to react to the savagery on Tiananmen Square.

But before the year was out Sichuan poets showed their resilience through new unofficial magazines: *Appearance Deception* (*Xiang wang*), and *The Nineties* (*Jiu shi niandai*), in 1990 followed by *Against* (*Fandui*), whose title was accompanied by an explanation away from politics and into the realm of "pure poetry", maybe to undo the mood of opposition it exuded. Contributions to these three publications were mostly by Sichuan poets, but authors from elsewhere were also represented. In Shanghai the unofficial circuit scrambled back to its feet with, among other publications, *Hello* (*Wei*) (1990) and *The South Poetry Magazine* (its title in English, later without the definite article, printed alongside its Chinese name: *Nanfang shizhi*) (1992); *At Sea* had in the fall of 1990 brought out a "closing issue" (*zhong kan hao*), entitled *Defend Poetry* (*Baowei shige*) – a possible reading of this paradoxical name for a last-ever publication is that under the circumstances, only silence could safeguard the poem. The unofficial circuit in Beijing gradually recovered too: in 1990, *Margin* (*Bianyuan*, with the English caption *Brink*) and *Discovery* (*Faxian*) came out, and in 1991 a publication provocatively called *Tumult* (*Da saodong*).

The most eye-catching unofficial magazine in recent years has been *Modern Han Poetry* (*Xiandai Han shi*), a quarterly first published in the spring of 1991. After June Fourth no more was heard of *The Survivors*; some members' magazine-making energy was channeled instead into *Modern Han Poetry*, which was initiated by familiar names: Mang Ke, Tang Xiaodu and others. On the personnel level the continuity with *The Survivors* and *Today* is further embodied by Lao E, who is now a car mechanic. Archivist of the *Today* generation, this successor to Zhao Yifan has since 1979 busied himself with technical matters in the unofficial poetry circuit. In their declarations of principle, both *The Survivors* and *Modern Han Poetry* show high regard for poets' individuality. But June Fourth caused a disenchantment of sorts, replacing highfalutin abstractions with a no-nonsense announcement. In 1988 the first issue of *The Survivors* still proclaimed that the poets' club was

"a group of artists purely from among the people, but not an artistic current. (...) [It has as its aim] to exert itself in upholding and developing poets' individual explorations, and to spur on such explorations through exchange [of materials and views] between

poets. (...) It attaches great importance to the intrinsic value of art, the power of the poet's personality, the crossing of swords by [different trends in] artistic thinking and [poets'] self-reliant efforts to recreate tradition."<sup>48</sup>

Quite differently, in 1991 *Modern Han Poetry*

"constitutes materials for the exchange of pure literature, with as the publication's sole aim to spur on and develop modern Han poetry. (...) It exerts itself to collect and unearth works of excellence in any trend or style. (...) It is published four times a year, in Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter issues. (...) It has an editorial board made up of a number of modern poets, on the basis of which executive boards [for separate issues] are organized. (...) It institutes the annual Modern Han Poetry Award, for which a jury made up of members of the board appraises and selects one excellent poet."<sup>49</sup>

While the majority of poets publishing in the magazine are Han Chinese, the race of its authors is not a criterion for "Han poetry". The phrase may have been motivated in two ways. First, the Chinese *Han shi* (Han poetry) is intended as a shortened *Hanyu shige*, meaning 'poetry in Chinese', as can be deduced from the report on a 1992 meeting of the board.<sup>50</sup> Secondly, the alternative in Chinese for *Chinese poetry* meaning 'poetry from China', is *Zhongguo shige*. Whereas *Zhongguo* is the name of the Chinese nation, *Han* refers to a vaguer, less political concept: the Chinese people. It stands to reason that this – unofficial! – publication wants to have more to do with *Han* than with *Zhongguo*. While unwilling to represent the political entity that is China, it does accommodate poets from all over the country, as contributors and editors. This nationwide orientation, reaffirmed at the 1992 board meeting, is all the more conspicuous if the magazine's Beijing genealogy – *Today* and *The Survivors* – is borne in mind. It is substantiated in the close to forty names on the editorial board, which indeed includes poets of all kinds, from different times and places in Experimental poetry: the 1978 political rebel Huang Xiang, the Obscure poet Mang Ke, believers in irony like "Speech poets" Han Dong and Yu Jian, *Nay Nay*-ist Zhou Lunyou (b. 1952), metaphysically inclined devotees of poetry such as Xi Chuan and Chen Dongdong, the champion of the modern epic Zhong

<sup>48</sup> *The Survivors*, # 1 (1988).

<sup>49</sup> *Modern Han Poetry*, # 1 (Spring 1991).

<sup>50</sup> *Modern Han Poetry*, # 7-8 (Fall-Winter 1992).



Ming (b. 1953) and others.<sup>51</sup> And while *Modern Han Poetry's* nerve center lies in Beijing, different issues are prepared in different cities: the first three in Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou respectively.

The liveliness of the unofficial circuit is a sure sign: Experimental poetry has not been stamped out by June Fourth. Unofficial publications in the years since 1989 were the precursors of its comeback in official books and magazines too. Convincing examples are the leading review *Explorations in Poetry* (*Shi tansuo*, reestablished in 1994), the many anthologies and individual collections of recent years, and Experimentally inclined histories of modern Chinese poetry. The latter polish off Communist literary dogma in a tone of self-evidence, almost as if everybody had known all along that no good can come of the subordination of literature to politics. The results of the "massification" of poetry, for instance, are candidly called disastrous from a literary point of view.<sup>52</sup> Within the framework of modern poetry in this century, Experimental poetry since *Today* is seen as tremendously important. Within the framework of Experimental poetry, the histories' authors seem better equipped – so far – for dealing with Obscure than with Newborn poetry. In a sense that is only natural, for criticism comes after creative writing and Newborn poetry is the latest thing. Moreover, much of the material published in the early 1990s, in literary histories and prefaces to anthologies, was doubtless written in the late 1980s and would have appeared earlier had it not been for June Fourth – "drawer literature" is not just written by poets but also by critics. If the years 1992 and 1993 saw something of a breakthrough for anthologies and for works of more or less academic literary history and criticism, that is partly because the drawers were pulled open once more.<sup>53</sup>

All of this does not mean that anything goes, either in poetry or in criticism. While literary policy and literature from earlier days like the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution can freely be taken to task, recent history remains dangerous ground for critics. Developments in poetry can almost without exception be described and supported, but political obstacles in their way, such as the campaign against Spiritual Pollution and June Fourth, are hardly mentioned explicitly – while clearly visible between the lines.<sup>54</sup> This ambivalence reflects the authorities' conditional connivance and makes controversial poets' role in official literary history

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<sup>51</sup> The board is forever subject to slight changes. This account is based on the list of names printed in *Modern Han Poetry* # 11-12 (Fall-Winter 1993).

<sup>52</sup> See for example Wang (Guangming) 1993: 104.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. the appearance of Huang (Zumin) 1992; Tang 1992; Wan & Xiaoxiao 1993; the series Xie & Tang 1993 and Xie & Li 1993; Hong & Liu 1993; Wang (Guangming) 1993.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Xie 1995a and 1995b.



a strange one indeed. Bei Dao's writings, for instance, are frequently quoted in books from 1993, but rarely accompanied by his pen name. If his authorship is acknowledged at all, Bei Dao is mostly referred to by his lesser-known real name (Zhao Zhenkai) or by an earlier pseudonym (Ai Shan).<sup>55</sup> In one poetry history, with separate sections devoted to major Obscure poets, his is a glaring absence, all the more so because in the preceding chapter he is listed together with the three poets who *are* discussed individually.<sup>56</sup> All the same the situation has improved since 1991. Then, in the Communist tradition, Bei Dao's poetry and his person could at a national conference on poetry still fall victim to political innuendo and vilification of an embarrassing baseness and stupidity, all under the banner of literary criticism, and a 1500-page "dictionary for the appreciation" of twentieth-century Chinese poetry was banned because it contained six of his poems – all of which had been published and anthologized before.<sup>57</sup> The shift in policy as regards Bei Dao's poetry is exemplary for general trends in the literary climate since 1989: a partial reversion to repression, roughly from June Fourth through 1991, followed by a period of increasing tolerance since 1992. This is no absolute periodization – early in 1992, for instance, Shanghai poets Meng Lang and Momo were taken into custody, and their personal libraries, manuscripts and correspondence confiscated; in 1994 copies of the reestablished *Tendency* meant for distribution abroad were seized by the Chinese customs and its editors given trouble by the police;<sup>58</sup> and there are always authors, topics and styles that are "inconvenient" for publication in the official circuit, and books blacklisted or kept from publication "from above". But on the whole, the poetry scene is at this writing once more characterized by pluriformity and proliferation, even more so than in the late 1980s.<sup>59</sup> And while it is unwise to call any type of poetry irrepressible in the totalitarian state that is China, it is no longer altogether outlandish to do so.

<sup>55</sup> Yang 1993; Hong & Liu 1993; Wang (Guangming) 1993.

<sup>56</sup> Hong & Liu 1993: 374, 413ff. In this history the same fate befell Jiang He. Cf. Wu 1991: ch. 5, on Obscure poetry: Bei Dao is mentioned in the general outline but absent from the individual discussions (Shu Ting, Gu Cheng, Jiang He, Yang Lian).

<sup>57</sup> Chen (Shaowei) 1991 and Wang 1991. The latter had been scheduled to come out in the fall of 1991. It was banned in the summer, at the very last moment, when part of the first edition had been printed and bound. In March 1994 the ban seemed in the process of being lifted: the book was in limited circulation, its contents unchanged. Bei Dao's poems are on 848-857. On post-June Fourth orthodox PRC criticism of Bei Dao and his work, see also Liu 1992.

<sup>58</sup> See *Memorandum on the State of Chinese Literature and Art and Chinese Writers and Artists* (*Zhongguo wenxue yishu ji zuojia yishu jia zhuangkuang beiwang lu*) # 1, in *Tendency* 1994 # 1: 265.

<sup>59</sup> The spring of 1995.

*After June Fourth: Outside China*

For major poets who found themselves abroad at the time, the suppression of the Protest Movement made a return to China impossible: Bei Dao, Duoduo, Gu Cheng and Yang Lian, among others. True enough, Bei Dao's relationship with the authorities had not been harmonious in the spring of 1989 and neither he nor Duoduo had foreseen the length of their stay abroad – but none of these four had left China as political refugees and all had left or decided to leave long before June Fourth. While they had not been officially forced to leave the country and there were no legal verdicts forbidding them to come back, they can be seen as exiled poets, certainly in the first few years after June Fourth. They had reason to believe that in the near future the Chinese political climate would not be favorable to overly creative writing; and outside China they had willy-nilly become spokesmen for the repressed, ambassadors of resistance using and used by foreign media for their condemnation of the Chinese government's brutality. This publicized dissidence would not make life or poethood inside China any easier. If their exile was voluntary in the sense that they had gone abroad of their own free will and not been banished or expelled, the net effect of their fears – political trouble or sabotage of their writing – was the same during the first few years after 1989: they could not go back. In fact Bei Dao, Gu Cheng and Yang Lian, being the Spiritually Polluting Obscure poets they were, had long known from personal experience what it was to have their art attacked by orthodoxy. For them, the wish to leave China – as opposed to the wish to go somewhere else – had helped motivate earlier sojourns abroad in the late 1980s as well, but June Fourth vindicated them in a terrible way and burned their bridges for them. Unwilling to risk their personal or artistic safety, the exiled poets stayed abroad. Nobler tragedies like their uprootedness, language barriers, and the loss of their native audience aside, they had to deal with the vulgar but acute problem of money. There were royalties and fees for publications, readings, public interviews; slightly more structural solutions were provided by employment in Chinese Departments and as writers in residence with academic and cultural institutions around the world.

As time went by and the world's memories of June Fourth faded, its political interest in exiled Chinese poets declined. But by then the Chinese poetry scene had grown a foreign offshoot, started in 1987 with the New York-based Chinese poetry magazine *First Line*<sup>60</sup> (*Yi hang*) and symbolized by the 1990 reestablishment of

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<sup>60</sup> *First Line* is the translation offered by the magazine's editors (*Front Line* for the first issue). In Chinese, its title is a most versatile phrase which would, in its customary pronunciation and in connection with poetry, normally mean "one line" but can also be read as "in one [i.e., a shared] trade". Pronounced *yi xing*, it means "group traveling together", or "coterie".

*Today*, in Oslo and later Stockholm and New York, as a quarterly with Bei Dao as editor in chief. Like the old *Today*, it is a literary magazine carrying Chinese Experimental poetry, fiction, essays, drama, criticism and introductions and translations of foreign literature and criticism. But the new *Today* is a publication in exile and must cover great distances to reach readers inside China. While it has of course been taken into the PRC from day one, distribution there remains a problem for political reasons: having been resurrected in angry response to June Fourth, the magazine is potentially incriminating material and in the years 1990-1991 led an underground existence inside China. But roughly since 1992 *Today* no longer seems to count as an acutely dangerous counter-revolutionary magazine, although not a few copies still get lost in the mail. A third publication, less defined by the state of exile than the new *Today* and with less of a focus on poetry than either *Today* or *First Line*, is *Tendency*: while most of its authors and editors still reside in China, the magazine has been based in and run from Cambridge, Massachusetts since its reestablishment early in 1994.

In the first years after June Fourth there was predictably little contact between the scenes inside and outside China. This separation resulted in ignorance and misunderstanding, where poets inside China had a distorted picture of those abroad and were quite unjustly envious of them. Understandably, there were those inside the country who felt that the exiled poets were riding the tide of political attention, that they were arrogating foreign sympathy as the would-be victims of a repression they had in fact escaped. Among younger poets such grudges were deepened because it was once more the old *Today* generation of poets who seemed to be in the right place at the right time. Many of those inside China, especially if they had never had the chance to go abroad themselves, failed to realize that foreign soil was a far cry from the right place if going back was not an option. They had no way of truly knowing that stripped of its heroic surface, the state of exile must invariably entail a despondent loneliness, a painful longing for the past from which one is now cut off in space.<sup>61</sup>

Fortunately, much crossing of the borders has taken place since the relaxation of the Chinese literary climate around 1992. In a literal sense: in recent years those abroad have been joined, often temporarily, by other, mostly younger poets, whether or not "in exile" according to themselves or others; and in 1993, both Gu Cheng and Yang Lian visited China – while unexpectedly, Bei Dao's first attempt to go home after five and a half years was thwarted by the Chinese authorities, in an infuriating

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Van Creveld 1991.

manner.<sup>62</sup> Still, that sad incident has not halted an osmosis of the two poetry scenes – analogous to that of the official and the unofficial circuits within China – which is manifest from publications inside and outside China. The new *Today* features a growing number of contributions straight from the PRC; in a 1993 issue of *South Poetry Magazine* Wang Jiixin dwells on Chinese poethood outside China,<sup>63</sup> and it is not at all uncommon for one author to publish in both scenes at the same time. Besides, *First Line*, a magazine less politically defined than the new *Today* and publicly advertizing the names and addresses of its agents on the Chinese mainland, has maintained this connection ever since 1987.

As a side-effect of this osmosis, the concept of exile literature (*liuwang wenxue*) has not become any clearer<sup>64</sup> and there is no consensus as to where its territory begins and ends. In a sense that is just as well; for the label "exile literature", perhaps because of its political relevance, is one likely to condition its readers in an overbearing way. With the dynamism of the two interacting scenes and the overall pluriformity of contemporary Chinese poetry, questions arise: Is exile literature defined by its author's being in exile? If so, what are the criteria? Being forced to leave, unable to return for political reasons, unwilling to return for personal reasons, living abroad? Do all authors in exile write exile literature? Can they write anything else? Or is exile literature about the state of exile, or the forces bringing it about? Can exile literature be written at home, as a pure product of the mind? Is exile literature political by nature, directly or by implication? Because exile literature is hard to delineate – and because political repression and the wish to leave home are of all times and places – there is a depressing multitude of examples: exile literature is not a new thing, in the Chinese tradition or elsewhere.<sup>65</sup> The above and other

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<sup>62</sup> See Burdman 1994 and Van Crevel 1995a. Upon arrival at the Beijing airport on 24 November 1994, Bei Dao was detained for twelve hours and interrogated. Subsequently, he was officially refused entry to China on the basis of his "non-cooperative attitude" and his "participation abroad in activities opposing the Chinese government", and expelled. His ordeal is caused by his politics, not his writing: his interrogators questioned him on his membership of the New York-based non-governmental organization *Human Rights in China* (*Zhongguo renquan*), on his part in the February 1989 petition supporting Fang Lizhi's request for amnesty for political prisoners, on his open letter to the government after Fang had been prevented from attending a banquet in Beijing hosted by the American President Bush, and on his view of June Fourth. They expressed little interest in the new *Today* or foreign collections of Bei Dao's poetry.

<sup>63</sup> Wang (Jiixin) 1993: 44-45 (question 7).

<sup>64</sup> The Chinese term accommodates this vagueness: a dictionary rendition of *fangzhu* is *banish* or *expel*, whereas *liuwang* is rendered as *be forced to leave one's native land, go into exile*.

<sup>65</sup> In imperial China, poetry-writing officials could be appointed in distant border regions; twentieth-century writers left the Chinese mainland at various times before 1989, especially toward the end of the Civil War and the Communist takeover in 1949; of those who went to Taiwan, some ended up leaving there too. As for other literary traditions, there is an infinite set of examples the world over and ranging from ancient times to the present. Before it encountered Chinese authors abroad after June Fourth, the

questions have been asked before, but that does not make them any less valid for the Chinese poetry scene in the years after June Fourth.<sup>66</sup>

#### FOREIGN ATTENTION

Since its first publication in *Today*, Experimental poetry has attracted foreign attention, much more so than Establishment poetry from the same period or before. Seen as a sign of the changes after Deng Xiaoping's rise to power, the 1978-1979 Democracy Movement was followed and reported on by foreign observers. Had it not been published in those turbulent days, Experimental poetry might at the time have had fewer foreign readers. But this slipstream effect and the political significance of Experimental poetry aside, its literary qualities did not go unnoticed by foreign scholars and readers familiar with PRC literature. For unofficial publications they mostly depended on personal contacts, but once Experimental poetry had made its way into official magazines and books it became accessible to faraway readers as well. Foreign interest, including Chinese interest from Hong Kong<sup>67</sup> and Taiwan, was further nourished by this poetry's declared international orientation, and soon led to translation and publications outside China in both scholarly and literary circuits.<sup>68</sup> This took place – as it did for other literary genres – in the context of China's opening up to the world and a rapid increase of the frequency and intensity of Chinese-foreign contacts at all levels. In the field of poetry such contacts expanded across the Chinese borders from roughly the mid-1980s onward, when poets began to travel abroad and could meet with foreigners under foreign circumstances too. Their physical presence abroad, at poetry readings and as writers in residence, furthered production and distribution of their work in translation.<sup>69</sup>

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West had in this century become closely acquainted with Russian, Soviet and Eastern-European writers in exile. But no quarter of the world has been without its tragic representatives, although some receive more publicity than others.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Lee 1993a.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Beiling & Meng 1989. The article is dated 1986 and its contents do not lead one to suspect antedating. It seems likely that its belated publication in the September and October 1989 issues of the Hong Kong monthly *Jiefang* was in part motivated by that year's political history, conveniently summed up as June Fourth.

<sup>68</sup> Examples of scholarly articles in English on the work of individual poets are McDougall 1985, Yip 1985, Golden & Minford 1990, Lee 1990, Patton 1991, Lee 1993b, Van Crevel 1993b.

<sup>69</sup> The annual Poetry International festival in Rotterdam has, for example, featured the following Experimental poets since 1985: Bei Dao, Duoduo, Gu Cheng, Ma Gaoming, Mang Ke, Shu Ting, Song Lin, Tong Wei, Wang Jiaxin, Xi Chuan, Yang Lian, Zhai Yongming.

Foreign attention reached a peak in the years after June Fourth, partly for the wrong reasons: political sympathy. To be sure, political sympathy for the victims of repression is in order and Chinese Experimental poets and poetry were in the line of fire. But that hardly warrants the degree to which both were politicized by some of their foreign champions, even if the poets now and then lent a hand themselves. Unfortunately, *a priori* sympathetic foreigners can mistreat a poem in essentially the same way as Chinese defenders of orthodoxy, by denying it the right to be read for what it is: a poem, not a pamphlet.<sup>70</sup> With the best of intentions – and, granted, usually a more nuanced approach than Chinese hard-core Establishment critics – its foreign promoters have on occasion given their audience a distorted impression, as the following examples show. One: in a diary entry from late 1990, published in 1993, a translator states that an unnamed, famous poet, presumably Haizi, "committed suicide just prior to June 1989".<sup>71</sup> This is not a lie – Haizi killed himself on 26 March – but it suggests a causal relationship which it is impossible to prove, and it is in bad taste. Haizi also committed suicide just prior to April and May 1989, and if "just" is omitted the same thing is true for Sylvia Plath or Qu Yuan, the archetypically Chinese Poet said to have drowned himself in the third century B.C. Two: the blurb of a 1991 anthology in translation has as its last sentence: "Mang Ke was arrested after the 1989 demonstration in Tiananmen Square", implying that he was still behind bars when the book went to press.<sup>72</sup> In truth Mang Ke returned home after two days, as would have been easy for anyone anywhere to find out. By 1991 he was busy running a nationwide unofficial poetry magazine. Three: against the poet's and the translators' will, a 1989 collection of Duoduo's poetry in English was christened *Looking out from Death: From the Cultural Revolution to Tiananmen Square*, as if his poetry were but a chronicle of political repression in China.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Lau 1990: 19, on the unequal division of foreign attention for different Chinese literatures, particularly those from Taiwan and Hong Kong as opposed to PRC literature: "(...) to limit our attention to the literary products of an area only for their extra-literary significance is to violate the sanctity of imaginative literature as an artistic autonomy". See also Van Crevel 1993a, 1994a and 1994b, and chapters six and seven of this book.

<sup>71</sup> Haven 1993.

<sup>72</sup> Finkel 1991. In the *Biographical Notes* (xvi), the facts are presented in exactly the same way.

<sup>73</sup> Duoduo 1989b. According to Duoduo (personal communication, summer 1989) this title was pushed through by the publisher. Gregory Lee and John Cayley had earlier prepared a collection entitled *Statements for Wellsweep* (Duoduo 1989c). It was expanded and revised for publication by Bloomsbury, under a time pressure which must have been motivated by the wish to stay as close to June Fourth as possible. The cover of the Bloomsbury edition shows Mao's portrait and the Chinese students' plaster version of the Statue of Liberty in the Square, and has these opening lines: "The events of June 4 in Tienanmen [sic] Square stunned the world. Duoduo (...) was there." This politicizing is especially uncalled for in the case of Duoduo's work. For its low politicality, see Van Crevel 1993a and chapters six and seven of this book.



Four: the translator of a 1993 anthology including poetry from the preceding twenty years has the nerve to write: "The poems you read in this book have traveled from Tiananmen Square to your living room (...)." <sup>74</sup> Strictly speaking the stories are not untrue; but their wording is tendentious and unjustified, even by the sincerest esteem for poetry or justice.

This and other problems surround the role of foreign critics, editors and translators shaping the image of Experimental poetry outside China, sometimes acting in conjunction with Chinese colleagues. But on the whole much more good work is done than bad. Publications in magazines, literary or other, newspapers etc. are numerous and books of Experimental poetry in translation have come out from the early 1980s onward, in Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Swedish and other languages. Apart from academic articles and introductions to literary translations, book-length studies have in recent years also begun to appear. In its turn, foreign criticism is translated into and sometimes written in Chinese, and published in the official and unofficial circuit, inside and outside China. <sup>75</sup> This indicates a wish, on both sides, for interaction and dialogue.

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<sup>74</sup> Barnstone 1993: xviii.

<sup>75</sup> The following examples are book publications in English (cf. Yeh 1990): Bei Dao 1984, 1988a, 1991a, 1994; Duoduo 1989b, 1995; Gu 1990; Yang 1990a, 1990b, 1994 (all one-poet collections); Link 1983; Siu & Stern 1983; Soong & Minford 1984; Duke 1985; Barmé & Minford 1987; Morin 1990; Finkel 1991; Tang & Robinson 1992; Yeh 1992a; Barnstone 1993 (anthologies, the last five exclusively of poetry). Examples of book-length studies outside the PRC are Yeh 1991a (treating of Experimental poetry in the greater context of modern Chinese poetry since 1917); Hoffmann 1993; Zhuang 1993. Both *Modern Han Poetry* and the new *Today* carry foreign contributions; an example from the official circuit inside China is Zheng 1989.



## Chapter four

### DUODUO

Duoduo (Li Shizheng) was born in Beijing on 28 August 1951, the youngest of three children in a family whose class label was that of intellectuals.<sup>1</sup> He went to primary school from 1958 to 1964; from 1964 to 1968 he was registered as a high-school student, but in reality his formal education came to an end with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in the summer of 1966. In that year, belonging to the "stinking" class of intellectuals was no small matter. The Li home was searched and put under seal by Red Guards; Duoduo's parents had to go live at their work-units on week-days, were subjected to "criticism and struggle" and eventually sent to a cadre school to be "reeducated" in the spirit of the day. As a teenager caught in the whipped-up Mao cult, Duoduo wanted to be a Red Guard, but his family background made that impossible: he was not "red" enough. All the same he enjoyed the anarchy among the young, and with classmates went on a three-month train journey through different parts of China, to "link up to exchange revolutionary experiences". Early in 1967, after factional strife had divided the Red Guard movement – roughly along the lines of "redness" by birth versus "redness" by behavior – he became a member of the Third Headquarters of the Rebel Faction in Beijing. After more traveling and "revolutionary" frenzy, 1968 was a year of relative calm. Duoduo read classical Chinese literature, orthodox PRC works, the writings of Marx, Mao Zedong and other authors from the political canon but also foreign literature in Chinese translation. In January 1969, with the Rustication Campaign well under way, he was one of eight Young Intellectuals, friends and classmates in Beijing, who moved to the village of Da Diantou in the Hebei area called Baiyangdian to join a rural production brigade. Mang Ke and Genzi, both of whom he had befriended in high school, were among them. In the fall of that year Duoduo contracted hepatitis and returned to Beijing. Afterward he lived at his parental home again, by himself until his parents returned in 1972. Until 1975 he officially remained resident in Baiyangdian and occasionally went there. After he had once more been registered in Beijing he was unemployed for three years.

Duoduo had long wanted to be a professional singer but failed the entrance examinations of the Beijing Central Philharmonic Society. In 1978 he got a job as library attendant in the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and in 1980 he started working for the *Peasants' Daily* (*Nongmin ribao*), as editor at the economics desk. He got married in 1981. The couple had a daughter who died in infancy, on 24 April

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based on Duoduo 1988b and 1992; Zhang 1990; Bei Dao 1991 and 1992c; Sizoo 1991; De Swaan 1990; my fieldwork. Information in chapters two and three on Duoduo's life and career as a poet will not be repeated here.

1982; later that year they were divorced. In 1985 Duoduo was transferred to the *Daily's* reporting desk. His new position did not require much presence at the office and gave him the chance to travel for one or two months a year. Reporters had a say in their itineraries; writing on the circulation of money and commodities in rural areas, Duoduo journeyed to Gansu, Inner Mongolia, Qinghai, Sichuan, Tibet and Yunnan. Late in 1988 he became an editor at the paper's literature and art desk.

Invited for the June 1989 Poetry International festival in Rotterdam, Duoduo availed himself of the opportunity to make his first trip abroad a longer one to Great Britain, the Netherlands and other places. His date of departure was 4 June, which turned out to be June Fourth; he was among the first eyewitnesses to the events in and around Tiananmen Square to give an articulate testimony in the West, in London and Rotterdam. He made candid public comments on the suppression of the Protest Movement and on PRC society, in speech and in writing; a return to China seemed unwise. After participating in Poetry International he settled in London, where he found one year's employment with the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. At the same time he began writing columns for the leading Dutch daily *NRC Handelsblad*. From the fall of 1990 he was writer in residence with the Canadian branch of International PEN, at Glendon College, University of York; during the following academic year he was supported by the Ludo Pieters Writer in Residence Foundation to take up a similar position at the Leiden University Sinological Institute. After a period of alternating sojourns in the Netherlands and Canada, he became writer in residence again in 1994, this time in Berlin, sponsored by the German Academic Exchange Service. In the years he has hitherto spent outside China, Duoduo has participated in numerous literary activities in various countries in Europe and North America.

#### POETHOOD, RECOGNITION, PROMINENCE

"The windows open like eyes..."

In 1988 Duoduo remembered these words as the first expression of his poethood.<sup>2</sup> When the phrase presented itself to him on 19 June 1972 – it has not returned in any published poem – reading poetry was no longer enough. He wanted to write it too. The image is appropriate for the experience it constituted, for Duoduo recalls his conversion to poetry as no less than a revelation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Duoduo 1988b: 167.

<sup>3</sup> Duoduo 1992: 103.

His earliest poetry went into the "yearbooks" he exchanged with Mang Ke from 1972 onward. There was no question of reproducing these texts. Even having them copied out by friends was risky business at the time, because it took control of their readership away from the author.<sup>4</sup> Duoduo kept filling "notebooks" with poetry, and later with fiction too. The last of these private collections was compiled in 1981.

The early 1980s also marked the beginning of Duoduo's public poethood.<sup>5</sup> He first published in the third set of *Today's Materials for Internal Exchange*, under the pen name Bai Ye. Before long, *Today* went out of business; Duoduo's late appearance earned him the nickname "Last Bus" among fellow poets. In spite of his contribution to the magazine, the widespread assumption that Duoduo was a member of the *Today* group of poets who was somehow overlooked until the mid-1980s is wrong. He was never structurally involved with the magazine, he was not a regular contributor and he did not attend any of the meetings organized by the *Today Group for the Study of Literature*.

Ten years after he had started writing, in 1982, two of Duoduo's poems appeared in an official magazine: *The Ugly Duckling* (*Chou xiao ya*). This was the first time he used the pseudonym Duoduo, in remembrance of his daughter Li Duoduo; it has accompanied his literary writings ever since.<sup>6</sup> Between 1982 and 1989 his poetry appeared in three official magazines – in *The Ugly Duckling* (*Chou xiao ya*) in 1982, in *China* (*Zhongguo*) in 1986 and in *Poetry* (*Shikan*) in 1989 – as well as in both regular issues and one special issue of the unofficial magazine *The Survivors* and in three issues of the New York-based *First Line*. Only in 1985 did he publish his fiction, which he had begun writing in 1974; in five years, 11 of his stories came out in the official circuit. It was also in the second half of the 1980s that his poetry was included in several important anthologies. In 1987 and 1988 he won awards for his poetry at readings organized at Beijing University and the Beijing No. 1 Foreign Languages Institute. An official collection of his poetry published by the progressive Lijiang Press and entitled *Salute: 38 Poems* (*Xingli: shi 38 shou*), in the series *Poetry by the Young*, has 1988 as its colophon year of publication; a year later the book became actually available, in an edition of 7409 copies.

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<sup>4</sup> Gan Tiesheng (1994: 152) relates how Duoduo tried to recover such control when he had reason to believe trouble for underground literature was at hand.

<sup>5</sup> For the publications listed below, see the bibliography: POETRY BY DUODUO.

<sup>6</sup> Besides Bai Ye, other pseudonyms he used are Bai Mo, accompanying a selection of his poems in a 1982 issue of the French magazine *DOC(k)S*, and Tantan, for a short story published in 1986 in the Chinese magazine *Youth* (*Qingchun*) 1986 # 6. The origin of the pen name Duoduo warrants its transcription as one word, but some transcribe it as Duo Duo.

Duoduo was an inner-circle member of The Survivors Poetry Club, and a member of the editorial board of their unofficial magazine; he participated in The Survivors' poetry reading of April 1989. Evidence for his recognition as an Experimental poet is further provided by the 1988 Today Poetry Award, which included the publication of a large – unofficial – collection of his poetry by the *Today* editorial board. This book, *The Road Traveled (Licheng)*, was prepared by Duoduo in collaboration with Lao E, and came out in 500 copies. After its publication in the early spring of 1989, a meeting was held on 8 April to honor the author: poets and critics such as Bei Dao, Tang Xiaodu, Wang Jiabin, Yu Cijiang, Huang Ziping and Guo Lusheng spoke, and Duoduo gave a long poetry reading. He did so in a Cultural-Revolution style outfit, presumably to recall the world in which he had once begun writing.

After leaving China Duoduo has continued to write poetry and fiction; upon an invitation by the Amsterdam theater De Balie in 1989, he also wrote a play. All his literary publications in Chinese after June Fourth have been in the reestablished *Today*, except for previously published poems included in PRC anthologies of recent years.<sup>7</sup> He is a member of the new *Today's* editorial board.

Before 1989 little of Duoduo's work had been translated. With his participation in literary activities in the West, the situation changed: a book of his poetry in English translation was to come out during his visit to Great Britain, and Dutch translations were made for Poetry International. June Fourth and the way it "cut his life in two"<sup>8</sup> abruptly increased his fame to well outside the sphere of literature, and politicized the poet and his poetry alike. The instant remodeling of his first foreign book by a publisher capitalizing on June Fourth is one in a long list of examples.<sup>9</sup> Be that as it may, in a bitter way politics secured more than the average attention for a Chinese poet from publishers, editors, critics and readers in the West and helped enable Duoduo to make a living as a writer outside China. As it turns out, in the mid-1990s he is still writing and publishing in an original, individual voice – and getting translated, long after June Fourth has been largely forgotten. Besides the 1989 English collection *Looking out from Death: From the Cultural Revolution to Tiananmen Square*, in 1991 a book of his poetry in Dutch translation appeared: *A Writing-Table in the Fields (Een schrijftafel in de velden)*, and in 1994 a German collection called *The Road Traveled (Wegstrecken)*; at this writing, a new book of his poetry in English called *Crossing the Sea* was scheduled for publication in late 1995; in the spring of 1996 a second Dutch collection entitled *There Is No Dawn (Er is geen nieuwe dag)* will appear. In Germany and the Netherlands his newspaper

<sup>7</sup> Only Walan & Wen 1990: 171-172 contains two previously unpublished poems.

<sup>8</sup> See Zoon 1989.

<sup>9</sup> See chapter three: FOREIGN ATTENTION.

columns were republished as books, in 1990 and 1991 respectively – in the Netherlands a second volume is to come out in 1996 – and in the Netherlands a collection of his short stories appeared early in 1995. Translations into different languages – e.g. Bulgarian, Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Hebrew, Iranian, Italian, Persian, Spanish and Swedish – published in literary magazines, anthologies etc. are too numerous to be listed here.

If publication and distribution of a poet's work are measures of success, Duoduo's breakthrough came later than it had for the six names most readily associated with Obscure poetry: Bei Dao, Gu Cheng, Jiang He, Shu Ting, Yang Lian and Mang Ke.<sup>10</sup> He had only one poem published in *Today*, he did not partake in the literary activity generated by the magazine and his work did not enter mainstream state-run magazines in the early 1980s. He was not taken to task in the controversy over Obscure poetry or during the campaign against Spiritual Pollution – for his writings, that is. Still, at his work-unit he was called in for talks regarding the nation's mental health, because of his long-standing acquaintance with members of the Obscure poetry scene. Conversely, his literary success, i.e. frequent publications in the second half of the 1980s, coincided with the emergence of a younger generation of poets whose personal histories had little in common with the Obscure poets' or with Duoduo's.

In other words, Duoduo's background and his publication history offer conflicting clues for his categorization as a poet. The inclusion of his poetry in some anthologies and its absence from others illustrate the point. His poems were not included in the 1986 anthologies *Obscure Poetry* and *Poems by Five [Poets]* – Bei Dao, Shu Ting, Gu Cheng, Jiang He, Yang Lian, all well-known Obscure poets – or in the 1988 *Dictionary for the Appreciation of Famous Obscure Poems*: so Duoduo was not an established Obscure poet. But his work is also absent from *Contemporary Experimental Chinese Poetry* (1987), from *Exploratory Poetry by Poets of the Third Generation* (1988), from *The Lampwick's Happy Dance: A Selection of Post-Obscure Poetry* (1988), from *After Obscure Poetry: Chinese Avant-Garde Poetry* (1990), from *Eastern Pyramid: 13 Young Chinese Poets* (1991) and *Ten Young Contemporary Poets* (1993), and from *The Complete Post-Obscure Poetry: A Chronicle of Modern Chinese Poetry* (1993). Apparently the editors of this second list of books did not find him an "experimental", "exploratory", "Third Generation", "Post-Obscure", "avantgarde" or "young" poet; all six terms are used in emphatic dissociation from

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<sup>10</sup> Although Mang Ke was no longer part of this group when it entered the official circuit – which explains his absence from Guan 1986 and his much too modest appearance in Yan, Gao, Liang & Gu 1986: 307-312 – he had definitely "broken through" in the pages of *Today*. Moreover, Mang Ke's (1980) was the earliest individual collection of poetry in the *Today Series*.

Obscure poetry, so Duoduo was not an established non-Obscure poet either. Finally, most of the anthologies in which his work did appear assume no division of Experimental poetry into Obscure and other types of poetry. A mere two take a firm stand: according to these books, Duoduo is an Obscure poet after all.<sup>11</sup> Their judgment may be based on his involvement with *The Survivors* and especially his status as the first *Today* Poet Laureate in 1988. The Award, a set of original copies of *Today*, seemed at long last to welcome him as one of the generation of Obscure poets. The dedication printed before the table of contents in *The Road Traveled* says it all:

"From the early 1970s until this day Duoduo, lonely and indefatigable, has made artistic explorations, encouraging and influencing many of his contemporaries all the while..."<sup>12</sup>

Here, the Chinese poetry scene's general love of the word *lonely* only partially accounts for its use, which can almost be read as an expression of guilt by the ranks he did not join earlier. In fact this "loneliness" of the poet Duoduo is just as well: it reminds one of an essential disorderliness often glossed over by literary historians, and Duoduo's wayward style deserves a certain intangibility.

In sum: in its literary surroundings, Duoduo's work is that of a prominent poet whose career reflects the vicissitudes of PRC poetry since the late 1960s.

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<sup>11</sup> In order of appearance in this passage: Yan, Gao, Liang & Gu 1986; Guan 1986; Qi, Ren & Jie'er 1988; Tang & Wang 1987; Xi Ping 1988, Tang 1992 (published in 1992 but compiled in 1988); Li, Zhang & Zhang 1990; Niu 1991, Jiang 1993, Wan & Xiaoxiao 1993; Lao Mu 1985a, Jiang (Jincheng) 1986, Zhou 1986; Xu, Meng, Cao & Lü 1988; Xiao 1989, Wang 1991; Chen 1989, Tang 1993a.

<sup>12</sup> Duoduo 1989a.





## Part II

### DUODUO'S POETRY

If Duoduo's prominence as a PRC poet helped motivate this case study of his oeuvre, my "pre-academic" appreciation of his poetry was equally important. I find in some of his poems a beauty and intensity unrivaled in contemporary poetry from the PRC.

Chapter five describes my approach to the subject. In chapters six and seven I present commentaries on Duoduo's early and later work. The periodization – ca. 1972-1982 and 1983-1994 – is mine; my commentaries are the result of close reading and pay more attention to content than to form. Chapter eight charts published receptions of Duoduo's poetry.



## Chapter five

### APPROACH

The following issues come under this heading: aim, terminology and method of my commentaries; my selection of poems from the oeuvre and the order in which they are discussed; the sources; and my English translations.

#### AIM, TERMINOLOGY AND METHOD

##### *Aim: Transparency*

Reading poetry is holding it to the light. From different angles it will show different degrees of transparency. The more transparent a poem becomes, the more satisfaction may be derived from reading it. One needs light in order to see – and if not to see, why bother to look at all?

Some readers are horrified by the thought of more words being added to those in the poem. The starting point of my discussion is that commentaries on Duoduo's poetry derive meaning from the transparency they can bring about. By transparency I mean the extent to which the structure of a single poem or of greater parts of the oeuvre becomes visible and plausible to other readers.

##### *Terminology: Form, Content, Structure, Analysis, Interpretation, Theme*

I employ a number of terms as they have been defined by the Dutch critic and theorist J.J. Oversteegen.<sup>1</sup> Oversteegen's writings present a combination of meticulous scholarship and common sense. His approach is a conscious attempt to establish coherence by close reading, which I find suitable for Duoduo's poetry. By contrast, both an ideologically motivated approach, like that of orthodox PRC criticism, and a Deconstructionist approach strike me as unrewarding for this oeuvre. The importance of ideology in Duoduo's work quickly dwindles after his first few years of

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<sup>1</sup> Oversteegen 1982, 1983, 1986; esp. the 1965 essay *Analyse en oordeel* (Analysis and Judgment) reprinted in Oversteegen 1983. During my research I acquainted myself with various approaches in literary criticism (e.g. Bal 1991; Bronzwaer 1993; Culler 1989a and 1989b; Eagleton 1989a and 1989b; Eco 1992; Fokkema & Ibsch 1992; Fowler 1989; Leech 1988; Luxemburg, Bal & Weststeijn 1988; Oversteegen 1982, 1983, 1986; Wellek & Warren 1986). I audited classes on the analysis and interpretation of poetry at Leiden University (Department of Literary Studies) in the spring of 1992, and partook in the October 1994 seminar *Problems of Interpretation*, organized by the Netherlands Graduate School for Literary Studies.

writing, and it seems unwise to apply Deconstruction to a poetry whose whim and disjunctive qualities are among its distinguishing features.

An appealing aspect of Oversteegen's approach lies in his treatment of form and content. It is common knowledge that these two concepts are harder to define and tell apart than their ubiquity in literary criticism and less specialized language suggests. An extreme example would be a poem typographically arranged to look like a swastika: form or content? But an equation of the two – form *is* content – is in danger of oversimplifying matters as well. One would have to forget one's familiarity with the two concepts to maintain that, say, the number of syllables per line in Duoduo's early free verse has anything to do with the content of that poetry, and is more than form *per se*. Oversteegen sees form and content as Siamese twins: two entities but inseparably linked, fasciated from birth. His definitions of form and content are relative to and dependent upon one another. Form is a function of content, and vice versa. As follows:

*Form is the shape in which content manifests itself; content is the matter present in a certain form.*<sup>2</sup>

*Matter* is here taken to mean 'story', 'subject matter', 'topic'. According to this definition, matter becomes content only when formed.

Since form and content are relative to one another, they have a simultaneous bearing on other concepts. This is how Oversteegen defines structure:

*Structure is the unique coherence between all aspects of form and content.*<sup>3</sup>

Coherence is not necessarily of an affirmative nature; it can be "negative", and include contradictions between different aspects of form and content. The coherence of every literary work is unique, because every literary work differs from any other literary work. As regards the phrase *all aspects of form and content*, all aspects of a literary work have their own role to play but it would be impracticable to say everything that can reasonably be said about, for instance, one of Duoduo's sizable later poems.

But incompleteness need not render a commentary meaningless. A commentary is meaningful if it makes a poem's structure visible, or more clearly visible than at first sight, and if it is plausible to other readers. From Oversteegen I borrow an image as

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<sup>2</sup> Oversteegen 1983: 29.

<sup>3</sup> Oversteegen 1983: 32.

accurate as it is elegant: the commentary as a map, documenting the commentator's journey but in no way making another traveler's journey labor lost.<sup>4</sup>

I am aware of the vagueness of the word *commentary*, and should add that it is not Oversteegen's but mine. Its use is inspired partly by a distrust of jargon, partly by more positive considerations. What I have to say about Duoduo's poetry is to some extent determined by my appreciation of his work, in its turn a function of my identity as a reader. To that extent, too, my discussion cannot but be subjective and lays no claim to being scientific in the sense of making verifiable observations or predictions. But as long as *subjective* does not mean 'incomprehensible to anyone but the subject' and it is recognized that literature is not science,<sup>5</sup> the discussion is not invalidated.

Within the scope of commentary two activities take place: analysis and interpretation. Returning to Oversteegen's definitions:<sup>6</sup>

*The analysis describes those aspects of the work which lend themselves to an intersubjective and systematic treatment, namely formal characteristics – e.g. prosody, division into lines, stanzas, sections etc. – and primary meaning of the poems under scrutiny; semantic domains providing the vocabulary employed; the poems' protagonists and the narrating agent.*

These data constitute the basis and the point of departure for attempts to make the separate poems' structure visible.

This is the definition used for interpretation:

*The interpretation is a proposition for a semantic arrangement of the data in the text, based on unambiguous description of the linguistic possibilities, and with explicit argumentation for choices which cannot be founded on linguistic fact.*

The goal of such a proposition is to make one possible overall meaning of the poem – its bottom line, so to speak – visible and plausible to the reader, not to paraphrase it. Interpretations are not presented as sketches of the only possible meaning of the texts. No effort is made to retrace the author's intention, since in the present frame of reference it is neither knowable nor relevant.

<sup>4</sup> Oversteegen 1983: 70.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Duke 1993: 63-64.

<sup>6</sup> As discussed in personal communication (the fall of 1990).

The semantic arrangement in an interpretation goes further than the assigning of primary meaning. It entails examination of the means the poet uses to cover the distance between the different semantic levels. A major role is therefore assigned to studying the nature of imagery in Duoduo's poetry.

The analytic part of the commentary is more "scientific" than the interpretative part. After the image of the commentary as a map, analysis could be likened to one that describes the surface landscape, whereas interpretation would be one that indicates the composition of the soil and the depth of the water. In a none-too-coincidental analogy with the issue of form and content, analysis and interpretation are sometimes difficult to distinguish. There is a flowing transition between them, not a clear borderline. But the two ends of the scale are always discernible: it is on the basis of analysis that interpretations are proposed.

Commentaries on separate poems combine to chart essential aspects of Duoduo's poetry, in other words: to make the structure of his poetic oeuvre visible. As holds for the separate poems, the oeuvre's structure is the unique coherence of all aspects of its form and content. Within reason, that is: to present the rhyme pattern in one poem as evidence for historical allusions in another would be stretching it. But less outlandish statements about the oeuvre as a whole can be justified. They include the identification of themes in Duoduo's oeuvre:

*Themes are semantic arrangements on the level of interpretation,  
recurring in different poems.*

Themes are not assumed to be unambiguous facts and figures which can be unveiled by decoding the poem's language, any more than imagery is supposed to be a disguise for a verifiable intention or form to be a cloak for content. My commentary is no treasure hunt for keys to break codes. Such an approach would treat the poems as constructed of a secret core and protective layers, and is in the case of Duoduo's poetry indeed tempting at first sight. Everyday logic often fails to provide a rational understanding of these poems, and the impossibility of paraphrasing what is on the page may well lead one to wonder if there is a systematic type of symbolism behind it. Thrilling as the thought may be, it would be hard to prove and diminish the chances of an unbiased reading – insofar as that is humanly possible to begin with. I do not view Duoduo's poetic oeuvre as a series of riddles daring their reader to solve them in a one-on-one, right-or-wrong fashion. This has helped motivate my avoidance of the easily confounded *metaphor* and *metonymy*, both technical terms which formalize and classify the connection between levels of reading. For assigning more than primary meaning to imagery, I do occasionally call on words from common usage like *represent* and *symbolize*.

*Method: Close Reading*

My approach assigns central roles to the text and the reader, not to the author. With one caveat: Duoduo's poetical statements, made within the space of his poetic oeuvre or elsewhere, are taken into consideration – but to add to analysis and interpretation, not to overrule them.

I have noted the personal nature of reading, which needs no further illustration. Apart from being personal the act of reading is also unspeakably complex. But hopefully my reading of Duoduo's poetry is not wholly idiosyncratic, and it is possible to describe the attitude with which I profess to read his work. That is: close reading, once again as defined by Oversteegen.<sup>7</sup> He treats of this much-used and much-abused term in connection with the concepts discussed above:

*Close reading is first of all: reading thoroughly, word by word, and secondly (that is, specifically): reading on the assumption that every part of a text has – or should have – its place in a meaningfully coherent structure.*

Self-evident as the first part of this definition may seem, it stresses the importance attached to linguistic fact, to the text rather than to the reader's extra-textual knowledge; and implicitly, the intention to approach the text in as unbiased a fashion as possible. The definition's second part indicates one possible reading attitude. Its almost moral – literature is not science – hues: *should have, meaningfully*, seem to constitute a value judgment. But this is not reproving or trying to outsmart the author: reading with an eye for structural coherence means that one takes the text and the author seriously enough to take all textual details into account, but not uncritically.

This approach also shows when no coherent structure can be brought about or maintained. Fragmentariness need not invalidate discussion of parts of a poem or of the oeuvre which are coherent in themselves. This is all the more true for a poetry whose fragmentariness appears at times to be deliberate.

Respect for the text does not imply that extra-textual knowledge is out of bounds for one who practices close reading. Unless one believes there is no connection between the words of the poem and the same words in the rest of the world, one cannot avoid mobilizing such knowledge. And if extra-textual knowledge can increase a poem's transparency, why close one's eyes to it? If a commentary has to

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<sup>7</sup> For an enlightening discussion of close reading, including different stages in its history, and Oversteegen's definition, see Oversteegen 1983: 33-35.



call on such knowledge in order to make sense, that does not make the poem intrinsically less interesting; it merely says something about the poem's accessibility to different readers.

#### SELECTION AND ORDER

##### *Selection: The Typical*

My discussion does not touch on all of Duoduo's poems from 1972 to 1994. It covers a number of poems which I believe to be typical of his art, with more attention to content than to form.

There are countless ways to represent a poetic oeuvre. I wish to stress again that subjectivity need not invalidate a given representation.

First of all, mine is one of many imaginable selections involving the hermeneutical cycle. What one looks for influences what one finds, and I did not approach Duoduo's poetry with a blank mind. Contemporary poets from mainland China were not the first poets I read, and Duoduo was not the first contemporary poet from mainland China I read. Some of my expectations were confirmed: here and there, I found what tallied with my idea of poetry, and specifically of contemporary Chinese poetry. What deepened my interest in Duoduo's work were its unexpected traits, things I had no way of predicting or recognizing. Poetry is in the beholder's eye, and it is inevitable that some of Duoduo's poetry I cannot see, leaving it out from my discussion where another reader would include it. But my expectations also made it possible to be surprised, by whatever distinguished Duoduo's poems from his contemporaries' or otherwise forced its way into my line of vision: by his poetry's originality.

Secondly – and this phenomenon is akin to that of the hermeneutical cycle – it is through the separate poems that one knows a poetic oeuvre, but it is also through the poetic oeuvre that one knows the separate poems. Reading a tenth poem may in retrospect change the first nine. Poems illuminate or eclipse one another, and thus help motivate representations of an oeuvre. Again: this mechanism presupposes a degree of structural coherence in that oeuvre, not just in the separate poems.

Neither the hermeneutical cycle nor the recursive nature of reading is a recent discovery. I mention them because they are not of necessity involved in discussing a poetic oeuvre. One could, for instance, choose to comment on poems by Duoduo containing the word *horse* only, or on those written after 4 June 1989.

A criterion for my choice of poems is their transparency: what I believe to understand of them. I find a commentary expressing only incomprehension meaningless, except to show what makes certain parts of an oeuvre opaque and inaccessible to certain readers. But the inaccessible in Duoduo's work is not what moved me to write about it.

Another factor shaping the selection is my personal appreciation of Duoduo's poems: what I like about them. Once more in defense of subjectivity and value judgment, let me put it this way: it does not surprise me that Duoduo counts as a prominent Chinese poet, for the simple reason that I think he is a very good poet. It is therefore difficult to draw a clear line between what I perceive as his talent and what I assume to be the reason for his prominence, even when incorporating receptions of his work by other readers. I am prone to include in my discussion what I see as successful examples of his art.

If writing about a poet whose work one dislikes, one might be influenced by comparable factors to discuss what one considers that poet's most disastrous failures. The only way to circumnavigate such matters of taste may be to restrict oneself to poetry which leaves one cold, selected purely on the basis of its author's prominence. Suffice it to say that such has not been the nature of my research on Duoduo's poetry.

*Order: Chronological if Any*

Duoduo started writing poetry in 1972. The poems examined in this book stem from different moments in over two decades of creative production. The order in which they appear is more or less chronological.

If one assumes coherence in a poetic oeuvre a chronological approach seems sensible enough. Part of each of the poems' history is in its predecessors. In its resemblance of them it may be familiar at first sight. To follow the linear process of the birth and growth of the oeuvre is to study its development: what has changed and what has remained the same.

But the emergence of a poetic oeuvre is not just linear. Different poems may be written simultaneously and the time from conception to publication may vary; and Duoduo is in the habit of dating his poems, but only by year, not month or day, which offers a partially accurate logbook only. So-called real time is therefore not a reliable guide. Besides, there is the possibility of poems being dated incorrectly. The author may be mistaken, especially if the poem is published much later than it was written; the author may intentionally backdate or postdate a poem, for political reasons or even to increase its artistic worth *post hoc* by calling on specific back-

ground knowledge in its reader, thus making the date part of the poem; and the possibility of misprints should not be excluded. Dates accompanying poems are one type of information for periodizing them, but of a secondary kind; they should never overrule arguments based on the texts they accompany.

Furthermore, while a poem may be recognizable if one knows its predecessors, that does not make the poem predictable before it is written. No poem is the only possible poem at any stage in a poet's career, and poetry has no obligation to cater to its future chroniclers. Literature is not science: the professional writings of a poet can with impunity be far more capricious than those of an engineer.<sup>8</sup> If a poem cannot be seen to make any sense at all, it is unreadable or impossible to react to other than intuitively. But the order in an oeuvre is not necessarily linked to the passage of time. It is legitimate to classify a poem dated 1986 as in spirit belonging in the early 1970s, or one dated 1974 as belonging in the late 1980s – although the latter case seems less likely.

A chronological ordering of the poems is thus justified by two considerations. In the first place, the question of poetic development is an interesting one; secondly, a chronological approach can be complemented by whatever other types of logic – themes, for example – present themselves between the separate poems. If not applied too strictly, chronology is not without its merits. For this oeuvre, a chronological approach is further motivated by my belief that Duoduo's poetry does indeed show strands of consistent development.

In line with these reflections, the commentary covers the period from 1972 through 1994 *more or less* chronologically. A result of my research is the division of Duoduo's work into early and later poems, roughly from 1972 to 1982 and from 1983 to 1994.

## SOURCES

Of poems which have appeared in more than one publication, I will discuss what I believe to be the most authoritative edition. For the years 1972-1989, that is usually the text included in Duoduo's 1989 collection *The Road Traveled*. It is possible that Duoduo made changes in his poems when compiling that book, but anthologizers like Lao Mu appear to have treated the texts with such carelessness as to justify this

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<sup>8</sup> Stalin's definition of poets as "engineers of the soul" does not appeal to me. Repression of writers in the PRC is a sad piece of evidence that *impunity* must be taken figuratively, applied to the value of the poem in itself – which is, of course, non-existent in the Maoist view of literature.

decision. More generally, *The Road Traveled* is a publication with minimal interference by editors embodying the harsher sides of the PRC literary climate. I will record textual discrepancies with other versions for all poems discussed, and incorporate them in my commentary when necessary. As regards poems published from 1990 to 1994 in the new *Today*: in my capacity as translator, I kept photocopies of their manuscript versions. Duoduo invariably provided me with these, presumably at the same time as submitting them to the magazine's editors. This enables me to point out misprints in the published versions, while referring to the easily accessible source that is *Today*.

#### TRANSLATION

English renditions of many of Duoduo's poems by various translators exist. I have consulted these texts and tried to avoid forced attempts at originality where others have provided adequate wording. Still, for the sake of exactness and a semblance of stylistic consistency I have retranslated all poems and passages under scrutiny.

## Chapter six

### THE EARLY POEMS (CA. 1972-1982)

In Duoduo's first decade of writing his output is quantitatively uneven. Three years of high productivity (1972-1974) are followed by a quieter period. If this coincides with the disintegration of the Beijing underground poetry scene during the final years of the Cultural Revolution, that is at best a partial explanation. After the end of the ultra-leftist reign and during the publication of *Today* and the controversy over Obscure Poetry, i.e. from 1977 to 1981, Duoduo never ceases to write. Still, those years seem to carry little weight within his oeuvre. A case in point is 1981, the one year not represented by a single poem in any of Duoduo's publications to date. By 1982 the tide seems to have turned. That year's rich harvest completes what I propose to call the early stage in Duoduo's poetry, and ushers in the later period.

Duoduo's early poetry confirms expectations one may have of 1970s Chinese Experimental poetry in view of its history. In that respect his poetry is a product of its time, showing similarities with writings by his contemporaries in its ideological streak, its romanticism and its bent for abstraction. These characteristics suggest the influence of cultural orthodoxy, also reflected in the occasionally bombastic tone of Duoduo's early work. Otherwise, the poetic voice in the early poems – mostly in free verse – is often impersonal. Their language has reality, not representation, as its *raison d'être*, even though it has clear aural qualities. Many of the early poems contain straightforward imagery, sometimes explained within the space of the poem, and permit little in the way of exegesis.

There are two angles from which examination of the early period is particularly rewarding. One is that of politicality and Chineseness (section I), the other is that of love relationships made explicit in the poem (II). Politicality and Chineseness and, to a lesser degree, love also provide tools for reviewing a conspicuous poem from 1982, which embodies the conclusion of the early years (III).<sup>1</sup>

These angles do not offer an exhaustive overview of Duoduo's early work, but they do yield substantial insights into it. They are employed on different levels of abstraction: while the angles of politicality and love relationships classify texts according to theme, Chineseness can in principle be a feature of any poem, regardless of its theme. But coupling politicality and Chineseness makes more sense than coupling love relationships and Chineseness would, as is clear from the definitions of politicality and Chineseness given below.

A few more words on the angle of politicality are in order. As can be seen in Part I of this book, the question to what extent poetry reflects politics is more relevant

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this chapter have appeared in Van Crevél 1993a.

for poems from the PRC than for poems from less repressive societies – so much so that it tends to dwarf other questions, perhaps unjustly. In this chapter and the next, my review of politicality recognizes that question's relevance, at the same time opposing its tendency to monopolize discussions of PRC poetry. As it turns out, one strand of development in Duoduo's poetry is a sharp decrease of politicality with the passage of time. This modifies the picture drawn by not a few critics, in which members of Duoduo's generation are essentially political poets with their origins and inspiration ultimately in the Cultural Revolution.<sup>2</sup>

## I POLITICALITY AND CHINESENESS

My use of *political* and *Chinese*, as well as of *politicality* and *Chineseness*, to comment on Duoduo's poetry requires explanation.<sup>3</sup>

For present purposes I call a poem more or less political depending on the prominence in that poem of the real world, and particularly of the socio-political reality of China since the Cultural Revolution proper. I call a poem more or less Chinese depending on the knowledge of contemporary China it presupposes in its reader.

In this definition politicality encompasses more than the reverberations of what is known as "politics". Strictly speaking *socio-politicality* would be more accurate, but that word is unreadable. *Political* is used in opposition to *personal*, to describe anything that could make the agenda of official or unofficial media, and of the undocumented *communis opinio* on a given matter in a given society. In other words: the real world. Until he left China in 1989, the poet Duoduo's real world – including his impressions of the non-Chinese world – existed within the socio-political reality of China: whence the specification.

As for Chineseness: *Chinese poetry* usually means poetry written in Chinese or by a Chinese author, or both. I use the Chineseness of a poem, as determined by what one needs to know of China for a successful reading, to steer clear of uncontrollable undertones of words like *local*, *regional*, *indigenous*. It has nothing to do with the poet's ethnic or cultural identity.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter eight.

<sup>3</sup> My definition and use of *politicality* and *Chineseness* stem from a presentation at the 1993 annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies. My presentation addressed one of the questions posed by Professor Wendy Larson, organizer of the panel on modern Chinese poetry: To what extent has it been possible to reestablish Chinese literature in a realm outside politics since, roughly, the 1970s?

<sup>4</sup> The Chinese equivalent of *Chineseness* as I use it is therefore definitely *Zhongguo xing*, not *Zhonghua xing* (cf. Zhang (Yiwu) 1994).

*Memory and Contemplation: There is a class...* (1974)

*The Road Traveled*, Duoduo's 1989 collection of poetry, opens with five short poems from 1972-1974, presented as a series called *Memory and Contemplation*.<sup>5</sup> The second poem has no title:<sup>6</sup>

there is a class whose blood has all flowed away  
 there is a class whose archers are still shooting  
 that hollow, uninspiring sky  
 that dream that is China, old and haunted by spirits

5 as that grey and rotten moon  
 rises at the edge of history's wilderness  
 in this pitch-black empty city  
 the urgent knocking of red terror sounds again...

*There is a class...*<sup>7</sup> is in free verse: it has two stanzas of four lines each, the number of syllables per line varying from 9 to 13 in the original. While it has no end rhyme or metrical patterns, it does show awareness of prosodic possibilities (slant rhyme in l. 3-4 and 7-8). The poem employs repetition and parallelism in phrase structure (l. 1-2 and 3-4). Its vocabulary, whose main sources are politics and the natural world, does not stand out as original or personal. The narrating agent remains outside the text and uninvolved. Protagonists are blurred to the point of being invisible, especially in the poem's conclusion. The abstraction red terror, not the people executing it, is said to sound again, but it is not made explicit to whose ears it does so.

The following interpretation is not situated at a great distance from its analysis. Such is the effect of the poem's imagery: with the exception of the rotten moon – *bianzhi* 'rotten' being a word commonly used to describe food gone bad – it is not of the startling kind. The images of the dream and the wilderness are actually explained within the space of the poem. They are accompanied by what they have to

<sup>5</sup> *Huiyi yu sikao*, Duoduo 1989a: 1-3.

<sup>6</sup> Normally, the two-character heading *without title* (*wu ti*) should in contemporary Chinese poetry not be taken as part of the poem – unlike truly self-reflective title-phrases such as *Unfinished Poem* (*Mei you xie wan de shi*, Jiang (He) 1980: 21-25 and 1986: 22-27). Depending on the prevalent customs in the target language, it may be more faithful to the original to omit the heading than to translate it as *Untitled*, or even *Without Theme* (*Ohne Thema*, Wolfgang Kubin's rendition in Bei Dao 1991b: 58, original in Bei Dao 1987: 143).

<sup>7</sup> (Untitled) *Yi ge jieji de xue liu jin le...*, Duoduo 1989a: 1-2. The original is included in APPENDIX B (300). I take *yingrao* (l. 4) in Duoduo 1989a as an error of homophony.



represent, i.e. China and history. But truly instrumental in directing the course of reading is the poem's connection with the real world, established by the word *China*. The assumption that *China* refers to the country of that name in the real world is not belied by the rest of the poem. It would be difficult to turn a blind eye to this poem's politicality and Chineseness.

While the interpretation does not hinge on the final two lines, they do make it more specific. The knocking of red terror evokes frenzied persecution in the heyday of the Cultural Revolution, when shades of red were a matter of life and death. Not other times of intense ideological repression under the flag of communism, for red terror is said to take place against the backdrop of a pitch-black, empty city – leading one to think of the abrupt end put to urban intellectual life with the rustication campaign in the late 1960s.

If the scene described reflects aspects of the Cultural Revolution, the members of the class concerned are victims of that vortex of strife and struggle, and must be close to death. Yet, they have not given up the fight.<sup>8</sup> The Cultural Revolution is an example of wars and revolutions' disorderliness in whom they hurt, and it is hard to say which category of victims this class may represent. But there is a clue.

Although lines 3-4 in the first instance read as noun phrases grammatically unconnected to what precedes them, they can be taken as descriptions of the archers' target. The reader's eye is inclined to follow the arrows, and finds itself looking at the sky. Shooting at the sky paints a helpless picture of the dying archers' struggle, even if they bring to mind the Chinese legendary archer Yi<sup>9</sup> – who shot down from the heavens ten suns threatening to annihilate the world – and Mao Zedong, who was during the Cultural Revolution customarily likened to the sun. *That dream* can be read on the same grammatical level as *sky* – an isolated noun phrase, but close to being an adjunct of place – or as in apposition to it. In both cases China is called vast, hollow and uninspiring, and indifferent to the archers' arrows, i.e. to the violence unleashed on it by the doomed class. Calling China an old and haunted dream suggests the weight of a tradition felt to be as massive as it is obsolete. The rotten moon and the wilderness (l. 5-6) project this feeling onto the natural world and history. This is typical of mutinous sentiments felt by members of Duoduo's generation. In that generation, depending on class background among other things, there were those who carried out and those who underwent the assault on traditional values during the Cultural Revolution, but red terror would seem to be something

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<sup>8</sup> It is theoretically possible to take the two classes in l. 1-2 as referring to different groups of people. I find that improbable, since it clashes with the identical wording at the beginning of both lines: *there is a class whose blood...*

<sup>9</sup> For the myth of Yi the Archer, see Birrell 1993: 77-79.

experienced by those on the receiving end. At least, it is safe to say that the protagonists vainly try to make the sky or the sun come crashing down, and that their attack on traditional China comes to naught. This recalls the frustrated state of the Young Intellectuals.<sup>10</sup>

*There is a class...* is a political poem: it is anchored in the real world. Here, the real world is the People's Republic of China in the late 1960s and early 1970s; this poem shows where it comes from beyond all shadow of doubt. The above reading also makes it a poem with a fair degree of Chineseness, in that it presupposes specific and not altogether common knowledge of China.

*There is a class...* features China and history; it takes place in the public domain, and its protagonists lack identity. It is an impersonal, gloomy, political, Chinese poem, short and with inconspicuous formal properties. I have dwelt upon it at length because it is representative of one type of poetry present in Duoduo's early writings. Various aspects of that type of poetry come together in this poem and elsewhere in *Memory and Contemplation*. That series is therefore an appropriate text to open *The Road Traveled*, a publication presented in 1989 as an overview of Duoduo's oeuvre to date. Below are some related examples.

*Memory and Contemplation: When the People Stand up from Their Snoring* (1972), *Oh this race swollen...* (1973), *On the dead-drunk soil...* (1973)

The other four poems in *Memory and Contemplation* share all but one of the characteristics listed for *There is a class...*: they do not invoke background knowledge as specific as the rustication movement, so they are less Chinese. But they are definitely impersonal, gloomy, and political, and in form similar to *There is a class...*

The first poem in the series is entitled *When the People Stand up from Their Snoring*,<sup>11</sup> an image for awakening or enlightenment. Its opening words: *singing*

<sup>10</sup> See chapter two: CHASING BOOKS (PAO SHU): UNDERGROUND READING.

<sup>11</sup> *Dang renmin cong ganhan shang zhan qi*, Duoduo 1989a: 1. The peculiar discrepancy with Cayley's, Finkel's and Rosenwald's translations (*When the People Stand Up Out of the Hard Cheese*, Duoduo 1989b: 20; *When the People Arose from Cheese*, Finkel 1991: 29; *When People Rise from Cheese, Statement # 1*, Barnstone 1993: 83 and 10-11) is caused by what I assume to be an unfortunate misprint in the version included in Lao Mu's anthology (1985a: 386): *ganlao* instead of *ganhan*. Cf. Tang 1993a: 79. Following Tang Xiaodu (personal communication, November 1993), I take the second character of *ganhan* in Duoduo 1989a as an error of homophony.

leaves out the bloodiness of revolution, bring to mind Mao Zedong's statement that revolution is not a dinner party.<sup>12</sup> Duoduo's phrase is less cynical and identifies singing as that which overlooks the violent nature of political turmoil. Singing is easily associated with poetry; in Chinese both words (*gesheng* and *shige*) contain the syllable meaning 'song'. That singing leaves out the bloodiness of revolution could thus be an example of art's failure to be complete, *ergo* its failure to be true, in representing life. If its focus is further narrowed down, the first line can be seen to stress the corruption of art after it is made a slave of politics in a totalitarian state like the PRC, where revolution is made to look glorious. That renders this text political but does not make it Chinese, for this reading does not rely on extra-textual information about China.

The rest of the poem, and of the poem series, resists the glorification of what in reality is a grim affair. In other examples of Duoduo's early work too, there is much violence, bloodiness, death, in scenes reflecting side-effects of social upheaval, often situated in the cultivated countryside rather than the city or the natural world untouched by man. More generally, some of this poetry tells of the victims of injustice; its scope is not limited to the Cultural Revolution. In three poems from the series quoted below, the beasts of burden, the race and the people are all underdogs, victims of a Power which is manifest in images such as troops and whiplashes.

This is *When the People Stand up from Their Snoring*:

singing leaves out the bloodiness of revolution  
 August is like a cruel bow  
 the poisonous son walks out of the peasant hovel  
 carrying tobacco and a parched throat  
 beasts of burden are blindfolded with barbarous blinkers  
 on their haunches hang blackened corpses like swollen drums  
 until the sacrifice behind the fence blurs slowly too  
 in the distance, troops come marching again under clouds of smoke...

These are the first four lines of *Oh this race swollen*:<sup>13</sup>

oh this race swollen with edema and sallow  
 body already stiffening on its deathbed  
 centuries of whiplashes have landed on your back  
 that you silently bore (...)

<sup>12</sup> In his 1927 "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan", Mao 1968-1: 17.

<sup>13</sup> (Untitled) *Fuzhong qiaocui de minzu...*, Duoduo 1989a: 2-3.

*On the dead-drunk soil*<sup>14</sup> opens thus:

on the dead-drunk soil  
the people's coarse face and groaning hands  
before the people lies an endless misery

Short poems presented together and with one overall title are frequently seen in contemporary Chinese poetry.<sup>15</sup> The Chinese term is *zushi*, meaning 'suite of poems' or 'cycle of poems'. Relationships between the separate poems do not always display the coherence suggested by *suite* or *cycle*; I therefore refer to them as *poem series*.

*Memory and Contemplation* does display coherence. I still call it a series because the poems it contains are separately dated and have separate titles.<sup>16</sup> Besides, the series may offer memories for contemplation, but it does not strike me as being about memory or contemplation. It seems probable that Duoduo gave it its title when compiling *The Road Traveled*, i.e. in late 1988 or early 1989. The five poems had not been publicly connected by their author before, while they had been published earlier: two in Lao Mu's 1985 anthology and three in *Salute*.<sup>17</sup>

*All Things on Earth: Era* (1973), *Liberation* (1973)

*All Things on Earth* is another series of short poems in free verse in *The Road Traveled*.<sup>18</sup> Sweeping as its title may be, the series indeed contains heterogeneous materials. It treats of temptation and infatuation in a loveless world, of the nature of the Poet, of the passage of time, of grim vistas of war and revolution and finally of a quiet, radical refusal by the sea to have anything more to do with humankind.

<sup>14</sup> (Untitled) *Zui xunxun de tudi shang...*, Duoduo 1989a: 3.

<sup>15</sup> An example is Bei Dao's *Notes from the City of the Sun* (*Taiyang cheng zhaji*, Bei Dao 1984: 87-88 and 1987: 21-24; English translation in Bei Dao 1984: 36-37 and 1988: 31-32).

<sup>16</sup> Giving a poem the heading *Untitled* is different from giving it no heading at all or numbering it. The latter is common practice in contemporary Chinese poetry as well. See for instance Mang Ke's *Sky* (*Tiankong, Today* # 1: 28-30 and Mang Ke 1988: 8-11 and 1989: 9-11).

<sup>17</sup> *Dang renmin cong ganlao* (sic) *shang zhan qi* and *Wu ti* (*yi ge jieji...*) as # 1 and 3 of a series of ten *Statements* (*chenshu*), Lao Mu 1985a: 386-387; *Zhufu, Wu ti* (*fuzhong qiaocui de minzu...*), and *Wu ti* (*zui xunxun de tudi shang*), Duoduo 1988a: 2, 4, 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Wanxiang* (literally: Every phenomenon on earth; all manifestations of nature), Duoduo 1989a: 9-15. While the series, fourteen poems in all, is dated 1973-1979, all but one of its constituent parts are from the years 1972-1975, the exception being the second part of *Dusk*, dated 1979 (but 1977 in Lao Mu 1985a: 390).

From the angle of politicality and Chineseness, two of its constituent parts are of interest, *Era*:<sup>19</sup>

an era of repression comes back to life  
 cannonfire gently shakes the earth  
 war stubbornly opens up wasteland  
 livestock is confiscated, peasants return from the fields  
 carrying plows dripping with blood...

and *Liberation*:<sup>20</sup>

the revolutionary falls asleep on his clenched fist  
 "liberation" slowly ripens in his memory  
 like a sleepless dream, like a lonely sail  
 love no longer knows where it is bound  
 only God protects its soul-stirring refuge...

*Era* is akin to the poems in *Memory and Contemplation*, so much so that one wonders why it is not part of that series. It may not be particularly Chinese, but it is yet another impersonal, gloomy, political poem, short and with inconspicuous formal properties.

*Era* displays idiosyncrasies which have remained visible throughout Duoduo's oeuvre. One is the physical relationship, covering the full scale from caress to aggression, which his poetry establishes between its protagonists and the soil beneath their feet. *Era* features an unforgettable image of that relationship: plows dripping with blood. It remains unsaid whose blood this is; probably that of war casualties, staining plowshares after life has on the surface returned to normal. But the phrase *war stubbornly opens up wasteland* also leads to association with plows as weapons of a war waged on the land by peasants. In the latter reading, which draws support from an examination of later poems,<sup>21</sup> the blood is that of the soil.

Destruction and suffering in the wake of warfare, indispensable to the real world, make *Era* a political poem. Similar politicality is found in *Liberation*. The revolutionary falling asleep on his clenched fist is a heroic image in the tradition of art made to serve the cause of socialism. The clenched fist symbolizes determination in the face of hardship, or an unadorned way of life in which a pillow is a contemptible

<sup>19</sup> *Niandai*, Duoduo 1989a: 14.

<sup>20</sup> *Jiefang*, Duoduo 1989a: 14-15.

<sup>21</sup> See chapter seven: section IIIA.

luxury. But after the title and the opening line, the phrase "liberation" slowly ripens in his memory makes the story ambiguous.

Quotation marks cast doubts on the correct usage of a word: do those who were "liberated" themselves feel they have been liberated too? This point combines with the rest of the line to hint at indoctrination. Slowly the revolutionary learns how to remember "liberation", which implies that his initial, perhaps more personal recollection of that event is adjusted. Correcting people's – even revolutionaries' – memories is correcting their thinking; the poem's politicality, already manifest in the person of the revolutionary, increases with this reference to ideological campaigning. Its Chineseness is contained in the word *liberation* itself, although liberation and revolutionaries have been associated in other places than China, too: *Liberation* (*Jiefang*) is the word used in China for the establishment of Communist rule in 1949. This poem can thus be heard to interrupt orthodox literature's monotonous eulogy of the New China. This reading draws support from the poem's last three lines, if it is legitimate to assume that a place where love no longer knows where it is bound leaves something to be desired.

#### *Doctor Zhivago* (1974)

Not all of Duoduo's early poems are short. *Doctor Zhivago*<sup>22</sup> is in formal aspects similar to the poems examined so far, but it is 112 lines long (divided into parts A, B, C), and more narrative in nature than the series *Memory and Contemplation* and *All Things on Earth*.<sup>23</sup>

Part A of *Doctor Zhivago* treats of the Russian Revolution, in bombastic tones and violent images:

the days of 1917 have made their advent  
on the sober, desolate soil of early in this century  
history's bitter focus shifts to the East  
(...)  
how many barbarous, sumptuous years  
come to an end today

<sup>22</sup> *Riwage yisheng*, Duoduo 1988a: 27-32 and 1989a: 22-27. The two versions show negligible differences: the latter has two errors of homophony and one instance of different punctuation.

<sup>23</sup> Other examples of long poems from the early stage are: *Dream* (*Meng*, 1973), *Marguerite's Travels with Me* (*Mageli he wo de luxing*, 1974), *Teachings* (*Jiaohui*, 1976), *Living Together* (*Tongju*, 1976), *I Remember* (*Wo jide*, 1976), *For the Optimist's Daughter* and *The Optimist's Daughter's Reply* (*Gei leguan zhe de nüer* and *Leguan zhe nüer de huida*, 1977), *Time of Feelings* (*Ganqing de shijian*, 1973-1980), *The Crocodile Market* (*Eyu shichang*, 1982).

how many guilty, bloody iron doors  
 are wrought open today  
 (...)

here and now, a miraculous child is born  
 (...)

this stubborn child in a pool of blood  
 after a long time in the womb  
 forcibly delivered by the people of the countryside  
 is the International Proletariat  
 (...)

The new era is welcomed and contrasted with the faded city walls of religion, a symbol of the Old. Part B opens with traditional, romantic scenes from the Russian countryside, moving on to the changes taking place there with the coming of the Revolution. It also contains a lament for the poet Marina Tsvetaeva, said to have bid farewell to the streets of Moscow a thousand times. The final two stanzas hint at the political motivation of her eventual exile:

lonely, she strolls across the Kremlin Square  
 around her, the white snow-walls of communism are now quietly arising.

The sun, in part A the one who fathered the miraculous child, has in part C changed into a heartless judge presiding over a trial in process: of Aleksandr Blok, and twelve sailors pacing back and forth between Jesus and the Revolution. If this allusion to Blok's controversial poem *The Twelve* captures an essential aspect of that text, the renowned Russian poets Balmont, Bryusov and Esenin appear in part C as little more than supernumerary actors. In part B, this is true for Doctor Zhivago too. The clearest connection with Pasternak's novel is that historical scenes are presented as memories of its protagonist. The title of Duoduo's poem comes across as a token tribute to Pasternak rather than an intrinsic allusion to his work.<sup>24</sup> In the early 1970s exhilaration of underground reading it was not uncommon for Chinese

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<sup>24</sup> On Pasternak and *Doctor Zhivago*, see Terras 1985: 331-333; on Blok and *The Twelve*, see Terras 1985: 54-57. I consulted Dutch translations of *Doctor Zhivago* and *The Twelve* (Pasternak 1963 and Blok 1947). My thanks go to Petra Couvée, whose help clarified this and other connections of Duoduo's work with Russian and Soviet literature.



Experimental poets to use the names of foreign texts in this manner,<sup>25</sup> perhaps as a general acknowledgment of foreign inspiration, or a chic type of name-dropping.

Throughout the poem nostalgia for pre-Revolution Russia is countervailed by awareness of its darker sides. Again, quotation marks serve to undermine a noble word: in the poem's penultimate stanza,

"justice" from days of old is trembling  
oh Russia from days of old with your treebark shoes.

The new order is not unconditionally hailed. The miraculous child cannot obtain freedom; its procreator, once a source of warmth and life, becomes an unfeeling official judging writers; the snow-walls of communism offer Tsvetaeva no hospitable abode.

Strange as it sounds, this poem's language is of secondary importance. In this respect *Doctor Zhivago* is a typical example of Duoduo's early work. Its language appears to be a means to an end – not an end in itself – and hardly reflects individual perception or expression. The narrating agent operates at a far remove from the events in the poem. The abrupt use of a first-person pronoun halfway through the poem does nothing to change that: it is a plural interpretable as referring to Pasternak's readers, a limitless group of people unknown to each other.<sup>26</sup> The poem's language is not without embellishment or emotional quality, it is literary language, skillfully written and well behaved – but unsurprising and impersonal. It is impersonal because it is collective, not because it is ironic.

The nature of this poem's language is perhaps a consequence of its subject matter. *Doctor Zhivago* is named after a well-known book, and it is full of geography and history. It is poetic coverage of events from the public domain, which invites the use of an impersonal, collective language.

The real world plays a prominent role in *Doctor Zhivago*: it is a political poem. It is not a Chinese poem – if anything, it is a Russian poem.

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<sup>25</sup> Bei Dao (personal communication, July 1994). Wang Jiaxin (personal communication, May 1995) mentioned a 1960s issue of *Reference Materials on Foreign Literature* (*Waiguo wenxue cankao ziliao*) on Soviet and foreign reactions to Pasternak's winning of the 1958 Nobel Prize for Literature, also including an outline of his novel. In this publication – "for internal distribution" – of the Institute for Foreign Literature of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, ca. 200 pages on the author and his work were presented for criticism. Chinese translations of *Doctor Zhivago* came out in 1986 and 1987. Cf. the discussions of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, below, of *The Optimist's Daughter's Reply* in section II of this chapter, and of *Death of a Poet* in chapter eight: section V.

<sup>26</sup> Part B, l. 16.

*Farewell* (1972); *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1972); *Teachings* (1976)

Thematically, these three poems focus on the same part of the vast landscape that is the politicized China of the late 1960s and early 1970s. They can be seen to touch upon the Old Three Classes, the Young Intellectuals sent from the cities during the rustication campaign. Not only these poems' narrower focus sets them apart from those discussed so far, but also their less impersonal voice.

*Farewell*<sup>27</sup> is in formal aspects similar to *There is a class...* and related poems. It has one stanza of eight lines of irregular length without much in the way of rhyme or meter. As regards its semantic domains, none of the words in this poem, if put to orthodox use, would be unbecoming to PRC Establishment poetry to date. Besides the image of troops that come marching, it shares with *There is a class...* a bent for abstraction: *ideas, construction, the future*. The poem's first four lines contain as many comparisons made through the stative verb *xiang* (*to be like*), rather than other types of imagery. As noted above, in *There is a class...*, imagery is explained too, albeit through another grammatical construction.<sup>28</sup> But in *Farewell* the narrating agent is more involved than in either *Memory and Contemplation* or *Era and Liberation*, as is indicated by the second person singular pronoun halfway through the poem. True enough, *you* also occurs in *Oh this race swollen...*, but there the narrative agent addresses a race, while in *Farewell*, *you* can be visualized as a single, lonely person. Moreover, the narrating agent empathizes, perhaps identifies with *you* by expressing what must be *your* perception of things, namely that the turn *you* is pushed to take is unfamiliar:

the green fields are like constructions of ideas  
 just gone limp, like a never-ending hour of dusk  
 when the future comes marching like troops  
 it is like you are pushed to take an unfamiliar turn  
 in the side lane leading toward maturity  
 the city lights stretch out in loneliness  
 there is only the herdsman, clenching the handle of a red whip  
 oh, he guards the dark night, guards the darkness<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Gaobie*, Lao Mu 1985a: 386-387, published with the subheading "Statement no. 2".

<sup>28</sup> By means of the particle *de*, here comparable in function to 's in English.

<sup>29</sup> Literally, l. 4 has *pushed onto an unfamiliar road*. I have opted for *pushed to take an unfamiliar turn* instead because *fenlu* in the original indicates that *you* is already *en route* and is now forced to part ways with others, rather than being pushed onto the road as opposed to, for instance, into the woods or the river.

*Construction, ideas and future* are all PRC political jargon, but the first two are here used in a non-conformist way. In Communist propaganda, neither ideas (*sixiang*, which also means ‘thinking’, ‘ideology’) nor construction are supposed to go limp, and both are more comfortably likened to the splendor of dawn than to the dying of the light. The poem’s opening lines create an uncanny atmosphere, undermining values officially self-evident in China at the time of writing. The farewell from the poem’s title must take place when *you* is pushed to take an unfamiliar turn, to make way for the future and get out of the troops’ line of fire. This portrayal of the future as a military force one has to escape from or surrender to once more calls to mind the Destruction of the Old that was one of the professed aims of the Cultural Revolution; it is consistent with the deviant picture drawn of ideas and construction.

A possible reference to the rusticated urban youths becomes clear in the poem’s second four lines. As in *There is a class...*, the adjunct of place after *unfamiliar turn* is not grammatically linked to it. But in the linear process of reading the poem, one can imagine *you* now walking down the alleyway to maturity. That alleyway is a side lane, an out-of-the-way sidestreet: *you* has been banned from the thoroughfare and sidetracked to this place to grow up. The city lights are visible, although it is unclear at what distance. But their twinkling is contrasted with the dark of night in the poem’s closing line, representing the countryside as opposed to the city. Standing guard there is the herdsman. There is no need to determine the herdsman’s identity in greater detail than by suggesting that he might symbolize Communist – or, in the context of the Cultural Revolution, Red – power preventing a return to the city.

This is a tentative interpretation, for which detailed knowledge of recent Chinese history is necessary. Once its reader situates *Farewell* in that history it becomes a political poem. But without extra-textual information its politicality is obscured by its Chineseness.

In the case of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*,<sup>30</sup> in free verse, with two stanzas of 10 and 9 lines, the story of the rustication campaign has to be supplied from outside the poem as well, so it is a Chinese poem. But its politicality does not depend on what its reader knows about China, because its wording is general and explicit:

– *I’m asking you, telegraph office*

freedom has long been frail as the two ears of a bachelor  
and wisdom is weak to the bone, hibernating after birth

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<sup>30</sup> *Zhong wei shei ming*, Duoduo 1988a: 7-8. In a 1982 issue of the French magazine *DOC(k)S* featuring both the original and a French translation, the poem’s motto is *winter and its myth*.

education and children are strangled by dirty hands  
 intellect chased deep into the mountains by the bunch, like criminals  
 5 all there is time for behind false newspapers  
 is repeating the director's ideas and prophecies  
 (...)

but once the bad guy's hairy legs really sweep the mud off the wall  
 the apples tied to the tree will roll around left and right  
 then all will be so different  
 then I will surely throw my cap into the air  
 (...)

The poem's title and its motto are puzzling. The tolling of the bell could symbolize the advent of a decisive moment; the clock might be located on the building spoken to. The passages quoted above are both followed by a few lines of more private speech addressed to a second person singular pronoun. In both stanzas this switch is marked by the phrase *and then there's you, of course*. These words express reluctance at changing the subject, clarified by the descriptions of *you*, which are neither complimentary nor enthusiastic. But the interpretation below is limited to aspects of the poem belonging in the public domain.

In the first six lines the contours of a depressing society become visible. The place spoken of here is lacking in freedom and wisdom. Wisdom is declared to be weak to the bone; the word used for freedom, *frail (danbo)*, commonly describes a poor physique. In the next two lines a reason for this sorry state is given: a climate of anti-intellectual molestation and repression. In tune with sham newspapers, the Orwellian eulogy of the omniscient Ruler completes the picture.

The second stanza begins with a mystifying image. The event hoped for seems out of the bad guy's control; if one proceeds from this assumption and bears in mind that the director is unmistakably a bad guy, it might be that whatever is done to him brings on the euphoria in which the apples are set free – intimating a season of abundance – and the poem's narrating agent expresses joy at the changes by throwing a cap into the air. The turn of events so eagerly awaited makes the title a trifle clearer: does the tolling of the bell mean that the director's days are numbered?

The politicality of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is hard to overlook. First, because the poem has as its subject matter real-world politics like totalitarian abuse of the media to enforce ideology. Secondly because it calls a spade a spade, perhaps to the detriment of subtlety: it contains the words *freedom, education, intellect*. But most of all because its politicality is not a function of detailed historical information.

Yet it is also a Chinese poem, for detailed information on China in the late 1960s paves the way for a more specific interpretation (l. 3-6). In that reading, education

strangled by dirty hands refers to the nationwide closing of schools and universities with the advent of the Cultural Revolution. The strangling of children is less easily linked to historical events. It symbolizes how countless young people fell victim to one aspect of Red Terror or another,<sup>31</sup> but it also echoes the unspeakable cruelty of those days. The fourth line needs only four extra letters (or, in Chinese, two more characters: *fenzi*) to turn into plain historiography: intellectuals chased into the mountains by the bunch, like criminals.<sup>32</sup> Cultural Revolution politics were anti-intellectual; when the urban youths were summoned to go – chased would be saying too much, but it was an offer they could not refuse – “up to the mountains and down to the countryside”<sup>33</sup> it was by the bunch; and many were like criminals in that a wrong class background was made to look like a crime, to be atoned for by forced migration. *Like* (l. 4) implies a different verdict from the one reported in the poem: according to the narrating agent, they were no criminals. Hiding individual opinions behind the façade offered by unreliable newspapers, people simply reproduce the slogans they have been subjected to.<sup>34</sup> The same is true of public life in Orwell’s *1984*, where Big Brother is no less than a supernatural being (*prophecies*). But not only the Great Helmsman’s supernatural qualities during the Cultural Revolution point to a reference to the Chinese case. The word in the original for *ideas* (*sixiang*) is to this day linked to the name Mao Zedong, in the phrase *Mao Zedong sixiang*: the political program distilled from Mao’s worldview rendered in English as *Mao Zedong Thought*. Seen in this light the poem’s title could allude to the motto of Hemingway’s novel, with reference to the entire generation of Young Intellectuals: the bell then sounds the death knell for the “normal” lives they had led so far.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> In the original, the word for *children* is *ertong*. According to the *Xiandai Hanyu da cidian* (Hainan chubanshe, 1992) *ertong* denotes children up to ca. 16 years of age. *Haizi* or *shaonian* would have been a more straightforward reference to the Old Three Classes, so this phrase is less specific than, for example, line 4.

<sup>32</sup> I have translated *zhishi* as *intellect* rather than *knowledge* to retain the strong association with *zhishi fenzi* ‘intellectuals’.

<sup>33</sup> See chapter two: CHASING BOOKS (PAO SHU): UNDERGROUND READING.

<sup>34</sup> There is a theoretical possibility of reading line 5 as *all there is time for on the back of false newspapers*, but *baozhi de houmian* would be a more natural wording of that phrase. Besides, the context suggests that the director’s words are front page material.

<sup>35</sup> According to Tang Xiaodu (personal communication, spring 1994), two Chinese translations of Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* existed in 1972, when the poem was written: *Sangzhong wei shei er ming* and *Zhong wei shei ming*. The book’s motto, by John Donne, contains these lines: “No man is an *Iland*, intire of it selfe; (...) any mans *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankinde*; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for *thee*”. Otherwise, I have been unable to detect any connection with the novel. Cf. the discussions of *Doctor Zhivago* above, of *The Optimist’s Daughter’s Reply* in section II of this chapter, and of *Death of a Poet* in chapter seven: section V.

The interpretation of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* gains from extra-textual knowledge of Chinese history, but this highly political poem is also accessible to readers without such knowledge. Moving on from a general to a specific interpretation its message comes through unscathed, the sole difference being that in a specific interpretation the indictment of totalitarianism is anchored in the PRC of the late 1960s.

*Farewell* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* have a common denominator: their high compatibility with recent Chinese history. If one reads with an eye for politicality *Farewell* is actually compatible with little else, while *For Whom the Bell Tolls* welcomes a broader audience than those familiar with China. So does *Teachings*.<sup>36</sup> Still, this poem's abstract wording, especially in the portrayal of its protagonists, makes a reading involving the story of the Young Intellectuals worthwhile. The elusiveness of *Teachings* warrants quoting it in full, to allow as little as possible of this volatile matter to escape:

– in remembrance of decadence

in no more than one night, the wound had opened  
 and all the books in the bookcase had betrayed them  
 there was only the greatest singer of those days  
 bowing down to their ears with a hoarse voice, softly singing:  
 5           the night of the knight, the night of the century  
 they had been shoved aside by the high-class jungle of society  
 and were limited to this kind of theme:  
 it was merely as a foil to the world's misery  
 that they'd appeared, and misery  
 10           thus turned into their task for life

if someone said that early in their lives the theme  
 was one of brightness, to this day they still think  
 that is a pernicious saying  
 in nights with no artistic plot at all  
 15           the source of that lamplight was an illusion  
 what they saw was once and for all  
 a monotonous rope appearing in winter's snowfall  
 they had no choice but to go on playing tirelessly

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<sup>36</sup> *Jiaohui*, Duoduo 1989a: 28-30. The original is included in APPENDIX B (300-302). The text shows a number of interesting differences with the one published in Lao Mu 1985a: 400-402 (see the discussion below). The following translation and commentary are based on the 1989 version. I take *li zhong* (l. 38) in Duoduo 1989a as a misprint for *liliang* 'power.'

20       wrestle with what fled, and  
 live together with what could not be remembered  
 even if they had refound their earliest longing  
 emptiness had now become a stain on the rest of their lives

          their misfortune came from the misfortune of ideals  
 but their pain was self-inflicted  
 25       consciousness made their thinking grow sharper  
 and consciousness made them lose blood  
 but they could not be reconciled with tradition  
 although before they were born  
 the world had existed uncleanly for a long time  
 30       they still wanted to find  
 the first criminal to discover "truth"  
 and the time needed  
 to tear the world to pieces

          faced with the shackles around their neck  
 35       their single deed of insanity  
 was to pull them tighter  
 but they were not comrades  
 their scattered destructive power  
 had not nearly seized society's attention  
 40       and they were merely reduced to being criminals of the spirit  
 merely because: they had abused the fable

          but in the end they will pray in the classroom of thinking  
 and, once they decipher their own handwriting, fall into a coma:  
 they have not lived in the time set aside by the lord  
 45       they are men mislived, stopped where man's life is misunderstood  
 what they have experienced – is merely the tragedy of being born

The text is in free verse and its lines are of uneven length. Its narrating agent is omniscient and uninvolved, delivering a report and stating a diagnosis in a matter-of-fact way. The poem's protagonists remain silhouettes, huddled in the lee of the unwavering personal pronoun: *they* have no names or faces. Their anonymity seems appropriate to the poem's subject matter, which centers around political issues like the class nature of society and the conflict of tradition and reform, and existential problems: *the tragedy of being born*. While the formal properties of *Teachings* show no real innovation, it sounds markedly different from *Doctor Zhivago*. In the latter, the tone of voice is bombastic to the point of being inflated; in *Teachings*, it has become less dramatic and as a result more determined and more effective.



The above text is the one included in *The Road Traveled*. Like other poems in that book, it had been printed elsewhere before. A comparison with its earlier publication in Lao Mu's 1985 anthology is worthwhile, because it provides some of the leverage needed for the interpretation below.

The 1985 version is not divided into stanzas, but consists of an uninterrupted 43 lines, here and there rearranged in the 1989 text, which also contains three completely new lines: l. 34-36 in my translation. Other lines have been rewritten by the substitution of one conjunction, noun, adverb by another, or the addition of an adjective. Eye-catching cases are l. 6, which in the 1985 text does not have the word *high-class*, and l. 32-33, which had *memories* where there is in 1989 *the world*. An interesting change, implemented four times (l. 11, 18, 25, 44), is the use of a third person plural personal pronoun where there was nothing before. *They* were there in many places to begin with, but in 1989 *they* are there in even more, turning sweeping statements into remarks on *them* and nobody else. For example:

if someone said that early in life the theme  
is one of brightness

becomes

if someone said that early in their lives the theme  
was one of brightness

and

it is consciousness that makes thinking grow sharper

becomes

consciousness made their thinking grow sharper<sup>37</sup>

This addition of the personal pronoun makes the 1989 text more precise, more limited and clearer in scope: it contains no generalizations about mankind, but observations on *them* instead. The pronoun's pounding repetition in the 1989 text is one reason for reading *Teachings* as a poem about a particular group of people. But perhaps the most telling change, and one that suggests a connection with the real world, lies in the poem's motto in *The Road Traveled*: *in remembrance of deca-*

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<sup>37</sup> L. 12-13 and 25.

dence. Mottoes are equivocal by nature. They are both inside and outside the text they accompany; they make it aware of itself. In this case the motto can be viewed as a commentary, since it was not there in the poem's 1985 version. Also, the word *remembrance* hints at memorable moments in historical times gone by. *Decadence* is less explicit than, say, the name Sylvia Plath – in whose memory Duoduo wrote poems in 1988 and 1993<sup>38</sup> – but educated guesses at its coordinates in the real world are justified.

In *Teachings* the protagonists are betrayed: books – learning, art – prove unreliable company in the society of which they are members. They are relegated to an existence as by-products of misery, not permitted to set foot in more enjoyable areas of life. There is a widespread misconception that their youth, thus spent, has been splendid; but that splendor is a charade, symbolized by lamplight. This is confirmed by the fact that the protagonists are not living their own, real lives but caught in a game beyond their control. Their lot is a consequence of manipulation: they were led to believe in the wrong ideal. Once they see through it and rebel, they suffer for their disobedience but refuse to bow their heads to the established order. Tragically, as a remnant of their idealism, they think they are the first to be misguided by a so-called "truth" – quotation marks in the poem – and swear revenge. They have not yet grown as inexcitable as the narrating agent, who flatly states that delusion has always been part of life. They are made to look masochistic, and unable to unite in their dissidence and influence social order. One day they will learn to read their own hand, understand history's teachings and see themselves for what they are – or rather, for what they are not. A terrible judgment, reminiscent of Beckett's adage *Birth was the death of him*,<sup>39</sup> is passed on them in the poem's final lines: born at the wrong moment, they have remained outsiders to life.

Thanks to the disciplined tone of *Teachings* this abstract story is capable of capturing the reader's interest. But the poem gains a great deal in accessibility if background knowledge on the lot of the Old Three Classes is brought to bear. A list of examples: their formal education (*books*) was for many a privilege that later turned against them; without warning, they were ousted (*shoved aside*) from the higher strata of society; it was their glorious (*brightness*) task to partake of the bitter peasant life (*misery*<sup>40</sup>), and many of them met with formidable obstacles later, when trying to leave the countryside (*task for life*); they felt they had been manipulated by

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<sup>38</sup> 1988 nian 2 yue 11 ri, Duoduo 1989a: 124 and *Tamen*, *Jintian* 1993-2: 113-114.

<sup>39</sup> Beckett 1990: 425.

<sup>40</sup> *Beican* in the original. Cf. the final two lines of *Marguerite's Travels with Me*, discussed in section II of this chapter: *the laboring people's / miserable, holy evening meal (laodong renmin / beican de shengjie de wancan)*. This usage of *beican* and its context support my interpretation of lines 8-10 in *Teachings*.

a higher order (*had no choice but to go on playing*) and highfalutin theories and Isms (*the misfortune of ideals*); once they came to their senses they were by and large still powerless to effect social change (*their scattered destructive power / had not nearly seized society's attention*), for they were guilty of mental crimes (*criminals of the spirit*), inconceivable anywhere but in a totalitarian state; most importantly, a "normal" life (*in the time set aside by the lord*), according to what had once seemed reasonable expectations, became impossible for many after the Cultural Revolution invaded their lives – these *men mislived* are known, among other things, as the Lost Generation.<sup>41</sup> To return to its motto: if *Teachings* can be read as being about Chinese adolescents in the late 1960s, its decadence may point to aspects of life in those days less well known than political repression.<sup>42</sup>

*Farewell, For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *Teachings* are all political and Chinese poems. In the case of *Farewell* politicality is arrived at with the aid of extra-textual knowledge of China. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* can be read without such knowledge, but on the basis of background data it turns into a bird's-eye view of certain aspects of the Cultural Revolution. *Teachings* is political at first sight, but its degree of abstraction legitimizes a reading which involves information unavailable from the poem. It can then be interpreted, more so than *Farewell* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, as being about the victims of the shutdown of the Chinese education system in the late 1960s. By comparison with earlier poems, *Teachings* is written in a recognizable but changing tone of voice: less pompous and more intense.

#### *You Could* (1973)

*You Could*<sup>43</sup> is a poem with an atmosphere dissimilar to that of those discussed so far. Its subject matter is modest, gentle and innocent; nowhere does its accessibility warrant the suspicion of sarcasm. Although it qualifies as free verse it has a stronger aural presence than most of Duoduo's early work. This is manifest both in isolated instances – alliteration in l. 5: *xiang yi xie suosui de xinshi*; the near-symmetry of l. 23 – and in the repetition, 13 times in 27 lines, of the poem's title. The absence of a personal pronoun in the first 17 lines of the original makes the protagonist spoken to as un-individual as the narrating agent is throughout the text. One can view the

<sup>41</sup> I have translated *wu sheng de ren* as *men mislived* rather than *misborn people* to retain the resonance with *rensheng*, 'man's life' or 'human life'.

<sup>42</sup> See chapter two: FROM READING TO WRITING: THE BIRTH OF OBSCURE POETRY.

<sup>43</sup> *Nenggou*, Duoduo 1988a: 9-10.

speaker and the person spoken to in *You Could* as identical, that is: view the poem as a soliloquy.

you could have days of drunken gulping liquor  
 you could be a hero seeing double  
 you could, at noon  
 behind the curtain of the ticking of the clock  
 5 turn trivial worries over in your mind  
 you could be seriously embarrassed without end

you could go for a walk by yourself  
 sit on a bench painted green  
 close your eyes awhile  
 10 you could sigh to your heart's content  
 recall none-too-happy times gone by  
 forget where you flicked  
 the ashes of your cigarette

you could in days of illness  
 15 lose your temper, fail to keep your dignity  
 you could take the route you're used to  
 on your way home  
 you could have someone kissing you  
 scrubbing you, and then some exquisite lies  
 20 awaiting you, you could live that way

how wonderful, whenever, wherever,  
 your hands could pick flowers  
 your lips could reach lips  
 no storm no revolution  
 25 the earth irrigated with wine offered by the people  
 you could live that way  
 how wonderful, as wonderful as you want!

In English the poem's story has counterfactual overtones: *you could* means that you cannot, perhaps that you can but you don't. Things once were this way or might be this way one day, but they are not right now. Strictly speaking, there is no hard linguistic evidence of counterfactuality in the original; for lack of unambiguous grammatical markers, nothing short of an explicit explanation in adverbial adjuncts or subordinate clauses would do. Replacing *could* in the translation with *can* is therefore technically legitimate. The last stanza "come true" could be a eulogy of a peaceful life of beauty and love:

how wonderful, whenever, wherever  
 your hands can pick flowers  
 your lips can reach lips  
 no storm no revolution  
 the earth irrigated with wine offered by the people  
 you can live this way  
 how wonderful, as wonderful as you want!

But this does not work in the rest of the poem. I have therefore rendered it counterfactual in English.

After all, why speak of the possibility of turning trivial worries over in your mind or forgetting where you flicked the ashes of your cigarette, really no great adventures, unless they are unthinkable in your life? The first three stanzas contain musings about unspectacular, commonplace experiences: heroic drunkenness, a solitary stroll, dozing off on a bench in the park, walking home through familiar streets. It is by an implied contrast with their ordinairiness that they evoke a situation in which major fears block out minor bothers, where one must be on guard, cover one's tracks and expect to be ambushed.

The fourth stanza differs from the first three in two ways. It is the only stanza not starting with the catch-phrase *you could*, and it proceeds from description to judgment. Under the right circumstances the counterfactual life is not just possible, it is also desirable. Moreover, the fourth stanza contains the only statement as to what the situation imagined would *not* be like: no storm no revolution. For the factual state of affairs at the time of speaking, it suffices to remove the negations: storm and revolution, *ergo* the infringement upon personal life and terror hinted at in the preceding stanzas.

Without that statement *You Could* would still be about those things, regardless of the particular type of repression generating them. Reasons for a political reading are uncovered by the mechanism of implied contrast and prove to be abundantly present within the space of the poem. Chinese history is irrelevant. Of course the poem's message can be applied to nightmarish aspects of the Cultural Revolution, but that is only one possible reading.<sup>44</sup> *You Could* is a political poem, but it is not Chinese.

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<sup>44</sup> It is for comparable reasons that I find Wolfgang Kubin's presentation of Bei Dao's *A Day* in German translation unfortunate. The poem's text, akin to Duoduo's *You Could*, is accompanied by an explanatory note: *A day such as would have been impossible during the Cultural Revolution*, unnecessarily reducing the poem's scope. (Rizi, Bei Dao 1984: 86 and 1987: 20; English translation in Bei Dao 1984: 35 and 1988: 30; German translation in Bei Dao 1991b: 7.)

*Marguerite's Travels with Me* (1974)

Seen from a distance, *Marguerite's Travels with Me*<sup>45</sup> belongs in the same pigeon-hole as *Doctor Zhivago*. Both are long poems from 1974 in free verse, in parts with separate subheadings – A and B in *Marguerite's Travels with Me* – full of names from the real world. But on closer inspection there are disparities on the level of analysis, especially in the identity of the narrating agent and the protagonists. And while both poems are political and neither is Chinese, their politicality and their lack of Chineseness do not come from the same source.

Furthermore, in the context of Duoduo's early work *Marguerite's Travels with Me* is of striking maturity. The voice speaking here has various registers at its disposal and is quick to adjust its tone as the story it tells unfolds. This flexibility is clearest at the poem's turning point; after the playful part A the beginning of part B exudes resignation to injustice. *Marguerite's Travels with Me* is less bombastic than *Doctor Zhivago* but more dramatic than the cynical series of hammer blows that is *Teachings*. Another feature which sets off this poem from its surroundings in the early work is the identity of the narrating agent, who is one of its three protagonists, not the impersonal voice often encountered so far. *Marguerite's Travels with Me* is in the words of the first person singular, Marguerite's lover; the other two protagonists are Marguerite and the Chinese Peasant.

## A

like you promised the sun  
get crazy, Marguerite:

for you I'll plunder  
a thousand of Paris' most extravagant jewelers  
I'll cable you a hundred thousand  
wet kisses from a Caribbean beach  
if you'll just bake some English pastry  
fry two Spanish steaks  
and from your father's study  
steal me a pinch of Turkish tobacco  
and then, you and I, we'll evade  
the wedding's hullabaloo

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<sup>45</sup> *Mageli he wo de lüxing*, Duoduo 1989a: 18-21. An earlier edition, printed in Lao Mu 1985a: 395-398, is in two parts (A and B), as is the 1989 text, but like the 1985 version of *Teachings*, it is not divided into stanzas. The only other incongruity is in line 16, where the 1985 *pudgy lover* has in 1989 become an *unfaithful lover*.

and go to the Black Sea together  
 to Hawaii, to the great town of Nice  
 with me, your clownesque  
 unfaithful lover  
 go to the beach together  
 to the nude beach  
 to the coffee-colored beach that is the poet's  
 pace up and down, kiss, leave  
 straw hats, a pipe, random thoughts behind...

will you, you, my Marguerite  
 together with me go to a country of warmth

to a tropical city under cocoa trees  
 a harbor where golden merchant ships are moored  
 you'll see hordes of monkeys  
 standing under parasols and boozing  
 sailors with dangling silver earrings  
 winking with long lashes in the evening light  
 you'll be besieged by greedy merchants  
 and gain their eulogies  
 as well as oranges with acne  
 oh, Marguerite, look, in the water  
 all those black women  
 swimming there like eels!

come with me  
 Marguerite, let us  
 head for the wonderful thousand-and-first night of Arabia  
 head for the colors and hues of nightfall over the Persian Gulf  
 go where pink-skinned old people from strange lands  
 feed the peacock heady wine  
 and snake-charmers with shiny, oily skin  
 play their wooden flute in Calcutta's snake forest  
 we'll find the moonstone of India  
 walk into a palace  
 a palace resplendent and magnificent  
 on an elephant's back, moving ahead in a fairy-like way...

## B

oh, noble Marguerite  
 ignorant Marguerite  
 together with me, go to the Chinese countryside



to the peaceful, destitute countryside

go and look at that  
 upright, ancient people  
 those benumbed, unlucky peasants  
 peasants, my love  
 do you know the peasants  
 those sons of suffering  
 in the blaze of the sun and their fate  
 in their black superstitious hovels  
 where they've generously lived so many years

go there and look  
 melancholy Marguerite  
 poetess Marguerite  
 I hope you'll always remember  
 that tableau of pain  
 that guiltless soil:

the pockmarked wife prepares the offerings for thanksgiving  
 washes her child, bakes the red-hot holy cake  
 and after the rural ritual is performed, without a word  
 the laboring people's  
 miserable, holy evening meal begins...

The use of first and second person pronouns is no guarantee for any personality in the speaker or the one spoken to.<sup>46</sup> But Marguerite and her lover do accumulate some personality as the poem proceeds, not so much through the loud romanticism of stolen jewelry and telegraphic caresses as through more intimate scenes like this:

and from your father's study  
 steal me a pinch of Turkish tobacco

It may be the unmarked case for humans to have a father but it is the lover's casual mention of this man, who has a study and smokes a pipe, that makes his daughter come alive. The intimacy between Marguerite and her lover is underlined by their planned escape from the wedding. There is more to be deduced about the couple: Marguerite's Chinese name, Mageli, makes her non-Chinese, a foreigner to the poem's language, whereas her lover – the speaker of that language – is most likely

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. the above discussions of *Farewell* and *You Could*.

Chinese or at least familiar and sympathetic with the Chinese soil and the grim life of the Chinese peasants.

Part A is a naïve drawing of a tell-tale life across the border: a string of romantic images from the non-Chinese world, depicted with the excitement of a child in a sweets shop.<sup>47</sup> Marguerite's lover implores her to journey with him through that world, presumably on honeymoon after an equally romantic courtship and wedding – or elopement. He steals their rings in Paris and proposes to her by telegram. Their imagined voyage, everywhere but in China, is nothing more than an enumeration of stylized scenes from a materially carefree life, the backdrop to an infatuation with a sparkling-champagne-by-candlelight type of love.

But in part B the story changes radically. Her lover has charmed and flattered Marguerite, telling how others will sing her praises. Now he compellingly suggests that she accompany him to what is a different world from their extravagances: the Chinese countryside. And he states that she – and implicitly, the poem's non-Chinese reader – does not know the first thing about it. In a chilling voice ignorant Marguerite is asked:

peasants, my love  
do you know the peasants

The question is rhetorical, and her lover goes on to explain what the Chinese peasants are like. His words still hint at sympathy for Marguerite, not hostility. At the same time it is hard not to feel that his loyalties lie much more with the guiltless Chinese soil than with the foreign nude beach; he values the laboring people's miserable evening meal more than Spanish steaks or English pastry. After the boisterous part A, the restrained passion of part B has the effect of the tears of a clown. In retrospect, the skin-deep romanticism and exoticism of part A can be viewed as an unsmiling tongue-in-cheek performance.

*Marguerite's Travels with Me* takes place in the public domain, referred to by existing place-names and clichés, as well as a sketch of the Chinese countryside. The poem may be said to reflect its time and place of origin, perhaps even the age of its author: immersion in rural China left its mark on the minds of many Young Intellec-

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<sup>47</sup> More of these can be found in another series entitled *All Things on Earth* (1973) (*Wanxiang*, parts A-G, Duoduo 1988a: 11-14) included in *Salute*, and not to be confused with its namesake in *The Road Traveled*, discussed earlier in this chapter. In spite of occasional overlap, the two are different texts altogether. Part D is about America (i.e. the United States): *that place is a place of extravagance / that place attracts sailors from all over the world // in that place, gold coins rain from the sky / in that place, the people humorously open their umbrellas // in that place, there is happiness, that place / is called America*. The final line contains an untranslatable pun: the Chinese name for the U.S.A. is *Meiguo*, a transliteration of the second syllable of *America* plus *guo* 'country', literally meaning 'beautiful country'.

tuals. In a jolting if distorted comparison, the narrating agent makes the luxuriousness of fabled far-off places serve as a foil to the hard lot of the Chinese. The poem features rich jewelers in opposition to poor peasants and stresses the Chinese people's human dignity, measured by other standards than – foreign – material wealth. It is clearly a political poem; strikingly, its ideology is in fact similar to that of Political Lyricism.

All ingredients needed for the above discussion are provided by the text itself: the narrating agent takes pains to make an unknowing foreigner realize what China is like. While it explicitly treats of China, *Marguerite's Travels with Me* does not presuppose knowledge of China on the part of the reader and is therefore not a Chinese poem – in the above reading, that is.

At the same time, one who does know a thing or two about China may experience the poem quite differently. Just like the world across the borders in part A, the Chinese Peasant of part B is a caricature, glorified by the narrating agent's sympathy in a way reminiscent of Communist propaganda. As such, part B is no less romanticist, exoticist or cliché than part A, and moralizing to boot.

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Except for *Teachings* (1976) the poems discussed in this section go back to Duoduo's first three years of writing (1972-1974). They are all in free verse, but show an awareness of the possibilities of sound, most obvious in *You Could*, *Teachings* and *Marguerite's Travels with Me*; their length differs considerably. The majority feature an impersonal, uninvolved narrating agent and abstracted, sometimes collective protagonists. An important source of the poems' primary meaning is the violent reality of social upheaval such as war and revolution, more generally injustice and repression. In the short poems the poetic voice is solemn and unoriginal. The three long poems, *Doctor Zhivago*, *Marguerite's Travels with Me* and *Teachings*, differ a great deal in the way they sound: bombastic, passionate and cynical, respectively.

For most of these poems no great distance needs to be covered between analysis and interpretation. This is a consequence of their bent for abstraction. Still, some gain from the reader's reliance on extra-textual knowledge of contemporary China, specifically of the Cultural Revolution. Socio-political issues from the real world are prominent themes. Politicality and Chineseness, as defined in the beginning of this section, provide rewarding criteria for examination of Duoduo's early poetry.

## II POEMS THAT SPEAK OF LOVE

Human relationships are among the themes of Duoduo's poetry throughout. Important categories can be discerned, such as relationships between parents and their offspring, and love relationships. Love can be seen to provide the inspiration for the most divergent works of art, and I will not comment on all of Duoduo's poems that are possibly "about" love – that is, whose interpretation invokes love in one way or another. *Poems that speak of love* means: poems explicitly addressing the issue, often in a straightforward fashion, whether as an abstraction or as a concrete manifestation thereof. This description captures similarities between a number of Duoduo's early poems. While love is by no means absent from his later poetry, poems that speak of love do disappear in the 1980s.

Love is harder to define than politicality or Chineseness, and there are various kinds. Instead of explaining the use of a word perhaps as well known as *Coca-cola*, let me isolate the love spoken of here by excluding other types. The poems discussed in this section do not speak of the love for one's country, for a Just Cause, a God, Truth or even Beauty, or of the love for one's children, parents, siblings, friends – as opposed to one's lovers. The love in these poems is between humans; it is of the irrational kind, associated with unreasonable emotions, passion, lust, sex and exclusiveness; it is the love that can be "unrequited" and "break hearts"; it is the love pop songs are all about.

From politicality and Chineseness, the discussion thus shifts to the private domain. After an examination of the longest and perhaps the most typical of Duoduo's poems that speak of love, points of kinship between this poem and others are identified.

*Time of Feelings* (1973-1980)

If only because it took its author eight years to write it – albeit presumably in an off-and-on manner – and it is over 300 lines long, *Time of Feelings*<sup>48</sup> merits attention. Again, disparities between the version published in Lao Mu's 1985 anthology and that in *The Road Traveled* are considerable. First, while the former has 21 parts, A through W (no T and U), the latter is in separate poems # 1-30, of which two (# 3 and 15) are further divided into 1, 2 and 3. Comparison shows that # 14, 18-25 and 28-30 do not appear in the 1985 version; that # 15 was part R in 1985, then preceded by what would in 1989 be # 16 and 17; that, as in the case of *Teachings*, none

<sup>48</sup> *Ganqing de shijian*, Duoduo 1989a: 34-51 and Lao Mu 1985a: 412-422. Excerpts also appeared in Liu & Wang 1989 (102-105), under the title *A Different Time* (*Ling yi ge shijian*).

of parts A through W are divided into stanzas, whereas the 1989 version contains 14 stanza divisions; that the single seeming stanza division in the 1985 version (in part W) is in fact the omission of a line retraceable in the 1989 # 27. Judging from their style, there is no reason to assume that the poems "added" in 1989 were actually written after 1985, unless the author with astonishing agility returned to an earlier self. In sum, the text included in Lao Mu's anthology is 86 lines shorter than that in *The Road Traveled* and fails to divide the cycle's constituent parts into stanzas; it is probably an excerpt from a longer text extant in 1985 but first published in Duoduo's 1989 collection.

The separate poems in *Time of Feelings* are short; the lines of the separate poems are short, too. Duoduo recalls an enthusiastic audience response to the cycle at a poetry reading in 1987<sup>49</sup> and indeed, *Time of Feelings* seems made for reading aloud. With frequent rhyme, repetition and parallelisms, it shows a more systematic regard for prosody than most of Duoduo's early work. An example is the second stanza of # 4, transcribed below. *Ting qing* in its opening line is an inversion of the homophonous *qingting*, used twice in the preceding stanza, and smoothly connects the two stanzas on the level of sound:

*wo zai ting qing*  
*rang wo nanguo de shengyin*  
*wo zai ting qing*  
*rang wo nanguo de ganqing*  
*wo jiu na qi ni de shou*  
*ca gan ni de yanjing*  
*ranhou chui xia wo de tou*  
*qu xiang yi xie gaoshang*  
*ningjing, er you*  
*juedui juewang de shiqing.....*

(I clearly hear  
 the voice that grieves me  
 I clearly hear  
 feelings that grieve me  
 and I take your hand  
 to wipe your eyes dry  
 then I hang my head  
 to think of noble

---

<sup>49</sup> At Beijing University (personal communication, February 1992).

peaceful, but  
absolutely hopeless things...)

*Ningjing* is a postponed instance of rhyme in the penultimate line, having made way for the unexpected *-ang* of *gaoshang*. It combines with the sudden repetition of *jue-* in the final line to avert the danger of monotony, before the poem returns, in its last syllable, to its most prominent sound: the ending *-ing*.

The narrating agent is in the first person singular and coincides with one of the two protagonists: throughout the cycle, *I* addresses *you*. The speaker's voice is lyrical, giving vent to a nostalgia often lapsing into sentimentality. The cycle's wording seems determined by the wish to tell a story, to get a message across in everyday language and in a song-like manner, not by any urge for linguistic experiment.

Apart from its sound, an explanation for listeners' enjoyment of *Time of Feelings* could be its accessibility. It is among Duoduo's most easily comprehensible work, not only for an audience familiar with China. There is nothing ambiguous about the cycle: it is about a love affair and its unhappy end.

*I* and *you* are ex-lovers, or lovers caught in an endless ordeal of breaking up. There is scattered "evidence" that they are male and female, respectively, such as in # 4:

it is you  
missing someone else  
which attracts me (...)  
I listen closely  
to your love for him

in # 6:

with the hands of a wife  
you take off my clothes

in # 18:

when once more I feel the power of a man

in # 21:

it was I who called awake your sleeping peaceful breasts

in # 22:

you with your skirt undone

and in # 30:

when you called my name with the voice of a girl

The cycle's first and last poems set its parameters:

# 1

oh, my love, let us  
 look once more at the world outside the window  
 look at liquor and tobacco stores by nightfall  
 at streets wet with rain, cars and lovers  
 look once more at this city, desolate as the wind begins to blow  
 at trees without fruit, all by themselves  
 and you will feel it: we must be together  
 time we spend together  
 is the time of a home  
 and you will stop writing on the window pane  
 be silent no more, waver no more  
 and look at me no more, throw yourself back into my arms...

and

# 30

when you left footprints on the snowy ground of early spring  
 when you appeared in the sunlight, arms full of flowers  
 when you called my name with the voice of a girl  
 a different time began

a different time began  
 when you stood up from the lawn at dusk  
 when you walked away toward the purple wound of nightfall  
 when you thus walked toward a parting of such beauty...

In the first stanza of # 30, youthful beauty and happiness unfold with the lovers' meeting. When a different time begins, that is presumably the time of feelings. But the time of feelings – life while in love, lived and remembered in # 1 through 29 –



must be situated between the first and second stanza. For when the phrase *a different time began* is repeated, identical words point to another reality: the painful darkness of life after love. # 30 thus concludes the cycle by giving its circumference.

# 1 is the point of departure for # 2 through 29. It sums up the speaker's lament over the time of feelings, and over the fact that it is a thing of the past: he tries to convince his love that she and he must be together. The implication is that now, they are not. The need to persuade her to go back on a decision to leave him is clear from her posture in the poem's last three lines.

In the following some 300, no radical changes occur in this scheme of things. They make up a drawn-out declaration of love, with extra ingredients mixed into an ever more tragic monologue. One is the speaker's tendency to wallow in a past that is as sweet as it is bitter:

# 5

do you remember that place, my love  
 where I so deeply loved you  
 (...)  
 that place is deserted now. my love  
 the bushes we looked for together  
 the bench we sat on together  
 (...)  
 that autumn you don't want to remember  
 that autumn we spent living on love  
 (...)

and:

# 6

my love, do not forget  
 that we were once together  
 (...)  
 that is the little room we lived in  
 that is where our past is  
 where you are, in a time of purity  
 faithfully walking about for me  
 in peaceful nights  
 breathing deeply felt breath for me  
 pressed close to my face, oh  
 endlessly talking with me  
 sweetly sitting on my knees

lighting a cigarette for me  
 with the hands of a wife  
 you take off my clothes  
 (...)

Before the cycle enters its saddest stage, the lovers' one-time intimacy is made even more explicit:

# 21

once, I knew every inch of your body  
 and in your eyes found grounds for love  
 (...)

and:

# 22

oh, I remember, I remember  
 the mole on your chest, your smeared-out lipstick  
 you with your skirt undone, walking about in the room  
 (...)  
 I remember, I remember  
 you and me, bodies exchanging love  
 young bodies, pure bodies  
 touching without a trace of shame...

It is not only in # 1 that the speaker begs his ex-lover to undo his fall from grace. In # 26 and 27, both melancholy, soft-spoken poems, he implores her to return:

# 26

I prune the trees you planted  
 look after the greenhouse you abandoned  
 I leave the window open all four seasons  
 like a welcome for when you arrive  
 I won't even sweep the staircase  
 so as to keep the footprints you left there  
 I don't even dare step outside the walls around the yard:  
 all this to make myself believe that you are still singing with the zither  
 but this my devotion in keeping watch  
 is no testimony of a little love

I'm only begging  
for the freedom to see you once more –

# 27

(...)  
I'm sick now  
my love, I believe  
all the world is sick now  
all the world believes  
(...)  
you will certainly  
write me a letter...

The projection of the speaker's personal situation onto the world is repeated in # 29:

yes, my love, you must wait  
for the sky to turn dark and peaceful  
wait for the gaze of all the world  
to become gentle and focus on you  
and only then stretch out your hand to me  
to show that you love someone else...

Calling on the world to be a witness is but one instance of romanticism in *Time of Feelings*. Whereas the cycle is conspicuous in its tireless repetition of the speaker's lament, such romanticism is encountered in Duoduo's contemporaries' work as well, whether unleashed on Chinese history or on a love affair. Exceptional in the context of 1970s PRC poetry are the unabashed passages on carnal love. Sex can be found in other authors' work as well, Mang Ke's early poetry being the most obvious example. But *Time of Feelings* is of uncommon frankness.

A distinguishing feature of the cycle is the blend it contains of love and hate, pleasure and pain, loyalty and betrayal, which returns – somewhat more sophisticated – in Duoduo's later work. The final two lines of # 29 are typical:

stretch out your hand to me  
to show that you love someone else

A third party is rarely mentioned, and either in passing or in a roundabout way. In # 4 the speaker says:

it is you  
 missing someone else  
 which attracts me  
 (...)  
 I listen closely  
 to your love for him...

and # 28 suggests that the speaker's lover is getting married to someone else and is therefore no longer available to him:

for the holiness of tomorrow's marriage  
 you are hoarding yourself  
 under your sweet rouge and powder  
 I can smell the fragrance of an accusation, of parting...

But in none of these cases is the third party more than a blurred silhouette. It is not he or any other foreign body that makes the protagonists' relationship contradictory. In fact the speaker presents such contradictions without any surprise, as self-evident and unavoidable, as inherent in human traffic.

On occasion the tension between emotional opposites is captured in black humor, as in the last four lines of # 7:

oh look at you, and all your  
 understanding of feelings  
 and all your  
 knowledge of their content  
 all the time you  
 leave your lipstick on my face  
 and then slowly for me  
 close your eyes  
 you prepare to treat me  
 in the sweetest way  
 softly reminding me  
 not to exceed  
 not to exceed  
 your rules regarding time...

In # 12 the speaker reproaches *you* with her coldness, pointing out the two sides to the coin in the phrase *your beautiful harmful eyes*:

oh, don't open them  
 don't shine your light on me, don't make me faint

don't make me realize your soul  
 is not kind, don't make me see  
 your lashes-covered eyes  
 your sumptuous tearless eyes  
 – don't make me see  
 your costly chilling eyes  
 your beautiful harmful eyes  
 oh, don't make me see, don't make me go blind!

Here, in his wailing over the dangerous splendor of her eyes he never loses sight of her ears, and of those of the reader. My translation does little justice to the rhythms and rhymes in the original.

To treat of togetherness and separation, sarcasm and reproof are only used incidentally. This is also true for the folded hands and bended knees in # 3 (3):

broken-hearted, I kiss you  
 and bury my head in your bosom  
 like a child  
 stroking you, sniffing at your body  
 hoping that you  
 can give me a little faith  
 hoping to forget  
 that this is parting...

The speaker's contradictory feelings arise when he is humiliated. In # 10:

(...)
   
 often, with your eyes  
 staring at me, you tell me:  
 you're only using the most beautiful of faces  
 to overlook me...

When self-mockery is not enough, he becomes masochistic, as in # 4:

it is, in your eyes  
 the thing that breaks hearts  
 which attracts me  
 it is you  
 missing someone else  
 which attracts me

(...)

I listen closely  
to your love for him...

In # 11 his love almost becomes a threat, when he assures *you* that her rejection of him is counterproductive:

(...)  
for fear that your determination to leave me  
still attracts me, for fear that what I  
learn from our parting  
still is love...

Phrases such as *how gentle is my pain* and *all I feel is unbearable happiness* (# 15 (3)) recapitulate this uneasy love. Like the two preceding quotes they are examples of a bent for abstraction which is characteristic of Duoduo's early poetry, and of work by some of his contemporaries. But the nature of the protagonists' relationship – sarcasm, reproof, humiliation, masochism etc. – is most poignantly clear from a casual remark in # 27, effective in its brevity, italicized below:

(...)  
I'm sick now  
my love, I believe  
all the world is sick now  
all the world believes  
*that once you finish your cigarette*  
you will certainly  
write me a letter...

Details gain in importance in Duoduo's later work. *Time of Feelings* still tends to present the reader with conclusions rather than the stories or arguments they conclude. A case in point is this statement, in the first stanza of # 13:

that was a short time  
that was the time when we loved each other  
in the time that we loved each other  
we found the place to part

Contradictory feelings and the near-simultaneity of opposites are no contingencies: meeting engenders parting.

*Dream* (1973)

There is a strong similarity between the last passage cited from *Time of Feelings* and the fourth stanza of *Dream*:<sup>50</sup>

that was a time of love  
                   that was a time of being together  
 that was a brief time  
                   barely enough to warm our souls

*Dream* is a sizable poem: it has 13 stanzas of four lines each. Delivered in a solemn voice, it is full of rhyme, repetition and parallelisms. While *Time of Feelings* is truly in the vernacular and in free verse, *Dream* employs a literary language. It is also more strictly arranged on the formal level, although it has no consistent rhyme pattern or set line length. Again, the narrating agent is *I* and addresses the only other protagonist: *you*.

Below are stanzas 4-11:

that was a time of love  
                   that was a time of being together  
 that was a brief time  
                   barely long enough to warm our souls

but: kisses, yes, kisses more than enough  
                   and staring at me closely, gently  
 stroking me, comforting me –  
                   you will soon say goodbye to me

and soon it will be time to admit it  
                   your laugh is cold, your laugh leaves no trace  
 your laugh is so hurried  
                   at parting, your laugh is so hurried

and as the stars become blurred, you  
                   standing at the wet bus stop  
 will draw back your hand

---

<sup>50</sup> Meng, Duoduo 1988a: 22-24. There are minor differences with the version published in *The Ugly Duckling* (*Chou xiao ya*) # 9 (1982): 28. The poem also appeared as *Dream Traces* (*Meng hen*) in Liu & Wang 1989: 98-100. Comparison with the text in Duoduo 1988a shows a number of omissions: part of l. 11, l. 12, and, crucially, l. 41-44.



and carefully hide it in your pocket

fled, fled at last  
     those days, can't put the finger on them now  
 like false gold coins, like pretty eyes  
     jingling, deceitfully flowing past

ten beautiful Sundays  
     secret time created by the two of us  
 like a dim dream not remembered  
     like a countryside morning with no smoke from kitchens

not a thing remains  
     of love, not a thing remains  
 you left at your leisure, go on, leave  
     you took another's spring, go on, take it

oh the fearful thing that is love  
     oh the fearful fault that is love  
 wipe these moist eyes  
     what more can you say now

Like *Time of Feelings*, *Dream* is about a love affair and its unhappy end. But in this litany, the speaker is not stubborn or one-track-minded, and appears resigned to the course of events. *I* does not try to keep *you* from leaving and only once is there a hint of reproach: *your laugh is cold, your laugh leaves no trace*. While the speaker does not explicitly pass judgment, a cold laugh shows cruelty and a laugh that leaves no trace makes the laughter an unreliable emotional companion.

Resignation points to greater dignity on the speaker's part than in *Time of Feelings*. In *Dream*, there is no sarcasm, self-mockery, humiliation and masochistic pleasure. But both poems present a less than optimistic, cynical view of love and its durability.

That *you* will soon say goodbye to *me* while the lovers' affection is superficially still mutual makes love shallow and transient. This passage touches on a fundamental category of discord: in love No overrules Yes. The awkward moment when the lovers no longer share their feelings arrives when at parting, *you* seems to have other matters to attend to, while the stars become blurred: perhaps because *I* is crying. Several phrases in the separation scene suggest a degree of fatalism.

After the agony of breaking up, cynicism rears its ugly head. Now that love is gone, the speaker disavows its former existence too: past happiness is likened to false gold coins and deceitful pretty eyes, and the lovers' one-time bliss is denied

altogether. Not only is it irretrievable, it was secret time, perpendicular to "real time", it was but a dim dream – as in the poem's title – and is now not remembered, and it took place in a normally impossible moment: a countryside morning with no smoke from kitchens. Love is incompatible with everyday life, so much so that it is deprived of the right to become a beautiful memory:

not a thing remains  
of love, not a thing remains

Finally, personal grief is extrapolated to the very concept of love, which the speaker calls a fearful fault.

*The Optimist's Daughter's Reply* (1977)

An atrabilious view of love relationships is by no means exceptional in Duoduo's early work. The message contained in *Time of Feelings* and *Dream* is confirmed by the 1977 twin poems *For the Optimist's Daughter* and *The Optimist's Daughter's Reply*.<sup>51</sup> Again, the two protagonists are lovers or ex-lovers, in the first and second person singular, this time taking turns as the narrating agent. As the second title indicates, the optimist's daughter answers her lover, who has spoken in the first poem. Just like in *Doctor Zhivago* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the title phrase alludes to a foreign source: Eudora Welty's novel *The Optimist's Daughter*, but an intrinsic connection with that text is hard to find.<sup>52</sup>

The reader does not learn much about the speaker in the first poem. He delivers a monologue describing the optimist's daughter as a conceited woman, who treats her lover with carelessness:

(...)  
the wine I gave you – you watered flowers with it  
and the handkerchief you wiped your lips with  
you stuffed it into my hand, then  
pacing up and down contentedly

<sup>51</sup> *Gei leguan zhe de nüer* and *Leguan zhe nüer de huida*, Lao Mu 1985a: 405-407 and 408-409.

<sup>52</sup> In 1974 the Chinese translation of Welty's (1972) *The Optimist's Daughter* came out, "for internal circulation" (*Quanguo neibu faxing tushu zongmu (1949-1986)*: 364). Cf. the discussions of *Doctor Zhivago* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in section I of this chapter, and of *Death of a Poet* in chapter eight: section V.

She vainly tries to control her emotions:

(...)  
 and then, unwilling and sudden, you'll feel your fear  
 your fear of thinking  
 of which you never speak  
 (...)  
 you live for your moods  
 your goal in life  
 is to carefully protect them  
 (...)

For all her hidden insecurities, the woman seems adept at manipulating her lover. This impression is reinforced by her answer in *The Optimist's Daughter's Reply*:

oh, really? when you say  
 "you're tormenting me"  
 all I want to do is help you  
 but then again, who am I

it is thinking – that makes you scary  
 your eyes void as a dream  
 your hands twitching as if they've just been amputated  
 your face both savage and peaceful  
 just been through a war  
 only your heart – I don't know  
 it might be a full  
 boring  
 book

but everything is very clear  
 so that I know, all in all, that you  
 still see feelings as a matter of importance  
 that you are still wholeheartedly  
 broken-hearted  
 but to make me believe that  
 is, I'm afraid, no longer possible  
 if you cannot express love  
 more beautifully, you don't belong  
 in what you make it out to be  
 when you stubbornly collect smiles from my face  
 my world comes walking toward me

the man carrying time  
 comes walking toward me  
 I have to go and greet him  
 I have to go and greet him  
 so as to prove what you have said:  
 love is cancer  
 love is an incurable disease –

Although the relationship's termination is not made as explicit as in the previous two poems, it is strongly hinted at. The optimist's daughter's welcome of her world and of the man carrying time indicates that she wants to go her own way and get on with her life, returning to her former lover his pitch-black maxim that love is cancer. There is more to this image of physical illness than semantics. *Cancer* – rather than *war*, to name another characterization of love conceivable in Duoduo's early work – is aurally motivated, too: the original is *aiqing shi aizheng*, an almost symmetrical line containing alliteration and slant rhyme.

This time it is not the one broken-hearted but the one breaking hearts that speaks. The roles have been reversed: *you* in this poem is in the same camp as *I* in the other two poems, and *vice versa*. This explains the change of tone: from the self-mocking sentimentality of *Time of Feelings* and the solemn resignation of *Dream* to undisguised enmity in *The Optimist's Daughter's Reply*.

*Honeyweek* (1972); *All Things on Earth: Girls' Polka* (1973), *Child* (1973);  
*Hello Hello* (1983)

*Time of Feelings*, *Dream* and *The Optimist's Daughter's Reply* all exude a cynical view of love. This view is explicit, but it is also retraceable to love affairs reported more or less in detail. Other early poems by Duoduo display this cynicism as well, but less elaborately justified.

*Honeyweek*<sup>53</sup> consists of seven short poems in free verse, entitled *The First Day* through *The Seventh Day*. The name of the poem literally translates as 'sweet week', alluding to the Chinese word for *honeymoon*, 'sweet month'. Once again, protagonists are *you* and *I*, woman and man respectively. The first five poems contain the speaker's depressing remarks on their sexuality and love. Sex is associated with physical crudeness and the need to hide from and lie to others, specifically one's parents; when, in *The Fifth Day*, their love first makes its advent, it is called

<sup>53</sup> *Mi zhou*, Duoduo 1989a: 4-8.

shallow. In *The Sixth Day*, the speaker delivers two asides to a dialogue reported verbatim, in which he denies he ever loved the woman and states that the absence of love from their relationship should logically be followed by marriage.

*The Seventh Day* draws generalizing conclusions:

(...)  
 we are written up together to be slogans in a demonstration  
 the controversy: who are the world's biggest assholes  
     first place: the poet  
     second place: the woman  
 (...)

It seems fair to assume that these statements are based on the case examined in the first six poems, and that the poet coincides with the speaker. That this coincidence may not be a coincidence at all can be seen in the final line of *The Fourth Day*, spoken by the woman to the speaker-poet: *you, go ahead and conquer the world!* The original is: *nǐ, qù zhèngfú shìjiè ba!* Duoduo's real name Shizheng is made up of two characters: *zheng(-fu)* and *shi(-jie)* – *conquer* and *world*. The possible autobiographical nature of *Honeyweek* is irrelevant, but an allusion to Duoduo's poethood is not. It is circumstantial evidence that the speaker is a poet, that the relationship commented upon throughout is one between a poet and a woman, and therefore, through the generalization in *The Seventh Day*, that those entertaining relationships involving sexuality and love are assholes – or become assholes as a result of their relationship, during their "honeyweek".

*Girls' Polka*<sup>54</sup> and *Child*<sup>55</sup> are short poems with little regard for form; their narrating agent is an impersonal voice and their protagonists are unspecified (*these girls, bad men*), abstract (*woman*) or conceptual (*God*). These poems are aphorisms, statements made out of the blue without a context to justify them. They are no great artistic achievements, but of interest here because they confirm Duoduo's poetry's early disillusionment with rosy images of love. This is *Girls' Polka*:

just as arrogant, just as fond of teasing  
 these free girls  
 these girls, who shall grow to be empresses  
 will for love go to the ends of the earth  
 will follow bad men and never cease to be faithful

<sup>54</sup> *Shaonü boerka*, Duoduo 1989a: 9.

<sup>55</sup> *Haizi*, Duoduo 1989a: 11.

Initially life seems to treat the girls well. They are free and destined to marry emperors. The girls are spiritually motivated to boot: for love, they will go out of their way. Whether the bad men are the emperors or lovers preferred to the emperors does not matter: in the poem's final line the girls' devotion turns against themselves, and love becomes an impediment to freedom.

For love the girls in *Girls' Polka* will do anything. The poem's conclusion implies that they have been misguided by what they believe is love. Any remaining illusions are swept aside two pages further in the same series *All Things on Earth*, in *Child*:

you created mankind but no freedom  
 you created woman but no love  
     God, so mediocre  
     God, you are so mediocre!

Although children are as a rule not prone to top-heavy statements on the freedom of mankind or indictments of a deity, the poem's title could mean that l. 1-4 are presented as children's words. Quite aside from this puzzle or the verdict passed on God, the message is simple: no love.

*Hello hello*<sup>56</sup> does not literally speak of love, and it was written ten years later than the poems that do. But it is an early poem in spirit, and it does speak of the meeting of two humans as a moment engendering a beautiful smile and an image hinting at sexual excitement: a quivering spring. Its formal properties are limited to the division of the poem's 16 lines into eight stanzas of two lines each, and scattered instances of rhyme (l. 1-2, 9-10, 13-14). The story of *Hello Hello* is simple: *I* and *you* shake hands. Its wording is transparent:

hello   hello  
 stretch out my hand to you

to shake hands with you  
 hello   hello

5 stretch out your hand to me too  
 we're very firmly shaking hands

shaking mankind's invention  
 hello   hello

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<sup>56</sup> *Ni hao ni hao*, Duoduo 1988a: 55-56. The original is included in APPENDIX B (302-303).

- hello    hello  
 10    a beautiful smile
- a spring is quivering  
 hello hello hello
- hello hello hello  
 I got to shake your hand
- 15    five ice-cold bullets  
       covered in red nail polish

The typography of the title (and of l. 1, 4, 8, 9) suggests two speakers exchanging greetings. They do so in a fashion unique to human beings, by shaking hands. The handshake, most everyday of actions, is described at length, with a predictable effect of defamiliarization. It is followed by a smile affirming the acquaintance, and by the single thing not among standard stage props for a meeting: the quivering spring, a sudden contribution by the imagination. The phrase *got to shake your hand* (*wo dao le ni de shou*) makes shaking the other's hand something of a feat, or a privilege. The ever more absurd repetition of *hello* shows the speaker's increasing enthusiasm, which becomes pathetic in the poem's last two lines. In the last stanza the fingers or fingertips of *your* hand are abruptly likened to bullets. The hand's destructive power is accentuated by the contrast with its red fingernails, ostensibly aimed at charm and seduction.

In *Hello hello* love and its side-effects are thus denied before they have been spoken of. But reasons for including this blow-up of a handshake in this section are reinforced by a glance back at the essence of *Time of Feelings*:

(...) stretch out your hand to me  
 to show that you love someone else

\*

Duoduo's early poems that speak of love are all in free verse, varying in length from as few as five to as many as 328 lines. Most of them, especially the long poem *Time of Feelings*, display some regard for prosody. They do so in a conservative, skillful way, but their sound is not their most conspicuous feature. Usually a first-person singular narrating agent coincides with one of the two unnamed protagonists *I* and *you*. Relationships between them are more convincingly characterized by concrete details than by abstractions. As observed in section I, Duoduo's early poetry contains not a few of the latter, a trait it shares with work by his contemporaries. Its romanti-

cism and sentimentality are another similarity with other Chinese poetry from the 1970s. While his early poems' wording is not spectacular or experimental, it is often effective in its frankness. As regards content, analysis and interpretation show considerable congruence. In these poems the reader happens upon themes in the course of reading, rather than actively reading them into the text.

These poems do not overlap with the public domain. The majority are about love affairs and their unhappy endings. These events and the thoughts and feelings they evoke show hate, pain, and betrayal going hand in glove with love, pleasure and loyalty. Such contradictions are presented as inevitable in human traffic, specifically in love relationships.

The poems that speak of love are skeptical and cynical. If love provokes quintessential behavior in humans, it is not of a graceful kind. In sum: undamaging and undamaged love are incompatible with Man.

### III THE CROCODILE MARKET

Within Duoduo's oeuvre, *The Crocodile Market*<sup>57</sup> (1982) is a singular work. First of all because of its length: it runs to 203 lines of poetry. It is divided into three parts, but they are coherent and connected in a straightforward linear fashion. Unlike in *Time of Feelings*, there is no repetition to speak of in *The Crocodile Market*. Its three parts are marked by special punctuation – asterisks – and not headed by titles, numbers or letters. The poem is presented as a single whole, dated 1982. The boundaries within it are nothing more than breathers, for the poem's speakers and readers alike: one step up from stanza divisions.

The poem's length is at the root of other differences with the rest of Duoduo's oeuvre. Only in a vast space can a range of related sub-subjects be treated as elaborately as in *The Crocodile Market*; this poem is closer to prose than any other of Duoduo's poems. Although its poetic qualities – prosody, tone, imagery – amount to more than typographical arrangements, its difference from the rest of the oeuvre might lead one to view it as a transitional stage between the early and the later work.

But in a transition one should find not only vestiges of the past but also seeds of the future. I therefore classify *The Crocodile Market* as the conclusion of the early years. Whereas aspects of the early poems' themes resound in this modest epic, it shows little kinship with Duoduo's later writings.

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<sup>57</sup> *Eyu shichang*, Duoduo 1989a: 53-62 and 1988a: 40-49. The original is included in APPENDIX B (303-310). There are negligible differences – many in punctuation and typography, some in wording – with the text included in Duoduo 1988a: 40-49.



*The Crocodile Market* has three parts, of 39, 100 and 64 lines. It is in free verse: there are no regularities in the structure of its lines and stanzas, or in the sound patterns it contains. Maybe as an antidote to monotony, many of its lines are indented, which gives the poem a conspicuous typographical presence. Its tone is of a solemnity – manifest in exclamatory particles like *a* and *ao*, among other things – more like that of a public speech than, for instance, fixed formulae in a religious text aimed at specialized readers. The poem does the opposite of creating intimacy.

The protagonists are denoted by plural pronouns. When the protagonists are in the first person, they coincide with the narrating agent; when they are in the second person, the narrating agent is a nameless voice uninvolved in the events in the poem. The protagonists are a collective and must be of the same age; in many places, they seem to represent a generation. Before outlining the poem's story, let me attempt to summarize it: *The Crocodile Market* is about growing up, which entails the loss of purity and innocence.

The poem opens thus:

once upon a time we were sincere  
 just because ignorance looks unblemished  
     just because we  
     had not yet learned to play the part of someone else  
 did not realize what things cost  
 did not yet know that integrity  
     is the least durable of commodities  
     did not even want to know

we often opened the cupboard  
 to take out that rotten generosity  
 (...)  
 we were all brilliant young people  
     who when still in our prime  
     wanted to go look at the sea –

but then the first melon was cut up  
     which greatly startled us  
 we had, indeed, already set foot on the market:

    people were roasting meat with cruel machines  
     and peeling off the skin that symbolized purity

The first stanza contains no imagery, except for what things cost – literally *the price* – and the commodity of integrity, both abstractions. The protagonists' sincerity is not established by their behavior but simply announced. So is their generosity, as a

consequence of ignorance. In short, the poem's opening lines are no source of ambiguity. Nor do the images of the sea, of the first melon being cut up, and of the market and the people roasting meat present mysteries, if only because the skin peeled off is explicitly said to symbolize purity. The marketplace scene seems to represent children's initiation into the society of grown Man. The poem's title intimates the atmosphere at the market, *ergo* the nature of human traffic: crocodiles are carnivorous animals associated with violence, cruelty and physical danger. The sea and the uncut fruit, both images from the natural world, are part of life as we had naively imagined it to be.

The poem's second part begins:

because, just because  
 when we were only children  
 we saw cameras  
 look us in the eye and lie  
 from then on  
 we could only see the world through the space between our fingers  
 and see where the world was wanting – freedom  
 freedom never known  
 small as the skylight  
 our great-grandfather wiped clean  
 with his very own hands: freedom  
 freedom never known

(...)

no sooner had we begun to understand dirty words  
 than the ears on our faces  
 withered forever. with them, we lost  
 the organ that feels shame: human dignity  
 the earliest human dignity

but we had never yet seen roses  
 oh, we boys who'd never seen roses

As elsewhere in Duoduo's early work, the reader is left with little more to do than receiving and registering the text. Whether the camera is taken literally or as representing other channels of information, it is presumably to shield ourselves from its lies that we cover our faces with our hands, pecking through to get at the depressing truth. Freedom would let the light in and previous generations exerted themselves to make that possible, but it is of no avail to us now. Surrounded by cruelty and gluttony in the grown-ups' marketplace and by lies, we are corrupted. Once we become attuned to dirt, we are no longer receptive to anything else. Again,

imagery – the withered ears – is accompanied by a univocal, abstract explanation: the loss of human dignity. All of this happens while we have not yet seen roses, before we ever had a chance to acquaint ourselves with beauty. At this point in the poem, the protagonists, who have so far been called young people and children, are boys.

They say of themselves:

eventually, we were sent into a school  
 that gym where one is drilled  
 in lies and cruelty. there it was  
 that someone used a shiny pair of pliers  
 to remove our teeth  
 our milk teeth, before we learned to eat meat  
 there it was  
 that we grew  
 elephant ears no longer knowing of shame  
 as well as – on the faces of unhealthy youth  
 tinea breaking out in spring

This passage draws an unfavorable picture of formal education: something forced upon the protagonists, passively undergone rather than enjoyed. Its content is labeled morally despicable. Lies and cruelty are, of course, accessories needed to survive at the crocodile market. The pulling of teeth, the new, ludicrous ears – deaf to shame, and therefore to dignity – and the skin disease are physical expressions of degeneration.

The protagonists continue to tell the story of their life:

we tasted the joy of nipping off flowers  
  
 we were infatuated heart and soul with the joy of  
 the tip of the tongue touching the tip of the tongue  
  
 we laid eyes on the flesh  
  
 in the swimsuit's mesh  
 the quivering flesh – as well as  
 the meaning of living on:  
 the moment when toes lock in embrace  
 the time when they grope for one another  
  
 until the foreskin gradually receded  
 and bristly hairs grew all over the body

we were eventually hurried into one room  
 after another  
 only when we awoke with a start did we notice  
 that this was: home

there, in one room after another  
 we drew back, drew back  
 feet that had wanted to stride across the earth

there, on one big bed after another  
 our degenerate body weight increased  
 until our stomachs drooped down to the ground  
 and we would see another person: the wife  
 and her shadow: in the kitchen  
 life oozing with sweat  
 "why don't you give the closet another coat of paint, stupid!"

that's when the sun turned into a lowly photographer

From victims the protagonists have changed into people with a taste for pleasure. In nipping off flowers there is still an element of violence provoked by beauty, more specifically by sexuality. Sexual awakening is intimated by crude scenes; for a moment all forms of conflict disappear, and survival derives meaning from physical intimacy. But sexual maturity heralds a next somber stage of matrimony, imposed on the protagonists as was education before. The homeliness of domestic life makes them forgo the right to dream. In their lethargy they grow fat and are ordered about by the wife. Cynically, they come to see the sun as the artificial light photographers use.

The poem's second part ends in gloomy sarcasm:

all we forgot was man  
 we finally gave up  
 the bad habit of caring for someone else  
 when your hand rests on someone else's shoulder  
 you're bound to feel a leathery lack of understanding  
 when you see how someone else's face  
 has become indifferent  
 you're bound to feel that someone  
 blessing someone else  
 has grown to be a scandalous affair of days gone by – of course  
 in this world you and I remain  
 nothing but a pair of ordinary merchants

– we rarely discuss the sun anymore  
 and if the price is right  
 we might as well  
 sell it and be done with it!

oh but once we were young people picking up the oyster's exquisite shell  
 oh once we were people with a dream of being masters of magical music<sup>58</sup>

Here, the poem is at the height of its cynicism. Concern and love for other people are anachronisms; idealism – discussing the sun – is a rarity we should rid ourselves of. Still, we seem to remember that things were not always as bleak as they are now.

This uneasy feeling is rubbed in by the unnamed voice taking over from the poem's protagonists in the poem's third part, which opens thus:

until the day that someone called out our name: idiots

oh, idiots  
 comb your beards  
 pull out the hairs from your noses  
 go cut your toenails

oh you  
 you men, greasing leather jackets  
 leaving dandruff on women's pillows  
 you women, rubbing deodorant in your armpits  
 lacing up body fat with garters made of silk

In its first outburst the voice ridicules grown men and women trying to make themselves sexually attractive. Afterward it reproaches them with devastating scorn:

when you see how the hide  
 is peeled from the cow's body  
 how the cow's head is parted from the cow's body  
 how butcher Time  
 wipes bloody hands on a leather apron  
 then quietly  
 turn away, spit your teeth in the pond  
 spit them in the left-over porridge

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<sup>58</sup> Duoduo 1988a: 46 has *young people* for *people* in line 139.

glistening with fat in the pond  
 and don't forget that what you spit out  
 is the rebellious streak from your early years  
 is your one-time stubbornness, when you were still a good-for-nothing!  
 (...)

oh you men who forever lost the joy of sucking lemons  
 oh you men with your big fat buttocks  
 oh you men who think sobs are useless  
 and how you long for the beautiful fruit on woman's chest  
 and how you long for  
 the song of the big-mouthed woman:  
 give us a sense of shame again!  
 give us a useless sense of shame again!<sup>59</sup>

The voice deplors Man's estrangement from purity – again: fruit, contrasted with the flesh, here of big fat buttocks – emotion and dignity, before letting the protagonists speak once more. In the poem's last stanza, they lament how the sense of shame they long for vanished along with childhood magic:

oh, when wide-eyed children stare at us  
 how, how terribly we miss  
 how terribly we miss  
 the great pipe organ from when we were little –

There are obvious reasons for the switch from one narrating agent to another and back. In the third part's opening lines, it takes another voice than their own to rake the protagonists over the coals in the caustic manner that it does. Later the return to the first person enables the protagonists to give vent to their nostalgia – almost remorse – themselves, and close the circle they commenced to draw in the poem's first line: *once upon a time we were sincere*.

*The Crocodile Market* recounts how its collective, generalized protagonists are first victimized and then corrupted by their surroundings.<sup>60</sup> This happens as naturally as growing up; like the passage of time, it is unstoppable. Corruption *is* growing up

<sup>59</sup> Duoduo 1988a: 48 has *talent (caineng)* for *streak (xingge)* in line 178.

<sup>60</sup> Michelle Yeh suggested (personal communication, March 1993) that the poem's human protagonists eventually *become* crocodiles. L. 100 (*until our stomachs drooped down to the ground*), for instance, can be read to offer a clue to that effect, but I believe there are more indications that the protagonists remain human beings while being likened to crocodiles throughout. Still, in a sense the protagonists' crocodilian state, whether taken literally or figuratively, is of course the gist of the poem: *homo homini crocodilus*.

rather than a part of it. It is both innate to man and a consequence of living at the crocodile market: that is, in a society shaped by previous generations, of life governed by customs, rules, conformity, uniformity – of life in public. In one possible paraphrase: corruption is a consequence of the prevalence of the political over the personal.

What about politicality and Chineseness as defined and examined in the first section of this chapter? What is the relationship of *The Crocodile Market* to the real world, and what does one need to know of China for appreciating the poem? It contains the experiences of a collective group of people who gain maturity and lose their dignity. The story touches on the media, freedom, education, matrimony, human traffic at large; its protagonists show disillusionment and lethargy, they degenerate and betray their ideals. Throughout the poem, a real world of sorts is recognizably present, and *The Crocodile Market* is therefore a political poem. If searching for the socio-political reality of China since the Cultural Revolution proper, one may recall that cameras look us in the eye and lie, and that lies and cruelty are forcibly taught at school. Media and education bring to mind propaganda and indoctrination, and the formidable means to these ends at work in PRC society. But do not cameras lie all over the world, and is it not in the very nature of schools to present private versions of Truth, whatever they profess to teach? So far there is no evidence that the real world referred to is Chinese. What about the observation that the world is wanting in freedom? This is an indictment of repression, and it may have been written in reaction to repression in China. On the other hand its loudness and clarity erase the need for such – unverifiable – information. This cry from the heart comes through regardless of the reader's familiarity with China. The author's own experiences may have been his source of inspiration, and his real world at the time of writing was Chinese. But this in no way impedes appreciation of the text by a reader who does not foreground contemporary China. In other words: this does not make the real world at the time of reading Chinese as well.

And love? *The Crocodile Market* does not speak of love. But consistent with poems that do is the cynical view of love it exudes. Passages on sexual awakening, romance presented as a momentary lapse of reason and the shock of finding oneself married to a fearsome wife are reminiscent of *The Sixth Day of Honeyweek*: what comes after love is no love, and matrimony. Physical intimacy is made to look useless and old-fashioned; the one time in 203 lines that the protagonists are singular pronouns, it is to confirm this by the example of *you and I* as nothing but a pair of ordinary merchants – *yi dui* 'a couple' is the unmarked phrase to describe people married or entertaining a love relationship. Finally, human courtship display nauseates the narrating agent: dandruff on the pillow, smelly armpits.

*The Crocodile Market*, in over 200 lines of sometimes prose-like free verse, is part of Duoduo's early work in several respects: stylistically, but also for its politicality. Far be it from me to contend that none of Duoduo's poetry since 1982 is about social issues like the power of the media and education. But no other poem dwells in the real world as extensively and in such plain words as this one. Of Chineseness, on the other hand, it has little or none. Its frame of reference is much wider than the socio-political reality of China, and earlier traces of PRC political rhetoric have begun to vanish. More generally speaking, one does not need to know when and where it was written to appreciate it. As for love: as in much of the early work, it is hard to find other than with its back to the wall.

The above is enough to situate *The Crocodile Market* within the early period of Duoduo's poetry. But perhaps the most important reason to do so is that here, again, little ground needs to be or *can* be covered between analysis and interpretation, because of the scarcity of individual imagery and language usage. Imagery in *The Crocodile Market* is not of the difficult or experimental kind to begin with, and is often chaperoned by unequivocal explanations.



## Chapter seven

### THE LATER POEMS (CA. 1983-1994)

Duoduo's later work has certain traits in common with Chinese Experimental poetry by other authors of the 1980s and after: its generous use of imagery, for example. But on the whole, roughly from 1983 onward his poetry becomes ever more headstrong. This is especially true for the nature of its imagery and for its language, which is often wilfully oblivious to the rules of "preferred usage". Within Experimental poetry, his work repeats the move that first set such poetry off from its orthodox environment: away from the political, the public and the collective and toward the personal, the private and the individual. In Duoduo's later work individuality comes to dominate all else.

Under these circumstances his art reaches maturity in robust, wayward poems. Their consistency in being wayward gives me the impression some of these poems are essentially unalterable, a feature best captured by the word *intensity*. To me, Duoduo's later poems differ greatly in accessibility and beauty; as recounted earlier, these two qualities have helped determine my selection of poems for discussion. I recall them here because they have also helped determine my periodization: generally, I find the later poems superficially less accessible and fundamentally more beautiful than the early poems.

In Duoduo's later work form plays a role of increasing importance. That is to say, formal characteristics such as enjambment, division into stanzas, repetition and rhyme have a stronger presence than in his early work. This points to a growing distance between language, or representation, on the one hand and reality on the other. In comparison with the previous decade, words take over from things: language becomes both cause and effect. In keeping with this change, the later poetry seems to be meant for voices and ears and to focus less on thoughts preceding and following sounds. Its aural qualities are clearer than those of the early poems. Still, I have mostly been unable to detect mechanisms which would make form contribute directly to content – with notable exceptions in poems from the last few years. Form generally seems to be the stylization of content, not an icon for it. The discussion therefore concentrates on the poems' content.

As in the previous chapter, I have arranged the poems according to theme. Some poems resist being pigeonholed; I have tried to use the themes as desk lamps, not straitjackets. They are: politicality and Chineseness (section I), Man and Man (II), Man and Nature (III), exile (IV), and limits of language (V).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this chapter have appeared in Van Creveld 1993a, 1993b, 1994a and 1994c.

## I POLITICALITY AND CHINESENESS

If I were writing on Duoduo's later poems only I would not dream of including this section. It is intended as material for comparison: to show how politicality and Chineseness, prominent features of Duoduo's early poetry, all but disappear in his later work. This section thus calls attention to its own superfluosity. Its brevity is not compromised by what it leaves unsaid – there is simply little to say.

*Looking from the Death Side* (1983)

*Looking from the Death Side*<sup>2</sup> is a short, sober poem:

looking from the death side you'll finally look at  
 people you shouldn't have seen all your life  
 you'll finally be buried where you like  
 sniff around as you like, bury yourself right there  
 5 bury yourself in a place that makes them hate

as they dump the soil from the shovel in your face  
 you must thank them. as you thank them again  
 your eyes can no longer see the enemy  
 and from the death side will sound  
 10 their scream, bogged down in enmity  
 but which you can no longer hear  
 that is truly a scream of pain!

In spite of the detailed image of burial, the poem remains abstract – which is not to say it is unclear or intangible. Its tone tallies with the impersonal *you* that is the protagonist.

The poem presents death as liberation and freedom to do as one pleases; in life one has to deal with enemies, from whom death offers a triumphant escape. There is even sympathy for the enemies, stuck in their powerless hatred. The opposition of *look* (*kan dao*) and *see* (*jian dao*) (l. 1, 2) indicates this shift of initiative: dead, one can decide whether to look or not, while alive, one cannot decide not to see. The wording of the poem allows for different interpretations of the enemies: they could be fellow men, certainly in an oeuvre which shows little faith in harmony between humans. More specifically, they can symbolize political repression. Such a view is

<sup>2</sup> *Cong siwang de fangxiang kan*, Duoduo 1989a: 76.

likely to be inspired by the author's history. Indeed, Duoduo's first English book of poetry, presented in emphatic connection with June Fourth, was named after this poem, with the subheading *From the Cultural Revolution to Tiananmen Square* and a dedication to match:

"to all those struggling for a voice in China today and to those who have died in that struggle"<sup>3</sup>

*Looking from the Death Side* permits a political reading, but linking the poem with China adds little to its appreciation – not just because it was written six years before June Fourth.

### *Fifteen Years Old* (1984)

Less abstract and more personal than *Looking from the Death Side*, *Fifteen Years Old*<sup>4</sup> is both political and Chinese. Public experience – in words like *summer*, *earth*, *the world* – constitutes the background, in screaming colors, to a private moment of being fifteen years old. But the modest protagonist of this poem is granted little more than an age. Not even a personal pronoun:

fifteen years old and sowing steel  
when the ripened crops opened fire

earth was blindfolded with a blanket  
and a big swelling bulged from the world

struggle was a great big mop  
still scrubbing for dear life if no blood could be seen

the belly of a summer opened up  
and all the little nitwits raised their heads

the world was one big ambush  
the world was one big infant

that opened its cruel eyes:

<sup>3</sup> Duoduo 1989b. See chapter three: FOREIGN ATTENTION.

<sup>4</sup> *Shi wu sui*, Duoduo 1988a: 63-64.

sometimes, blood must flow for a beginning

sometimes, beginnings are used to stem blood  
fifteen years old and kicking new shoes into the trees

darkness had firmly clutched the pointed tips  
of a claw stretched out ahead –

The third, fourth and fifth stanzas give grounds for a specific reading in which *Fifteen Years Old* is about the summer of 1966 in China. *Struggle* is a word with a shrill political ring to it in PRC society; the indefatigable mop recalls the Maoist view of struggle for struggle's sake, of class struggle as an end in itself. The nitwits raise their heads in a confusing world, full of hidden dangers but also newborn, naive, ruthless in its ignorance. The text does not state who is fifteen years old. If the poem reflects its author's memories, the events described must have taken place in the summer of 1966: the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, a period in Chinese history that in hindsight made many youngsters feel they had been fooled, as nitwits tend to be. The poem's title assumes sarcastic qualities when contrasted with a passage from the *Confucian Analects*, in which the Master says he had his mind bent on learning at age fifteen.<sup>5</sup> In the summer of 1966 the PRC education apparatus was brought to a grinding halt, and Duoduo stopped attending school. Both these references, to the Cultural Revolution and to Confucius, presuppose knowledge of China – and of Duoduo's year of birth.

*Voice of the North* (1985); *Remold* (1987); *My Uncle* (1988)

*Fifteen Years Old* benefits from an "informed" reader, perhaps needs such a reader for its appreciation. This is not so for the following three poems.

The second stanza of *Voice of the North*<sup>6</sup> reads:

I grew up in the storm  
the storm holds me close, lets me breathe  
it is as if a child weeps within me  
I wish to understand its weeping, as if to harrow myself

<sup>5</sup> Legge 1983, vol. I: 146.

<sup>6</sup> *Beifang de shengyin*, Duoduo 1989a: 97 and 1988a: 65-66. The two versions show inconsequential differences.

each grain of sand has its mouth open  
 mother will not let the river weep  
     but I recognize that this voice  
     can rule over all authority!

Duoduo's generation's history justifies calling the storm an image for the Cultural Revolution, which has more than once been likened to a storm in Chinese literature. The image befits social upheaval regardless of time or place. The last two lines of this excerpt employ political vocabulary: *recognize*, *rule*, *authority*. But these words are spoken in awe of the power of Nature, slighting man-made forces at work in society: politics, for example. Besides, section III of this chapter shows that the natural world in Duoduo's poetry has enough personality to be an alternative to rather than a symbol for politics. A political reading of *Voice of the North* does not yield the greatest degree of coherence, within the poem or between this and other poems by Duoduo. Chinese history may not be needed for one that does.<sup>7</sup>

In *Remold*<sup>8</sup> politicality and Chineseness present themselves immediately and in close connection. In the original the poem's title is *gaizao*, usually translated as *reform* in Chinese household expressions like *laodong gaizao* 'Reform through Labor'. The first stanza invites a political reading:

with remolded tools remold language  
 with remolded language  
 continue to remold

But such a reading is not enhanced by the rest of the poem:

every generation  
 gropes around on this table  
 right up to this generation

he  
 sticks out his hand  
 and the girls begin to laugh

this is detected by him  
 and he laughs along with them

<sup>7</sup> See sections IIIA, IIIB and V of this chapter.

<sup>8</sup> *Gaizao*, Duoduo 1989a: 115.

until it becomes more laughable yet

he sticks out his hand  
and the waters stop running  
he removes his hand

but the waters will not flow again...

While his predecessors got no further than chaotic fumbling, the male protagonist's gestures have profound consequences. Aside from these godlike but limited, one-way powers and his good-natured reaction to being laughed at, he remains a silhouette. In recent Chinese history there is a godlike male protagonist whose remolding of language was so successful that a considerable part of modern Chinese usage was named after him: Maospeak (*Mao wenti*). The first stanza brings to mind how Maoist politics monopolized the management of language. But there is no unambiguous connection with the rest of the poem – does every generation remold language? does *he* call all that remolding to a halt? – and the poem's opening lines could just as well be about undermining that monopoly, as Experimental poets did in the 1970s. Besides, these lines reach far beyond the borders of politics and China: this is also poetry about poetry, about the search for a language of their own carried out by all poets with a desire for originality.

Of the poems in this section, *My Uncle*<sup>9</sup> is the most robust and wayward, in both imagery and wording:

as I looked down from the lavatory, the pit so high when I was a kid  
my uncle was staring a bull straight in the face  
this look, of which they availed themselves together –  
I thought there was a purpose to it:  
to let all light in the shadows be without a place to hide!

as a flying soccer field passed over the school grounds  
a possibility of dissolving reality  
made my uncle's eyes grow bigger  
so that he could see all the way to the sun, frozen over the north pole  
and my uncle wanted to use tweezers – to put it back in history

for this, I believe the sky can move  
my uncle often returned from there

<sup>9</sup> *Wo yifu*, Duoduo 1989a: 121-122. The original is included in APPENDIX B (311).

with the strides of a designer walking out of his design  
 so I believed even more: with the sound of opening a door my uncle wanted  
 to close himself – by telling the story backwards

my uncle wanted to repair the clocks  
 as if breathing in his premonition beforehand  
 the mistake he wanted to correct  
 had already been completed by time missed out on:  
 for this reason, the lot of us have been reduced to liberated people!

that tobacco smell sealed in the clouds still chokes me to this day  
 in the distance where the rails of the streetcar disappear  
 I see how my uncle's beard grows from a wheatfield  
 my uncle, wearing a red kerchief, long ago  
 ran straight off the earth –

On the whole, this poem's sound is subordinate to its content, but occasionally the roles are reversed. In l. 3 and 4, *look (muguang)* and *purpose (mudi)* "avail themselves together" of the character *mu*; in l. 18-19, there is a similar connection between *mistake (cuowu)* and *missed out on (cuoguo)*, with a fortuitous echo in the translation. These lines are also exemplary of Duoduo's later poetry in their compact ambiguity: besides 'time missed out on', *cuoguo de shijian* also means 'time passed in a wrong way', with both time and someone passing time as possible subjects of *passed*. The latter reading is supported by the inversion of *guocuo* 'mistake' that *cuoguo* is too.

If the red kerchief represents Chinese Communist garments, *my uncle*, an overbearing character, is a type of Communist ruler that vanished long ago. His fiddling with the passage of time – the sun, clocks – accentuates his outdatedness and the generation gap separating him from the narrating agent. The poem's political overtones grow louder because to be liberated is presented, with the passive marker *bei*, as undesirable; this hinges on the PRC connotations of *liberation*.<sup>10</sup> These, and the red kerchief, present a modest degree of Chineseness for *My Uncle*.

There is no need to downplay this text's politicality in order to see that it is more than a political pamphlet. Within the space of the poem my uncle becomes a fascinating personage. Readers of all sorts may be entertained by phrases like *a flying soccer field* and *the sun, frozen over the north pole*. Interestingly, the former leads to a meta-consciousness within the poem, when it is followed by the *possibility of dissolving reality*: once he is aware of the powers of the mind, the ends of the

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<sup>10</sup> See the discussion of *Liberation* in chapter six: section I.

earth are within my uncle's field of vision, and with them the poem's next image. So *My Uncle* is poetry about poetry, as much as poetry about politics or poetry about a peculiar senior member of the family.

*Voice of the North*, *Remold* and *My Uncle* all permit political and Chinese readings. But they positively benefit from interpretations in which the real world and the reality of China are *not* brought to bear.

\*

In Duoduo's later poetry politicality and Chineseness yield a meager harvest. Reading with an eye for statements in the public domain and reference to things Chinese, one does happen upon the occasional passage. But it is the exception rather than the rule, and often embedded in a context which makes it difficult to maintain a coherent reading from beginning to end.

Some of the poems Duoduo has written since 1989 may lead to association with politics and China if the reader knows their author's history. But those texts cannot be reduced to socio-political commentaries either. They are discussed in section IV of this chapter.

## II MAN AND MAN

In Duoduo's later poems politicality and Chineseness disappear, and clichéd representations of love fall victim to individuality. But *Man and Man*, or the subject of human relationships, offers more than one type of love.<sup>11</sup> While not necessarily dealing with lovers' romance, a number of poems from Duoduo's later oeuvre are about boundaries and distance between the Self and the Other.

*Oh Afraid, I'm Afraid* (1983)

*Oh Afraid, I'm Afraid*<sup>12</sup> stands out by the shortness of its lines and stanzas, and by

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<sup>11</sup> *Man (ren)*, as in *Man and Man*, is used as meaning 'human being', not 'male'. This also holds for my translation of several poems in the rest of this chapter. In my commentaries I have marked this usage with a capital M, but in translations I find such a marker distracting and sometimes misleading.

<sup>12</sup> *O pa, wo pa*, Duoduo 1989a: 69-71. The original is included in APPENDIX B (312-313). The text in Lao Mu 1985a: 430-432 has been "edited" with particular carelessness. As in other poems, there are no stanza divisions; in l. 2, 4 and 7 the editor's "common sense" must have overruled the author's precise



its simple vocabulary and syntax. These features are the more striking for the intricate story they turn out to tell, in what seems at first sight an "easy" text. The poem contains enjambment (l. 1, 5, 20, 33, 36), most of which has been lost in my translation. *Oh Afraid, I'm Afraid* is pleasing to the ear with its dialogue-like rhythms, its repetitions and its occasional, lightfooted rhyme (e.g. l. 2 and 4, 9 and 10, 30 and 31). It is an enthralling poem:

oh afraid, I'm afraid  
 of what? that's me asking you  
 – are you afraid?  
 that's me asking myself.

5 judgment is something to be afraid of:  
 the enemy

I have no enemy. but then I'm  
 more afraid. suppose the night  
 were a giant orange peel  
 10 and the orange's flesh in my mouth  
 I'm afraid – this is possible

this is possible. are you afraid?  
 my face is transparent, in it is you  
 looking at me. us two looking at each other  
 15 granulations sprouting rapidly out of the same face

unless we go blind, we'll forever be  
 looking – looking at each other  
 in a glass of pitch black milk  
 looking. unless we go blind. gone blind

20 I'm more afraid – stitched by  
 a simple nurse  
 in a transplant of someone else's  
 eyes, under an operation sheet  
 two children's heads will show

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wording, and in l. 30 *shards* (*cha*) has been omitted. What little respect can at this point be left for this edition vanishes once the reader embarks on a fruitless search for the poem's final ten lines.

- 25      whether one of them screams  
           or both scream together  
           I'm afraid. the mere thought makes me afraid:
- protruding from the shattered window  
           I only have
- 30      a head with shards of glass stuck in it  
           and two abhorrent hands  
           that will stick out from underneath the coffin's lid  
           but those are yours. I  
           don't want to think about it
- 35      from the top half of a tree  
           saw off my  
           bottom half, and you're in pain  
           you're screaming, you scream:  
           I'm no longer afraid. no pain
- 40      I'm not at all in pain, and scream with you:  
           oh that's right, you're no longer afraid.

Crucial in this poem is the identity of the protagonists, one of whom is also the narrator. In the first stanza the relationship between *I* and *you* is mystifying. Are they two persons – twins, lovers – or two halves of one schizophrenic person? Both hypotheses draw support from these lines:

          my face is transparent, in it is you  
           looking at me. (...)

This suggests a familiarity deep enough for the sensations of physically containing the other in oneself, or experiencing someone else from the inside. Alternatively the scene can be imagined to take place in front of a mirror. No matter how the reader visualizes the first person's other half, the relationship between the two becomes ever more intriguing as the poem unfolds.

In the penultimate stanza a window has been shattered. Did *I* fall through it or jump, was *I* pushed? The coffin shows that it was an event with fatal consequences. Have *my* hands been cut or mutilated?

Then the story takes a shocking turn: *I* disinherits these hands and palms them off on *you*. This means that *you* is now in the coffin, that *you* must die and *I* can live.

*I* severs the connection with *you* in the final stanza: by sawing in two the tree they constitute together, which embodied the fasciated state the protagonists were in until now. First *you* has been ordered to die instead of *I*; now *you* is once more violently separated from *I*. Like the hands of the deceased, the pain this human compound inflicts upon itself is left to *you*. *You* screams, from pain, but also to declare that the omnipresent fear is gone. There is after all a way out: death.

If death offers refuge from this fear it must be a fear of life itself: an existential fear, adorned by the surreal images of a giant orange and pitch black milk. Eventually it destroys the bond between two humans who seemed inseparable. For it is when *I* is afraid of the nightmares of going blind and dying a violent death amidst the sound of breaking glass that *I* betrays *you*, like Winston Smith betrays Julia.<sup>13</sup>

Existential fear and the betrayal of an intimate, whether in nightmarish visions or in "real life": this is a case of the *condition humaine*, not the *condition chinoise*. It illustrates a tendency of Duoduo's later work to reflect personal rather than political realities.

#### *It Is* (1985); *Desire* (1986)

Size is no guarantee for success. Good poems, like bad poems, can be both long and short, and everything in between. In Duoduo's later work the very short and the very long disappear. It includes no drawn-out, narrative poems like *Time of Feelings* or *The Crocodile Market*, and there are no more aphoristic fragments that make one wonder if they are presented as poems simply because their author could not bear to kill his darlings. The later poems, which never come across as products of storytellers or philosophers, are typically between 15 and 40 lines long. These boundaries strike me as befitting Duoduo's art. Its imagery must have enough space to be given free rein and be truly seen by the reader; on the other hand, if it is not called to a halt in time its abundance runs the risk of blurring the picture.

*It Is*<sup>14</sup> offers a torrent of images, but they do not breach the poem's dikes. Like *Oh Afraid, I'm Afraid*, it has 41 lines, but that is where surface similarities end. *It*

<sup>13</sup> Because of its existential nature, I translate *pa* as *to be afraid*. With *to fear*, the lack of an immediate cause – i.e. of a direct object – is more conspicuous. But *to be afraid* precludes a smooth translation of l. 4-5. If read with enjambment, they mean: *judgment is a fearful / enemy* (as in Gregory Lee's rendition: Lee opts for *fear* in Duoduo 1989b: 82-83). As for *black milk*, the phrase occurs in a context so vastly different from both Paul Celan's *Todesfuge* (1988: 38 and 40) and one of many fits of Spanish cursing in Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1966: 203) that a relevant relationship with either text seems unlikely. For Winston Smith and Julia, see Orwell 1949: 289ff.

<sup>14</sup> *Shi*, Duoduo 1989a: 104-105. The original is included in APPENDIX B (313-315).

*Is* contains 17 "holes", blanks the size of one character, and each of the five stanzas is concluded by the same two indented lines. The blanks are more than a replacement for punctuation, often absent from Duoduo's later work anyway. As do the chorus-like conclusions to the stanzas, the blanks work as visual limits to the imagery. *It Is* contains little or no rhyme. Its aural qualities derive from repetition:

- it is   trampled by dawn at the edge of the sky  
 such a beautiful piece of cloth  
 it is the moment that night and day  
 come to possess one another  
 5 it is the light of dawn    behind the ruins of a metal wall  
 revealing a crippled    face  
           I love you  
           I'll never take that back
- it is   a tilted stove    the sun collapsing on a mountain ridge  
 10 loneliness racing for the abyss  
 it is the wind  
 a blind man delivering the mail    in the depths of the earth  
 its green blood  
 blots out all voices    I believe  
 15 the words it carries off:  
           I love you  
           I'll never take that back
- it is a song of old    a string of bells with staring eyes  
 it is the river's water sounding like shackles  
 20 and beating tiny drums  
 it is the two suns of your blue eyes  
 descending from the sky  
           I love you  
           I'll never take that back
- it is two hammers    in turn striking  
 at fire from the same dream  
 it is the moon    heavy as a bullet  
 making the boat we traveled on    go down  
 it is mascara    that sticks forever  
 30            I love you  
           I'll never take that back
- it is all that was lost  
 and swells into a river

it is the flames    the flames are a river too  
 35    the flames    eternal hooks  
       their claws all sticking upward  
       it is the shape of the flames  
       splintering    splintering on star-shaped  
       held-out    burning-on fingers    it is  
 40                I love you  
                   I'll never take that back

The poem's title and its repetition raise a simple but pressing question: What is? The last occurrence of *it is* (l. 39) offers an escape hatch which has unfortunately been boarded up in this translation. In Chinese the title phrase has no personal pronoun. By itself, *shi* also means 'that's right', 'that's correct', 'indeed', 'yes'. The first-person narrator thus ends the poem by saying *yes, I love you, I'll never take that back*. (I have not translated it as such because elsewhere in the poem *shi* is frequently a copula, and cannot mean *yes*.) This makes *I love you* an unspoken statement prior to the poem, from which the text originates: the chorus at the end of each stanza is a confirmation rather than an assumption. *I love you*, or love, for short, *is* – i.e. generates, produces, evokes – a series of images. The images are different from those in Duoduo's early poetry: although their source is in one of the two perennial subjects of poetry they are no clichés but powerful to the point of being uncontrollable.

Read thus, the basic message of *It Is* is awe and wonder at the phenomenon of love. The poem can afford protagonists hardly deserving of that title, who remain at a distance from the reader. Other than the connection between their lives, all that is disclosed is that *I* and *you* once traveled together and that *you* has blue eyes.

Listeners have less to hold on to than readers, but audience responses to reciting *It Is* are invariably enthusiastic.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps because of the sheer power of the imagery, which is convincing enough to be taken at face value; but definitely because of the two-line chorus, which assures the listener five times in a row that *It Is* is a straightforward love poem and there is no need to wonder what the none-too-ordinary scenes in between may have to hide. The chorus functions as an interpretation ahead of time, at regular intervals within the space of the poem. It relieves those bent on breaking codes of an arduous task. Still, there is more to be said about this imagery than that it is extraordinary and overwhelming. The following remarks are the result of substituting *love is* for each occurrence of *it is*. This is not intended as

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<sup>15</sup> Observed during poetry readings (1989-1994) in Holland. The originals were always accompanied by Dutch translations.

a line-by-line solution to a riddle but to point out, with hindsight, a consistency in this poem which goes beyond things like its mood and its atmosphere.

Daybreak has a sobering effect on what was perceived in the night, lovers' domain where darkness shuts out the rest of the world (l. 1-6). Nocturnal love is thus portrayed as illusory or transient. Love may be a natural power (the wind), but is powerless or impossible in everyday life: a postman who cannot see, much less read. The wind erases human voices captured in writing but against all odds, *I* puts trust in a return letter it takes away – this reading is enhanced by an alternative reading of *wo xin*, which besides 'I believe' also means 'my letter' (l. 11-15). An opposition of dream and reality, of true love and real life, is also present in the description of the loved one's eyes. Their likeness to the sun is a conspicuous cliché, hardly mitigated by the fact that the loved one's eyes equal *two* suns (l. 21-22). The lovers are blacksmiths forging the connection between them; the accompanying fire, scorching, visible, but intangible (l. 25-26), returns in the last stanza. By association – from the moon to the bullet to the sinking of the ship – the poem hints at the disastrous end of the companionship of *I* and *you* (l. 27-28). Make-up, with its sexual connotations, can never be removed and becomes the still to end the film of memory: the past cannot be undone, "they cannot take that away from me" (l. 29). In the final stanza *I* reasserts a stubborn belief in love, in the compound image of fire and a hand reaching out (l. 34-39), even after it has been conceded that all was lost.

*It Is* combines a past euphoria with its memory in the present. It shows ecstatic visions together with the realization that they are but visions; it worships a love and at the same time recognizes that it did not last. Its refusal to be reasonable, to give up, leads to a final observation on the two lines concluding each of the poem's five stanzas.

There are two ways of reading

I love you  
I'll never take that back

with sharply different aftertastes. One: the second phrase enhances the first. The declaration of love is presented as eternally valid. Two: what if the love in *It Is* were not mutual? *I'll never take that back* (*wo yong bu shouhui qu*) is in everyday speech also used to confirm speech acts not welcomed by the addressed, such as insults and threats. This makes *I love you* change colors and turn into an act of aggression or hostility. This is less absurd than it may seem, first because such an act may have been incited by an unrequited love, and secondly because Duoduo's oeuvre avails itself of the power of ambiguity throughout. Even for innocuous words one must reckon with the presence of multiple meanings, if only backstage.

*It Is* speaks of love and its inevitable failure to last. But it does so in an infinitely more sophisticated way than the early poems, even though it makes the most unmarked, the most pop song, of all declarations of love – and not just once.

In Duoduo's 1989 collection *The Road Traveled*, *It Is* is followed by *Desire*, written in 1986.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, these poems seem "close" at first glance, because of their typography. Like *It Is*, *Desire* covers exactly two pages and has an unusual look to it: there are words outside the poem's margins, on otherwise empty lines. While these words are part of grammatical sentences, their isolation creates an urge to pause before and after them when reading, as do the blanks in *It Is*. The two poems are also related in other ways: like *It Is*, *Desire* contains large quantities of euphoric imagery and features *I* and *you*, connected by love. Other than between the lines, love is found in the phrase *you are my beloved* (l. 37).<sup>17</sup> Below are two fragments from *Desire*, its opening and closing scenes (l. 1-9, 37-46):

sitting on a corner of the city  
 sitting here  
 sitting on your left foot  
 sitting on your tiniest toe  
 sitting on its toenail, on the very tip  
 on  
 kneeling glass kneecaps sliding  
 I  
 am a glass liquid, alcoholic air of nothingness  
 (...)  
 you are my beloved, your breath is weak but it lasts  
 in  
 the moment the birds' pink claws grab hold of one another  
 that moment, just that one moment, that one of all moments  
 a shadow enters another shadow  
 you are myriad mirrors reflected in a mirror  
 maybe it is you and me, maybe it is me and someone else, maybe  
 it is of all people two fledgling dancers who  
 decide  
 to go on propping up this world on the tips of their toes!

<sup>16</sup> Yuanwang, Duoduo 1989a: 106-107.

<sup>17</sup> Literally, *love-person*; the original *airen* should definitely not be translated as *spouse* here. Other dictionary renditions like *sweetheart* are off the mark too, because they gloss over the *love* in this word. *Lover* is problematic for its connotations with fornication, which *airen* lacks altogether (a Chinese equivalent of *lover* would have to be *qingren* here).

There is a certain kinship between these passages and *It Is*, but there are important differences as well. First, *Desire* is exceptional within Duoduo's oeuvre because of its happy end: love, intimacy, sex may after all be able to make the world go round. Secondly, *Desire* lacks a device like the chorus in *It Is*, to set limits to the imagery. If *It Is* is a torrent contained by its banks, *Desire* is more like an avalanche.

*Dumb Child* (1988)

In contrast with the previous poems in this section, in *Dumb Child*<sup>18</sup> the omniscient narrating agent is not one of the protagonists. Here there is no place for euphoria, in imagery or sound. *Dumb Child* is a painful, bitter poem about a very different kind of relationship than that between ecstatic lovers:

from your face the man's eyes go  
 outside, stare at stare at the woman  
 clutch at the wall clutch at its face  
 in the time it takes to give birth to one child  
 5 your tiny figure  
 makes its way out of the scallop's bedroom  
 two doors of flesh, so red  
 and your body  
 is a saw  
  
 10 violently rocking the fruit tree  
 the dumb child hides its head  
 stuttered lust the rose-colored smell of armpits  
 left on the bottom of the sexy coffin  
 silk made of flesh jellyfish skin  
 15 stretched into the wail of knee-high stockings  
 the dumb child drinks drinks a rage that lasts all winter  
 all night that man fidgets tearing up paper  
 all night he curses her calls her a devil!

It seems likely that *you* is the dumb child, even if it is in the second stanza no longer directly addressed by the narrating agent, and plausible that the man and the woman are its parents. The first scene (l. 1-3) can be visualized in many ways. A tentative reading is that the man is at a loss for words. He can only look in bewilderment at

<sup>18</sup> *Ya haizi*, Duoduo 1989a: 109.



what is now his family: his child and its mother. Instead of bringing them together the child's advent has separated the parents or ruined the woman's body, or both. The image of the saw, recalling the final act of *Oh Afraid, I'm Afraid*, is reinforced by the subsequent separation of the poem's two halves. In the next scene it may be the saw acting for the child or the child itself that rocks the fruit tree.<sup>19</sup> Whether or not the fruit tree – the woman's body? pleasure? – is actually felled, the child, helpless as it is speechless, has reason to fear being hit by the debris. The next four lines (l. 12-15) proclaim the death of lust and sex between its parents, and their replacement by clothing.<sup>20</sup> The passion which led to lovemaking is superseded by the family bond to which lovemaking has led. In the final scene (l. 16-18) – I take *he* and *her* in the last line to refer to the man and the woman – no way out from the tension in the poem's first few lines is offered. *The dumb child drinks drinks a rage that lasts all winter* brings to mind the opposition love vs. marriage and family life also found in *Honeyweek*.<sup>21</sup>

*Sea of the North* (1984); *Wintertime* (1990); *No More than One Allowed* (1992); *Keeping Silent* (1992)

If *Sea of the North*<sup>22</sup> shows formal consistency, it is to the eye. The poem is divided into eleven three-line stanzas, which do not coincide with the successive scenes in the poem's story. Its tone is grave and solemn, intensified by occasional rhyme and repetition. The narrating agent, in the first person, is also the poem's only real protagonist. Surrounded by an impressive number of other people, animals, natural elements, objects and abstractions, *I* does not truly interact with any of them and claims that there is no significant emotional contact with other human beings (l. 6-15):

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<sup>19</sup> My translation is ambiguous because both readings of the original are possible. I am inclined toward the first.

<sup>20</sup> I have omitted *silk* before *stockings* to avoid a false repetition: the original has *chouzi* (*silk* as a noun, denoting fabrics) in l. 14 and *si* (*silk* as a noun denoting threads or an adjective meaning 'made of silk' or 'silk-like') in l. 15.

<sup>21</sup> See chapter six: section II.

<sup>22</sup> *Beifang de hai*, Duoduo 1989a: 95-96. The text shows minor differences with the version published in *China (Zhongguo)* 1986 # 2: 93-94 (with blanks instead of punctuation), and with the one in Zhou 1986: 101-103 and Chen 1989: 208-209. In section IIIA of this chapter, I return to *Sea of the North*.

– oh, I reveal how I live

and in my life there is no excitement. no  
in my life there is not the excitement of man and man exchanging blood  
if I could not possess a memory – stronger than the wind

I'd say: this sea's getting older all the time  
if I could not rely on hearing – that which eliminates voices  
if I could not study the sound of laughter

– that which looks forward to returning from sea  
I'd say: by proportions as tiny as those of my body  
I cannot be excited

*Man and Man exchanging blood* can be read in two ways: as referring to blood-oaths and the drinking of each other's blood to pledge friendship, or as a sarcastic image for physical violence. Different as they are, these readings have in common that they presuppose an intense human relationship, as a result of which excitement of one kind or another can be felt. Within the space of two lines (l. 7-8), the existence of such excitement in the speaker's life is denied three times. Bodies comparable to the speaker's, i.e. other people, are unable to excite the speaker.

In the past such excitement may have occurred: the speaker knows these bodies are other people (l. 8) and brings up the possibility of contact with them, if only to rule it out. If there were no memory of such a thing the speaker would not even recognize them as other people: whence the alienated description *proportions as tiny as those of my body*.

Whether intimacy is undesirable or impossible, or impossible because it is undesirable, a lack of contact between the protagonist and other people can be observed elsewhere in Duoduo's later oeuvre too.

One example is the 1990 poem *Wintertime*.<sup>23</sup> The speaker is at a distance from the bustle of everyday life, and has few strings attached in the world of Man:

twilight's final brilliance warms the tip of the church tower  
inside the church, the stove has gone out  
oh, time, time

I search for what I've lost

<sup>23</sup> Dongri, *Today* 1991 # 1: 50.

let go of what I've gained  
having used up the words on my tombstone

I saunter among people  
vast heaven and earth, eternal father and mother  
prayer rises from my heart

silence, something else than voices  
blended into an exchange with winter:  
the wind is a lonely horseman

the clouds are laughing country brides piled up  
the magical heartbeat of December  
sounds like no more than bursts of old recital...

The speaker longs for things irrevocably past and has no interest in the present (l. 4-5). The epitaph (l. 6) can be read as an image for the poet's writings; at any rate the speaker has no words left, which makes sauntering among fellow men a lonely business. In this loneliness heaven and earth are invoked as parents. If in traditional Chinese philosophy heaven and earth are the origins of life, they are not presented as a refuge from one's everyday, flesh-and-blood companions.<sup>24</sup> But in *Wintertime* they must substitute for human beings.

An equally grim message resounds in the spellbinding *No More than One Allowed*.<sup>25</sup> Indented lines divide this poem into six three-line, parallel parts which still constitute one massive text:

no more than one memory allowed  
stretched to where the tracks are powerless to go – teaches you  
to use millet to measure your prospects, cloth to lay out a road  
no more than one season allowed  
5 the time for sowing wheat – when sunlight in May  
above a naked back flings soil to all sides  
no more than one hand allowed  
teaches you to bow your head and look – there are furrows in your palm  
thoughts of the soil have slowly been flattened by another hand

<sup>24</sup> See Fung 1973, vol. I: 353.

<sup>25</sup> *Zhi yunxu* (also pronounced *runxu*, "in between" *yunxu* and *rongxu*), *Today* 1992 # 4: 116. The original is included in APPENDIX B (315). On the basis of the poem's manuscript version, I take *tian li* (l. 2) in *Today* to be a misprint for *wuli*, 'unable' or 'powerless'.

10                   no more than one horse allowed  
 paralyzed by the glance of a woman at five pm  
 teaches your temper to bear with your body  
                       no more than one man allowed  
 the man who taught you to die has died  
 15                   the wind teaches you to be familiar with that death  
                       no more than one death allowed  
 every word is a bird with its head crushed  
 and the sea keeps overflowing from a shattered jar...

A difference with *Sea of the North* and *Wintertime* lies in the presentation of solitude (l. 13-14). In those two poems solitude is caused by unwillingness or failure to establish contact with other people; here, it is the only possible state of affairs. Decried by an unnamed power, solitude is a law of life precluding human relationships in the simplest manner possible – there can only be one Man at a time, with the cynical mission of teaching the next in line how to die and make sure the species dies on. In *No More than One Allowed* Man is not just lonely but alone. This scenario applies without respect to persons. Its impersonal aspects are strengthened by the use of a generalizing *you* for the protagonist.

In *Keeping Silent*<sup>26</sup> indented lines joining the "real" stanzas are preceded and followed by empty lines. As a result it is of lower density than *No More than One Allowed* and a quieter, more laid-back poem altogether. Also, the transitions between stanzas coincide with changes of location from inside an abode of sorts (l. 1-3) to outside, where there are horses and hills (l. 5-7), to a cemetery (l. 9-12) and finally back inside (l. 14-17). Whereas in *No More than One Allowed* the second person pronoun depersonalizes the protagonist, in *Keeping Silent* it does not. *Keeping Silent* describes its protagonist's surroundings in greater detail and suggests the protagonist's self-awareness by *your portrait* in a window: a reflection?

in a window waiting for the blizzard hangs your portrait  
 a black tray is filled with bread  
 hand stretched out to where no hand exists

                      this is keeping silent

the snow comes down in this moment  
 you are stared at by the horse

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<sup>26</sup> *Jingmo, Today* 1993 # 1: 142-143.

the snow-covered hill is a bunch of ideas

    this is you keeping silent

in the cemetery, sheep move quietly  
in a sky full of crows it is dawn now  
a silence allowed to be kept  
records on the tombstone:

    ponderations interrupt the silence kept

the world outside the window keeps its silence does not speak  
in the white landscape keeps its silence does not speak  
the clock ticks, nothing on the dial moves  
under the hand, on paper, there is this ordeal:

    in search of something else than man.

*Keeping silent* is an awkward translation of the original *jingmo*, which means more than the absence of sound. *Jingmo*, like *chenmo*, is the silence of people not speaking, silence as opposed to speech.<sup>27</sup> When that is attributed to animals or inanimates, they are personified. *Shumu jingmo*, for instance, means 'the trees keep silent', implying the trees can speak, not 'it is quiet in the woods'. An example from this poem is *the world outside the window keeps its silence does not speak (jingmo bu yu)*. It is clear from the start that speech, a means for human communication, is "not on" in this poem. Nor is physical contact, as an alternative or a complement to language: *hand stretched out to where no hand exists*. In the penultimate line the hand returns, perhaps to put the protagonist's literally unspeakable ordeal down on paper.<sup>28</sup> Read thus, *Keeping Silent* turns out to be the poem written by its protagonist, who ends up in search of something else than Man – discarding other people.

The lack of human contact in these last few poems is reinforced by a somber distrust of language. For *Keeping Silent* this needs no more elucidation. In *Wintertime*, I call attention to *silence (chenmo)*, and the phrases *something else than voices* and *blended*

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<sup>27</sup> In Chinese, noiselessness or quiet can be conveyed by *wusheng* or *chenjing*. French *se taire*, German *schweigen* adequately translate *jingmo*; the English *tacit* captures one aspect of *mo*, in expressions like *tacit agreement (moqi* in Chinese).

<sup>28</sup> The liberties taken in the translation of l. 16 (literally, *the clock ticks, its hands don't move*) are to avoid adding hands to those found in the original. Chinese has different words for human and clock hands.

into an exchange with winter (l. 10-11). This scheme of things, in which the natural world offers an alternative to or a way out from language and other people, also shows in the back-to-nature feeling of *No More than One Allowed* (l. 1-9). There, a cruel verdict on language is passed: every word is a bird with its head crushed. But as themes, both the natural world and the defeat of language deserve separate discussion. I will return to them in sections III and V of this chapter.

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Intimacy, whether or not between lovers, and human relationships in general are important themes in Duoduo's later work. Set off against the early poems that speak of love, the poetry in this section yields three findings.

One: sentimentality and romanticism, as found in *Time of Feelings* (1973-1980) and *Dream* (1973), have largely disappeared. This marks the emergence of an original poetic voice. Two: these poems are pessimistic as to the possibility of shared, lasting joy and loyalty. There is clear continuity with the early poems that begin to speak of love and end their speech with hate. The marriage of opposites – love and hate, loyalty and betrayal, pleasure and pain or sex and violence – still holds, even if one has to look a little harder. It is worded with more sophistication and subtlety than in the early work, intimated rather than announced. Three: whereas some of the later poems dwell on the intricacies, the difficulties, the treacherousness of human relationships, others contain passages in which the very possibility of meaningful contact between people is denied. Their protagonists tend to leave the world of Man for what it is, and turn somewhere else for company. On the subject of relationships, Duoduo's later poetry provokes an examination of Man and Nature as much as one of Man and Man.

### III MAN AND NATURE

By his publication history Duoduo is not self-evidently one of the Obscure poets.<sup>29</sup> Yet his writing history makes him a member of that generation more than of any other. Among other things, this is manifest in the importance in his work of the natural world. But if Duoduo's poetry is like, for instance, Bei Dao's in that both offer Nature great amounts of space, their likeness does not extend beyond this abstraction: Nature is not at all the same thing in these two poets' oeuvres.

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<sup>29</sup> See chapter four: POETHOOD, RECOGNITION, PROMINENCE.

Nature imagery in Experimental poetry from the 1970s and early 1980s is predominantly positive: roles assigned to the natural world are of a comforting, idyllic, stimulating and sometimes liberating kind.<sup>30</sup> The natural world in Duoduo's work is different. It comes across as an unfeeling, forbidding and violent primeval force, in the face of which ordinary humans are powerless by themselves. At the same time their collective attempts at civilization, most of all the human tendency to cultivate, are capable of harming Nature. Only an extra-ordinary human being, introduced below as a non-human human, enjoys a rewarding relationship with the pristine, primitive natural world (IIIA). Rooted or at least embedded in Nature – and therefore treated here rather than in section II – is the "vertical" relationship between members of successive human generations. They resemble relay runners, whose individual lives are tiny parts briefly separated from the greater whole that is Nature (IIIB). The frequency with which some images from the natural world recur in Duoduo's poetry warrants a closer look at one of them: horses (IIIC).

### IIIA *The Nature of Nature and the Non-Human Human*

*Voice of the North* (1985); *Soil of the North* (1988); *In the North in Fallow Fields There is a Plow That Gives Me Pain* (1983); *Night of the North* (1985); *Sea of the North* (1984)

Between 1983 and 1988 five of Duoduo's poems have *the North* (*beifang*) in their names. In a Table of Contents this alerts one to possible kinship, like a family name in a register of population. The texts confirm this suggestion. This justifies a certain eclecticism in commenting on them: within the borders of the North I have fewer qualms than usual about combining passages from different poems to make a point.

To be sure, not all nature imagery in Duoduo's work is of the kind that is found in the North poems. On the other hand, *East* and *West* seldom occur in Duoduo's poetry and *South* never does. And if it is mostly winter and sometimes spring or fall, it is hardly ever summer in his work. In other words, the natural world present in the North poems is typical for Duoduo's later poetry in roughly the second half of the 1980s – not just in the North poems. In the 1990s, while still leaving its mark on his work, Nature no longer constitutes a central character. Indeed, the North and the

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<sup>30</sup> Examples are given in Yeh 1991c: 406-407.

North poems have been remembered and thereby labeled as a past episode, by their author in another North poem: *Memory of the North* (1992).<sup>31</sup>

Some of the nature imagery in the North poems reminds one of Northern China, and may at first sight seem more Chinese than universal. But this assumption is based on grounds alien to the texts. The reader is likely to know that their author is Chinese, perhaps even that he is Northern Chinese, and therefore may surmise the texts refer to Northern China: whence the temptation to conclude that this natural world is Chinese. But it may be more to the point to contrast it with the Southern natural world so conspicuously absent in Duoduo's poetry. The North brings to mind a colder, less hospitable climate than the South, and in its wake different landscapes and populations. Not only in China does the vast, storm-swept bleakness described in this poetry belong to the North.

This does not preclude Northern China's having been a source of inspiration for the author. That may be biographically interesting and recall Duoduo's ample record of domestic travels, but it is irrelevant for appreciating the poems – which in its turn does not preclude a foreign reader from reading them with a rock-solid conviction that their nature imagery is Chinese.

In an examination of Man and Nature in Duoduo's work, and in fact in all of his oeuvre, *Voice of the North*<sup>32</sup> is a crucial text; not as regards form – both prosody and stanza division gain in importance in the 1990s and this poem is a regular 1980s specimen – but as regards content. While it proves nothing, the fact remains that *Voice of the North* provides raw materials for sections I, III (IIIA and IIIB) and V of this chapter. In none of the three is it possible not to discuss it. The poem is not intangible or hard to classify, but it contains more than will fit in any one pigeon-hole. Its protagonists include the North, earth, a multitude of anonymous voices and the speaker. In this section I quote the entire text:

much expanse and vastness uniting, it uses its lungs  
its front paws, bends backwards, lies on its chest  
its breath spurs on the warmth of winter  
but it loves to use the bitter cold instead –

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<sup>31</sup> It was not *Memory of the North*, which I first read in the spring of 1993, that prompted me to view the North poems as interconnected. From 1990, I had written and lectured on Duoduo's poetry and dwelt on the North poems more than once (e.g. at the *Workshop on Modern Chinese Poetry: Bridges in Space and Time*, Leiden University Sinological Institute, June 1992; see also my *Afterword (Nawoord)* to Duoduo 1991c and Van Crevel 1993b). *Memory of the North* is discussed in section IV of this chapter.

<sup>32</sup> *Beifang de shengyin*, Duoduo 1989a: 97. The original is included in APPENDIX B (316). The text shows inconsequential differences with that in Duoduo 1988a: 65-66.



I grew up in the storm  
 the storm holds me close, lets me breathe  
 it is as if a child weeps within me  
 I wish to understand its weeping, as if to harrow myself  
 each grain of sand has its mouth open  
 mother will not let the river weep  
     but I recognize that this voice  
     can rule over all authority!

some voices, even all of them  
 are used to bury in the ground  
 we walk on top of their heads  
 underground, they catch their mighty breath  
 without feet or footsteps, earth  
 begins to rumble and move  
     all language  
     will be shattered by a wordless voice!

By their proximity to the poem's title *expanse* and *vastness* evoke vistas of a Northern landscape endowed with a voice and alive in a non-human, animal way: it has paws and is referred to by a neuter personal pronoun. It has enough energy, in a literal sense, to exhale warmth and inhale cold. The image points out that the North, or the animal-like creature representing it, enjoys the cold which in human eyes might be a hardship. No change of location is indicated; it is also in the North that frequent or continuous storms must rage for the speaker to say *I grew up in the storm*. There are grounds for assuming the speaker is a human being, notably in the third stanza, so growing up must have taken years.

The animal constitution of the North and the human-ness of the speaker are essential to the poem's last four lines. When earth begins to *move* – *zoudong*, meaning 'walk about' – it can do so without feet, unlike Man. The rumble could announce the ruthless violence of an earthquake. At any rate, imminent destruction of Man by Nature is suggested by the opposition of *language* (*yuyan*) and *wordless* (*wuyan*). The rumbling of the earth is the wordless voice – not a *soundless* voice – of Nature, bound to shatter the thing differentiating Man from all that surrounds him: language.

Like many of Duoduo's later poems, especially from the 1980s, *Soil of the North*<sup>33</sup> is in free verse with lines and stanzas of irregular length and no patterned rhyme or meter. But on the level of prosody there is a difference with *Voice of the North*. *Soil of the North*, written in 1988, shows that in the late 1980s form is on the rise in Duoduo's poetry. Some examples: parallelism in l. 1-2, especially their first halves, ending in a beautiful rhyme (*maibo* and *muzhuo*); the "beat" of l. 4, full of assonance and abruptly brought to a halt by its unexpected final character, in enjambment with l. 5: *zongshi zai chudao guo dong de dong tu, jiao*; and most of all repetition, in the enumeration of the speaker's activities (l. 6-8), the assertion that *here* is the place to be (l. 5-8), the repeated *zai* (*in, in, at*, l. 9-11) – the comma<sup>34</sup> behind *zai* also calls attention to its meaning 'be there' or 'be present' – the numerals in l. 12-16 and finally the second person singular in l. 29-32, when the speaker directly addresses the other protagonist in *Soil of the North*: the soil of the North itself.

always take my pulse, watch after the river flowing off  
 always lean on a wooden table, long for heavy snow  
 the sound of an axe and locusts splitting firewood  
 always touch the frozen soil in winter, my feet  
 5 know for sure, I belong here  
 I belong here, I record, I survey, I feed  
 the instruments raw meat, I know for sure: here, right here  
 always here –

in – a country where a stone king stands towering with his back to the sun  
 10 in – a big threshing ground, an empty classroom in the holidays  
 at – a time when the snow has not yet set out from the sky's depths  
 fifty bad clouds pass over cotton-pickers' heads  
 a hundred old women fly out of the sky  
 a thousand boys stand pissing at the ends of the earth  
 15 a hundred million planets go on being desolate  
 it's been a century now –

<sup>33</sup> *Beifang de tudi, The Survivors # 2: 2*. The original is included in APPENDIX B (317-318). The poem has also appeared in the booklet (13) published by *The Survivors* for the poetry reading of 2 April 1989 (see chapter three: THE POETRY SCENE). This discussion is based on the former text, with changes made by Duoduo in 1989 (the rearrangement of l. 24-25, the insertion of l. 28 and the deletion of a comma after l. 31; cf. the English and Dutch translations in Duoduo 1989b: 124 and 1991b: 24).

<sup>34</sup> A dash in my translation. I believe the comma in the original serves to create the famous pregnant pause, and that such a function is best rendered in English by a dash. The other option is to omit it altogether, as I have done, for instance, in l. 5 of *Voice of the North*, in which *I (wo)* is followed by a comma in the original. But in *Soil of the North*, the comma immediately after *zai* is too unusual to go unnoticed. Generally, strict and literal adherence to punctuation in Chinese originals is disastrous for translation.

the ancestors' gloomy faces darken rows of statues  
stones lie quietly in the distance between them  
in the birch forest hang black woolen overcoats  
20 on heads of wheat are tied red scarves of women reapers  
the seasons, the seasons  
with imperishable discipline  
plant us in the road that history will go –

always in this season, in winter reading  
25 slows down, the pages of the fields  
no longer turn, every reader's head  
is caught in secrets – agitation after it's made public:

soil of the north  
your desolation rests its head in the holes dug in you  
30 your memories have been dug away  
your vastness, through a lack of sorrow  
has withered, you are sorrow itself –

where you are, there is sorrow  
from – the temples of that failed wheat field  
35 seventy *mu* of corn fields destroy your brain  
vegetable plots bigger still are quiet, without a sound  
that which is feebler than grass, you can no longer hear  
that which you'll say to yourself continues to pour out:  
"those are your glad tidings..."

This poem adds to the image of the Northern landscape in Duoduo's poetry: a river, frost and frozen soil, the promise in clouds of heavy snow, the stone king that is perhaps a mountain range oblivious of the sun. Of course it is winter and winter is hailed, because it befits the desolate vastness of the North.

But whereas in *Voice of the North* Nature destroys Man, in *Soil of the North* no such thing occurs. To some extent the roles are reversed (l. 28-39). Nature is vulnerable and helpless when Northern desolation rests its head, the landscape is deprived of its memories – one is what one remembers – and its vastness withers. From the last stanza it appears that all harm was done by Man, specifically by Man's proclivity to cultivate Nature. If Man is thus saved, Nature is damaged and implies (l. 39) that to her cultivation is not the Gospel it is to Man.

At the same time, it is the human speaker who laments the sorrow of the soil of the North. This contradiction is resolved by a closer look at the speaker's humanness, below. For the moment it suffices to note that the speaker is denoted by a singular pronoun, but Man in general, the cultivator, by plural pronouns: *us* and

*your* (l. 23 and 39), and that the two are further distinguished in that the cultivator submits and adapts to the succession of the seasons (l. 21-23), but the speaker wants to remain in winter (l. 24, harking back to the first stanza). In *Voice of the North* a similar distinction is made: throughout the second stanza *I* speaks, while in the third (l. 15) *we* speak.

As regards form, *In the North in Fallow Fields There Is a Plow That Gives Me Pain*,<sup>35</sup> written in 1983 and the oldest North poem, is an early one among the later poems. If prosody is not one of its outstanding features the poem does employ repetition, sometimes with a few lines' delay (l. 5 and 11, 13-15, 17 and 26, 19-20, 23 and 25-26). Its protagonists are a storm called *the storm of death*, spring, and in minor roles a peasant woman and her son, the plowman. Reference to the speaker does not recur after the poem's title, which is also its first line:

in the north in fallow fields there is a plow that gives me pain  
 when spring falls over like a horse, from an  
 empty cart collecting corpses  
 a head made of stones  
 5 gathers the storm of death

the storm's iron hair has been combed  
 and below a hat  
 lies a gap – time after death  
 has stripped off his face:  
 10 a brown-red beard sticking forward  
 gathers the majesty of the north, which has long lain fallow

spring, like a bell, bites his heart  
 just like the sound of a child's head sunk to the bottom of a well  
 just like a child being cooked over a boiling fire  
 15 his pain – is just like a giant

standing on felled timber and sawing  
 as if sawing off his own legs  
 a sound more delicate than spinning thread laden with grief

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<sup>35</sup> *Beifang xianzhi de tianye you yi zhang li rang wo tengtong*, Duoduo 1989a: 65-66. There are minor discrepancies with the text in Lao Mu 1985a: 404-405. Most importantly, the division in stanzas is different, and the poem is dated 1976. Duoduo confirmed 1983 as its date of composition (personal communication, March 1995).

- cuts through the shut-down sawmill cuts through  
 20 the sawmill's lonely storehouse  
 it's the loneliness of the sower who has come to the end of the field
- the flax-colored peasant woman  
 has no face but still waves her hand  
 at the plowman's back bent forward  
 25 a rusty mother has no memories  
 but waves her hand – like the stones  
 she comes from faraway ancestors...

This poem does not feature Northern Nature untouched by Man, as do *Voice of the North* and the first stanza of *Soil of the North*. In its title *fallow fields* and *a plow* make clear that the poem takes place in a cultivated part of the North. Combined with the title and the opening line, this could mean that the speaker *is* pristine Nature or someone sympathizing with Nature to the point of identifying with it, perhaps someone writing a poem in Nature's defense. A plow would give such a speaker pain.

Besides the issue of Man cultivating Nature and damaging it, *In the North in Fallow Fields There Is a Plow That Gives Me Pain* revolves around the succession of the seasons, specifically the transition from winter to spring. This is another similarity to *Soil of the North*, where *I* is said to be *always in this season*, denying the coming of spring. Here, the storm, beautifully described as having iron hair, is winter's natural companion, as in *Voice of the North*. When winter is over the storm must die. In l. 6-8 it looks like a laid-out corpse: its hair has been combed, it wears a hat, but it no longer has a face, i.e. the expression of a live face. The changing of the guard is painful: spring bites the storm's heart. When his pain is likened to that of a giant sawing off his own legs, winter and spring are made into parts of the same body just as they are both part of the seasons' cycle: separate but intimately connected. In *Oh Afraid, I'm Afraid* and *Dumb Child*, discussed in section II of this chapter, the saw also functions to sever such connections. The sound cutting through the sawmill could be the giant's cry of pain, marking the end of winter and the beginning of spring.

In the last stanza this transition is mirrored in the peasant woman waving at her son. Faceless like the storm, she belongs in winter, while the plowman does his work in spring. She is closer to death – rusty – than her son, who represents the next generation and cannot or will not look back. But still she waves her hand, confirming the bond between them. The final two lines extend this relationship to distant ancestors and enhance the parallelism of seasons and generations: an unstop-

pable succession – resisted only by the singular speaker in *Soil of the North* and the second stanza of *Voice of the North*, who feels at home in winter storms.

The 1985 poem *Night of the North*<sup>36</sup> (also discussed later in this section and in section V) echoes the resistance, observed in two other North poems, to the changing of the seasons (l. 7-16):

what night brims with is too much; what flows away with water is too little  
and these two collide, forever without peace. in their collision  
there are nights that begin but have no end  
rivers flash but their colors are impossible to see  
there is time which fiercely opposes the night  
there is time which arrives only in the night  
    in the night that the woman meets a good little animal  
    language begins, but life leaves

snow occupies all of the afternoon seen from the window  
an afternoon that will not end

Here, the transitions from day to night and from night to day are called into question: more frequent than those between the seasons, they are also marks of the passage of time and under normal circumstances equally inevitable.

The poem's last two stanzas show a shift from the opposition of pristine and cultivated Nature to one between the countryside and the city. Like that from an untouched landscape to a cultivated one, the step from the countryside to within the city limits is deplored by a voice sympathetic with Nature:

where the pasture ends and the city begins  
crops are weary of growing and grapes are dead tired  
25 the stars have all gone out, like bags of stones  
rays of moonlight enter the room, the walls are full of holes  
we know and it is only right that we know  
time is on its way home and life is a child after school  
    the world is a large window outside the window there are horses  
30 that whinny after eating up ten thousand lamps:

a big foot crosses the fields strides over the mountains  
prehistoric man raises fossils and hits us on the head  
inside our brains, shining like lamps

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<sup>36</sup> *Beifang de ye*, Duoduo 1989a: 98-99.

stretch wild forests, to this day  
 (...)

With the deterioration of natural life (l. 24-25) comes a literal end of time, when human, urban life falls idle (l. 28). In the night of the North darkness envelops the world when artificial, Man-made sources of light are removed in a most basic fashion: they are eaten by representatives of Nature (l. 30). Then a mighty, larger-than-life prehistoric Man seems to punish *us* – modern city-dwellers? – and make us remember and realize where we come from (l. 31-34). With darkness all around we turn to the imagination to see our origins, in snow-covered, untamed natural surroundings. Back to Nature, once again.

Earlier I noted that some of the North poems harbor a "singular speaker". Here, *singular* not only means alone and denoted by a singular pronoun. It also means strange: this speaker combines human properties with non-human ones. This is a non-human human; no inhuman human, for cruelty or heartlessness are not the creature's dominant traits.

A number of actions in the first stanza of *Soil of the North* are typically human: taking one's pulse, keeping a record, and feeding technical instruments raw meat – the distinction between raw and cooked is one made by humans only. In *Voice of the North* the human-ness of the first person is suggested by the words *child*, *harrow*, *mother* (*muqin*) and *recognize*, *rule*, *authority* in the second stanza. In the third, it is confirmed by the images of burial and language. In *Sea of the North* establishing the identity of the first person is not easy. The sea itself is ruled out, since it is referred to as a third party and there are no grounds for assuming a change in the narrating perspective. A case can be made for calling the speaker human: the awareness of the phenomenon of memory, for instance, and of a sound categorized as laughter, seem to point in that direction – and again, to laugh and to know what laughter is are in all probability exclusively human traits. The poem's last two stanzas provide a final clue:

the moment when sentimental people shed tears – I notice  
 how the storm lifts up the earth's four corners  
 on earth, there is silence after the last child was eaten by wolves

but from a large basket rising up high  
 I see all people who once loved me  
 so tightly, tightly, tightly – locked in embrace...

The words *sentimental people* and *child* show a human perception of things. Also, the embrace of those who once loved the speaker calls to mind human rituals of collective mourning.

Verifying the human-ness of a protagonist in this way is hairsplitting, but the fact of the matter is that poetry can bring inanimates to life. Duoduo's work makes enthusiastic use of this possibility, and the speaker's human features are of special interest because they go together with non-human ones. The latter are manifest in relationships with other constituents in the poems.

In the first place the speaker seems, in *Voice of the North*, to belong and feel at home in the bleak natural world that is the North:

I grew up in the storm  
the storm holds me close, lets me breathe

The first line leaves unresolved whether growing up was accomplished in spite of the storm or thanks to it, but that is clarified when the relationship is turned into that of a protector raising a child. In *Soil of the North* the speaker displays an intimate, physical bond with the Northern landscape, most explicitly by saying

always touch the frozen soil in winter, my feet  
know for sure, I belong here

and later (l. 28-39) laments how the soil of the North has been violated – plausibly by other, "normal" human beings. As observed above, the title of the earliest North poem bespeaks a similar identification with Northern Nature: *In the North in Fallow Fields There Is a Plow That Gives Me Pain*. But in that poem, the speaker's identity is revealed no further.

Secondly, one who is raised in – in fact: by – the storm grants a mother few parental powers. The mother and the speaker in *Voice of the North* have incongruous loyalties:

mother will not let the river weep  
but I recognize that this voice  
can rule over all authority!

The river is an archetypal part of the natural landscape. *Sea of the North* contains two telling statements, examined in detail in section II of this chapter:

in my life there is no excitement. no  
in my life there is not the excitement of man and man exchanging blood



and

by proportions as tiny as those of my body  
I cannot be excited

While the speaker thrives in Northern desolation, there are no relationships with "fellow" men to speak of. This animal is not gregarious, another reason for dehumanizing the human being under scrutiny.

One more look at the last two stanzas of *Sea of the North* is in order, because the text intimates what kind of dehumanization takes place here. The end of the poem is ushered in by an apocalyptic scene (l. 29-30) with earthshaking winds, and wolves feasting on children. In the last stanza the speaker is not among "fellow" men, but above them. The speaker's elevation evokes images like that of the soul's ascension. Coupled with the use of *once* (*guo*, l. 32), and certainly if the others' embrace is for mutual consolation, this specifies dehumanization as death. Here, being non-human simply means being no longer alive.

### IIIB *Man: Part Come Loose from the Whole*

*Night of the North* (1985); *Voice of the North* (1985); *The Road to Father* (1988); *Her Stupid Daughter* (1988); *Morning* (1991)

Against the backdrop of Northern Nature, Duoduo's later work highlights "vertical" links between human generations. The connection can be between parents and children or it can point the way back to an endless row of ancestors – again, human descent and reproduction are linked to birth, growth and death in the natural world.<sup>37</sup> Alternatively the connection can be between the dead and the living, spilling over the boundaries of family genealogy. In this case *death* may not be the right word for what appears to be residence in a greater whole, a tiny part of which – individual "life" – temporarily comes loose. Man is the part, Nature is the whole; "life" is but a short break in "death". Like primal matter, the whole is ontologically prior to the part, which it surrounds and encloses.

After another look at two of the North poems, both from 1985, the discussion will proceed to two 1988 poems featuring ancestors, parents and children. In a fifth poem, from 1991, a "vertical" relationship and the enchanting form in which this

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. the above discussion of *In the North in Fallow Fields There Is a Plow That Gives Me Pain*.

content manifests itself outweigh the absence of Nature, and warrant its inclusion in this section.

In *Night of the North* (l. 27-28) we seem to feel nostalgia for our origins, not only in space but in time:

we know and it is only right that we know  
time is on its way home and life is a child after school

Time as experienced by living Man is presented as an excursion which will end where it started, at home. Home is also a child's point of departure and the place to which it returns after school. Incidentally, learning (*xue*, in the expression *fangxue* 'finish classes' or 'go home after school') can be seen as another instance of cultivation imposed on Nature by Man. Home, in time, is primal time enclosing an individual lifetime. It is with two lines locating primal time that *Night of the North* ends (l. 35-36):

a beginning, beginning before the beginning  
a reunion, reunion in time of reunion...

*Voice of the North* depicts a less harmonious encounter with our seniors than that suggested by *reunion* (*zaihui*, a polite expression literally meaning 'meet again'). I quote once more its third stanza:

some voices, even all of them  
are used to bury in the ground  
we walk on top of their heads  
underground, they catch their mighty breath  
without feet or footsteps, earth  
begins to rumble and move  
    all language  
    will be shattered by a wordless voice!

The voices, buried without exception in the end – the phrasing *used to bury* is merciless – represent mortal Men now dead in their graves. *We*, the living, unwittingly walk on the ground they were buried in, unaware that underneath us they prepare themselves for the move which will destroy us. Their breath is collective: the dead have gone back to a greater whole from which the living once came. After the dead catch their breath, earth takes over: the whole is embodied in earth, which will call the living home when their time has come.

If the 1988 poem *The Road to Father*<sup>38</sup> does not have *the North* in its title, it still takes place in winter. *The Road to Father* contains little or no rhyme. Its formal properties are limited to a division into seven three-line stanzas roughly corresponding to seven successive "acts":

- sit on the chair twelve seasons and bend its back, all the way  
hit my hands until they're swollen, inspect the wheatfields  
winter's handwriting grows amid destruction:
- 5            someone in the sky shouts: "buy all shadows  
the clouds cast on the dikes!"  
with a stern voice, mother's
- mother walks out of her will  
snow draped around her  
using a climate to seize the little room
- 10          inside the room is that famous piece of land:  
a boy with golden-lashed hangnails, kneeling  
digs up my beloved: "you're not allowed to die again!"
- 15          I, kneeling behind the boy  
dig up my mother: "it's not because there's no more love!"  
behind me, my ancestors are kneeling
- together with the sapling to be made into a chair  
they rise up into the unfeeling firmament  
to pull up weeds. behind us
- 20          a gloomy celestial body is kneeling  
with shoes of iron, in search of a sign of birth  
and then continues to dig – the road to father...

After a puzzling beginning the poem's second half shows a mirror image of the closing scene in *Voice of the North*. This time it appears that the living go after the dead, but that distinction quickly proves unreliable. If the boy is the speaker's son and digs up the speaker's beloved, the one the boy digs up is presumably his mother. She must be "dead". Her partner, the speaker himself, may be "dead" too, in which

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<sup>38</sup> *Tongwang fuqin de lu*, Duoduo 1989a: 126-127. I assume that in the version included in Xu, Meng, Cao & Lú 1988: 409-410, the repetition in l. 5 of the last three characters of l. 4 is a printing error.

case he has been dug up and as such made to "live" again before starting to dig up his mother. His grandmother, mother's mother, is another "dead" protagonist who has returned to "life". She seems to have decreed the digging, whether through her will or by rising from the "dead" herself: she has taken command of the room inside which the digging is done.

When the speaker's ancestors – a word reaching further back than *mother* – kneel behind him, it must be to dig up still older generations. In the above translation, *they* in the sixth stanza is a grammatically necessary addition to the text, with interpretative hues. The original does not specify who are the ones rising up together with the sapling; but for syntactic and semantic reasons the ancestors are a good guess. The sapling in their company will in time become a tree, be felled and be made into the chair that the speaker ends up sitting on in the poem's first line. The relay-like process of human propagation is thus presented as parallel to different phases in the tree's existence – *life* is obviously not the right word here.

Finally Man and tree are put to work and use in outer space, the backdrop against which this roots-seeking continues on a larger scale. In the penultimate stanza, *us* can be read as referring to all generations, to a human race passing on "life". We collectively come from a celestial body, personified – brought to "life"! – by its shoes of iron. Whether it is earth inhabited by Man and tree or some other planet, this celestial body in turn comes from a First Cause of sorts, and now tries to make its way back there. It is on the road to father; its iron shoes, a well-known image in classical Chinese poetry, intimate both the length and the fruitlessness of its quest.

In this reading the father in *The Road to Father* is no less than a primal mover. The mother in *Her Stupid Daughter*,<sup>39</sup> also written in 1988, is not of such proportions. Here it is the relationship between mother and daughter – the latter being a presence rather than a protagonist – that matters, not their ultimate origin. As regards form, this poem has neither rhyme nor regular stanza length to rely on for effect. Still, it is a formal mechanism – the repetition of *to say (...) means (...)* – that builds up tension in the second stanza:

in a pitch-black night mother's hair is dyed for her. a horse's hoofbeat  
comes closer. mother's coffin  
starts putting on mother's clothes for her  
mother's shoes climb up the tree by themselves  
5 the wind left for mother refuses to disperse, like iron  
mother's end

<sup>39</sup> Ben nūer, Duoduo 1989a: 123. The original is included in APPENDIX B (319).

means that winter  
disintegrates, from within hate

- winter has finished its pressure  
10 the horse's hoofbeat blossoms on resounding iron plates  
over the earth rubbed up by the snow, for the wind  
to say the wind is cruel  
means a different cruelty; to say  
that which flees toward the sky  
15 is paralyzed in mid-air  
means all of mother's life  
was nothing but ten toes breaking at the same time  
to say that when mother throws charcoal in the fire  
she's really throwing children, means her stupid daughter  
20 sympathizes with the ashes in the furnace  
to say this is a crime means:  
"I'll do it again!"

It seems plausible that the poem starts right after mother has died. In the first stanza preparations for her physical departure are made. She is being laid out and made to "wear" a coffin, aside from her clothes. The horse is like a hearse or pulls one; it will take her away. But again mother seems to belong in winter and forces resisting the change of the seasons must be overcome before she can leave.<sup>40</sup> The wind stagnates and the moment lasts, impossibly, until both mother and the winter have come to an end. When winter has disintegrated and, in the second stanza, finished its pressure – completed its task? – the horse and mother are presumably on their way. From here, the focus is not on mother's death but on her life, on her daughter's perception of that life, and on her daughter's destiny: to be like her mother.

A digression on the repeated formula *to say (...) means (...)* – or rather: *say (...)* *mean (...)* – is needed here. In the original the first occurrence of *say* (l. 12) raises the question who says or is imagined as saying that the wind is cruel: the wind itself (l. 11, with enjambment), or no one in particular? The latter option seems unlikely because it would leave the wind (l. 11) in a strange position. Unattached to anything at all, *the wind* would be a nominal sentence, a mere announcement of the wind's presence, which would normally be made by the phrase *there is wind (you feng)*.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Cf. the above discussions of *Soil of the North* and *In the North in Fallow Fields There Is a Plow That Gives Me Pain*.

<sup>41</sup> In a different context (e.g. an exchange like: "What is it that you like about today's weather?" "The wind") this nominal sentence can of course be perfectly normal.

If, on the other hand, the wind itself (l. 11) is taken to be the one saying that the wind is cruel, the translation would be:

when over the earth rubbed up by the snow, the wind  
says the wind is cruel  
it means a different cruelty

So far, so good. The problem is that in the three repetitions of the formula, there is no reason to view the wind as the implied agent of *say* and *mean*. Furthermore, the third and fourth occurrence of the formula provide grounds for assuming that in this stanza things are said and meant by someone else, i.e. the stupid daughter. The translation

(...) for the wind  
to say the wind is cruel  
means a different cruelty

is a half-hearted solution, attempting to give the stupid daughter her due, retain some of the ambiguity of the original and avoid reading *the wind* (l. 11) as a nominal sentence.

Unnamed and omniscient, the narrator knows more than the stupid daughter, which is an explanation for calling her stupid in the first place. The formula *to say (...) means (...)* can therefore be rephrased as *when the stupid daughter says (...) that really means (...)* – even if the girl herself does not always mean to mean it. She does not understand that it is not the wind that is cruel but something else. The wind, which stopped blowing for a moment before mother was finally taken away, is then an image representing Time, different cruelty is the cruelty of decay, and Time and decay are hard to tell apart. When the girl doubts that her mother's soul will make it to heaven, that really means mother suffered for nothing and will not even have a decent afterlife (l. 13-17); the breaking of mother's toes recalls the Chinese practice of footbinding, a symbol of the lifelong repression of women. To some extent, it is implied – for the girl is stupid – that mother *will* be compensated for her pain. Similarly, the narrator knows that charcoal does *not* feel what people burned to death go through, while the girl finds her mother guilty of a gruesome crime (l. 18-20). When, finally, she says so, she has no way of knowing that one day she will inevitably commit the same crime, and perhaps in her turn be condemned by a stupid daughter (l. 21-22). The poem's conclusion is that everything, including what the young see as evil inflicted on or by the old, carries over from one generation to the next.

This reading is not without its problems. It hinges on the attribution to the stupid daughter of the agency of *say*. But there is thematic consistency with other poems discussed in this section: the burdensome transition from winter to spring, an unstoppable, repetitive process in the natural world, is linked to a painful transmission of human life through successive generations.

Death is a distinguishing feature of life, so there is a connection with the transmission of human death in *No More than One Allowed*, discussed in section II:

no more than one man allowed  
the man who taught you to die has died  
the wind teaches you to be familiar with that death

Here the wind can be seen to represent Time in much the same way as in *Her Stupid Daughter*. The human relationship is like that between relay runners: they meet, but can never be shoulder to shoulder.

The 1991 poem *Morning*<sup>42</sup> also treats of this fundamental solitude of people related to one another in an exclusively "vertical" way. Its protagonists are *you* – who seems like the Self addressed by a first person – and *your father*. But it is almost unthinkable that readers of *Morning* should not first of all be struck by its form. From a safe distance this poem appears ordinary enough to the eye: stanzas and lines of irregular length, no discernible rhyme or metric patterns. But as soon as one starts reading it, one's attention is drawn to obsessive repetition and near-repetition, and to fanatical use of sound-effects in general. *Morning* is exemplary of the increasing importance of form in Duoduo's work of recent years. The repetition of *dream* supports the embedment of one dream in another; *Morning* is one of the rare moments in Duoduo's oeuvre that form does directly contribute to content, justifying the equation of the two concepts.

in the morning or at any time, in the morning  
you dream you wake up, you're afraid of waking up  
so you say: you're afraid of the rope, afraid of the face  
of a bird on a woman, so you dream of your father  
5 speaking birdwords, drinking birdmilk  
you dream your father is by himself  
and by chance, not in the dream

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<sup>42</sup> *Zaochen*, *Today* 1992 # 2: 142-143. The original is included in APPENDIX B (320). Comparison with the manuscript shows three errors in the published text: a comma should be inserted after *cengjing* (l. 12), *zhi guo* should be *zuan guo* (l. 13) and *qi la* should be *dala* (l. 14).

had you, you dream the dream your father dreamed  
 you dream your father says: this is a dream a dead man dreamed.

- 10 you don't believe but you're inclined to believe  
 this is a dream, but a dream, your dream:  
 once, it was the handlebar on a bicycle  
 in the shape it was squeezed into by a hand  
 now, it droops from your father's belly  
 15 once it was a foetus refusing birth  
 now it is you crawling back to the handlebar  
 you've dreamed all the details in your dream  
 like the teeth your father left on the ground, flashing  
 and laughing at you, so you are not death  
 20 but a mere case of death: you've dreamed your dream's death.

This translation captures all instances of repetition and takes the liberty of adding two more. Strictly speaking, the final lines of the first stanza should be

(...) you dream the dream your father had  
 you dream your father says: this is a dream a dead man had.

But in Chinese, with the head of the noun phrase in final position, both these lines end with the word meaning 'dream', as a noun and a verb. Unfortunately there is more to the original's prosodic structure than repetition. The echo of the everyday word for everyday milk: *niunai*, in the newly coined *birdmilk*: *niaornai* (l. 5), near-homophony of *xiang* (twice) and *xiang* (once), with first and fourth tone respectively (*believe* and *inclined*, l. 10), the closeness of *bashou* 'handlebar' and *bei shou* 'was squeezed' (l. 12-13), final rhyme in the final two lines – the translation fails to reflect all these things. In sum, *Morning* invites recital, especially in the original.

The dream has a double function. In its literal meaning it is the abode, in the dreamer's mind, of a bird-faced woman and other things in the poem without access to daytime reality. Within that framework it can be viewed as an image for "life" – but a dream – and waking up as one for "death". Fear of waking up is fear of death; when *your father had you*, it was not in your life nor in his (not in the dream), but in a place where the end of his life and the beginning of yours overlapped. That he is by himself and had you by chance – not through a joint effort with a fellow human being, for *dushen zhe*, besides 'single', also means 'celibate' – is one more example of an exclusively "vertical" human relationship. It is inevitable that you live the life he lived and eventually die the death he died (l. 8-9). In the first half of the second stanza the focus is on individual Man's immediate, physical origins and, echoing *The Road to Father*, an attempt to return there: maternal womb and paternal



reproductive organs. The final four lines of *Morning* confirm that when you wake up and die (your dream's death), that is but one in an endless series of incidental deaths constituting Death. The fact, finally, that you have only dreamed (l. 20) about waking up and dying works as a safety net. This is again a dream in the literal sense. It invalidates the gloomy philosophy unfolded so far and takes the reader back to a particular morning on which you had a particular dream. More interesting than the reassurance it offers is that this self-repeating construction – to dream about dreaming about dreaming and so on, like talking about talking and thinking about thinking – makes the poem highly self-contained. The assertion *this is a dream*, made over and over again, thus becomes a poetical statement of skepticism regarding the poem's connection with reality.<sup>43</sup>

### III C *Horses, among Other Things*

*Horse* (1984); *When My Beloved Walked into a Red Mist for Shelter from the Rain* (1987); *I'm Reading* (1991); *Bells* (1988); *Other Poems*

Some images make conspicuously frequent appearances in Duoduo's poetry. A list of "preferred" Nature imagery in his later work would include the winter, spring and autumn seasons and the weather: wind and snow, and some sunlight – but also the soil, farmland, trees and the leaves and the fruit on those trees, as well as rivers and the sea; the animal most often present is a horse. This enumeration lays no claim to completeness on the basis of clear-cut criteria and wind, soil, rivers and seas are no original or rare images in any poetic tradition. But their presence in Duoduo's poems is emphatic, while other images in the semantic domains from which they have been taken are as emphatically absent. Summer, stifling heat, mountains, lakes, the desert and bears, for instance, never became part of Duoduo's poetic landscape in two decades during which the source of Nature imagery was constantly tapped.

Before taking a closer look at the horses in Duoduo's work I should briefly dwell on my purpose in doing so. I have no hopes of revealing any unchanging "real meanings" of this image. A consistent use of imagery by one author is interesting, but there is no compelling reason why an image should mean the same thing throughout an oeuvre. Moreover, I do not believe that in Duoduo's later poetry images are aestheticized "representations" of retraceable "realities". The digression of this short section, in which I will not analyze and interpret entire poems but highlight relevant passages, is motivated by the sheer power of Duoduo's imagery.

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Gerbrandy 1995.

The horses in his work are exemplary of this power: they are convincing horses in themselves, and thus invalidate a search for their "true identity". Even if they can in one poem or another be seen to have something in common with, say, Chinese intellectuals under the Communist regime, that does not make them into a disguised version of those intellectuals. First and foremost they can as horses be recognized and appreciated by any reader, not just by those familiar with China. I will *discuss* these horses, and make no attempt to decode them.

*Horse* is a frequent word in Duoduo's poetry. It occurs by itself, as the head of a noun phrase, as well as in compounds like *horse-eyes* and *horse-legs* and, less interestingly, *horse-cart* and *horsefly*;<sup>44</sup> the connection between horse and cart, or horse and fly, is not as inalienable as that between a horse and its body parts. Rather than chart every occurrence of *horse*, I will offer a list of characteristic appearances by this animal.

Occasionally the sound of the Chinese word for horse: *ma*, and especially the repetition of one and the same sound seem to matter as much as its meaning. The two are hard to disentangle; for a poem's story to feature a horse, its text must contain the word for it. At any rate, in four different poems written between 1983 and 1991 *ma* is strikingly frequent. Perhaps, the repetition of *horse* – three times in three lines (l. 10-12) – in the 1983 poem *The Most Normal*<sup>45</sup> is visible only with the hindsight provided by later poems, but still:

(...) the buttocks of a big round horse  
and the buttocks of a horse with a fever at night  
are the same, any horse at all believes

The "horseness" of the next example, the 1984 poem *Horse*,<sup>46</sup> extends beyond its title. *Horse* occurs seven times in fourteen lines:

the lion of dusk does not speak  
along the furrows the horse-tail sows silence, like a blanket  
from the trumpet's bent-down sounds  
the horse's worries are wrapped up in gold  
5 absorbed by a solemnity of greater vastness

<sup>44</sup> In the following, I have tried to retain some of the structure of compound nouns in the translation, where the particle *de* could have been but has not been used to link two nouns (e.g. *horse-face* instead of *the horse's face*; *ma lian* and *ma de lian* respectively).

<sup>45</sup> *Zui yiban de*, Duoduo 1989a: 71-72.

<sup>46</sup> *Ma*, Lao Mu 1985a: 426.

the horse obtains lasting strength, as that of labor pains:  
 paddies from the past oh a dazzling gold  
 the horse-saddle from olden days was a magnificent crown  
 the horse's tall thin shadow breaks away from the hay-cart  
 10 tramples the pitch-dark fields into the shape of a sickle  
 shakes off jeweled rings that covered its body like stars  
 the dark night entangles the horse-head like velvet  
 listening for the horse-hoofs that have come to a halt  
 like the spatter of shattered stones...

Horse indeed. In spite of the abstractions and the confusing multitude of hurried images, the reader gets an impression of what the horse is like: a serious animal of noble descent, put to the cart by Man against its will and liberated at night.

In the first stanza of the 1987 poem *When My Beloved Walked into a Red Mist for Shelter from the Rain*,<sup>47</sup> the fading of daylight and the end of the horse's working hours are followed by its death and a lonely burial:

the setting sun, with mother on its back, descends from bronze rooftops  
 horses lose their motive force and take off their horse-skins  
 the woods have moved to the cliff's edge where stones are rolling  
 horse-piss falls down from the edge  
 bricks are laid to form the horse-head, the horse-face  
 is inlaid with twenty-four lead bullets  
 there is not one, not one lover to take it to its grave  
 (but the pit is gigantic)

This stanza confirms the role of sound, as opposed to meaning, in the frequent appearances of the horse outlined here. In the original, *horses* is a near-homophone (the difference being the tones) of *horse-skins*, and *horse-head* brings a near-homophone to mind, especially since that word (*matou*, with an unstressed second syllable) means 'wharf' or 'quay', something more likely to involve brick-laying than a horse-head.

A fourth poem in which the horse is hammered home is *I'm Reading*,<sup>48</sup> written in 1991 and reminiscent of *Morning* – also from 1991 – in both form and content.

<sup>47</sup> *Dang wo airen zou jin yi pian hongwu biyu*, Duoduo 1989a: 116-117. The version included in Xu, Meng, Cao & Lü 1988: 410-411 has *tiao* 'jump' for *zou* 'walk' in its title; the stanza quoted here merely differs in punctuation (Xu, Meng, Cao & Lü 1988 has a full stop where Duoduo 1989a has a comma, in l. 5). More consequential differences in the poem's final stanza are outside the scope of this discussion.

<sup>48</sup> *Wo du zhe*, *Today* 1992 # 2: 145, 148. The original is included in APPENDIX B (321-322). Duoduo confirmed (personal communication, spring 1992) that *yan dai* (l. 3) in *Today* should read *lingdai*.

Besides *horse*, *I'm Reading* employs frequent repetition and near-repetition. The horse in this poem has the same personality as elsewhere in Duoduo's oeuvre:

in November wheatfields I'm reading my father  
 I'm reading his hair  
 the color of his tie, the crease in his pants  
 and his hoofs, caught in his shoelaces  
 how he skated and played the violin too  
 his scrotum shrank, his neck stretched to the sky for undue understanding  
 I read how my father was a big-eyed horse

I read how my father once briefly left the other horses  
 his coat hung on a small tree  
 and his socks, and hidden among the other horses  
 those pale buttocks, like in an oyster stripped  
 of its flesh the soap that women use to wash  
 I read the smell of my father's pomade  
 the smell of tobacco on his body  
 and his tuberculosis, lighting up the left lung of a horse  
 I read how the doubts of a boy  
 rose from a golden cornfield  
 I read how for me at the age of understanding  
 it began to rain on the red roof where the grain was put to dry  
 how in the sowing season the plow drew four legs of a dead horse  
 the horse-skin like a parasol, and horse-teeth scattered all around  
 I read faces taken away by time, one after the other  
 I read how my father's history quietly rots underground  
 how the locust on my father's body goes on existing by itself

like a white-haired barber embracing a senile persimmon tree  
 I read how my father puts me back once more into the belly of a horse  
 when I am about to become a stone bench in the London mist  
 when my gaze passes over men strolling down the street lined with banks...

The horse in *I'm Reading* is still serious, but it is also intelligent and cultured. Perhaps this entails its physical weakness, manifest in a body used to clothes, and in the tuberculosis from which that body suffers. It is crucial that the horse in this poem is a Man, or that the Man in this poem is really a horse. As a draft animal, the horse has died and can no longer serve: its division of labor with the plow has been reversed. Throughout the poem the distinction between horse and Man is blurred, and the issue cannot be dodged by association with a centaur. *My father* as well as *I* belong to both worlds, are both men and horses.

The relationship between horse and Man may be clarified by more examples. The next four quotations call attention to the horse's eyes and how they look at Man.

The 1984 poem *The Manufacture of Language Comes from the Kitchen*<sup>49</sup> ends thus (l. 18-24):

(...) savage men, smoking cigarettes  
say nothing but press the walnut  
into the table-top. they say

all discussions  
should stop – while  
the horses around them are so quiet  
while they watch man's eyes...

*The Sky on a Winter Night*,<sup>50</sup> written in 1985, contains these two stanzas (l. 10-15):

"who will come and clasp me round the neck!"  
I hear the horse  
whisper as it walks

"clip, clip" giant scissors start to work  
from inside a large hole, all stars rise to their feet  
waves are splashing in the horse-eyes

Here the horse no longer keeps its silence, but it does not raise its voice above a modest whisper. Its eyes are moist, to put it mildly. Another poem from 1985, *Deep in the Flames*,<sup>51</sup> has these opening lines:

melancholy ships pass through my eyes  
from inside the horse-eyes I can see all of the sea

and in the last stanza (l. 23), the speaker says:

<sup>49</sup> *Yuyan de zhizuo lai zi chufang*, Duoduo 1989a: 67. The version included in Lao Mu 1985a: 432-433 is not divided into stanzas.

<sup>50</sup> *Dong ye de tiankong*, Duoduo 1989a: 91-92. In the passage quoted, this edition differs from the versions included in *China (Zhongguo)* 1986 # 2: 95; Zhou 1986: 88-89; Chen 1989: 216; Wang 1991: 915-916 in the division of l. 14-15, and in the onomatopoeic characters in l. 13. In *China*, the poem is entirely without punctuation.

<sup>51</sup> *Huoguang shenchu*, Duoduo 1989a: 93-94. Apart from other, minor differences, the version included in Xu, Meng, Cao & Lü 1988: 11-12 has *jin* 'soak' instead of *ji* 'draw water' in l. 23.

(...) my eyes, drawn full of tears – no one believes them

A fourth, telling picture of the horse's gaze and its meaning for Man can be found in the 1992 poem *Keeping Silent*, discussed in section II. The human protagonist (l. 6) is

(...) stared at by the horse

and, in a somber conclusion (l. 18), is

in search of something else than man.<sup>52</sup>

In association with other occurrences, the horse's quiet gaze in *Keeping Silent* gives the impression of being sad and wise, perhaps reproachful.

The horse seems to know better than Man. It refrains from speaking, instead holding up the proverbial mirror to invite Man to contemplate his life and especially his sins. The horse in these poems comes across as morally superior to corrupted Man who has enslaved it. It has not retained its innocent, gentle nature without paying a price: the horse is a victim, in a world governed by the aggressor that is Man. The obedience forced upon it by Man is apparent from two more passages, quoted below.

In 1985, Duoduo wrote a second poem called *Horse*.<sup>53</sup> Its last two stanzas are (l. 7-10):

wild prince coughing blood tearing across the fields  
the last cavalier of the old world

– horse  
a headless horse is racing along...

The word translated as *cavalier* is *qishi*, *qi* by itself meaning 'straddle', 'ride an animal' or 'cavalryman'. The wild prince must tear across the fields on horseback. The horse, brought to the reader's attention by the poem's title as well as by the abrupt, one-character penultimate line, has no head of its own; it has become an instrument in the hand of Man.

<sup>52</sup> *Today* 1993 # 1: 142-143.

<sup>53</sup> *Ma*, Zhou 1986: 100.

Two occurrences of *horse*, in the compound *mapeng* 'horse-stable', have been lost in the translation of the 1988 poem *Bells*.<sup>54</sup> But *Bells* is not discussed here for horse density so much as for horse personality and the horse's relationship to Man:

- there is no bell that sounds to remind one of memories  
 but today I heard it  
 it struck nine times in all  
 and I don't know how many more  
 5 I heard it when I left the stables  
 and after one mile  
 I heard it again:  
 "when, in the struggle for survival  
 did your servility increase?"  
 10 right then, I began to hate another horse left in the stables  
 right then, a man riding me struck me in the face

The second stanza confirms what is but a possibility in the first. The speaker is a horse, and a slave to Man. Its memories are of days before its slavery.

The horse's many appearances in Duoduo's later poetry provide each other's context. As the poems go by the horse gains in personality and becomes familiar to the reader. It shows how convincing imagery claims the right to exist independently, not as a vehicle for something else that is the real thing. Powerful imagery, that is: imagery whose presence in the poem appears to a reader as natural and unnecessary to explain, makes the author's intention and the reader's background knowledge especially irrelevant – without precluding interpretation. Naturalness is a subjective category; let me end this section with the subjective statement that many of Duoduo's images – the horse for one – strike me as having been *seen* rather than thought up.

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Nature and Man's relationship with Nature are major themes in Duoduo's later poetry, especially in the second half of the 1980s. The natural world, specifically the desolate North, is an awesome, indifferent power capable of destroying individual Man. At the same time it is the victim of Man's proclivity to cultivate, the soil as well as animals like the horse. Divorced from and subjugating Nature, Man forfeits

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<sup>54</sup> *Zhongsheng, Today 1990 # 1: 28. The struggle for survival (l. 8) is a free but not unfaithful rendition of a phrase which in a literal translation would be the struggle for conditions.*

a state of purity. Although the changing of the seasons is in the nature of Nature, it is associated with cultivation and an accordingly painful event. On the part of the North and its individual dweller – the non-human human – there is resistance to markers of the passage of time like the transition from winter to spring. Solitary human beings, members of different generations, have an exclusively "vertical" relationship whose function is the transmission of human life. Their relay-like succession is presented as parallel to processes of birth, growth, decay and death in the natural world.

#### IV EXILE

The title of this section does not refer to Duoduo's life in exile outside China. In other words, the poems in this section have not been chosen on the basis of their author's whereabouts at the time of writing. What they do have in common is that they can be seen to be about the phenomenon of exile, or that they lead to association with Duoduo's life in exile. Of course the latter observation only holds for a reader who knows about Duoduo's situation in the first place.

If the concept of exile is taken to encompass things like "spiritual exile", in partial overlap with alienation, there is no reason why poems written before June Fourth could not be subsumed under this heading. Yet I have only considered poems written after June Fourth, because this section is partly a reaction to the politicized reception of Duoduo's poetry outside China. Foreign attention to Duoduo and his work can hardly be seen in isolation from the way Chinese politics have affected his life, but I have my doubts about foreign media's tendency to look at his writing almost exclusively through the prism of his exile.

But this section is not primarily motivated by the issue of foreign reception. Exile in general and the story of Chinese exile since 1989 have obvious "poetic potential", and might grant politicality and Chineseness a comeback in Duoduo's later work. This is of special interest, since it would seem to contradict his later poetry's growing individuality: its move away from the political and toward the personal.

#### *Five Years* (1994)

*Five Years*<sup>55</sup> is a short poem. In two stanzas totaling fourteen lines, the passage of five years gives rise to 16 instances of the word *five* (including *fifty* and *fifth*, not

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<sup>55</sup> *Wu nian*, *Today* 1994 # 2: 109. The original is included in APPENDIX B (322).



counting its homophone *wu* 'noon' in the compound *wuye* 'midnight'):

five strong drinks, five candles, five years  
 forty-three years old, break out in a sweat at midnight  
 the palms of fifty hands on the tabletop  
 a flock of birds, fists clenched, comes flying from yesterday

- 5 five strings of firecrackers in month five, thunder from five fingers  
 but in month four four toadstools live off four dead horse-tongues don't die  
 on the fifth five candles go out at five past five  
 but the landscape screaming at dawn doesn't die  
 the hair dies but the tongue doesn't die
- 10 the temper rediscovered in the well-boiled meat doesn't die  
 fifty years of mercury seep through the semen but the semen doesn't die  
 the foetus delivers itself and doesn't die  
 five years gone by, five years don't die  
 in five years, twenty generations of worms all die.

*Five Years* has no "real" protagonist, but the announcement *forty-three years old* leads one to think of the rest of the poem as observations made by a person of that age looking back on the last five years. This recollection shows an opposition of things perishing and remaining, concluded by a grim statement of survival: *five years gone by, five years don't die* – the second part also meaning 'five years of not dying', leaving unsaid who or what has not died. The protagonist's achievement of not dying for these five years, not to mention the first thirty-eight, is stressed by contrasting it with the brevity of a worm's life.

*Five Years* is dated 1994. If that information is seen as part of the poem, that is, if it is assumed that 1994 is not just the date of composition but also the moment for which the poem's content "holds", the time contemplated is from 1989 to 1994. This would be in keeping with the assumption that the poem is autobiographical: Duoduo was born in 1951 and turned forty-three in 1994. The time contemplated would thus not be an arbitrary chunk cut from the calendar, but would coincide with Duoduo's life outside China, five years to date. If this bitter *lustrum* was the occasion for writing *Five Years*, the assertion of not having died becomes more meaningful and understandable, as for someone alive against all odds.

*Five Years* is reminiscent of Duoduo's 1984 poem *Fifteen Years Old*, discussed in section I of this chapter. But there is a difference. Arguably, *Fifteen Years Old* makes a number of references to the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in the summer of 1966; in *Five Years* no references are made to June Fourth, or to any event ushering in a new stage in someone's life. It follows that if *Five Years* is read as a reflection by the author upon his five years of exile to date, that is done wholly

on the basis of extra-textual information and the two above-mentioned assumptions: that the poem is directly autobiographical and that its date is really part of the text. Such a reading is not just legitimate but convincing. But the mechanism which makes it unfold is worth some thought. For within the space of *Five Years* all sorts of things can be found, but not exile.

*Amsterdam's Rivers* (1989); *In England* (1989-1990)

*Amsterdam's Rivers*<sup>56</sup> is another relatively short poem, with lines and stanzas of varying length. Apart from several instances of rhyme (l. 5-9) there is little else to note on the formal level. In short, simple clauses, the poem's tone is one of restraint, adding to a melancholy mood evoked by its imagery:

city at nightfall in November  
there are only Amsterdam's rivers

suddenly

the orange on the tree back home  
is shaking in the autumn winds

I close the window, but it's no use  
the rivers flow backward, but it's no use  
the sun inlaid with pearls has risen

but it's no use

pigeons flutter like iron filings  
streets without boys suddenly seem empty

after the autumn rain  
that roof crawling with snails  
– my native land

slowly sailing by on Amsterdam's rivers...

It seems plausible that the speaker vainly tries to ward off a disturbing memory of home, which in the end forces itself upon the reality of Amsterdam – impossibly, in

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<sup>56</sup> *Amusitedan de heliu*, *Today* 1990 # 1: 26.

the imagination, in the poem. Although home is not specified, there is a major clue besides the orange tree. The original is in Chinese, written by a poet from the PRC. But the question where home is, is less relevant than the answer: it is, in all probability, not in Amsterdam, which makes *Amsterdam's Rivers* a poem about exile. For a reader of a translation which does not reveal the author's identity nor the original's language – or a reader of the original thinking it was a translation – home might be France just as well as China.

Readers are likely to have some idea of a poem's author and its original language, and there is a reasonable chance that readers after June Fourth know about June Fourth; some readers know Duoduo's story, including his frequent sojourns in the Netherlands in recent years. If such a reader is prompted to remember June Fourth and make China the home of the speaker in *Amsterdam's Rivers*, that does not detract from the poem's power to stir up feelings known to people the world over: nostalgia, homesickness, uprootedness.

*In England*<sup>57</sup> has the same number of lines as *Amsterdam's Rivers*, but on the average they are longer. The poem is divided into five internally coherent stanzas of three lines. Its protagonist shows more character, so to speak, than the speaker in *Amsterdam's Rivers*, and *In England* has none of the quiet resignation of *Amsterdam's Rivers*. *In England* is bitter and provocative:

after church spires and city chimneys have sunk below the horizon  
 England's skies are gloomier than lovers' whispers  
 two blind accordion players walk by, heads bowed

5 without peasants, there'd be no evening prayers  
 without tombstones, there'd be no declaimers  
 two rows of newly planted apple trees sting my heart

it's my wings that bring me fame, it's England  
 that makes me reach the place where I was lost  
 memories, but no longer leaving furrows

10 shame is my address  
 in all of England, there's not one woman who will not kiss  
 all of England is too small for my pride

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<sup>57</sup> Zai Yinggelan, *Today* 1990 # 1: 27. The original is included in APPENDIX B (323).

in mud hidden in the cracks of my nails, I  
 recognize my native land – mother  
 15 has been packed in a small parcel, and sent far away...

In the first two stanzas, the speaker leaves the city for the countryside, which first leads to private musings (l. 4-5) and then triggers (l. 6, sting my heart) the emotional outpouring of the rest of the poem. Flying to England has resulted in fame, in a fulfillment (l. 8) unattainable where the speaker came from.<sup>58</sup> But there is a price, for the speaker's past is unconnected to the new environment. It no longer furnishes the tools needed to deal with the present (l. 9). In the final stanza all that is left from earlier days spent at home is a tiny bit of native soil, from a native land identified with the speaker's mother: all origins are now physically out of reach.

Being ashamed of one's fame can imply the idea that one does not deserve it, or that one has become famous for the wrong reasons. Still, no explanation is given for the speaker's fame and shame and for the anger exuding from the fourth stanza. Nor is there any indication as to who "lost" the speaker back home. But once more, blanks are conveniently filled in as soon as information on the author's life is brought to bear. The speaker's wings turn into those of the airplane which took Duoduo from Beijing – which "lost" him as a relatively unknown poet – to London, where he became famous upon disembarking: an eye-witness to the previous day's massacre in Beijing, he came close to being smothered in national and international media attention.

At this point it should be remembered that Duoduo did not flee from China, but set out on a previously arranged trip abroad as a literary figure, not a "dissident" – the wrong reasons, indeed. If the right reason would have had to be his poetry and the right wings those of the imagination, it is doubtful that they would have brought him instant, international fame.

*Amsterdam's Rivers* and *In England*, both written soon after Duoduo left China, are alike. They feature well-known, existing geographical names, which gain in importance for a reader aware of Duoduo's history: England and the Netherlands are the countries where he started his life in exile. As is true for *Amsterdam's Rivers*, no extra-textual help is needed to read *In England* as addressing the phenomenon of exile; both these poems hinge upon the term *native land*, extremely rare in this

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<sup>58</sup> There is an ambiguity in the translation: *lose* (l. 8) is used in the transitive sense of failing to keep, not as in *be lost* meaning 'having lost one's way': literally, the line runs *makes me reach the place from which I was lost [by others]*.

oeuvre.<sup>59</sup> But without a blurb, China and Duoduo's exile from China are nowhere to be found.

*Wintertime* (1990); *None* (1991); *Memory of the North* (1992); *Map* (1990)

Earlier in this chapter I discussed the 1990 poem *Wintertime* as one example in Duoduo's later poetry of pessimism regarding the possibilities of human contact. Here the question is to what extent it also qualifies as a poem about exile. Below is a passage from the poem which would seem to be of relevance:

5 I search for what I've lost  
let go of what I've gained  
having used up the words on my tombstone

I saunter among people  
vast heaven and earth, eternal father and mother  
prayer rises from my heart

10 silence, something else than voices  
blended into an exchange with winter (...)

For a change, let me *begin* by a biographical approach to the text, from the start using extra-textual information on the author's life. Such a reading, in which the speaker is a poet in exile, pays off instantly: the poet yearns for the past, i.e. for his native land, and feels disdain for the present, i.e. for his new place of – involuntary – residence (l. 4-5). That he has used up his epitaph, an image which brings his poetry to mind, points to his suffering from writer's block, a notorious horror in the life of the exile cut off from his mother tongue (l. 6). Finally, he invokes heaven and earth as a substitute for other people because he is now living among strangers (l. 7-11).

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<sup>59</sup> In Duoduo's early poetry the term *native land* (*zuguo*) is found in *Blessing* (*Zhufu*, 1973, Duoduo 1989a: 2, l. 7), *Doctor Zhivago* (*Riwage yisheng*, 1974, Duoduo 1989a: 22-27, C, l. 39) and *In Autumn* (*Zai qiutian*, 1973, Duoduo 1988a: 17-18, l. 3). It is only in the last of these three, telling of the death of a French woman living in China and the subsequent murder of her French pedigree dog by Chinese children, that distance from one's native land is at issue. As for the later poetry, *native land* also occurs in *Map* (1990), discussed below. Of course, a systematic and exhaustive treatment of this aspect of Duoduo's work would also have to involve related terminology like *foreign land* (*yiguo*, *yixiang*), *home town* or *place of origin* (*guxiang*, *jiexiang*).

But nostalgia and skepticism are not limited to any one category of people, living in a foreign language environment is not the only possible cause of writer's block and not just foreigners may experience loneliness while in a crowd. In other words, apart from offering an alternative which is really no more than a specification, the "exile reading" of *Wintertime* adds little to the reading suggested in section II.

*None*,<sup>60</sup> written in 1991, is in my opinion one of Duoduo's best poems. It is one of a number of poems from recent years in which form has further gained on content, in comparison with work from the 1970s and the 1980s. As elsewhere, the tools most frequently used are those of repetition and near-repetition. In *None* repetition takes place not just on the level of words, clauses or lines; there is parallelism on the level of stanza structure, too. There are no single words, like *dream* in *Morning*, or *horse* in *I'm Reading*, which are obsessively repeated to the point of becoming both magical and meaningless. One impression left by *None* is that form and content are in equilibrium throughout the poem. Its form does not seem merely to adorn or stylize, much less limit its content. This is another rare example of form contributing directly on the level of content. Here, I quote the first two "pairs" of stanzas:

there is no one bidding me farewell  
 there is no one bidding anyone farewell  
 there is no one bidding the dead farewell, when this morning begins

there is no limit to it

except for language, facing the limits where the soil is lost  
 except for the tulip's blossoming flesh, facing a window not closed at night  
 except for my window, facing language I no longer understand

there is no language

This is one-third of the text. In the other two-thirds the process is repeated: building up an image in a tense, three-line stanza only to revoke it in a curt, one-line verdict.

In a discussion of exile in Duoduo's poetry, the second pair of stanzas is of interest. *Language I no longer understand* can bring to mind not only the tragedy of Chinese living abroad for political reasons but the agony of anyone forced to live on foreign soil and reduced to the status of a deaf-mute. Obviously, this association –

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<sup>60</sup> *Mei you, Today* 1992 # 2: 143-144. For textual discrepancies between the manuscript version and the published text, see the discussion of *None* in section V of this chapter.

or that of estrangement from one's mother tongue – is readily made if *None* is presented together with an introduction of its author.

This is not to say that without additional information an exile reading is impossible or far-fetched. But there are worthy alternatives. First of all, *language I no longer understand* can signify not understanding what another speaker of one's – intelligible – mother tongue means. This possibility is marked by the use of *dongde*, 'understand' or 'grasp'. *Dongde* is a word typically used in phrases like *dongde geming daoli* 'understand revolutionary principles', whereas a conceivable but peculiar phrase like *dongde Hanyu* would have to mean 'understand the workings of Chinese', not 'understand Chinese' in the sense of being able to translate it correctly. Secondly, *language I no longer understand* and *there is no language* can be read as poetical statements. There is no single correct reading of the passage quoted, but the rest of the poem gives no grounds for sustaining an exile reading either. Precisely because *None* allows other plausible readings,<sup>61</sup> it is tempting to say that in this poem, geographical names such as in *Amsterdam's Rivers* and *In England* would be out of place.

By its title the 1992 poem *Memory of the North*<sup>62</sup> leads to association with Duo-duo's poetry from the 1980s, specifically with the North poems discussed in section III of this chapter. Kinship with those extends beyond the poem's title: *Memory of the North* reaffirms the picture of a solitary human being in a close relationship with a Northern brand of Nature. *Memory of the North* is similar to the other North poems in form, too. It has four consecutive stanzas of equal length and employs some rhyme, but its formal structure is otherwise inconspicuous:

absorb the winter cold, listen to the clouds in motion far away  
trees of the north stand in February winds  
parting stands there too  
reflected in the window, distant and clear

5 break out in a sweat at midnight, hard rain at dawn  
in a hotel in a foreign land  
wheatfields of the north begin to breathe  
just the way in the shed cattle startle the earth with their hoofs

<sup>61</sup> See section V of this chapter.

<sup>62</sup> *Beifang de jiyi*, *Today* 1993 # 2: 113. The manuscript has *yaoyuan* 'distant', where the published version has *xiaoyao* 'free and unfettered' (l. 1). More importantly, l. 17 of the manuscript version, the poem's one-line, final stanza (*Beifang de jiyi!*), has in the published version been omitted.

10 all alone, retain some sort of hearing  
 but no, no inspiration whatsoever  
 to go on squeezing this city  
 city of piled-up stones of the north

all alone sprinkle the sower's shoes on the canvas  
 the plow has divorced itself from the soil  
 15 like the clouds, that can look down upon this city  
 I use your walls to face up to your vastness

memory of the north!

*Memory of the North* provides leverage for an exile reading. First of all remembering a place suggests that the one remembering is now in another place. If this is not necessarily so, it is always true that a memory exists at a later point than – at a distance from – its content. Other words and phrases help to indicate that the speaker in this poem is no longer in the North, and has left the company of earlier days: *parting* (l. 3), *faraway* and *distant* (l. 1 and 4), *all alone* (l. 9, 13) and most of all *a hotel in a foreign land* (l. 6). As above, on the basis of biographical information on Duoduo another clue is found: *no inspiration whatsoever* (l. 10) can be seen to refer to writer's block. Still, it is not the story of the author's life but his other poems that provide the more interesting extra-textual grounds for an exile reading.

If a text can allude to extra-textual reality, one poem can allude to another as well as to a horse, or to anything else. A poem alluding to another poem by the same author is also a reflection upon an oeuvre, incorporated in that oeuvre by its author. *Memory of the North* thus presents Duoduo's poetry as conscious of itself. Seen in that light the poem's protagonist is reminiscent of someone encountered in earlier North poems: the speaker, in the first person singular, who belongs and feels at home in the bleakness of the North, and for whom human relationships have low priority. Whereas the speaker in *Memory of the North* is a solitary figure, the act of remembering is situated in a strange environment far away from the previous speaker's "home" in the North. Here a telling passage from *Soil of the North* may once more be recalled (l. 4-5):

always touch the frozen soil in winter, my feet  
 know for sure, I belong here

and read in connection with this statement from *Memory of the North* (l. 14):

the plow has divorced itself from the soil



which in its turn reminds one of a crucial line from *In England* (l. 9):

memories, but no longer leaving furrows<sup>63</sup>

Because the North itself is the subject matter of the earlier North poems, remembering it intimates that as raw material it is now out of reach. From there it is but a small step to viewing the speaker in *Memory of the North* as suffering the ordeal of a poet cut off from language – in exile.

In *Map*,<sup>64</sup> written in 1990, subject matter akin to that of *Memory of the North* can be found. Although it contains no geographical names, an abrupt occurrence of *native land* also connects it to *Amsterdam's Rivers* and *In England*. Plausible alternatives for an exile reading – which claims no coherence from beginning to end – do not immediately present themselves. This poem employs more concrete words than *None* and *Wintertime*, leaving less room for divergent readings; also, it comes across as a private, "difficult" poem. As regards form it is of little interest. Addressed by an unnamed narrating agent, its protagonist is in the second person singular. This *you* functions rather like *I* in, for instance, *Memory of the North*, even if the use of the second person suggests greater objectivity. The imagery in *Map* is typical of two almost contradictory tendencies in Duoduo's poetry. Its first and third stanzas are crammed with images, some of which have no chance to truly take shape. But its second and fourth stanzas concentrate on one image or idea, in a personal language, and have a doom-like momentum:

at midnight, there's someone outside the window seducing you  
cigarette ends begin to crawl, like silkworms  
and on the table, a glass of water is stirred up too  
you pull out the drawer. inside, it's been snowing for forty years

5        a voice, whose voice, asks: is the sky a map?  
          you recognize the hollerer's pitch-black lips  
          you recognize him  
          as you, as that old you  
          you recognize your head  
10        being coughed far away from a hospital window –

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<sup>63</sup> The Chinese for *furrows* is a compound containing *li* 'plow' (*ligou*, literally 'plow-rut').

<sup>64</sup> *Ditu*, *Today* 1993 # 1: 141-142.

together, the blacksmith and the nails move along the distant horizon  
 people fighting fire are crowding on a stamp  
 and splashing the sea over its edges  
 swimmers in the water are splashing water at each other  
 15 their swimming trunks are flourbags  
 with this imprint: nails, far from their native land  
  
 a pungent smell  
 you sniff up the storm's first message  
 cloud-like, on a meathook you swing through the meathouse's rear window  
 20 behind you, a leg is left lying on the meatboard  
 you recognize that leg as yours  
 for you've taken the step.<sup>65</sup>

If in *Memory of the North* temporal distance was implied, in *Map* it is made explicit (l. 6-7): the protagonist recognizes himself as he used to look in former days. He must be lost in memories, an assumption in keeping with the atmosphere of the first stanza. It is hard to establish logical connections between the poem's first half and its third stanza. The resonance of *far away* (*yuanyuan* l. 10) in *distant* (*yaoyuan*, l. 11) does not mean much, for the horizon is always distant. Only in the third stanza's final line do the faraway nails acquire a different identity: they become swimmers, said to be far from their native land. In Duoduo's oeuvre this description stands out like a sore thumb. All the more so if modern Chinese literature's "obsession with China"<sup>66</sup> is borne in mind: generally, Experimental poetry has not rid itself of that obsession and abounds with native lands. Combined with the distance in time, the distance in space serves as a prelude to the poem's shocking closing scene. In *abstracto*, the final stanza could be rendered as amputation and dislocation, together equaling the process of being uprooted, of having one's past torn loose from the present. With hindsight, the head being coughed far away from a hospital window (l. 10) has prepared the stage for this disintegration of the human body.

This reading does not make anything like a top-to-bottom structure visible. But in the context of Duoduo's poems and without calling upon biographical information, the meathouse scene is supported by several clues to evoke fundamental aspects of being exiled and finding oneself in exile.

<sup>65</sup> I am aware that neither *meathouse* nor *meatboard* are accepted English usage. My translation of *roudian* ('butcher's shop') and of *rouan* (a compound of *rou* 'meat' and *an*, 'table' or 'desk', which is not accepted Chinese usage either) is motivated by the emphatic repetition of *rou*, 'flesh' or 'meat' – the distinction in English often makes it a difficult word to translate.

<sup>66</sup> See Hsia 1974.

*Often* (1992)

In the context of Duoduo's poetry, familiar features of the 1992 poem *Often*<sup>67</sup> are its size, its shape, and its insistent repetitive tone, specifically the frequent repetition of *often* and *they / them / their* (identical in Chinese). Like many of Duoduo's later poems, it is a longish text with lines and stanzas of irregular length. Otherwise, *Often* is remarkable in more than one respect. Neither its language nor its imagery or its content displays the waywardness characteristic of Duoduo's later work. It is narrative in nature; imagery is conspicuous for its absence. Only the poem's last line contains a sudden image typical of Duoduo's poetry in the unusual connection it establishes, between an old lady's womb and what is called *a church of tomorrow*. But the most eye-catching feature of *Often* is the occurrence, unique in Duoduo's poetic oeuvre to date, of the word *exile* (*liuwang zhe*), in the final stanza. The exile unexpectedly joins the other protagonists, a couple of slightly tragic, grandmotherly women:

often, they occupy an iron bench in the park  
 just as they often have many clothes  
 in the houses they have, there once was human life  
 this city is often dreamt of by them  
 and so is this world

just like the endless years they've spent  
 they often feel hunger when reading the paper  
 this hunger, which comes from faraway lands  
 makes them think that being allowed to grow fat is really a painful thing  
 although their lives will not change because of this  
 the map does change; it's bigger, when they read the paper

they were lovers, wives, mothers – still are –  
 it's just that no one wants to remember them  
 even the pillows they slept on with someone else  
 don't remember now. so  
 they talk to themselves for an ever longer time  
 as if talking to the lord. so  
 they are kindhearted now, if they weren't to begin with

they want to listen closely, whether to people  
 animals, or the river. often

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<sup>67</sup> *Changchang*, *Today* 1992 # 4: 115-116.

they think they are harbors, waiting  
 for ships to go and come alike  
 they might not want to go to Africa  
 just want to sit on that fixed iron bench  
 across from them, the exile, under the canopy of the apple tree's leaves  
 can go to sleep, go to sleep and dream  
 that their womb is like a church of tomorrow.

The old ladies are losing touch with the world around them. In their unchanging immediate surroundings, embodied by the iron bench, distant parts of the earth constitute no reality outside of newspaper articles. This creates a contrast to the exile's experience: the strangeness of what must to the old ladies be "home", and the intense but thwarted wish to leave. At the same time, the ladies and the exile are united in their loneliness; whence the peace of mind the exile feels in their presence.

The text does not give the exile much in the way of an identity, and heavily relies on the reader's extra-textual knowledge. In *Often*, the exile's abode is viewed from the outside, as a closed door with a sign saying "exile". This situation is diametrically opposed to that in the final stanza of *Map*. There, the amputation of a leg and clues from the text itself lead to an exile reading actively established by the reader, who is behind the door without having been told flat out what the sign on its outside says. In *Often* the exile's experience must be assumed on the basis of the word *exile*, not on intrinsic references to the reality it represents. *Often* is thus fundamentally different from the other poems discussed in this section – and from just about all of Duoduo's poems to date. It is akin to writings of another genre: that of newspaper columns, private but easily accessible observations, brief and clearly structured. If its tone and its scarce imagery are still those of a poem by Duoduo, its explicit, conclusive mention of the exile makes *Often* a foreign body in this oeuvre.

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For a discussion of the poetry Duoduo has written since he left China, the "exile angle" proves valid and rewarding. In keeping with the growing individuality of Duoduo's later work, politicality and Chineseness fail to make the comeback which exile might seem to offer. Aspects of exile are presented in a personal manner, which in the end makes them universal: as poetry they speak of a human experience which is neither time- nor place-bound. Exile thus becomes an individual datum, not a geopolitical category. The texts can be seen to touch upon the ordeal of being exiled, but never on mechanisms in historical reality forcing their author to live through that ordeal. Exile has been "duoduo-ized", rather than that Duoduo's poetry has been "exilized"; Duoduo is an exiled poet but not an exile-poet, and June Fourth

does not constitute a dividing line between different stages in his oeuvre. The examples in this section are but a subset of thirty-three sizable poems written from 1989 to 1994 – aside from the fact that a number of the texts discussed cannot be contained by the boundaries of exile in the narrow sense of the word.

## V LIMITS OF LANGUAGE

This last section on Duoduo's later poetry has as its subject an often explicit ambivalence toward language, the poetic medium. Before dwelling on "limits of language" and poetical statements in Duoduo's work, the discussion touches on the image of the Poet in Duoduo's poetry.

In a poetic oeuvre the link between remarks on Poetry and remarks on Language needs no elucidation. Remarks in that oeuvre on the Poet's personality are of interest too, certainly if they offer something of a contradiction with the first two categories. Here I must add that remarks on the Poet are found in Duoduo's early poems, whereas remarks on Poetry and Language are part of his later work. But if it is not altogether outlandish to consider Poet, Poetry and Language as somehow related, Poetry and Language in Duoduo's later work seem incompatible with the Poet in his early work. In other words: the Poet described in his early work can hardly be imagined to write the Poetry described in his later work.

### *Death of a Poet* (1974) and Other Poems; *Craft* (1973)

Different authors of Chinese Experimental poetry have different ideas of the Poet. This seems a reasonable hypothesis, and it is borne out by what they have to say about the subject. But one Poet is especially popular: the extraordinary, sensitive, often *manqué* visionary, whose romanticism is of a slightly elitist kind.<sup>68</sup> This Poet is a descendant of the traditional Chinese Poet, and survived both the turbulent Republican era (1911-1949) and the suffocating Communist orthodoxy of the 1950s and 1960s. By poets of younger generations the Obscure poets have been charged with undue Poet-worship and a concomitant tragic heroism in their work. But the tragic hero is to this day alive and kicking in various other quarters of Chinese Experimental poetry too: the Poet's special status has not been worn away by time. One example is the motto preceding a 1992 article commemorating a young poet murdered after a quarrel in a restaurant: four lines from *Death of a Poet*, written in

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<sup>68</sup> See chapter three: THE POETRY SCENE and Yeh 1991a: ch. II.

1837 by the Russian poet Lermontov.<sup>69</sup> Its citation in a memorial for one Chinese poet by another is not surprising, since Lermontov's description of the Poet – shortly after Pushkin's death – fits Chinese Experimental poetry's tragic hero perfectly:

Certain it was his soul could never  
Endure the shame of men's disdain;  
He braved the world's harsh frown – as ever  
Alone! – and struggled – and was slain!

(...)

Did not you all in those first years  
His free great gift reject and shame?  
Did not you all with jibes and sneers  
Fan that scarce-hidden fire to flame?  
What, then? Rejoice! He could not bear  
Those his last tortures! His light was shaded  
Like a quenched torch; his genius rare  
Like a triumphal garland faded.

(...)

He died... The great music's unforgotten strain  
ceased... and shall not resound on earth again.  
Grievous and narrow is the earthy shield  
He rests in, and his prophet's lips are sealed.

(...)

You, greedy crew that round the scepter crawl,  
Butchers of freedom, genius and renown!

(...)

And all your black blood will not wash away  
The godly lifeblood of the poet's heart!

I have quoted extensively from Lermontov's poem because it has been called upon by one Chinese poet to mourn another – who, as a matter of fact, was not killed for his poetry – and because it depicts a kind of Poet encountered in the work of many an Experimental poet. And the Poet in Duoduo's early work is perhaps most characteristically present in a poem with exactly the same title as Lermontov's.

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<sup>69</sup> The Chinese poet murdered (in May 1992, in the town of Chuzhou, Anhui Province) is Yue Bing, commemorated by Yang Chunguang. The Chinese title of Lermontov's poem as quoted by Yang (1992: 3) is *Shiren zhi si*. Yang does not give the source of the Chinese translation, but my notes from a visit to the Beijing Archives Library (Beijing banben tushu guan) show that PRC editions of Lermontov's work in Chinese came out as early as 1949 and were reprinted in great quantities in the 1980s. I quote from the English translation by C.E. l'Ami and A. Weliktony (who translate the poem's title as *The Poet's Death*) included in Kelly 1983: 201-203. On Lermontov and the poem under scrutiny, see Terras 1985: 248-250.

Duoduo's 1974 poem *Death of a Poet*<sup>70</sup> differs from Lermontov's poem in two ways. In the first place it lacks the indignant tone of the latter, which paints the Poet's death as an injustice. Secondly, while Lermontov presents his poem as the words of an enraged third party, in Duoduo's poem the Poet speaks solemnly and directly to the reader, at the moment of dying:

- it is time for me to die  
 the same soil, the same sky  
 together with me, all so quiet  
 oh, quiet, so quiet
- 5 as in a dream, the moonlight is noble and heartless  
 my thoughts must have ceased  
 and have no more power to thank this frivolous life  
 oh, quiet, so gently quiet  
 life lightly flies off, as a breeze of parting...
- 10 oh, quiet, so quiet  
 as in a dream, the moonlight is noble and heartless  
 at the same day's dusk, at the same day's dawn  
 can't hear the dirge, can't hear the bells  
 the soul's great door is solemnly closing
- 15 sending me off into the funeral procession taking life to wife  
 demanding that I return my talents of former days  
 oh, quiet, so eternally quiet  
 there is no answer, there is no echo  
 there is only the ghost's torch, lighting up my life...

But the most important difference with Lermontov's poem is that in Duoduo's poem the Poet remains a nondescript person. Lermontov's Poet is called gifted, a genius, a prophet, even godly, and set apart from ordinary human beings: he is unable to endure the shame of men's disdain. In Duoduo's poem someone is dying, taking leave of earthly existence and about to turn into a ghost, but it is unclear what distinction from Everyman's death warrants the poem's title. In other words, in what way is the Poet different from anyone else?

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<sup>70</sup> *Shiren zhi si*, Duoduo 1988a: 25-26. If little kinship can be established between Lermontov's and Duoduo's poems (see the discussion below), the title of the latter may still allude to the former. For this poem, that is of course more uncertain than for titles like *Doctor Zhivago*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Optimist's Daughter*, discussed in sections I and II of chapter six. It is more likely that two poets at different times in different places should independently produce the phrase *death of a poet* than that both should come up with one of the other three examples.

In the context of Duoduo's early work and of poems and opinions of not a few other Experimental poets, the answer is one begging the question: the Poet's very essence lies in being different and therefore the difference need not be specified or otherwise explained. The Poet is exceptional by nature and writes Poetry for that reason – that is, to express a fundamental difference. Taken to extremes, this view makes Poetry a by-product of Poethood.<sup>71</sup> One can essentially be a Poet without writing Poetry or if that is too bizarre, Poetry counts as no more than circumstantial evidence of Poethood.

Indeed, when the Poet appears in Duoduo's early work, it is usually unaccompanied by Poetry. In the 1973 poem *To the Sun*<sup>72</sup> (l. 4) the sun is said to

let the dogs go roaming, after the poet

The second stanza of *Marguerite's Travels with Me*<sup>73</sup> (1974) ends thus:

with me, your clownesque  
unfaithful lover  
go to the beach together  
to the nude beach  
to the coffee-colored beach that is the poet's  
to pace up and down, kiss, leave  
straw hats, a pipe, random thoughts behind...

A comparable Poet, partial to romance and not established decency, is at large in the first of two short prose poems from 1977 with the shared heading *Night*:<sup>74</sup>

Who says what the night feels like is false? Do you understand  
how the night works?

When lovers lie sobbing in each other's arms it is the night,  
only the night, that props up their faces. But I am drawing closer  
to the night and aiming at its heart. Right then my hands take away  
the covers and I lay bare the night's private life, caught in a hotel  
room. Not just the night, it's the poet, instead of the cat, sneaking  
across the roof. I have thrown stones at his back before, I can hear

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Yeh 1994b: 53.

<sup>72</sup> *Zhi taiyang*, Duoduo 1989a: 16 (l. 4).

<sup>73</sup> See chapter six: section I.

<sup>74</sup> *Ye*, Duoduo 1988a: 36-37.



his suppressed wailing, and I see with my own eyes how he makes  
the fur of his fat tail into a luxurious scarf for noblewomen.

None of these examples hint at what the Poet writes, at least not in a more revealing way than by the phrases *random thoughts*, *his suppressed wailing*, and *the fur of his fat tail*.

More is disclosed by the following two quotations, telling in spite of their abstractness. In the 1973 poem *Dusk*<sup>75</sup> (l. 3-4) the Poet is distinguished from ordinary people more explicitly than by association with dogs or cats:

the poet has convulsions, gives birth to  
beetle-like feelings of which no man knows

The phrase *feelings of which no Man knows*<sup>76</sup> brings to mind the image of the prophet, of a sensitive soul receptive to stimuli unnoticed by common men. Consistent with the idea of boundaries between Poets and others, in the final line of *The Poet*,<sup>77</sup> a short poem from 1973, Poetry is at the root of the Poet's failure to achieve anything at all and of low social status:

moonlight draped around me, I am held up to be a fragile emperor  
letting sentences surge up like swarms of bees  
seeking the right word on my youthful body  
they dig me up and contemplate me  
they make me get nowhere

*Craft*,<sup>78</sup> also from 1973, finds room for somewhat more concrete descriptions of Poetry. But it has a motto which warrants the suspicion of interference by Duoduo's 1973 idea of the Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva and her work, or by his idea of *her* image of the Poet and Poetry. Perhaps this is a minor problem, for the Poet in *Craft* resembles the one encountered elsewhere in Duoduo's early poems:

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<sup>75</sup> *Huanghun*, Duoduo 1989a: 13. *Dusk* is part of the series *All Things on Earth*. See chapter six: section I.

<sup>76</sup> There is a marked difference with the text included in Lao Mu 1985a (390): *the poet has convulsions, and like a beetle / gives birth to feelings of which no man knows*. But if in this version the Poet is more directly likened to a beetle, its offspring *feelings of which no man knows* is unchanged.

<sup>77</sup> *Shiren*, Duoduo 1989a: 11-12. *Poet* consists of two parts. Quoted here is part 1. The third person plural pronoun in l. 4 and 5 is a neuter form, and must refer to *sentences* (l. 2).

<sup>78</sup> *Shouyi*, Duoduo 1989a: 17.

- *After Marina Tsvetaeva*

I write poetry of youth fallen low  
 (I write unchaste poetry)  
 I write in a long narrow room  
 poetry raped by the poet  
 poetry thrown out into the streets by cafés  
 this indifferent  
 poetry of mine, no longer resentful  
 (a story in itself)  
 this poetry of mine that no one reads  
 is like the history of a story  
 this poetry of mine, pride lost  
 love lost  
 (this poetry of mine – nobility)  
 she will be taken to wife by a peasant  
 she is the days I left to lie waste...

Various elements of *Craft* can be seen to echo a Chinese translation of the Soviet writer Ilya Erenburg's 1956 preface to a collection of Tsvetaeva's poetry; the piece was included in a 1962 Chinese anthology – predictably "for internal distribution" – of Erenburg's writings on literature and art. It opens with the following quotation from a 1912 poem by Tsvetaeva, here for obvious reasons translated from the Chinese text:

I write poetry of youth and death,  
 – poetry that no one reads! –  
 poetry scattered in the dust in shops  
 (no one comes to take it away),  
 this poetry of mine, like precious wine  
 its time has come.

Two pages into the preface Erenburg quotes one of Tsvetaeva's 1920 poems, containing the recurrent phrase *I write* also found in Duoduo's 1973 poem:

I write on flagstones  
 I write on fan-shaped withered leaves  
 I write on river sand, I write on sea sand  
 – as if skating, as if rolling rings on glass,  
 I write on my hand, I write on the trunk of a birch tree  
 – to make everyone understand,  
 I write on the clouds, I write on the waves,

I write on the walls of the dovecot  
 (...)

Finally, Erenburg says Tsvetaeva well knew that

"(...) without technique, there is no inspiration (...)"

and comments on her high regard for the poetic craft. Recalling how she would time and again recite Karolina Pavlova's poems, praised by Tsvetaeva's contemporaries for their formal qualities, he goes on to note that *Craft* (*Remeslo*, rendered as *Shouyi* in the Chinese translation of Erenburg's preface) was the name Tsvetaeva gave to one of her books.<sup>79</sup>

The above passages by Tsvetaeva almost exclusively speak of the act of writing. Duoduo's *Craft* says something about what is written too: *of youth fallen low, unchaste, indifferent, no longer resentful*. But these epithets for Poetry seem to reflect the tragic story of Marina Tsvetaeva's life and her harsh judgment of herself as told in Erenburg's preface rather than, for instance, characteristics of Duoduo's work up to 1973. *Craft* is a tribute to Tsvetaeva; should that set it apart, it is still consistent with Duoduo's other early work in its portrayal of the Poet.

In the first few years of this oeuvre the Poet's difference from other people is a presupposition, or a self-fulfilling prophecy. What little can be learned of the Poet's expression from phrases like *feelings of which no Man knows* and *letting sentences surge up like swarms of bees* intimates that the Poet acts as an easily misunderstood medium imparting higher truths to the world of Man. The Poet is not necessarily a maker of Poetry, but its carrier or its messenger: a prophet of things divine. This view, widespread among Chinese Experimental poets to this day,<sup>80</sup> has implications for what may be surmised of the Poet's writings. For the Poet's difference from ordinary people involves a value judgment: it is closer to superiority than to inferiority. Consequently the Poet's Poetry cannot be nonsense, and is in the last analysis unlikely to bespeak a despicable morality. If it could accept a failure to get its message across by blaming the listener, the Poet's Poetry cannot admit to the

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<sup>79</sup> Erenburg 1982; quotes taken from 71, 73, 78. In 1982, the 1962 Chinese selection of his writings "for internal distribution" was published anew, in the original translation. According to its colophon, the 1982 book is a first edition, perhaps because two of Erenburg's eleven pieces included in the 1962 book were omitted. For Erenburg, Tsvetaeva and Pavlova, see Terras 1985: 129-130, 485-487, 334.

<sup>80</sup> And tallying with several extra-textual statements by Duoduo. A clear example from an interview by Cees Zoon (1989): "Writers, especially poets, are like soothsayers who see things coming on the basis of a gut feeling. (...) That way, the writer may end up at a remove from society, but that is in itself nothing strange."

impossibility of communication-by-language, much less to an intrinsic arbitrariness on its own part.

As it turns out, in Duoduo's later work Poetry does just those two things. There, poetical statements and remarks on Language point to a very different kind of Poetry than the Poet in Duoduo's early work may be expected to write. This reflects a development in which the focus shifts from Poethood to Poetry. While the Poet has all but disappeared in Duoduo's later work, it is in the mid-1980s and the early 1990s that Poetry becomes a topic, mostly by deduction from statements on Language.

*Remold* (1987); *Woman on a Winter Night* (1985); *Clown* (1984); *The Road Traveled* (1985); *Moving House* (1986); *Tombstone* (1986)

In section I of this chapter, on the basis of these opening lines:

with remolded tools remold language  
with remolded language  
continue to remold

the 1987 poem *Remold* was called poetry about poetry. The reason is obvious: remarks on Language, made in a poem, have a serious chance of becoming remarks on Poetry.

*Remold* highlights the ambition to revamp the poetic medium; in the last of six poems constituting the series *Woman on a Winter Night*,<sup>81</sup> written in 1985, the object of innovation seems to be the subject matter. A parade of images familiar in Duoduo's later work is followed by a sudden appearance of the Poet. But unlike Duoduo's early work, *Woman on a Winter Night* states what the Poet is supposed to do besides being a Poet:

in the depth of night, big shoes are all over the room  
after sleep has come, the desk lamp is catching fire  
when the new day shines, like a fan the sun starts fanning

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<sup>81</sup> *Dong ye nüren*, part F, Duoduo 1989a: 89. The series is also included in Duoduo 1988a: 69-73, there consisting of parts A-C, corresponding to B, E and F in the 1989 collection (and in Zhou 1986: 90-92, in parts A-B, corresponding to A and D in the 1989 edition but dated 1984). Differences between F in Duoduo 1989a and C in Duoduo 1988a are limited to typography, punctuation and stanza division, and irrelevant to the present discussion.

- and six months' worth of leaves begin to snow
- 5 lovely time has been eaten up by flowers  
 life is grass eaten up by horses  
 can't believe the fields are false  
 can't believe the truth is false
- 10 the sea may be a shoe once filled with sand  
 the dried fish, its mouth open wide, may be  
 a ship of three thousand years ago. is your life  
 in order? are you satisfied with yourself?
- 15 the fish has been fried, the dish is changing shape  
 the feathers on the man's body become ever more wicked  
 the wares in the shop of sorrow  
 I've looked enough at all of them
- 20 please, give me a new pair of hands. the poet  
 is meant to maintain  
 that which sorts out the stripes on the tiger's back:  
 that madness.

Apparently the Poet longs for something other than unhappiness to serve as raw material (l. 15-16). The Poet's craft is depicted as an anomaly – what is madness but being unlike the majority? – enabling its bearer to reflect on natural beauty (l. 17-20). The phrase *the poet is meant to...* (*shiren de yuanyi shi*) sketches the Poet as subject to higher powers, and not wholly in control – of Poetry.

In its final lines *Woman on a Winter Night* thus offers important poetical information. Furthermore, the image of the hands provides a clue for reading the 1984 poem *Clown*.<sup>82</sup> Without mentioning the Poet, Poetry or Language in so many words, *Clown* can be seen to contain poetical statements in keeping with the shift from the Poet in Duoduo's early work to Poetry in the later part of his oeuvre:

in the past I was a lovely clown  
 only playing what I didn't like  
 I played my own voice

with my hands on other people's ears, I'd say: listen

---

<sup>82</sup> *Choujue*, Duoduo 1988a: 57.

5        in the past I was a cunning hunter  
           and only liked to hunt my own feet

I was such a cunning hunter  
 I could hunt between my toes  
 and now? I see the past as a mistake

10       I've smeared that mistake all over my hands  
           my hands have rested on this spot and that  
           I want to throw my hands away

I want to go into a briefcase  
 and unless by being born

15       never come out again

just a tiny mouse, so much is clear  
 but always want to be a man carrying a hare by its ears  
 with big steps striding through the fields – that I want to be!

A reading of *Clown* as a poetical poem is triggered by and dependent on the interpretation of the hands (l. 10-12) as belonging to a craftsman that is the Poet. The protagonist, in the first person, is the Poet looking back and regretting the past (l. 9). Formerly, the Poet sang for an audience but at the same time prevented that audience from appreciating a performance which was perhaps self-infatuated (l. 1-8). Possible identification of the hunter-Poet in *Clown* with its author does not influence this reading. But it is interesting to note once more that *Clown* was written in 1984, right before the shift in focus from Poet to Poetry first becomes manifest in Duoduo's poems from the mid-1980s.

Three of those, one from 1985 and two from 1986, contain poetical statements which seem to apply specifically to Duoduo's later work, more directly than from the rather abstract and general positions taken in *Remold*, *Woman on a Winter Night* and *Clown*. The first is *The Road Traveled*<sup>83</sup> (1985), which presumably gave its title to the more extensive of Duoduo's two collections in Chinese to date.

The name of a book can be a poetical statement, certainly if that book turns out to include a poem of the same name, as do both of Duoduo's Chinese books of poetry. But it is my impression that neither *The Road Traveled* nor *Salute*<sup>84</sup> – title

<sup>83</sup> *Licheng*, Duoduo 1989a: 100.

<sup>84</sup> *Xingli*, Duoduo 1988a: 75-76.

poem of the other collection – is a crucial text for the appreciation of Duoduo's poetic oeuvre. It seems more likely that their titles became book titles because they were fit for the job. *Salute* can be taken as a salute to the reader; *The Road Traveled* is an appropriate name for a representative anthology. Still, the selection of these titles does display a consciousness of poethood and of books as a palpable expression thereof.

As in the discussion of *Woman on a Winter Night*, my commentary fails to establish coherence stretching from the poem's first line to its last, even though much of the imagery in *The Road Traveled* is again familiar:

a wide road attracts you in a first direction, with dizzying force  
 that is your point of departure. clouds envelop your head  
 and prepare to give you a job  
 that is your point of departure  
 5 that is your point of departure  
 when prison forces its character upon a city  
 bricks embrace you in the middle of the road  
 the yearly snow is your old jacket  
 but the sky is a blue university, always

10 the sky, a deathly pale sky  
 a sky whose face has just been twisted  
 agrees to your laughing. your beard  
 is hurriedly eating  
 when you chase the big tree crossing time  
 15 golden rats, gone through water, dream of you:  
 you are a wrinkled broad bean in raging winds  
 you are a chair, you belong to the sea  
 you must read anew, at the coast of mankind  
 to search yourself, on a journey to get to know yourself  
 20 the snow of the north is your way  
 the flesh on your shoulders is your food  
 oh traveler who will not look back  
 of all you find contemptible, not a thing will disappear

Some of the more puzzling jumps from one translated image to the next can be explained by the sound of the original: the Chinese words translated as *snow* and *university* (l. 8-9, *da xue* and *daxue*) differ only in the tone of their second syllable.

Seen from the present perspective, that of poetical statements, the poem's closing scene (l. 18-23) invites scrutiny. To read anew (*dushu* 'read', also means 'study') to find out who one really is, recalls the undertaking of remolding language to achieve one's own style (l. 19). The coast of mankind is an image for ex-centricity – that of

an autarkic explorer – and marginal social status, confirmed by the inconsequentiality of the traveler's stubborn views (l. 21-23). Originality, lonely spiritual wanderings and a calling as described in the poem's opening scene (l. 1-5) could all characterize a general image of the Poet, as in the poems discussed in this section so far. But crucially, *the snow of the north is your way* is a phrase remarking on Duoduo's Poetry, not on the Poet's.

Incidentally, *The Road Traveled* once more brings to mind the Chinese translation of Ilya Erenburg's preface to Marina Tsvetaeva's poetry. Erenburg mentions Tsvetaeva's 1921 collection *Versty* 'versts'; in Chinese it is rendered as *Licheng*, the title of Duoduo's 1985 poem and of his 1989 book of poetry.<sup>85</sup> In his closing words Erenburg describes what Tsvetaeva looked like and remembers how she would, while carrying on a conversation, appear to be listening to something else:

"(...) she was constantly encircled by the sounds of poetry, as if encircled by clouds."<sup>86</sup>

*Clouds envelop your head* in Duoduo's poem (l. 2) is similar to Erenburg's phrase. The Chinese words translated here as *encircled* and *envelop* are *baowei* and *bao zhu*; *bao*, the character they have in common, means 'wrap' or 'contain'. Reading Duoduo's poem as addressing Marina Tsvetaeva would be problematic because its protagonist has a beard (l. 12). But the Tsvetaeva connection as a whole hardly invalidates the poetical reading suggested above, especially in view of Duoduo's early tribute to her in *Craft*.

In a short poem from 1986, *Moving House*,<sup>87</sup> more of Duoduo's Poetry can be found – or of his Poethood, but with an emphasis on activities, not personality. *Moving House* is simpler and more narrative than most of Duoduo's later work, but it takes place in a well-known setting: that of earth in winter. There are other connections with the North, like the near-quotation of the phrase *earth begins to rumble and move* from *Voice of the North*<sup>88</sup> in *Moving House* (l. 8-9: the originals read *dadi ye longlong zoudong qi lai le* and *dadi de rou xiang jinzi yiyang doudong qi lai le*):

<sup>85</sup> Erenburg 1982: 74. In Terras 1985: 486 *Versty* is translated as *Mileposts*.

<sup>86</sup> Erenburg 1982: 81.

<sup>87</sup> *Banjia*, Duoduo 1989a: 114.

<sup>88</sup> See section IIIA of this chapter.



one winter afternoon, when mice were skating everywhere  
 I made up my mind to move house  
 I left the nails to idle  
 and loaded the sleigh with the picture frames  
 5 my writing-table I moved right into the fields  
 I hadn't noticed the horizon was filled with people  
 and their hands were the armrests of stretchers  
  
 they lifted something up – the flesh of the earth  
 began to tremble like gold, I hadn't noticed  
 10 that the trees all around were taking after me  
 and wearing black on their upper body  
 and that on their lower body, on their naked trunks  
 was written: forest for sale.

In the second stanza, the "humanization" of the trees is striking: having put on clothes, they can also be naked. In their nakedness and on display they are helpless, no matter who it is that offers them for sale. The protagonist seems sympathetic, like other narrators encountered in *Nature* in Duoduo's later work.<sup>89</sup> But in *Moving House*, the action by which the narrator identifies with Nature is also a poetical statement with clear reference to this oeuvre, not to an abstracted Poetry: *my writing-table I moved right into the fields*. By association with a famous text in the *Book of Songs*, the oldest extant collection of Chinese poetry (ca. seventh century B.C.), writing can then also be seen as a way out of an unjust socio-political reality, represented by the mice: if one's abode is besieged by rodents, that is an ominous sign of the times, casting doubt upon the ruler's virtue.<sup>90</sup>

The 1986 poem *Tombstone*<sup>91</sup> is a third text containing poetical information which seems specifically to apply to Duoduo's work:

in Scandinavia, reading, in pitch-black bright daylight  
 giant ice floes sweep the boundless sea  
 the heart is filled with winter's landscape  
 mighty are the memories you have to bear

<sup>89</sup> See section IIIA of this chapter.

<sup>90</sup> *Large Rats!* (*Shuo shu*). For the Chinese text and for James Legge's translation and commentary, see Legge 1983, vol. IV: 171-173. For an orthodox PRC interpretation, see Zhao 1980: 76-78.

<sup>91</sup> *Mubei*, Duoduo 1989a: 112 and 1988a: 81-82. The two versions show inconsequential differences in punctuation. I take *zhan* in l. 11 to be a misprint for *nian*, 'grind' or 'crush'.

5 listen closely to the snow's solemn steps on the roof  
 at nightfall, plowing and weeding by generations of men come to an end  
 hollow sunlight trades places with the silence in the lamps  
 tonight, people sympathize with death and laugh at the sound of crying:

10 thinking is that weak thing  
 thinkers are those weaker things

tidy syllables grind through the snow-covered wilds, like caterpillar tracks  
 twelve stupid birds drop to the ground in a state of shock  
 a century's worth of fools discuss their fright:  
 the picture of the fields is left lying outside a sheet of paper.

15 come out of the forest, old clothes draped around you, use  
 the broken fields to cover your face in angry shame –  
 you, king in a village, by yourself  
 demand your gloom speak

demand that of your answer.

If *Tombstone* might by itself appear fragmentary and "difficult", other parts of Duoduo's later oeuvre provide context. Again, the poem takes place in the North – *Scandinavia* is in Chinese a compound which literally translates as 'northern Europe' – with its regular stage props: winter, snow, the fields, different generations of people tilling the soil with their plows. As regards poeticality, relevant passages from *Tombstone* come across as descriptive, not as statements of intention like that in *Moving House*. The association of Poetry and Northern Nature is most obvious in the image of syllables grinding through the wilderness. That the fields, recurrent in Duoduo's work, are not on the paper can be read as Poetry's failure to represent reality: whence the Poet's angry shame. The interpretation of *you* as the Poet is strengthened by that pronoun's occurrence (l. 4) in the first stanza. Presumably, it is *you* who is reading (*dushu*, as in *The Road Traveled*) and whose feelings and memories seek expression (l. 3-4). In keeping with earlier hints at social insignificance (in *The Poet* and *The Road Traveled*), the Poet is called *king in a village*. In Chinese, the opposition is sharper because *king* is, literally, *king of a country*, and *village* and *king* rhyme (*cunzhuang li de guowang*). The answer in the poem's last line may tentatively be read as the Poet's writings. The Poet – while bound to fail – is encouraged to go on writing, as spokesman for subject matter which will not speak for itself.

*Characters* (1986); *The Manufacture of Language Comes from the Kitchen* (1984); *Keeping Silent* (1992); *Voice of the North* (1985); *Night of the North* (1985); *No More than One Allowed* (1992); *None* (1991)

The 1986 poem *Characters*<sup>92</sup> is not a typical example of Duoduo's later poetry. It is short, its wording is unambiguous, and it contains no exuberant imagery. In the context of Duoduo's oeuvre, *Characters* is like an aside. This role befits the poetical statement it almost inevitably becomes since the text entitled *Characters* is not a dictionary entry but a poem:

they are their own masters  
 crawling together  
 resisting their meaning  
 read them and they'll fight at close quarters  
 every morning I'm angry at these things  
 I hate the way they've been written up  
 they've simply been written by him

the dreams I have had  
 are gas that has leaked from his head  
 tranquility, such as seen after  
 one's last good tooth has been drawn,  
 trembles on his face  
 like a patient who forgot about a blood transfusion  
 he dashes out of the house  
 he has long since looked down upon himself.

There are two protagonists besides the characters: *he*, who writes them, and *I*, who reads them. *He*, the author of the characters and by implication of this and other poems, operates at night, in the other's dreams. In the mornings, *I* sizes up the damage done. During the day, *he* cannot stand the sight of himself – or really, *I* cannot stand the sight of *him*.

But more important than a Jekyll-and-Hyde distinction of non-Poet and Poet within one person is the uncontrollability of characters and words. Used by *him* – by the Poet, in Poetry – they forsake the rules which *I* goes by in dealing with them, making themselves unreliable partners.

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<sup>92</sup> Zi, Duoduo 1989a: 113. *Characters* is used in its meaning '(Chinese) script'.

In the first two lines of *The Manufacture of Language Comes from the Kitchen*,<sup>93</sup> written in 1984, language is contrasted with or at least made to reside in a different territory than the heart:

if the manufacture of language comes from the kitchen  
then the heart is the bedroom. (...)

Whether or not this couplet is taken as creating an opposition of reason and emotion – reason presupposing language and language failing to express emotion – the verdict passed on language in the poem's closing scene is clear:

(...) savage men, smoking cigarettes  
say nothing but press the walnut  
into the table-top. they say

all discussions  
should stop – while  
the horses around them are so quiet  
while they watch man's eyes...

In section II of this chapter – from another angle – I noted a parallel with *Keeping Silent* (1992), in which the human protagonist forbears from speaking while being

(...) stared at by the horse

as a representative of Nature. That poem emphatically presents language as an instrument of Man, of which only harm can be expected. As previously suggested, writing poetry may offer a painful, lonely way out of the "normal" use of language:

under the hand, on paper, there is this ordeal:

in search of something else than man.

But this elegant escape route leads nowhere, for why bother with language if not to address other human beings? The answer is as much of a paradox as the question:

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<sup>93</sup> Duoduo 1989a: 67. The word translated as *heart* is *neixin*, 'innermost being' or 'heart of hearts'.

writing is a way of keeping silent without saying nothing, or as Bei Dao once phrased it, poetry is a way to keep secrets.<sup>94</sup>

In section IIIA of this chapter, I opined that the 1985 poem *Voice of the North* is exemplary of various thematic aspects of Duoduo's later work. In its last four lines:

without feet or footsteps, earth  
begins to rumble and move  
all language  
will be shattered by a wordless voice!

language represents Man, like the voices of the dead in the preceding passage. The opposition of language and Nature is that of Man and Nature narrowed down. In *Voice of the North*, the conflicting interests of the two result in a decided victory of Nature over Man, or, in the present context, of reality over language.

But such is not always the outcome of the conflict. *Night of the North*,<sup>95</sup> also from 1985, contains this aphoristic line (l. 14):

language begins, but life leaves

Here, reality is not represented by language but replaced by it: the two cannot coexist.

A similar observation, in which language literally kills the thing it professes – and fails – to represent, is made in the conclusion to the 1992 poem *No More than One Allowed*:

every word is a bird with its head crushed  
and the sea keeps overflowing from a shattered jar...

In section IV of this chapter I quoted from *None*<sup>96</sup> (1991) and suggested that the poem's first one-third allows various readings, one of which makes the second "pair" of stanzas a poetical statement. Here is *None* in its entirety:

<sup>94</sup> During a public interview by the Dutch writer Willem van Toorn, in October 1989 in the Amsterdam theater De Balie.

<sup>95</sup> See also section IIIA of this chapter.

<sup>96</sup> *Mei you, Today* 1992 # 2: 143-144. The original is included in APPENDIX B (323-324). Unfortunately, the strict division in stanzas of the manuscript has not been adhered to in the published text. Stanza divisions between l. 4 and 5, 11 and 12, 12 and 13 have been omitted. *Zhe* in l. 23 should be *guo*, a particle locating the preceding action in the past.

there is no one bidding me farewell  
 there is no one bidding anyone farewell  
 there is no one bidding the dead farewell, when this morning begins

there is no limit to it

except for language, facing the limits where the soil is lost  
 except for the tulip's blossoming flesh, facing a window not closed at night  
 except for my window, facing language I no longer understand

there is no language

only the light that never stops to torture, to torture  
 the saw that never stops pulling back and forth across the dawn  
 only the tulip that is restless, until it is restless no more

there is no tulip

only the light, bogged down in the dawn  
 starlight, sprinkled in the speeding train's luggage compartment, fast asleep  
 the last light flows down from infants' faces

there is no light

I cleave meat with an axe, I hear the herdsman's scream at dawn  
 I open the window, I hear light and ice shout at one another  
 it is their shout which makes shackles of fog fall apart

there is no shout

only the soil  
 only the soil and those who carry millet know  
 only at midnight calls the bird that has seen the dawn

there is no dawn

Uttered in a poem, the phrase *there is no language* has evident poetical qualities. It stresses both the powerlessness and the power of the Poet in the face of the poetic medium, for it is through language that language is negated and denied. In its skepticism with regard to language, *None* goes one step further than *No More than One Allowed*. In *No More than One Allowed* a word for a thing implies – or causes – the death of that thing, but in *None* a word for a thing implies – or causes – the absence, even the non-existence of that thing. Language has here come to exclude

reality; this rule is applied five times. The principle on which the poem is built will destroy it as soon as it is read, like a technical device promising its unauthorized user to explode at the count of ten.

And yet *None* was meant to be read: it was written, and published. If one can disregard its outline of the limits of language, if its reader will not let *None* destroy itself, and still believes that poetry is possible and language can represent reality – then this poem comes across as an attempt to erase reality, specifically aspects of reality often encountered in Duoduo's later work. Read as such, *None* expresses an existential disillusionment, so chilling as to be beyond despair.

*The Closed Direction and The Unclosable Direction* (1994)

Duoduo's last poem held to the light in this book was written in 1994. It is called *The Closed Direction*, but it is also called *The Unclosable Direction*.<sup>97</sup> At first glance this poem is two poems, but it really makes more sense to say that these two poems are one poem. It is feasible and enjoyable to read either one (half) by itself but once one has read both (halves), it is impossible to reflect upon one without involving the other. This is not intertextuality detectable only to one who knows the rest of Duoduo's oeuvre: *The Closed Direction* and *The Unclosable Direction* were published together, in the same issue of *Today*. In the light of their combined coherence, it is all the more disastrous that of all poems this poem had to fall victim to the misprint to end all misprints: its two halves were printed in reverse order.

This statement is based on the poem's manuscript version and borne out by its internal logic. *The Unclosable Direction* is a sequel to *The Closed Direction*, and it would be difficult to argue that it is the other way around. This is not just a matter of chronology in the poem's story. In narrated time *The Unclosable Direction* takes place after *The Closed Direction*, but that need not determine the order in which the two are read. It is a prerogative of the literary narrator to tell first things last and *vice versa* – but such arrangements must be justified by a perceptible effect or, at least, understandable motives, for instance that hindsight and foreknowledge add to the flavor of the text's respective parts. Although there are no standards for grading the flavor of a poem, in this case there are good grounds for first reading *The Closed Direction* and then reading *The Unclosable Direction* – or, even better, for

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<sup>97</sup> *Suo zhu de fangxiang*, *Suo bu zhu de fangxiang* respectively, printed in reverse order in *Today* 1994 # 2: 110-113. In the manuscript version, l. 32 of *Suo bu zhu de fangxiang* has *bing* 'ice', where the published text has *shui* 'water'.

bouncing back and forth between the two on facing pages, but definitely with *The Closed Direction* on the left page and *The Unclosable Direction* on the right.

Both halves of the poem have 36 lines, in stanzas of irregular length, but the irregularity of lines and stanzas is the same for both halves. Not only that: while no two lines in both halves are identical, each line in *The Unclosable Direction* echoes its predecessor in *The Closed Direction* by repeating it but replacing one or more constituents. This continued parallelism is the more striking because its every instance bridges the space between two texts, not that between two lines in one text. It calls for zigzag reading, as advertized above.

Below, the focus is first on the poem's last three stanzas, or to be more exact, on the last three stanzas of both of its halves. These passages (l. 24-36 & 24-36) give the reader an impression of this remarkable text, albeit an incomplete one. The occurrence of the word *word* helped motivate their quotation in this section. From *The Closed Direction*:

a chicken, frozen inside the fridge, longing  
 two raisins, clinging to the roast leg of lamb, longing  
 from unpredictable weather  
 from the dripping sound which lures the boy into taking a pee  
 from low fat milk  
 from the last operation  
 longing, together with golden sand, once again hurls itself into the storm

rising from sweat glands of smoked meat from violent armpits, the storm

when drift ice in a pregnant woman's posture goes on floating  
 longing is the only word they leave behind  
 when your soaring buttocks open up the closed direction  
 with their naked flesh prevent the long night from passing  
 the word they leave behind is semen penetrating concrete –

and from *The Unclosable Direction*:

a chicken, frozen inside the fridge, awakening  
 two raisins, clinging to the roast leg of lamb, awakening  
 from predicted weather  
 from the dripping sound which inhibits the boy from taking a pee  
 from low fat sperm  
 from an uncompletable operation  
 awakening, together with golden sand, once again hurls itself into the storm

sputured from the shower's spurting head, the storm



when a pregnant woman in drift-ice posture goes on floating  
 floating is the last word they leave behind  
 when your soaring buttocks close the unclosable direction  
 with their naked frankness confess that the long night passes  
 the semen they leave behind is a word masoned to death in concrete.

The punctuation of the respective final lines is one of many clues indicating the order in which they are to be read. Where *The Closed Direction* has a dash, *The Unclosable Direction* has a full stop. The imagery in the two lines, the word as semen and semen as a word, recalls the opposition of reality and language in other poems discussed in this section. The word as semen has the power of procreation. But this hopeful standpoint is rescinded when in this line's opposite number, semen is called a word masoned to death – a somber statement in keeping with earlier observations on Language and, by deduction, on Poetry.

Although the word may be semen, semen is but a word: again, an image is stripped of its powers within the space of the poem. The following example (l. 18 & 18) is even more directly reminiscent of mechanisms at work in *None*:

only the dead man has a soul

versus

even the dead man no longer has a soul

Once more the principle on which the poem is built holds an important message. This time, the "meta-message" is not self-negation or self-denial, but a disturbing arbitrariness. Together, *The Closed Direction* and *The Unclosable Direction* seem to contradict what I called the intensity of Duoduo's later work in the introductory remarks to this chapter. The point of this poem's format is that a poem is indeed alterable, that it could have been a different poem. As such it undermines its own *raison d'être*, whatever that may be. The said contradiction would not allow me to call this poem intense, but fortunately there is an easy solution: *The Unclosable Direction* could not have differed from *The Closed Direction* in a truly arbitrary manner and have produced the same effect when shoulder to shoulder with it. These two poems are really one poem, whose two halves are no more interchangeable than those of a soccer game. If this appears to be stating the obvious, it may be necessary to do so because that one poem itself conjures up the paradox: this is it, but it may be that, too.

In Duoduo's early work the reader encounters a Poet found in much other Chinese Experimental poetry to date: someone unlike other men and slightly self-obsessed. The Poet's essential difference is constituted by extraordinary sensitivity and vision. Little is revealed of the Poet's Poetry, but one would imagine it as the product of a superior mind and heart, expressing intellectual and moral truths. In the mid-1980s and the early 1990s Poetry and Language make their advent as subject matter and themes. The topic of the Poet's personality is replaced by poetical statements, general and abstract views as well as specific reflections on this oeuvre. Language and Poetry in Duoduo's later work turn out to be incompatible with the Poet in his early work. Language is uncontrollable and unreliable for representing reality, and by implication unfit for communicating with other people. In Duoduo's poetry, one way out of the problem is to say that nothing can be said; another, to say that nothing must be said; a third, to say that nothing has been said; a fourth, to say that something else could have been said.

## Chapter eight

### RECEPTION

This chapter charts published receptions of Duoduo's poetry to date. The reception of his other writings is outside the scope of this inventory. I divide receptions of Duoduo's poetry into those by Chinese readers and those by other readers. Within the second category, I distinguish translations and commentaries. Further ramifications are given as sources are discussed.

Relevant materials accumulated over the years, through my endeavors at strategic reading and the invaluable help of others. But barring superhuman expenditure of brute force – simply read Everything – there is no way of ensuring complete coverage of the sources. It is unlikely that all published receptions of Duoduo's poetry to date have come to my attention, and of the ones that have, not a few are in languages of which I have too little command to review them.

The best generals are those in armchairs. I realize that criticism is secondary to and may be easier than creation, and that this truism also applies to criticism of criticism and of translation. If I was aware of others' receptions of Duoduo's work, I tried to set them aside when writing the preceding two chapters. Strictly speaking that is impossible. In trying I was motivated by a desire for originality and coherence, and by the conviction that my commentaries were not primarily a response to others'. Had there been long rows of books on the subject, blinkering myself in this way would have been harder.

As it happened there were not. Serious receptions of Duoduo's poetry were few in number and fairly recent. During my research and the writing of this book I saved them up for this chapter. Below is my impression of the *status questionis*.

#### RECEPTIONS BY CHINESE READERS

##### *Publication Data: Inclusion in Anthologies*

Publication data provide information about the reception of an oeuvre, so another look at Duoduo's publication history is in order.<sup>1</sup>

I will not guess at Duoduo's and editors' reasons for their selections from his oeuvre for magazines and anthologies, or for Duoduo's individual collections. Their decisions prove no more than that under certain circumstances, someone considered

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<sup>1</sup> See also chapter four: POETHOOD, RECOGNITION, PROMINENCE and the bibliography: POETRY BY DUODUO.

certain texts fit for publication. With regard to publishing in the PRC, one must further reckon with an extra-literary factor whose role it is equally difficult to prove and to deny: politics, in the form of repressive censorship or of self-censorship in order to avoid repression.

Still, publication data are of interest because they shed light on processes of recognition and canonization; in this case also because they highlight a special function of poetry anthologies – i.e. books including selections from several authors' oeuvres – in China. Whereas in, say, Holland a poet usually publishes in anthologies *after* one or more individual books of poetry have appeared, in China it is the other way around. I know of no recognized Experimental poet who qualifies as an exception to this rule. In the PRC anthologies are easier to publish than individual collections; anthologies are not just books representing oeuvres and indicating trends through their authors' most famous or typical pieces, but also primary channels for *first* publication.

This is as true for Duoduo as it is for other Experimental poets. The first major publication of his poetry, fifty pages covering the years from 1972 to 1984, was in Lao Mu's 1985 *New Tide Poetry*. Officially, the book was "for internal distribution". In fact it was – and is – widely read. In 1986 Duoduo presented poetry readers with an update on his art when he contributed to *Sixteen Young Modern Poets from Beijing*, edited by Zhou Guoqiang: three poems dated 1984 and eight dated 1985. Next, the 1988 anthologies *First Line: First Anniversary Collection* and *Overview of Groups in Modern Chinese Poetry 1986-1988* each contained three new poems, from 1985, 1987 and 1988. Since 1980 magazines had occasionally featured Duoduo's poetry too, but by far the greater part of what he published first appeared in anthologies, the above-mentioned and others.<sup>2</sup> In 1989 his official and unofficial individual collections *Salute* and *The Road Traveled* came out at last. Since 1990 he has published his poetry exclusively in the new *Today*,<sup>3</sup> both unpublished poems from the 1980s and work written from 1989 onward. For Duoduo *Today* has taken over the anthologies' erstwhile function as a channel for first publication.

Another function of anthologies, in which they do resemble their Western counterparts, is that of a channel for re-publication and canonization. In this capacity Chinese anthologies of Experimental poetry tend to echo one another. As long as no

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<sup>2</sup> The above-mentioned anthologies are Lao Mu 1985a; Zhou 1986; Yi hang 1988; Xu, Meng, Cao & Lü 1988.

<sup>3</sup> *The House Where One Is Processed* (*Bei jiagong de fangzi*) and *Do You Like the Fields with Their Jingling Sound* (*Ni ai zhe dingdang zuo xiang de tianye ma*), two poems included in *Walan & Wen* 1990: 171-172, are the only exceptions. Presumably Duoduo gave them to the anthology's editors before *Today* had been reestablished. The two poems appear without dates. Duoduo mentioned 1987 or 1988 as their year of composition (personal communication, March 1995).

individual collections are available that stands to reason, although it is not impossible or unheard of for an editor to contact an author directly and ask for poems hitherto unpublished. Once individual collections have appeared, anthologizers' unanimity becomes a sign of their poor distribution, or of the rigidity of the literary canon. This, too, holds for Duoduo's poetry as much as for anyone else's: selections from his oeuvre in other anthologies than the four mentioned display conformity to the examples set in 1985 and 1986 by Lao Mu and Zhou Guoqi. Some editors clearly select from selections, not from oeuvres. This appears to be the case, for example, for all three "appreciation dictionaries" reviewed below.

*Commentaries in "Appreciation Dictionaries"*

Duoduo's breakthrough came later than it did for other poets of his generation: it must be situated in the second half of the 1980s, earlier magazine publications notwithstanding.<sup>4</sup> After substantial contributions to Lao Mu's and Zhou's anthologies in 1985 and 1986, in 1987 Duoduo won the poetry award of the annual Beijing University Arts Festival. In a 1988 article on trends in contemporary poetry Yu Cijiang mentions him in the same breath with Jiang He, Bei Dao, Mang Ke and Gu Cheng as one of the "poets around *Today*",<sup>5</sup> an erroneous description but indicative of Duoduo's incipient canonization. Later that year he was given the Today Poetry Award, enabling him to publish his collection *The Road Traveled* in the spring of 1989. His gradual recognition in the late 1980s reached a peak with the dedication printed in that book:

"From the early 1970s until this day Duoduo, lonely and indefatigable, has made artistic explorations, encouraging and influencing many of his contemporaries all the while. Through his knowledge of suffering and his introspection on individual life, he has laid bare the ordeal of mankind's existence; through a near-crazy challenging of culture and language, he has enriched the meaning of contemporary poetry and its power of expression."

These words constitute a reception of Duoduo's poetry by fellow members of the unofficial circuit. Highfalutin as they are, they do touch on a number of aspects which return in other commentaries on his work: his solitary poethood, the painful atmosphere exuded by his work, its individuality and its idiosyncracies in imagery

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<sup>4</sup> See chapter four: POETHOOD, RECOGNITION, PROMINENCE.

<sup>5</sup> Yu 1988: 483.

and diction. While some items on this list are indispensable for felicitations of any Poet Laureate, Duoduo has elsewhere been singled out for praise in similar terms.<sup>6</sup>

The first serious Chinese review of Duoduo's poetry is by Chen Chao, in his 1989 *Dictionary for the Appreciation of Chinese Exploratory Poetry*; the "appreciation dictionary" genre is one of anthologies in which primary texts are accompanied by literary criticism of one kind or another. Chen's is an extensive anthology of twentieth-century Chinese poetry, especially well furnished with Obscure and Newborn poetry. By contrast with the suffocating dogma in official criticism of only a decade earlier, Chen's preface, dated early 1988, is unrestrained and non-political. In defense of both modern poetry and his own single-handed selection and commentaries, Chen pleads for individuality on the part of author and reader alike. Unfortunately Chen tends to present his interpretations of Duoduo's work as self-evident, with abstractions like "profundity" as escape routes when arguments are in short supply. In reviews of *Sea of the North* (1984), *Farewell* (1985), *Horse* (1985), *Spring Dance* (1985), and *The Sky on a Winter Night* (1985), he notes the major role of imagery in Duoduo's work and the personal nature of the symbols used.<sup>7</sup>

Another "appreciation dictionary" on an ambitious scale is the *Dictionary for the Appreciation of Obscure Poetry from the Past and the Present, from China and Abroad*, edited by Xu Rongjie and Xu Ruiyue and published in 1990. It includes Duoduo's *To the Sun* (1973) and *The Window That Likes to Weep* (1983), with reviews by Shao Yingwu. Commenting on the latter poem, Shao notes the opposition of the pursuit of peace and quiet in the poet's soul on the one hand and the abrupt advent of spring revitalizing the poet on the other. As regards *To the Sun*, Shao contends that the sun became an "eternal theme" for poetry after the Chinese poet Qu Yuan had chosen to sing of it in the third century B.C. This Chinese annexation of the sun is all the more eyebrow-raising in a book whose colophon proudly announces the inclusion of 120 foreign Obscure poems – a fourth category after the first three of "classical Obscure", "modern Obscure" and "contemporary Obscure" poems. The "obscurity" in this anthology is problematic because that word has become inseparably linked to a specific kind of poetry, which is from the present

<sup>6</sup> Beiling & Meng 1989, part 2: 92. Beiling and Meng Lang fail to motivate their eulogy of Duoduo. *Nota bene*: the article is dated 1986, and on the basis of its contents there is no reason to suspect that it was antedated. See chapter three: FOREIGN ATTENTION.

<sup>7</sup> Chen 1989: 208-218. *Beifang de hai, Gaobie, Ma, Chun zhi wu, Dongye de tiankong* (incorrectly cited as *Dongtian de tiankong*). For Duoduo's poetry, Chen's book appears to have Zhou 1986 as its only source. *Farewell* and *Horse* are different texts than the ones from 1972 and 1984 commented on in chapters six and seven of this book. As is true of the next two "appreciation dictionaries" discussed, no dates accompany the poems in Chen 1989.

and from China. And if Duoduo is an obscure or Obscure poet, *To the Sun* is not one of his obscure or Obscure poems.<sup>8</sup>

The third of the "dictionaries" containing poems by Duoduo is that edited by Wang Bin, originally scheduled for publication in the fall of 1991, banned before reaching the bookshops but in limited circulation since roughly 1993. Wang's *Dictionary for the Appreciation of Twentieth-Century New Chinese Poetry* is a most impressive collection. In almost 1500 pages, it includes poems by and minimal biographical data on 443 authors, from Hu Shi (1891-1962), the godfather of New Poetry, to Haizi (1964-1989), the martyr of Newborn Poetry. Its structure would have gained in clarity if the division into categories given in its preface and afterword – Modernist, Symbolist, Taiwanese, Socialist Realist, Obscure, Newborn – had been reflected in the table of contents and in the layout of the main text. The commentaries accompanying Duoduo's poems are by Wang Jiaxin and two others both named Xiaodu, albeit with different characters and tones; the latter two can be reduced to one well-known critic, Tang Xiaodu. In his remarks on *Smoke Curls Upward from the Muzzle of Dawn* (1983) and *Skill* (1985), Wang Jiaxin notes Duoduo's innovative streak, manifest in his contempt for conventions and established "literary diction". The irrationality of Duoduo's poetry and its refusal to yield logical conclusions are said to call the reader's attention to the texture of its language *per se*. In his review of *Horse* (1985), the first Xiaodu is reminded of an anonymous narrative poem from the Han dynasty (206 B.C. – A.D. 220), *Mulberry along the Lane*.<sup>9</sup> He also chides the poet for making it too obvious what the horse symbolizes, which leaves this non-Chinese reader in awe and wonder. The second Xiaodu, reviewing *The Sky on a Winter Night* (1985), plays on the similarity of this dream-like poem to the dream it tells of.<sup>10</sup>

### *Commentaries in Histories of Literature*

Besides the status of being an entry in "appreciation dictionaries", Duoduo's poetry has in recent years also secured its place in histories of PRC literature. Below are three examples, all from books published in 1993.

<sup>8</sup> Xu & Xu 1990: 448-450. *Zhi taiyang, Aihao kuqi de chuanguhu*. Comparison of different editions of the two poems points to Lao Mu 1985a as the source for this anthology.

<sup>9</sup> *Mo shang sang*, thus translated by Joseph R. Allen (1992: 210-211). For the Chinese original, see Guo 1979, vol. 2: 410-411.

<sup>10</sup> Wang 1991: 910-917. *Liming de qiangkou yuyan niaoniao, Ji, Ma, Dong ye de tiankong*. For this anthology, Duoduo's poems appear to have been provided by both Lao Mu 1985a and Zhou 1986. On the book's history, see also chapter three: THE POETRY SCENE, *After June Fourth: Inside China*.



In *Underground Literature in the Cultural Revolution*, Yang Jian points out the shrill contrast between Political Lyricism and what he calls a "poetry of rebellion". He presents the latter as a direct consequence of the educated city youths' experiences during the Cultural Revolution – it is characterized by disbelief, doubt, and denial. "Poems of rebellion" tend to be short and are not overly concerned with the fate of China. After quoting from Mang Ke's work, Yang Jian moves on to

"poems whose very words [*huayu benshen*] contain rebellion in themselves, (...) which seem unbridled, their every word and line opaque and hard to interpret, but sharp as drilling rods, such as the writings of the 'Baiyangdian School of Poetry'. This was a strongly Modernist poetry, to which the Young Intellectuals sent down to Baiyangdian and nurtured by the salons in the city gave birth."

As examples Yang cites Duoduo's untitled poem *There is a class...* (1974) and Genzi's *The Month of March and the End*. Next, commenting on the 1985 poem *The Road Traveled*, he states that some of Duoduo's poems must be decoded before they can be understood, but that the imagery pieced together in them is both enticing and peculiar. Finally, Yang calls *The Sky on a Winter Night* (1985) a "weird" poem. As an account of some of the better-known origins of Obscure poetry, Yang's re-arrangement of history is dubitable. In the lives of the poets quoted, including their literary development, Baiyangdian came before Beijing salon life. Moreover, Yang fails to note the crucial role of foreign literature, and simplistically traces Modernist tendencies to disgust with PRC orthodoxy. All the same, his brief comments on Duoduo's work are sensible enough. Yang finds Duoduo's art attractive but difficult.<sup>11</sup>

Wang Guangming's *Pointing the Way under Difficult Circumstances: "New Tide Poetry" and Modern Chinese Poetry of the Twentieth Century* is an elaborate history of Experimental poetry. The book is well written, and indicative of the regime's relative tolerance for ideologically unsound criticism since roughly 1992. Wang's discussions of the controversy over Obscure poetry, of the relationship between Obscure and Newborn poetry, and of some conspicuous currents in the unofficial circuit are especially worthwhile. As for individual poets, he is most knowledgeable on Shu Ting's work, but in the course of his book he touches on a long list of other authors too – with the almost proverbial exception of Mang Ke, whose refusal to

<sup>11</sup> Yang 1993: 163-166; quote taken from 164-165. The title of this section: *Poetry of Rebellion and Rebellion of Poetry*, bears a striking resemblance to that of Jiangjiang's (1990) review of Duoduo's poetry: *Banishment of Poetry and Poetry of Banishment*. A substantial part of Yang's earlier chapter (101-112) on "Baiyangdian" and Xu Haoyuan's salon has been taken from Duoduo 1988b.



become part of the official circuit should not make him less visible to scholars of Experimental poetry, but does. In his commentaries on Duoduo's work, Wang more than once combines original observations with unacknowledged borrowing, mostly from a 1990 article by Jiangjiang discussed below. Wang's most interesting comments are made in connection with *The Road Traveled* (1985) and *One Story Contains All of His Past* (1983). He cites the former as an example of the difference between Chinese and Western Modernism, also upheld by Establishment critics in the early 1980s:

"While aware of the emptiness of existence, [Chinese Modernist poetry] does not deny the reality of individual life or lead to nihilism on the part of the subject. This is a fundamental tendency in New Tide Poetry, which helps constitute its distinction from Western Modernism."

Wang invokes the opening lines of the latter poem to support his defensible claim that in much New Tide Poetry, writing is still a code for the expression of – heterodox? – wisdom or social commentary. Apart from these two poems, Wang mentions *The Crocodile Market* (1982), *The Manufacture of Language Comes from the Kitchen* (1984), *Voice of the North* (1985) and *Teachings* (1976).<sup>12</sup>

A more heavyweight literary history is Hong Zicheng and Liu Denghan's *History of Contemporary New Chinese Poetry*. Hong and Liu's study has a wider range than Wang Guangming's: it is in three parts, covering the 1950s through the mid-1970s, the late 1970s and the 1980s, and Taiwanese poetry. While in Wang's book, pre-Cultural Revolution poetry is discussed as a prelude to the rise of Experimental poetry, for Hong and Liu orthodoxy in the 1950s and 1960s constitutes a topic in its own right. This results in an informative and lucid treatment of Political Lyricism. The following quotation, on the Tiananmen Poems, concludes the book's first part. It shows that Maoist literary doctrine has been overturned after fifty years, and that new beliefs can openly be professed in a mainstream official publication by the prestigious People's Publishing House:<sup>13</sup>

"(...) if one assumed that, because of their tremendous political impact, [the Tiananmen Poems] could on the artistic level also provide a model for our poetry, this point of view would in its

<sup>12</sup> Wang (Guangming) 1993: 57, 84-85, 87, 99, 214-215; quote taken from 84.

<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that all restrictions have been lifted. Cf. the apparent compromise determining Bei Dao's appearances in Hong and Liu's study, described in chapter three: *THE POETRY SCENE, After June Fourth: Inside China*.

replacement of art by politics still be debatable. Not only would the pursuit of such views fail to contribute to the development of the art of poetry; on the contrary, it might in fact hinder the development of that art."

Hong and Liu comment on Duoduo's poetry only once. After mentioning American Beat Literature's influence on Chinese Experimental poetry as it emerged in the 1970s, they claim that

"(...) there is a clear difference, too. The youths in *On the Road* and *The Catcher in the Rye* flee from the hypocritical adult world, resisting "tradition" and rebelling against it through jazz, sex, narcotics, [the sensation of] speed and mysticism; these Chinese youths, on the other hand, protested against contemporary political reality through an idealist [wish] to build a life of true value."

Again, a careful distinction between Western and Chinese Modernism is made. As evidence Hong and Liu present Duoduo's early poem *Marguerite's Travels with Me* (1974), with its return to the hard lot of the Chinese after a voyage through a foreign dream world. A practical explanation of the Chinese youths' failure to truly set foot "on the road" is offered by Chinese political reality:

"For one thing, they could not really go roaming; and even if their souls were free and unfettered, they did not get very far either. The heavy reality of China made their thoughts and feelings come to a halt after one or two steps outward; in the end, they would return to China's guiltless but miserable soil. Their poetry, with its Modernist hues, harbored a deeper romanticism and idealist passion."<sup>14</sup>

The above receptions of Duoduo's poetry by Chinese readers from the PRC warrant some tentative generalization. From the 1940s through the 1970s PRC literature and literary criticism were made into means to political ends, and the only "correct" reading of a text was a political reading in keeping with prevailing ideology. In the late 1980s and early 1990s it had become possible to comment on Experimental poetry without even paying lip service to class consciousness, class struggle and all that. But aside from healthy effects, the collapse of long-standing, deadening rules for creation and reception and the influx of foreign examples seem to have brought

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<sup>14</sup> Hong & Liu 1993: 405-406; quotes taken from 234, 405, 406.

in their wake something of a free-for-all. Quantitatively, poets' and critics' production since the second half of the 1980s is amazing, but it is frequently unclear what other logic has replaced the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist logic of orthodoxy. PRC critics afford high degrees of abstraction and a resulting vagueness, as well as a serious lack of intersubjectivity: close reading is practiced rather loosely.

### *Commentaries in Magazines*

Not only Chinese poets see the Poet as an extraordinary person and Poetry as the expression of intellectual and moral truths; these views are widespread among Chinese critics too.<sup>15</sup> This brings me to a 1991 review by Zhang Yuanshan of the 1990 anthology *Works by First Line Poets*. While his piece does not contain any in-depth treatment of poems by Duoduo, Zhang uses a number of quotes from *The House Where One Is Processed* (ca. 1987-1988) and *Night of the North* (1985) in a bizarre collage with lines by other poets to show the Poet's singular, glorious loneliness. In Zhang's world the tragic hero's range of activities extends beyond the realm of art into that of chauvinist politics, as in this enthusiastic passage:

"Anyone whose conscience has not disappeared, whether or not you are Chinese, in the face of these poems made of life, blood and tears that reflect the love of our country – can you keep yourself from trembling? Yes, the love of our country! Unreserved and at the risk of everything, the love of our country!! Determined, solemn and stirring, the love of our country!!! If the classics of loving our country speak of heartfelt love for our nation's [*minzu*] culture, then I daresay that in this day, any Chinese picking up the pen to write poetry is imbued with the love of our country. To be sure, he is the same as common men, prone to human emotions and longing for 'a life of joy'; but the Poet is called Poet because when joy is unattainable, he will strive for suffering instead, and not for numbness – as does the common man.

Therefore, though no one tells them what to write and as if by prior consent, the Poets have collectively created a dirge for Chinese civilization (...)"

Presumably the collectiveness of the Poets' undertaking justifies quoting them without context, or in the context of oeuvres differing sharply from their own. Even

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<sup>15</sup> See chapter three: THE POETRY SCENE; chapter seven: section V; Yeh 1991a: ch. II.

so and bearing in mind that love cannot be equated with orthodox glorification, "the love of our country" is nowhere to be found in Duoduo's poems included in the said collection, or in any of his other works.<sup>16</sup>

Zhang Yuanshan's article appeared in *First Line*. While it is hard to imagine a Chinese Establishment publication featuring Duoduo's poetry for a eulogy of patriotism, one would not expect a privately run, New York-based magazine of Experimental poetry to do so either – although here patriotism would be the problem, not Duoduo. Then again, *First Line* is not as politically defined as the new *Today*. Suffice it to note the different circumstances under which Chinese critics inside and outside the PRC operate. Seen in that light, the next reception to be discussed here is especially interesting.

In an article called "Banishment of Poetry and Poetry of Banishment", published in 1990 in *Today*, Jiangjiang (pseudonym of Yu Cijiang) does not politicize Duoduo's work by, for instance, pitting it against Establishment literature as the product of a dissident. True enough, the political situation resounds in Jiangjiang's use of *banishment*, but his review seems inspired by Duoduo's poems more than by their author's personal history.<sup>17</sup>

Jiangjiang begins with remarks on Duoduo's position in contemporary Chinese poetry. While Duoduo's poems have since the 1970s constituted a remarkable phenomenon, they went unnoticed for many years. Even his eventual triumph in the unofficial circuit, when in 1988 he was given the Today Poetry Award, is not known to many. Indeed, at the time of writing, in 1990, Duoduo has not been given due recognition by any critic. This lack of "success" is a first instance of – self-imposed – banishment. A possible reason is Duoduo's consistent silence outside of his texts: he has never elucidated or otherwise advertized his work. Also, Chinese readers arguably had limited vision, especially in the first years after the Cultural Revolution, and most of Duoduo's poems were not clear indictments of the system such as Bei Dao's or Shu Ting's. Next, Duoduo's is a singular language. A final reason for Duoduo's being overlooked by readers and critics, as simple as it is convincing, lies in the mechanisms of canonization: fame makes fame the way money makes money, but shaking off obscurity – here the antonym of fame, not of clarity – is difficult.

In the second section of his review Jiangjiang interprets Duoduo's poetry. In the process he cites too many poems to be listed here, often by merely quoting their titles, and his interpretations remain superficial and abstract. Still, his comments on Duoduo's poetic oeuvre, on the basis of examples from 1972 through 1988, are

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<sup>16</sup> Zhang 1991; quote taken from 172.

<sup>17</sup> Jiangjiang 1990.

convincing and to the point. First, he states that – Chinese? – interest in Duoduo's poetry has increased over the years because readers' interest has shifted from politics to the human experience, which in Duoduo's work is presented as a clownesque tragedy. There is a parallel between such ambivalence and contradictions in Duoduo's poetry on the one hand, and the critics' divergent views on the other. This was illustrated at the Today Poetry Award ceremony, during which some speakers sketched Duoduo's work as an elegy for an ideal human character retraceable to childhood years, while others saw his poetry as the degeneration of ideals, not their embodiment. Jiangjiang names categories for Duoduo's poems: among others, those which have as their theme a dialogue with the lover, with parental or earlier generations, or with the world across the Chinese borders.

Section three is on Duoduo's sedulous manipulation of language – which includes his choice of imagery. Through form and language, Duoduo gives expression to his grasp of and respect for the power of human dignity. Jiangjiang notes readers' admiration for Duoduo's achievements in the realm of language. Sarcasm and self-mockery are among the characteristics of his imagery, which through its internal order provides the mainstay of his poetic world. Juxtaposed and interwoven images of life and death are sources of dramatic tension, often against a backdrop of snow, sea or sky. The horse and the window make conspicuously frequent appearances. The former, "speaking by not speaking", refers to a real or ideal kind of human dignity and tilts the material world until it becomes a world of feelings; the latter connects landscapes and moods, the known and the unknown, the soul and the outside world, longing and fear. Having praised Duoduo's imagery, Jiangjiang concludes by touching on his use of punctuation and his habit of dating his poems.

In the fourth and final section Jiangjiang proceeds from his concentrated discussion of Duoduo's oeuvre to a very different topic: the sudden banishment, following June Fourth, of many Chinese men of letters. It is disappointing that Jiangjiang needs Duoduo's poetry to arrive at what in itself is a valid and acute subject: Chinese exile literature. Banishment, whether spiritual, self-imposed or simply pointing to a distance from mainstream literature, is with hindsight imposed on Duoduo's oeuvre of 1972-1988, with one of the rare occurrences of *native land* for a motto. If this hints at an "obsession with China" yet again, that impression is confirmed by the article's final lines, in which both Duoduo and "we" are urged on. But this hardly detracts from the quality of Jiangjiang's review, which is beyond doubt the most important Chinese reception. An example of Jiangjiang's insights is the brilliant opposition in one aphoristic sentence of Bei Dao's and Duoduo's oeuvres: he calls Bei Dao's writing warmth covered in cold, and Duoduo's a nucleus of cold hidden in layers of warmth.

Duoduo's poetry caught the public eye in the late 1980s but well before June Fourth, in both the official and the unofficial circuit. Chen Chao, for instance, must have completed his manuscript in 1988. But when Duoduo's personal history became the subject of international media attention after June Fourth, that spurred the interest taken in his poetry too. The "banishment factor" in Jiangjiang's review is an example, although his earlier writings and his presence at the Today Poetry Award ceremony prove that he did not need June Fourth to be aware of Duoduo's poetry. Other articles such as the following two, in Taiwanese and Hong Kong media, would not have existed if Duoduo had not become an exiled poet.

In a December 1989 issue of the Taiwanese daily *Lianhe bao*, Qiu Yanming reports on an October poetry reading by Bei Dao and Duoduo in Amsterdam, followed by a public interview with the two poets by the Dutch author Willem van Toorn. Qiu meticulously covers Van Toorn's questions and Bei Dao's and Duoduo's answers, dividing her article into "Poetry and Politics", "Poetry and Sources", "Poetry and Nature" and "Poetry and Sound". But while Van Toorn definitely talked about poetry, the event would not have been organized if it had not been for June Fourth, and this is reflected in Qiu's article.<sup>18</sup>

In May 1992 Duoduo gave a talk entitled "Exile and Exile Literature" at the Ruhr University in Bochum, Germany. That year's June issue of the Hong Kong monthly *Zheng ming* contains an article by Liao Tianqi written on the occasion. Liao provides extensive background information on Duoduo's history as a poet, naming the Cultural Revolution and establishment art at the time as the main inspiration for his early work. Through well-chosen examples from his poetic experiments in the 1970s and early 1980s she outlines his development toward artistic maturity, judging that his later work – still mostly interpreted as social commentary – can send shivers down one's spine. Like Jiangjiang, Liao observes that for Duoduo, exile since June Fourth was long preceded by a self-imposed, spiritual banishment while he was living in China. She does so with a reference to his above-mentioned use of *native land*. In view of the subject of Duoduo's talk and of Liao's focus on the phenomenon of exile, this is understandable. It is also one more instance of the retroactive, sweeping politicization by June Fourth of Duoduo's art prior that date.

Li Oufan (Leo Ou-fan Lee), finally, is a Chinese reader whose brief review of some of Duoduo's recent poems merits attention. In a 1994 "Poetry Talk from a Foxhole" column in *Today*, commenting on the magazine's previous issue, Li first notes the sexuality in Duoduo's *The Closed Direction* and opines that it might cause problems in a PRC publication. After expressing surprise at the "symmetry" of *The Closed*

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<sup>18</sup> Qiu 1989.

*Direction* and *The Unclosable Direction* (1994), a poem which he calls too heavy for his taste, Li states an intuitive preference for *Still* (1994). From Li's comments on *The Closed Direction* and *The Unclosable Direction*, the fact that the two were printed in reverse order is clear. While in the manuscript version *The Unclosable Direction* is the second text and undermines what has been said in the first, in *Today* Li is presented with *The Closed Direction* as the second text, and concludes that it confirms what in the first text was still open to doubt. On a cheerful view of the matter this proves that the misprint to end all misprints added to the poem's possible readings.<sup>19</sup>

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Receptions by Chinese readers show agreement on several aspects of Duoduo's art: its reflection of his generation's history, of the Cultural Revolution above all; his belated breakthrough as a representative of Experimental poetry; the major role in his work of spectacular imagery; and the singularity of his usage. For obvious reasons only those writing and publishing outside the PRC dwell on the phenomenon of exile.

#### RECEPTIONS BY OTHER READERS

##### *Translations*

In recent years numerous translations of Duoduo's poetry have appeared, in magazines and anthologies as well as individual collections. Immediately after June Fourth foreign interest in his work was partly an extension of political sympathy. But that interest has not dwindled, though Tiananmen has long since vanished from front pages around the world. Before June Fourth Duoduo's poetry was translated too, and published, often in "China specials" of literary magazines and in anthologies of contemporary Chinese poetry.<sup>20</sup>

In 1982 the French magazine *DOC(k)S* featured seven of his poems, signed Bai Mo; in 1986 the American magazine *Nimrod* published four; Italian translations of six poems appeared in the 1987 and 1988 anthologies *A Fossil Fish Reborn: Contempo-*

<sup>19</sup> Lee 1994. On the misprint to end all misprints, see chapter seven: section V.

<sup>20</sup> The following account lays no claim to completeness. For bibliographical data, see the bibliography: POETRY BY DUODUO.



rary Chinese Poetry 1976-1986 (*Un pesce fossile rinato: poesia cinese contemporanea 1976-1986*) and *In the Form of Words: Contemporary Chinese Poets (In forma di parole: poeti cinesi contemporanei)*; five poems were included in a 1988 Japanese anthology called *Myriad Splendid Suns: Modern Chinese Poetry (Okuman no kagayaku taiyō: Chugoku gendai shishū)*; one in a 1988 issue of the Swedish review *Bonniers Litterära Magasin*; in 1989 English translations of four more appeared in *The Beloit Poetry Journal* and *Footwork: The Paterson Literary Review*, and Dutch translations of ten poems came out in a *Poetry International* edition.<sup>21</sup>

Also in 1989, an individual collection of Duoduo's poetry in English translation was produced by Gregory Lee and John Cayley. This book, *Statements*, never appeared on the market. When June Fourth made Duoduo famous overnight, the original collection was swiftly revised, expanded and renamed *Looking out from Death: From the Cultural Revolution to Tiananmen Square*, under pressure from its new publisher, Bloomsbury. Duoduo's first full-fledged book of poetry in another language than Chinese thus reflects the sudden, inevitable politicization of his art. It is revealing to read on the first page of *Looking out from Death*:

"this book is dedicated to all those struggling for a voice in China today and to those who have died in that struggle"

while the original *Statements* began thus:

"the translators dedicate this book to all those struggling for a voice in China today and to those who have died in that struggle"

In his introduction Gregory Lee characterizes Duoduo and his work as follows:

"Unlike a number of contemporary writers, Duoduo has not been outspoken on social or political issues, which is perhaps one reason why his reputation has taken longer to become established. (...) While Duoduo is a thoroughly Chinese poet, and shows little sign of the derivative and banal pastiche that mars the work of many contemporary Chinese poets, he is a thoroughly modern poet whose work demonstrates selective and cosmopolitan influences. (...) His is a poetry which is at once an expressive, individual reaction to Peking life and, at the same time, a poetry which is

<sup>21</sup> *DOC(k)S*, winter 1982; *Nimrod* vol. 29 # 2 (1986); Yuan 1987; Pozzana & Russo 1988; Takarabe & Mu 1988; *Bonniers Litterära Magasin* 1988 # 6; *The Beloit Poetry Journal* vol. 39 # 2 (1989); *Footwork: The Paterson Literary Review* '89; Duoduo 1989d.



committed to its own quest for universal truths. (...) Underneath his intense, passionate, but carefully controlled poetic voice, lies a barely restrained hysteria."

After June Fourth Lee writes:

"(...) in hindsight, much of his poetry may be seen as uncannily prophetic. Reading through those of his poems written in the atmosphere of terror and oppression that characterized the decade of the Cultural Revolution, one senses that history is repeating itself, that China is now being plunged back into the same old nightmare. In interpreting this nightmare Duoduo is more than a mere poet, he is a seer."

*Looking out from Death* contains an extensive selection of Duoduo's poetry from 1972 to 1988. Since 1989 it has served as the most important publication of Duoduo's poetry for readers of English. The translations are far from flawless. In a note on the Bloomsbury edition Lee and Cayley explain that they had little time, presumably because of the publisher's scheme of things. Their effort was worth it: on the whole, poetry readers benefitted a great deal from the revision and expansion of the original *Statements* manuscript.<sup>22</sup>

Immediately after June Fourth Duoduo enjoyed high visibility in Western media, mostly in his capacity as witness to the 1989 Protest Movement or as a "dissident", exiled poet: as an insider on the outside. It must be unpleasant to have such alienating roles imposed on oneself – but the situation made it easier for Duoduo to publish his poems, initially in the wake of his "dissident" testimony. A case in point is the space the leading Dutch daily *NRC Handelsblad* reserved for his poetry on 30 June, one week after the 1989 Rotterdam Poetry International festival: the full front page of its weekly Cultural Supplement. During the festival the editors had had a chance to acquaint themselves with his poems; had they deemed them unfit for publication, no amount of shocking background information would have secured the Supplement's front page. But I daresay they would not have made the offer if Duoduo had not "come from June Fourth" three weeks earlier. Similarly, the German *Lettre International* featured a poem by Duoduo and poetry by other Chinese poets in a 1989 fall issue also containing six of Duoduo's newspaper columns, abounding with

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<sup>22</sup> Duoduo 1989c and 1989b. See chapter three: FOREIGN ATTENTION. The dedications (my italics) are found before the respective tables of contents. Quotes taken from Duoduo 1989b: 11-12 and 13-14.

memories of and contemplations inspired by June Fourth, and pieces on the Protest Movement by non-Chinese authors.<sup>23</sup>

Since 1989 Duoduo has continued to live in exile, and Western media have to differing degrees continued to politicize his person and to present his work as exile literature. For his newspaper columns and to some extent for his 1991 play and his fiction, this makes sense; less so for his poetry. To approach the matter from a different angle, it is hard to believe that sustained foreign interest in his poetry can be reduced to political sympathy. If it was politics that gave his work a chance, it must have been poetry that made good on the opportunity.

In the Netherlands translations have kept appearing regularly to this day: in 1990 in an anthology entitled *Moment with No End in Sight: Chinese Poets Today* (*Een onafzienbaar ogenblik: Chinese dichters van nu*) and a second *Poetry International* edition, in 1990 and 1992 issues of *Raster* and a 1994 issue of *de revisor*, both respected literary reviews, and in other magazines and anthologies. In 1991 the influential publishing house Meulenhoff brought out an individual collection of Duoduo's poetry called *A Writing-Table in the Fields* (*Een schrijftafel in de velden*), in my translation. The majority of the texts included are from the years 1983-1991. In an afterword I discuss the vicissitudes of Obscure poetry, and imagery and usage in Duoduo's poems. In early 1996 Meulenhoff will publish a second collection, entitled *There Is No Dawn* (*Er is geen nieuwe dag*) and containing poems from 1991 and after.<sup>24</sup>

In Germany more translations appeared in 1990 and 1993, in the 1990 *Yearbook of Poetry* (*Jahrbuch der Lyrik*) and in a special issue on Chinese avant-garde literature of *die horen: Zeitschrift für Literatur, Kunst und Kritik*. In 1994 an individual collection of Duoduo's poetry called *The Road Traveled* (*Wegstrecken*) was brought out by Projekt publishing house, edited by Peter Hoffmann and translated by Jo Fleischle, Peter Hoffmann, Jürgen Ritter, Vera Schick and Sigrid Wallerich. This bilingual edition, with Chinese originals and German translations on facing pages, is a selection spanning the years 1972-1994. It is divided into *Poetry from the 70s and 80s, from [Duoduo's Chinese collection] The Road Traveled, and The Exile Perspective of the 80s and 90s*. The second section contains several poems written long before Duoduo left China, some of which are classified as exile poetry for puzzling reasons. Hoffmann's preface, entitled *Eternal Enemy of Heaven* after a phrase in one of Duoduo's poems, is in three parts: on Duoduo, on Duoduo's poetry

<sup>23</sup> *NRC Handelsblad* of 30 June 1989 and *Lettre International* # 6 (1989).

<sup>24</sup> Van Crevel & Haft 1990; Duoduo 1990; *Raster* # 50 (1990) and # 59 (1992); *de revisor* 1994 # 2-3; Duoduo 1991b and 1996.

and on the translations. The book makes an overall impression of thoroughness, so it is surprising to read that the poetry award Duoduo received in 1988 – half a year before June Fourth – was that of

"*Today*, a magazine appearing outside China, Chinese dissidents' most important channel of publication."

Another contestable claim is that in this collection,

"not a few poems are for the first time published in their Chinese original, too."

This suggests that the Chinese originals could not appear in Chinese publications. In fact every single one of the poems included was published in *Today*. Hoffmann's claim can have been valid only for few texts and for a short while: the time between the publication of the German collection and the appearance of Duoduo's most recent poems in different issues of *Today*. But these minor inaccuracies do not make the preface any less interesting or plausible in its outline of Duoduo's poetry. Hoffmann touches on oppositions such as those of sexuality and love, of reality and ideal, of time and eternity as sources of dramatic tension. Through grotesque portrayals of the absurdities of human existence, Duoduo's poetry can reflect a political situation as well as the *condition humaine*; it combines pathos and banality. Carnality is a feature distinguishing Man in Duoduo's poetry from other constituents of Nature like the horse, characterized as "Man's 'natural' side". In an afterword on the relationship of original and translation, Hoffmann grants little relevance to the author's intention and demands freedom for the translator. His approach has not led to irresponsible deviations from the original.<sup>25</sup>

If the most extensive selections from Duoduo's poetry have appeared in English, Dutch and German, translation into other languages has also continued. Some examples: Japanese anthologies from 1990 and 1992 *Modern Chinese Poetry (Gendai Chūgoku shishū)* and *Thirty Modern Chinese Poets (Chūgoku gendai shi sanjūnin shū)*, contain seven more of his poems; in 1992 four poems including the long poem *The Crocodile Market* were published in Sweden, in the daily *Svenska Dagbladet* and the review *Halifax*; a Danish anthology of the same year, called *Characters: Poems from China Today (Tegn: Digte fra Kina idag)*, features four; a 1993 issue of the

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<sup>25</sup> Buchwald & Mickel 1990; *die horen, Zeitschrift für Literatur, Kunst und Kritik* # 169 (1993); Duoduo 1994b, quotes taken from I and VIII.

French magazine *Po&sie* has two. Across these different countries and languages there is a clear preference for Duoduo's work from the late 1980s.<sup>26</sup>

To return to the first language other than Chinese in which an individual collection of Duoduo's poetry came out, English is still his poetry's most important foreign tongue. It has more potential readers than any of the other languages mentioned, and various translators have seriously tackled his work. Gregory Lee has continued to translate and publish Duoduo's poems, in 1991 and 1992 in the prestigious *Manhattan Review*, in his 1993 *Chinese Writing and Exile*, and in 1994 in *Mānoa: A Pacific Journal of International Writing* and in an anthology of works published in the new *Today* called *Under-Sky Underground*. After his pioneering work in *Looking out from Death*, Lee has thus made a substantial choice from Duoduo's recent work accessible to a large foreign readership. The publications in *The Manhattan Review* are accompanied by Lee's comments on some of the poems. In 1993 *The American Poetry Review* further published five of Duoduo's poems from the years 1983-1990, jointly translated by Jin Zhong and Stephen Haven, who in his "Beijing Journal" in the same issue called Duoduo "the best poet [he'd] come across in China".<sup>27</sup>

Several recent anthologies of Chinese poetry in English also contain selections from Duoduo's oeuvre. First and foremost there is Michelle Yeh's 1992 *Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry*, the most complete, balanced and authoritative book of its kind to date. Yeh covers Chinese poetry of the entire twentieth century and on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Her introductory essay *From the Margin* displays an admirable command of sources on different aspects of this vast subject. While aware of distances in space, time and writing between modern Chinese poetry's divergent authors, Yeh takes a comprehensive approach to what she sees as essentially one coherent tradition. She includes five of Duoduo's poems, the earliest from 1973 and the latest from 1991, in impeccable translations. Obviously Yeh's accomplishment as a translator *ergo* "other reader" in no way detracts from her qualities as a Chinese reader.<sup>28</sup>

Other anthologies are less ambitious, and while foreign knowledge of contemporary Chinese poetry is rapidly increasing, the image of one-eyed kings is sometimes hard to ban from one's mind. Donald Finkel's 1991 *A Splintered Mirror: Chinese Poetry from the Democracy Movement* contains work by Bei Dao, Duoduo, Gu Cheng, Jiang He, Shu Ting and Yang Lian. Finkel does not seem troubled by the

<sup>26</sup> Sasaki 1990; Korenaga 1992; *Svenska Dagbladet* of 12 January and 15 May 1992; *Halifax* 1992 # 6; Bordahl & Jorn 1992; *Po&sie* # 65 (1993).

<sup>27</sup> *The Manhattan Review* vol. 6 # 1 (1991) and vol. 6 # 2 (1992); Lee 1993c; *Mānoa: A Pacific Journal of International Writing* vol. 6 # 1 (1994); Zhao & Cayley 1994; *The American Poetry Review* vol. 22 # 6 (1993); Haven 1993.

<sup>28</sup> Yeh 1992a.

dictates of the originals. His translations are arbitrary, and his preface and bibliographical notes on the poets are confused and inaccurate to the point of being misleading. As a whole his book is shamelessly tendentious. An example, hilarious and infuriating, is his account of the emergence of Obscure poetry:

*"It has been suggested that [Obscure] poetry may have had its genesis in the Tiananmen Anthology, which grew out of a mass demonstration in Tiananmen Square in April 1976 to mourn the death of Chou [sic] Enlai and to protest against the dictatorship of Mao Zedong and the Gang of Four. In a grim foreshadowing of the events of June 1989, the demonstrators were violently dispersed. But the anthology was clandestinely preserved, and probably had something to do with the blossoming of the democracy movement in China."*

The genesis of Obscure poetry can be retraced to all sorts of places around the world, but not to Tiananmen in April 1976. Nothing bearing the faintest resemblance to what would later be known as Obscure poetry was included in any collection of Tiananmen Poems – and just how does Finkel visualize a *Tiananmen Anthology* growing out of a mass demonstration? He is all too ready to make the link with 1989, not only in the above quotation. Earlier I remarked upon his false suggestion-by-implication that Mang Ke went to jail after June Fourth and never came out. Finkel's non-committal wording – the italics in the above quotation are mine – shows that he is aware of the shakiness of his story. In keeping with other aspects of his book, it remains unclear what he means by "the democracy movement". Finkel's solidarity with victims of repression in China is laudable but *A Splintered Mirror* is a failure in its presentation and translation of Chinese poetry. Finkel includes six of Duoduo's poems from the early 1970s and one from 1983.<sup>29</sup>

Tang Chao's 1992 *New Tide: Contemporary Chinese Poetry* contains work by twenty-five poets. The majority belong to what Tang – another reader both "other", i.e. busying himself with translation, and Chinese – calls the second stage of New Tide Poetry, roughly equivalent to Newborn poetry. Leading poets subsumed under the first stage, i.e. Obscure poetry, such as Bei Dao, Gu Cheng, Mang Ke, Shu Ting, Yang Lian, are not represented. For critics and anthologizers it has consistently been difficult to determine Duoduo's status – Obscure or Newborn or both? – so the inclusion of his work makes sense. But it is hard to see why this anthology contains poetry by Jiang He, not to mention Zheng Min. *New Tide* is a bilingual

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<sup>29</sup> Finkel 1991; quote taken from xii. Finkel translates *menglong* as *misty*. See also chapter two: TIANANMEN 1976: WHAT KIND OF UNDERGROUND POETRY? and chapter three: FOREIGN ATTENTION.

edition, with two prefaces: one in Chinese and one in English. They are entirely different texts. Apparently Tang Chao wants his book to serve both Chinese and English readers and the Chinese originals were not merely included for curious English readers' reference; the poets' biographies are different in Chinese and English, too. In the Chinese preface Tang is much more apologetic toward the Obscure poets than in the English preface. In the latter they are depicted as slightly outdated, as more political, time- and place-bound, and less sophisticated than the Newborn poets. As regards early Obscure poetry, Tang obviously has a point here, and one which has been made by others, so why hide it from the Chinese audience? Perhaps rebellion against one's elders – Tang presents himself as a Newborn poet – is easier in a foreign tongue. Of the earliest Experimental poets, Tang says that

"[they] wrote during their field work breaks"

and of the Chinese poetry scene in the early 1990s, that

"there are about 2,500 major poetry societies spread over different cities."

In spite of such instances of mythicizing, *New Tide* contributes to foreign knowledge of contemporary Chinese poetry. The translations were made with the assistance of Lee Robinson, whose *Note on the Translation* has an ominous ring to it, as in this passage:

"(...) in the difficult compromise that is translation, we have sometimes sacrificed accessibility for authenticity. So you will read 'sunshine building' for what could be 'skyscraper' and 'heavenly well' for what could be 'laundry tub'."

*Heavenly well* would translate back into Chinese as *tianjing*, which means 'courtyard' or 'skylight', not 'laundry tub'. *New Tide* features five poems by Duoduo: three from the mid-1970s, one from 1983 and one from 1989.<sup>30</sup>

Seven of Duoduo's poems, mostly from the 1980s, are included in Tony Barnstone's 1993 anthology *Out of the Howling Storm: The New Chinese Poetry*. The book is in two parts: *The Misty Poets* – i.e. the Obscure poets – and *The Post-Misty Poets*. Duoduo counts as a Misty poet. In a lengthy introduction called *Chinese Poetry through the Looking Glass*, Barnstone writes:

<sup>30</sup> Tang & Robinson 1992; quotes taken from 1 and 6-7.

"Duo Duo was among the first to start writing the new poetry. He began creating strange, surreal, often absurd, and sometimes terrifying poetic landscapes during that culminating absurdity, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) (...) His idiosyncratic style often consists of a surreal juxtaposition of vignettes that create a cumulative mood or meaning. With Duo Duo's poetry the reading experience becomes one of deciphering common themes in poems that veer wildly through space and time and narrative – the reader must find the mathematical constant that unifies the set. This can make his poetry among the most obscure, or 'misty', of the poets presented here, but one must understand that in poetry that often edges into dissidence a certain slipperiness is a survival trait in contemporary China."

Barnstone's presentation of contemporary Chinese poetry is politically inspired. Consciously so, as the following quotation shows:

"In introducing the new Chinese poets here, I have chosen to highlight political aspects of their poetry and of their aesthetic stances, although they write many poems that are not political in nature."

This approach, valid in itself, does not justify the distorting of facts. As recounted earlier, this is the bottom line of Barnstone's *Comments from the Editor*:

"The poems you read in this book have traveled from Tiananmen Square to your living room through (...) translation."

Great efforts must be made to see this as poetic license, since *Out of the Howling Storm* contains work from the preceding two decades and Tiananmen Square is unlikely to have been its sole source of inspiration. In Barnstone's introduction there is more of this unwarranted politicizing, for example in this passage on Bei Dao:

"But the world of Bei Dao's poetry is as radically unstable as Chinese politics (...) Clearly, Bei Dao is opposed to the unnamed horror that we glimpse in this poem [*Nightmare*], but, characteristically, he wreathes its ultimate meaning, personal, political, in a fog of symbols. However, in his well-known poem 'Declaration' he comes out into the open, declaring himself a dissident: 'I will not kneel on the ground / allowing the executioners to look tall / the better to obstruct the wind of freedom'"



Barnstone fails to report the motto accompanying *Declaration*. That poem is dedicated to Yu Luoke, who was arrested during the Cultural Revolution for opposing theories which made class background hereditary. After three years of imprisonment, Yu Luoke was shot. To be sure, the poem's speaker is a dissident. But if this speaker had a name it would be Yu Luoke, not Bei Dao. As regards Barnstone's translations of Duoduo's work, the title of his note on the subject is painfully appropriate: *Translation as Forgery*. Especially *North Sea* – Barnstone's rendition, with Newton Liu, of the poem whose title I have translated as *Sea of the North* – contains a multitude of grave errors. Two examples, first in my translation and then in Barnstone and Liu's:

– oh, I reveal how I live

and in my life there is no excitement. no  
in my life there is not the excitement of man and man exchanging blood

versus

– O, I confess to my life

but must confess it is a bore, with not even  
the thrill of blood transfusions

and

I see all people who once loved me

versus

I see everyone I have loved

Far be it from me to offer my own translations as models in matters of style. But I am sure enough of their accuracy to point out Barnstone's disregard for faithfulness to the original – while knowing how deceptive the simplicity of that phrase is.<sup>31</sup>

A bird's-eye view of Duoduo's poetry in translation shows that after scattered publications in the 1980s, breakthroughs in several other languages than Chinese

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<sup>31</sup> Barnstone 1993; quotes taken from 10-11, 2, xv, 16-17, 85-86. The Chinese original can be found in Duoduo 1989a: 95-96.



have taken place since 1989. Foreign interest in his work was to some extent spurred by his personal history: his departure from China on 4 June 1989 and his subsequent testimony. But it seems plausible that his distinct poetic voice and its continued output have kept that interest from dwindling.

### *Commentaries*

Aside from introductions, prefaces and afterwords written – usually by the translator – to accompany Duoduo's poetry in translation, few elaborate commentaries by non-Chinese readers have been published to date. Since 1989 four scholarly articles have appeared, in addition to a number of book reviews in newspapers, weeklies and academic journals.

Duoduo's poetry was first thoroughly examined by Peter Button, in his 1992 review of *Looking out from Death*, published in *Modern Chinese Literature*. Acknowledging the difficulty of translating poetry, Button notes problems in Lee's and Cayley's renditions. He disapproves of the link with June Fourth imposed upon Duoduo's work in the book's overall presentation. His opening words are loud and clear:

"No more lethal a silencing blow may be delivered a literary text than to pose it as prophetic."

Before discussing Duoduo's poetry Button sketches the general background of what Gregory Lee calls "Chinese Modernism", and rightfully stresses that Duoduo was not formally identified with the Obscure poets when they first established themselves. With regard to Duoduo's work Button focuses on the 1970s, although he briefly dwells upon texts from the mid-1980s as well. His discussions of separate poems are detailed and precise. Below are some of his comments:

"Duoduo's work vividly articulates a series of issues concerning history, subjectivity, China and the West, and Chinese cultural identity. (...) [He has a] predilection for rendering psychological states of estrangement in the form of fractured images of horror and violence. (...) Duoduo's poems (...) seem to swing wildly between the tortured reflections of the poetic voice and the often grim desolation those reflections project onto the poetic landscape. (...) A reading of his work that seeks to find in it the ubiquitous oblique criticisms of the party as such would fail to address the complexity of the problems his works pose. (...) a reading of Duoduo's poetry that pits the presumably autonomous work of art

against the assumed absolute authority of the state would fail to appreciate the psychological depth of his *oeuvre*. (...) [A] number of Duoduo's poems address the problem of a Chinese identity in terms of a numbed and desperate peasantry incapable of overcoming and transforming itself (...) Duoduo's poems are filled with images of the countryside and of peasants, so much so that they are among his most predominant themes (this is true of many of his later works from the 1980s as well)."

Button's review comes across as the result of profound contemplation; his appreciation of Duoduo's poetry is convincing.<sup>32</sup>

Gregory Lee's article *Contemporary Chinese Poetry, Exile and the Potential of Modernism* is included in *Chinese Writing and Exile*, a 1993 collection edited by Lee which also contains his translations of "exile poems" by Duoduo. The volume derives its title from a 1991 conference of the same name. Lee's article contains his notes on Duoduo's poetry in *The Manhattan Review* and much more. As to its title, *Duoduo's Poetry, Exile and the Potential of Modernism* would have been more accurate. The occasional mention of Bei Dao, glossing over sharp differences between Duoduo's and Bei Dao's oeuvres, does not warrant the scope suggested by *Contemporary Chinese Poetry*. Lee treats the phenomenon of exile in the broadest sense of the word, making Duoduo a spiritual exile long before he left China. He quotes Edward Said and Iosif Brodsky, among others, on the ordeal of the writer in literal, i.e. geographical exile: cut off from the source and socially insignificant. It is also with social significance as a measure of potential that Lee discusses "Chinese Modernism", presenting his views on Duoduo's poetry as part of the socio-cultural commentary that is his article. Lee portrays contemporary Chinese poetry by stressing its direct connection with the public realities of contemporary China.

His characterization of Duoduo's work as social critique seems appropriate, certainly when he points to modernity rather than the specifics of Chinese society as the object of that critique. But for recent poems – Lee's research encompasses Duoduo's entire oeuvre to date – his approach can lead to a politicized report for which Duoduo's personal history appears to have set the tone. Commenting on the 1990 poem *In England*, Lee quotes Andrew Gurr:

"the exile leaves on an impulse to escape, not to enjoy travel"

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<sup>32</sup> Button 1992; quotes taken from 221, 223, 224, 225, 227, 229.

Lee calls Duoduo's long-planned trip to the West

"his dramatic flight to London"

presumably ending in

"(...) the new found freedom of exile"

of which he says

"Duoduo and many others now realize that freedom is a complex notion, that the 'freedom' of the West is a limited and limiting freedom, that China's seeming lack of freedom paradoxically empowered them to write. (...) All the 'freedom' in the world, cannot replace the invigoration of being engaged in the reality of China (...)"

All the same, in his discussion of *I've Always Delighted in a Shaft of Light in the Depth of Night* (1991) Lee emphasizes that Duoduo's poetry often allows for multiple readings and may not always bear out the presumption that it conveys a political message. His ensuing comments on Nature and humankind in Duoduo's work are more relevant and plausible than his suggestion that the poem under scrutiny may dwell on the death of Duoduo's relatives. Perhaps this is one of the

"comments (...) based on my acquaintance and conversations with Duoduo during 1986 in China and over the years since June 4th 1989."

The connection with the text is hard to see. For all poems discussed, readers wishing to consult the Chinese source will be baffled to find that the footnotes contain references to Lee's earlier publication of the translations, not to the originals.

Lee paints a vivid picture of how Duoduo's poetry was in 1989 made into a news item, a commodity among other assorted horror stories, by the Western media. This offers a bitter contrast with Lee's well-grounded assertion that

"Modernism can emphasize the importance of individuality, of difference, in a society where such are denied."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Lee 1993b; quotes taken from 68, 70, note 37 on 70, 75.

Besides Button's and Lee's, two other scholarly commentaries by a non-Chinese reader appeared in 1993. I published an article called *How Political and How Chinese Is Duoduo's Poetry?* (*Duoduo shige de zhengzhi xing yu Zhongguo xing*) in *Today*, and one called *Man and Nature, Man and Man: Aspects of Duoduo's Poetry* in the collection *Words from the West: Western Texts in Chinese Literary Context*, edited by Lloyd Haft. Of the latter article a Chinese translation appeared in *Modern Han Poetry* in 1994. My findings in these articles are contained in chapters six and seven of this book.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to elaborate, academic commentaries such as the above four, Western media have since 1989 featured reviews of Duoduo's poetry in translation: *Looking out from Death* and *A Writing-Table in the Fields*. I will briefly touch on nine such reviews, five in Dutch and four in English.

Early in 1990 Lloyd Haft reviewed *Looking out from Death* for *NRC Handelsblad*. Haft warns against a potentially distorting mechanism in Western reception of Duoduo's poetry:

"To his Western readers he is two things: a poet and a refugee. The combination of these two qualities, though it has made him an attractive subject for articles and interviews in the Western media, poses subtle dangers to his identity as a writer. It is easy enough to call to mind examples of writers and artists who fled to the West to escape persecution and owed their subsequent fame more to their celebrity status as refugees than to any exceptional merit in their art. Will Duoduo's sudden popularity in the West, together with the role of emigré-Chinese spokesman which seems to have been more or less thrust upon him, result in overvaluation of his writing?"

After reading *Looking out from Death* and comparing a number of poems with the originals, I am convinced that Duoduo is a first-rate poet who fully deserves his growing reputation. Even if he did not come from the People's Republic of China, even if he were a rich, fat conservative Capitalist, he would still be a poet of real importance."

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<sup>34</sup> Van Crevel 1993a, 1993b and 1994c.

While noting inaccuracies in the translations, Haft concludes that

"Duoduo's bright, rich imagery comes through the language barrier unscathed."

Haft praises Lee and Cayley for their quick production of the extensive collection that is *Looking out from Death*, but concludes that a smaller selection might have made for a more powerful book. He finds Duoduo's poetry from 1982 to 1985 of a truly arresting quality.<sup>35</sup>

In 1991 Haft reviewed Duoduo's newspaper columns and his poetry in Dutch translation, the latter as collected in *A Writing-Table in the Fields*. In this piece Haft states that many of Duoduo's poems can hardly be called "Chinese". Rather, they are part of world literature:

"The animals, the people, and especially the elements – wind, soil, blood – are timeless and speak for themselves. Here, we are moving (...) among the vital roots, the biological and psychological conditions enabling a person's experiences to remain interconnected even after generations, even at a distance such as that between Peking and Amsterdam."<sup>36</sup>

In the widely read weekly *Vrij Nederland* W.L. Idema also reviewed Duoduo's columns together with his poetry in Dutch translation, soon after the two books came out in May 1991. Idema finds the poems from the 1970s included in *A Writing-Table in the Fields* of a banal sentimentality. At the same time he realizes that in Maoist China they must have been heterodox and daring. He calls Duoduo's poetry from the 1980s

"an unceasing struggle to recover language from political jargon and once more forge it into an instrument fit for expressing the poet's personal feelings and ideas."

Idema reads the desolate Northern countryside in Duoduo's poetry as a symbol for society's emotional poverty. Simultaneously, it is a representation of the poet's hope for a language that will rebuild reality. While classifying Duoduo's unbridled imagery as occasionally naive and dated by Western literary standards, he calls it at other times intriguing, startling and moving. Idema stresses that awareness of the

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<sup>35</sup> Haft 1990.

<sup>36</sup> Haft 1991.

cruel realities of China determines one of Chinese poetry's functions as a challenge of political power, but that little justice is done to contemporary Chinese poets by reading them first and foremost as dissidents.<sup>37</sup>

As do Haft and Idema, Jaap Goedegebuure discusses both Duoduo's poems and his columns in one 1991 review in the weekly *HP/De tijd*. Such joint treatment tends to make the horrors of the Cultural Revolution, of June Fourth and of life in exile the point of departure for reviewing Duoduo's poetry. But Goedegebuure's emphasis on political history serves a purpose: it highlights the contrast between Maoist literary doctrine and Duoduo's work. Goedegebuure calls the latter

"a poetry which *ipso facto* proclaims the belief that the imagination is capable of changing reality."

He is not impressed with Duoduo's poetry: its bent for intuitive, roll-and-tumble associations is reminiscent of Dutch poetry of the 1950s, and it seems to convey a "message" too often for the reviewer's taste. Goedegebuure ends his piece in an apologetic manner, assuring the reader that he realizes Duoduo's poetry stems from a dream of freedom.<sup>38</sup>

Karel Hellemans, in a 1991 issue of the Belgian bimonthly *De poëziekrant*, is one critic commenting on Duoduo's poems without reference to his newspaper columns. Hellemans begins by pointing to the poet's undeniable talent and his swift evolution under Western influences. Reacting to the *Afterword* in *A Writing-Table in the Fields*, he underlines the "obscurity" of Duoduo's poetry. Extravagant metaphors, daring imagery, confused emotions and incoherent rhetoric make Duoduo's a demanding kind of poetry, which must be approached from an emotional rather than a rational angle. Hellemans notes the glaring contrast with PRC Socialist Realism. He traces Duoduo's use of Modernist forms and techniques to a strong desire for international recognition.

Catherine Byron's review of *Looking out from Death*, in an August 1989 issue of *The Independent*, contains recollections of Duoduo's first poetry readings in England, immediately after June Fourth. She describes how 1989 history influences the reading of a 1983 poem. Presumably in a conversation with the audience, Duoduo is quoted as saying that decent Chinese writers have always had to oppose the regime, but also that

<sup>37</sup> Idema 1991b.

<sup>38</sup> Goedegebuure 1991; quote taken from 63.

"the class struggle is *not* the prime job of the poet. The poet moves in other worlds also."

While Byron's review understandably has political overtones – contemporary Chinese poetry is "the extraordinary poetry of pro-democracy China" – she does not lose sight of the artistic side of things. She compliments Lee's and Cayley's translations and calls Duoduo's work remarkably accessible, because of its westward look. Her conclusion is that while *Looking out from Death* gives insight into the survival of the creative spirit in an overbearing system, it also harbors

"an exquisite lightness of heart in the midst of pain and absurdity."<sup>39</sup>

Michael Taylor's October 1989 discussion of Duoduo's poetry in *The Far Eastern Economic Review* is a lucid, expert piece of work. Taylor disapproves of the politicized presentation of Duoduo's work in *Looking out from Death*, aware that the circumstances of publication are bound to affect how poetry is received. At the same time, he realizes that

"in this case, the ends probably do justify the means. Thousands of Westerners will buy the book thinking to find the soul of Tiananmen, and thousands will be disappointed. But in the meantime, another of the Chinese 'modernists' gets into English translation. And Duoduo will get royalties to help him survive his exile. It's a fair deal."

Taylor praises the translations for their aural qualities. Before discussing Duoduo's work, he lists important differences with Bei Dao's poetry, a welcome and much-needed observation in view of Western tendencies to lump all contemporary Chinese poets together. According to Taylor,

"eschewing the role of poet-as-truth-teller, Duoduo adopts a stance familiar to the West, but shockingly new in China – he is the poet as seducer."

Taylor remarks on Duoduo's endless modulations of voice and his preoccupation with desire and its frustrations, mostly in his early work. He finds the most satisfying poems in later years:

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<sup>39</sup> Byron 1989.

"dense and complex poems associated with the humorless cruelty of nature, in which the narrative voice never wavers, and never intrudes."<sup>40</sup>

In 1990 *The China Quarterly* featured a review of *Looking out from Death* by Tao Tao Liu. Liu, here among the "other" readers because her review appeared directly in a non-Chinese publication, calls Duoduo's double identity to his Western audience, that of poet and eyewitness to June Fourth, an apt combination: Modernist Chinese poetry has been politically dissident, at least in the eyes of authority. She describes Duoduo's poetry as representing an extreme wing of the "obscure". Liu is filled with admiration for the translators for presenting the lines as directly from the Chinese as possible. Comparing his work to that of his contemporaries, she characterizes it as follows:

"Duoduo's poetry is less overtly political than Bei Dao's, less natural than Gu Cheng's and less limpid than Shu Ting's: his work of the 1970s is simpler but as he moves into the 1980s presumably with increased confidence and the greater currency of Modernist writings in Chinese, his poems become longer, as well as denser and obscurer in expression. He is above all a surrealist writer, with startling images (...) Criticism of society and of the social system pervades his poems. With it emerges a sense of fear and deep anxiety, of violence below the surface; the violence that erupts in images of death and suffering. They are the product of a young man's imagination, experimental and iconoclastic."<sup>41</sup>

In 1993 Simon Patton reviewed *Looking out from Death* for *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, together with English translations of work by Bei Dao, Yang Lian, Gu Cheng and Ha Jin. Like Taylor and Liu, Patton points out differences between the respective "obscure" poets, counting Duoduo as one of them in spirit if not in name. In his brief discussion of *Looking out from Death*, he passes a most favorable judgment on the book:

"[It] provides an excellent introduction to the poet Duoduo (...) The two translators (...) have each translated their own selections, and while Lee has the lion's share, it is Cayley who possesses the strongest feel for poetry (...) Duoduo's accomplished surrealist

<sup>40</sup> Taylor 1989.

<sup>41</sup> Liu 1990; quote taken from 564.



technique and sensual panache combine to produce poetry of engaging originality and lyrical intensity, as evident in this generous selection spanning the years 1972-1988. Passionate and full of compassion, this is the work of an entertaining modernist.<sup>42</sup>

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A dominant issue in the reception of Duoduo's poetry by non-Chinese readers is the connection of his work to the socio-political reality of China – in a sense, a specification of larger questions on the connection between poetry and reality. There are two reasons for this focus. First, Chinese poetry and politics have always been hard to disentangle, in traditional and modern times. Secondly, in the case of Duoduo it is close to impossible to get around what I here abbreviate as the June Fourth factor. But there is more to it than this explanation. Perhaps by its involvement of divergent, even contradictory aspects of both social and individual existence, Duoduo's poetry can be seen to provoke such a discussion in spite of the most fateful and powerful forces of politicization one can imagine. I need not repeat the history that transmogrified him from a relatively unknown Chinese poet into a center-stage, international representative of resistance to political repression.

Western scholars and critics agree on the importance of imagery in his work; it is original enough to make up for what some call outdated Modernist traits. The majority find his work of the 1980s better than his early poems. It would be interesting, in due time, to examine receptions – by Chinese and other readers alike – of his most recent work: at this writing, in mid-1995, of the last five years. Personally I think that is when some of his finest poems were written.

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<sup>42</sup> Patton 1993; quote taken from 206.

## A LOOK AHEAD

The study of Experimental poetry from the PRC is a young trade. One identifiable reason is that Experimental poetry is itself a young trade. This brings to mind the political repression which well into the 1960s precluded the very existence of such poetry in the PRC and hinders its development to this day. Viewed from this angle, ignorance of and misconceptions about this poetry are not surprising. But circumstances for research are improving: availability of texts and opportunities for field-work have been on the increase since the late 1970s.

The study of Experimental poetry being young and its object not much older, its future is particularly hard to tell. Still, I would like to make some educated guesses.

One: of the 1960s and 1970s underground history of Experimental poetry, little is known and much may not be known yet. Its gradual excavation may yield new treasures, and attract more diggers and more people who know where to dig.

Two: this holds for the years since 1979 too. Although the late 1970s and early 1980s mark a fundamental change in the relationship of PRC politics and poetry, my phrase *1978: Underground Poetry Above Ground* is optimistic if not misleading. Especially the unofficial circuit in the 1980s and 1990s deserves further research on texts, poetics and literary-sociological issues, a need that is reflected in recent PRC criticism.

Three: differences and similarities between the official, unofficial and exile circuits and the changing interaction of these three constitute interesting topics. So does the phenomenon of foreign influence, as long as it is examined with attention not just to poets' professed loyalties but also to the texture of their poetry.

Four: my attempts to disregard Chinese history while reading PRC poetry by Duoduo and others are partly motivated by the well-intended but undue politicization to which that poetry has been subjected, mostly by foreign readers. But my crusade aside, I believe that Duoduo's work lends itself to a literary, not a political approach and that his poetry is not dependent on its reader's nationality for its appreciation. If Duoduo's oeuvre is at all representative of Experimental poetry this holds a promise for more foreign enjoyment of this tradition in the making. If not, finding out is worth the trouble.



## APPENDICES

Appendix A gives the Chinese characters for a number of Chinese names, titles and terms rendered in transcription in this book. No characters are given for Chinese poem titles, for Chinese names of places, or for Chinese names taken from non-Chinese sources.

Appendix B contains the originals of sixteen poems by Duoduo, for the interested reader's convenience. All sections in chapters 6 and 7 are represented by at least one poem. My selection has further been motivated by what I perceive as these poems' importance within the oeuvre and their beauty. The poems appear in the order in which they are discussed in this book. Their titles in English translation are: *There is a class...* (1974), *Teachings* (1976), *Hello Hello* (1983), *The Crocodile Market* (1982), *My Uncle* (1988), *Oh Afraid, I'm Afraid* (1983), *It Is* (1985), *No More than One Allowed* (1992), *Voice of the North* (1985), *Soil of the North* (1988), *Her Stupid Daughter* (1988), *Morning* (1991), *I'm Reading* (1991), *Five Years* (1994), *In England* (1989-1990) and *None* (1991).

### APPENDIX A: CHINESE NAMES, TITLES AND TERMS

A Cheng	阿城
A Qu Qiang Ba	阿曲強巴
Ai Qing	艾青
Ai Shan	艾珊
Bai Hua	柏樺
Bai Mo	白魔
<i>Bai pi shu</i>	白皮書
Bai Qing	白青
Bai Ye	白夜
<i>Baiyangdian san jianke</i>	白洋澱三劍客
<i>Baiyangdian shige qunluo</i>	白洋澱詩歌群落
<i>Baiyangdian shipai</i>	白洋澱詩派
Bei Dao	北島
<i>Bei huigui xian</i>	北回歸線
Bi Ruxie	畢汝協
Beiling	貝嶺
Bian Zhilin	卞之琳

*Bianyuan*

Cao Changqing

Cao Yifan

*chaobenr*

Che Qianzi

Chen Chao

Chen Dongdong

Chen Jingrong

Chen Mo

Chen Quanrong

Chen Shaowei

Chen Yun

Cheng Daixi

*Chou xiao ya**chouti wenxue**chuanlian**Ci shenglin*

Cui Weiping

*Da saodong**da wo*

Dai Qing

Dai Wangshu

*daibiao zuo**Dalu*

Daozi

Deng Xiaoping

*Di san dai shi*

Ding Li

Ding Ling

*dixia wenxue*

Duoduo

## 邊緣

曹長青

曹一凡

抄本儿

車前子

陳超

陳東東

陳敬容

陳默

陳全榮

陳紹偉

陳韻

程代熙

丑小鸭

抽屜文學

傳聯

次生林

崔衛平

大騷動

大我

戴晴

戴望舒

代表作

大陸

島子

鄧小平

第三代詩

丁力

丁玲

地下文學

多多

E Fuming	鄂復明
<i>Fandui</i>	反對
Fang Lizhi	方勵之
<i>Fanyi wenti</i>	翻譯文體
<i>Faxian</i>	發現
<i>fei guanfang</i>	非官方
Fei Sha	飛沙
<i>fei zhengshi</i>	非正式
<i>Feifei</i>	非非
Feng Xuefeng	馮雪峰
Gan Huili	甘灰里
Gan Tiesheng	甘鐵生
Gao Falin	高伐林
Gao Yan	高岩
Ge Mai	戈麥
Genzi	根子
Gong Liu	公劉
<i>gong pipan yong</i>	供批判用
Gong Shuting	龔舒婷
Gu Cheng	古城
Gu Cheng	顧城
Gu Fang	顧芳
Gu Gong	顧工
Gu Hua	古樺
Gu Shengying	谷聲應
Guan Zhengwen	關正文
<i>guguai</i>	古怪
<i>Guilai zhe</i>	歸來者
Guo Lusheng	郭路生
Guo Maoqian	郭茂倩
Guo Moruo	郭沫若

Guo Shiyong	郭士英
Guo Xiaochuan	郭小川
<i>Haishang</i>	海上
Haizi	海子
Han Dong	韓東
<i>Han shi: er shi shiji biannian shi</i>	漢詩：二十世紀編年史
<i>Hanyu shige</i>	漢語詩歌
He Jingzhi	賀敬之
He Qifang	何其芳
Hei Dachun	黑大春
<i>Heidong</i>	黑洞
<i>Heping zhi ye</i>	和平之夜
Hong Zicheng	洪子誠
<i>Hou menglong shi</i>	後朦朧詩
Hu Feng	胡風
Hu Shi	胡適
Hu Yaobang	胡耀邦
Hua Guofeng	華國峰
<i>Huaxi</i>	花溪
<i>Huang pi shu</i>	黃皮書
Huang Rui	黃銳
Huang Xiang	黃翔
Huang Ziping	黃子平
Huang Zumin	黃祖民
<i>Hui pi shu</i>	灰皮書
<i>huise</i>	晦澀
Jiang He	江河
Jiang Jincheng	姜金城
Jiang Qing	江青
Jiang Shiwei	姜世偉
Jiangjiang	江江

Jie'er	階耳
Jiefang	解放
Jintian	今天
Jintian shige jiang	今天詩歌獎
Jintian wenxue yanjiu hui	今天文學研究會
Jiu ye pai	九葉派
Jiushi niandai	九十年代
Ke Lei	柯雷
Ke Yan	柯岩
Kouyu shi	口語詩
laodong gaizao	勞動改造
Lao E	老鄂
Lao Mu	老木
Lao san jie	老三屆
Li Duoduo	栗多多
Li Ji	李季
Li Li	李黎
Li Lizhong	李麗中
Li Oufan	李歐梵
Li Shizheng	栗世征
Li Yang	李楊
Liang Xiaobin	梁小斌
Liang Yun	梁雲
Liao Tianqi	廖天琪
Liao Yiwu	廖亦武
Licheng	里程
Lin Biao	林彪
Lin Mang	林莽
Liu Binyan	劉賓雁
Liu Denghan	劉登翰
Liu Feimao	劉飛茂



Liu Hongbin	劉洪彬
Liu Huai	柳槐
Liu Manliu	劉漫流
Liu Nianchun	劉念春
Liu Qing	劉青
Liu Qiuling	劉秋玲
<i>liuwang wenxue</i>	流亡文學
Lu Xun	魯迅
Lu Yimin	陸憶敏
Lü Dean	呂德安
Lü Guipin	呂貴品
Luo Yihe	駱一禾
Ma Gaoming	馬高明
Mang Ke	芒克
<i>Mao wenti</i>	毛文體
Mao Zedong	毛澤東
Meng Lang	孟浪
<i>menglong</i>	朦朧
<i>Menglong shi</i>	朦朧詩
<i>Menglong shi lunzheng</i>	朦朧詩論爭
<i>minban</i>	民辦
<i>Minzhu qiang</i>	民主牆
Momo	默默
Mou Dunbai	牟敦白
Mu Dan	穆旦
<i>nandong</i>	難懂
<i>Nanfang shizhi</i>	南方詩誌
<i>neibu faxing</i>	內部發行
<i>Neibu jiaoliu ziliao</i>	內部交流資料
Niu Han	牛漢

<i>Ouhua</i>	歐化
<i>Ouyang Jianghe</i>	歐楊江河
<i>pao shu</i>	跑書
<i>pao shu ren</i>	跑書人
<i>Qi Feng</i>	齊峰
<i>Qi Jian</i>	齊簡
<i>Qi Yun</i>	齊雲
<i>Qimeng</i>	啓蒙
<i>Qimeng she</i>	啓蒙社
<i>qingnian zhuyi</i>	青年主義
<i>Qingxiang</i>	傾向
<i>Qiu Yanming</i>	丘彥明
<i>Qu Yuan</i>	屈原
<i>Ren Wu</i>	任悟
<i>Ri ri xin</i>	日日新
<i>shalong</i>	沙龍
<i>shalong shenghuo</i>	沙龍生活
<i>Shanghai wenxue</i>	上海文學
<i>Shao Yingwu</i>	邵迎武
<i>Shen Taihui</i>	沈太慧
<i>Shenghuo liu</i>	生活流
<i>Shi Guanghua</i>	石光華
<i>Shi Kangcheng</i>	史康成
<i>Shi tansuo</i>	詩探索
<i>Shige bao</i>	詩歌報
<i>shige jianshang cidian</i>	詩歌鑒賞辭典
<i>Shijie wenxue</i>	世界文學
<i>Shikan</i>	詩刊
<i>shixue</i>	詩學
<i>Shizhi</i>	食指

- |                                    |          |
|------------------------------------|----------|
| Shu Ting                           | 舒婷       |
| <i>Si wu luntan</i>                | 四五論壇     |
| Song Haiquan                       | 宋海泉      |
| Song Lin                           | 宋琳       |
| Song Qu                            | 宋渠       |
| Song Wei                           | 宋煒       |
| Sun Shaozhen                       | 孫紹振      |
| <i>Taiyang zongdui</i>             | 太陽縱隊     |
| <i>Tamen</i>                       | 他們       |
| Tang Xiaodu                        | 唐曉波      |
| Tang Yaping                        | 唐亞平      |
| Tian Xiaoqing                      | 田曉青      |
| Tian Zhiwei                        | 田志偉      |
| Tong Huaizhou                      | 同懷周      |
| Tong Wei                           | 童蔚       |
| <i>Waiguo wenxue cankao ziliao</i> | 外國文學參考資料 |
| <i>Waiguo wenxue jikan</i>         | 外國文學季刊   |
| <i>Waiguo wenxue pinglun</i>       | 外國文學評論   |
| <i>Waiguo wenxue yanjiu</i>        | 外國文學研究   |
| <i>Waiguo wenyi</i>                | 外國文藝     |
| Walan                              | 瓦蘭       |
| Wan Xia                            | 萬夏       |
| Wang Bin                           | 王彬       |
| Wang Guangming                     | 王光明      |
| Wang Jiaxin                        | 王家新      |
| Wang Rongqi                        | 王榮起      |
| Wang Shiwei                        | 王實味      |
| Wang Xiaolong                      | 王小龍      |
| Wang Xiaoni                        | 王小妮      |
| Wei                                | 喂        |
| Wei Jingsheng                      | 魏京生      |

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <i>weijiao</i>                          | 圍剿        |
| Weiwei                                  | 維維        |
| Wen Hai                                 | 文海        |
| Wu Kaijin                               | 吳開晉       |
| Wu Sijing                               | 吳思敬       |
| <i>wu ti</i>                            | 無題        |
| <br>                                    | <br>      |
| Xi Chuan                                | 西川        |
| Xi Mi                                   | 奚密        |
| Xi Ping                                 | 溪萍        |
| <i>Xiandai Han shi</i>                  | 現代漢詩      |
| <i>Xiandai shi neibu jiaoliu ziliao</i> | 現代詩內部交流資料 |
| <i>xiandai zhuyi shiqun</i>             | 現代主義詩群    |
| <i>Xiang wang</i>                       | 像罔        |
| Xiao Jun                                | 蕭軍        |
| Xiao Quan                               | 蕭全        |
| Xiao Ye                                 | 肖野        |
| Xiaodu                                  | 蕭犢        |
| Xiaodu                                  | 曉渡        |
| Xiaoxiao                                | 瀟瀟        |
| <i>xiaoyuan shige</i>                   | 校園詩歌      |
| Xie Mian                                | 謝冕        |
| <i>Xingcun zhe</i>                      | 幸存者       |
| <i>Xingli: shi 38 shou</i>              | 行禮：詩38首   |
| <i>Xinsheng dai shi</i>                 | 新生代詩      |
| Xu Haoyuan                              | 徐浩淵       |
| Xu Jingya                               | 徐敬亞       |
| Xu Rongjie                              | 徐榮街       |
| Xu Ruiyue                               | 徐瑞岳       |
| Xu Xing                                 | 許行        |
| Xuedi                                   | 雪迪        |
| <i>Xungen pai</i>                       | 尋根派       |

Yan Li	嚴力
Yan Yuejun	閻月君
Yang Chunguang	楊春光
Yang Jian	楊健
Yang Lian	楊煉
Yang Zhijie	楊志杰
Yao Jiahua	姚家華
Yao Wenyuan	姚文元
Yi	羿
<i>Yi hang</i>	一行
Yi Lei	伊蕾
<i>Yi lin</i>	譯林
Yi Qun	依群
<i>Yi xing</i>	一行
Yi Xiqun	伊錫群
Yiliya Ailunbao	伊里亞·愛倫堡
Yiping	一平
<i>Yishi liu</i>	意識流
<i>Yiwen</i>	譯文
You Yi	尤翼
Youduola Weierdi	尤多拉·韋爾蒂
Yu Cijiang	于慈江
Yu Daxiang	喻大翔
Yu Gang	余剛
Yu Jian	于堅
Yu Luoke	遇羅克
Yu Youze	于友澤
Yuan Kejia	袁可嘉
Yue Bing	岳冰
Yue Caigen	岳彩根
Yue Zhong	岳重
Zang Kejia	臧克家

Zhai Yongming	翟永明
Zhang Langlang	張郎郎
Zhang Ming	章明
Zhang Xuemeng	張學夢
Zhang Yuanshan	張遠山
Zhang Zhen	張真
Zhao Haoru	趙浩如
Zhao Shuli	趙樹理
Zhao Yifan	趙一凡
Zhao Zhenkai	趙振開
Zhao Zhenxian	趙振先
Zheng Bonong	鄭伯農
Zheng Min	鄭敏
Zheng Shusen	鄭樹森
Zheng Xian	鄭先
<i>zhishi fenzi</i>	知識分子
<i>zhishi qingnian</i>	知識青年
Zhong Ming	鍾鳴
<i>Zhongguo</i>	中國
<i>Zhongguo renquan</i>	中國人權
Zhou Enlai	周恩來
Zhou Guoqiang	周國強
Zhou Lunyou	周倫佑
Zhou Yaping	周亞平
Zhou Yang	周揚
Zhu Yuan	朱園
Zhuang Rouyu	莊柔玉
<i>Zhuyi zhuyi</i>	主義主義
Zou Jingzhi	鄒靜之
<i>zushi</i>	組詩

## APPENDIX B: ORIGINALS OF POEMS BY DUODUO

## 回憶與思考（節選）：無題

*There is a class...*

一個階級的血流盡了  
 一個階級的箭手仍在發射  
 那空漠的沒有靈感的天空  
 那陰魂縈繞的古舊的中國的夢

當那枚灰色的變質的月亮  
 從荒漠的歷史邊際升起  
 在這座漆黑的空空的城市中  
 又傳來紅色恐怖急促的敲擊聲……

(1974)

■

## 教誨

*Teachings*

## ——頹廢的紀念

只在一夜之間，傷口就掙開了  
 書架上的書籍也全部背判了他們  
 只有當代最偉大的歌者  
 用弄啞的嗓音，俯在耳邊，低聲唱：  
     爵士的夜 世紀的夜  
 他們已被高級的社會叢林所排除  
 並受限於這樣的主題：

僅僅是爲了襯托世界的悲慘  
而出現的，悲慘  
就成了他們一生的義務

(Teachings)

誰說他們早期生活的主題  
是明朗的，至今他們仍以爲  
那是一句有害的名言  
在毫無藝術情節的夜晚  
那燈光來源於錯覺  
他們所看到的永遠是  
一條單調的出現在冬天的墜雪的繩  
他們只好不倦地遊戲下去  
和逃走的東西搏鬥，並和  
無從記憶的東西生活在一起  
即使恢復了最初的憧憬  
空虛，已成爲他們一生的污點

他們的不幸，來自理想的不幸  
但他們的痛苦卻是自取的  
自覺，讓他們的思想變得尖銳  
並由於自覺而失血  
但他們不能與傳統和解  
雖然在他們誕生之前  
世界早已不潔地存在很久了  
他們卻仍要找到  
第一個發現“真理”的罪犯  
以及拆毀世界  
所需要等待的時間

面對懸在頸上的枷鎖  
他們唯一的瘋狂行爲  
就是拉緊它們  
但他們不是同志



他們分散的破壞力量  
 還遠遠沒有奪走社會的注意力  
 而僅僅淪為精神的犯罪者  
 僅僅因為：他們濫用了寓言

(Teachings)

但最終，他們將在思想的課室中祈禱  
 並在看清自己筆跡的時候昏迷：  
 他們沒有在主安排的時間內生活  
 他們是誤生的人，在誤解人生的地點停留  
 他們所經歷的——僅僅是出生的悲劇

(1976)

■

你好 你好

Hello Hello

你好 你好  
 向你伸出我的手

和你握手呀  
 你好 你好

把你的手也伸給我  
 我倆握得死死的

握着人類的發明  
 你好 你好

你好 你好  
 一個美好的微笑

一根彈簧顫抖着  
你好你好你好

(Hello Hello)

你好你好你好  
我握到了你的手

五粒冰涼的子彈  
上面塗滿紅指甲油

(1983)

## 鱷魚市場

*The Crocodile Market*

一度我們曾是真誠的  
就因為無知的樣子很純真  
    就因為我們  
    還未學會扮演別人  
還不瞭解價格  
還不知道善良  
    是一種最不經久的商品  
    我們並不知道

才常常打開櫃子  
取出放爛的慷慨  
    去買零食吃吧，人們  
——就把果核吐到地板上

我們還想一步就跨到街上  
對着歲月皮膚鬆弛的臉

迎面灑上一大把  
新鮮的六月的櫻桃：

(The Crocodile Market)

別牽拉你們的耳朵啦  
——人民

就因為  
在我們內心  
裏面有一個世界  
車輛常在其中來往  
我們全是英俊的少年人  
正要乘着年華  
去看大海——

可隨着第一隻西瓜被切開  
就讓我們大吃一驚  
原來，原來已經走進市場：

人們在用殘酷的機器烤肉  
在剝下象征純潔的皮  
人們的臉上滿是油呵  
從口中取出果丹皮  
人們說：生活  
從沒有這樣真實過！

可我們一心只想聽到：  
再給我們一點羞恥吧！  
我們一心只想聽到  
大嘴巴女人的歌唱  
再給我們一點羞恥吧……

\* \* \*

因為，就因為  
 還在作孩子的時候  
 就看到照相機  
 對着我們的眼睛說謊  
 讓我們就此  
 只能從指縫中看世界  
 看到世界的缺口——自由  
 從不相識的自由  
 小得就像曾祖父  
 親手揩擦過的  
 那扇天窗：自由  
 從不相識的自由

(The Crocodile Market)

當我們還未學會  
 擺弄刀叉  
 挑吃牡蠣的肉——就有人  
 過來打我們的手  
 教我們珍惜麵包瓢裏  
 那幾顆果料  
 第一次有人扭痛我們的鼻子  
 說的就是：學着  
 作一隻卷心菜裏的瓢蟲吧  
 別小看——裏面有白來的生活！

剛剛能夠聽懂髒話  
 耳朵就從我們臉上  
 永遠地萎縮·還一塊儿失掉了  
 會害臊的器官：人格  
 最初的人格·

可我們還從未見過玫瑰呢  
 我們這些從未見過玫瑰的男孩子呵

竟又被送進學校  
 那訓練扯謊訓練兇殘  
 的健身房·就是在那兒  
 有人捏着亮晶晶的鉗子  
 爲了取走我們  
 學會吃肉之前的奶牙  
 就是在那兒  
 我們生出了  
 再也不知羞恥的招風耳  
 已及——不良少年臉上  
 在春天綻開的癬  
 我們嚐到了掐下花朵的快樂

一心迷戀舌尖兒  
 接觸舌尖兒的快樂

我們看到了肉

在游泳衣的網眼中  
 顫抖的肉——已及  
 活下來的意義：  
 腳趾互相勾住的那麼一會兒  
 互相摸索的時間

直到包皮也漸漸退化  
 遍身生滿粗硬的毛  
 我們，竟又被捉進一間  
 一間的屋子中去  
 當我們猛然省悟，才發覺  
 那就是：家庭

(The Crocodile Market)

就在那一間一間的屋子中  
縮回了，我們縮回了  
要去跨越大地的腳

(The Crocodile Market)

就在那一張張的大床上  
增加我們墮落的體重  
直到肚子也拖垂到地板上  
我們會看到另一個人：妻子  
和她的影子：在廚房中  
淌汗的生活  
“再油一遍小衣櫃吧——蠢貨！”

太陽就從那時變成了庸俗的攝影師

一些受到驚嚇的懦夫，看來  
正是我們，正盯着一些  
乾癟的棗兒吊在枝頭  
就像下垂的無能的陰囊  
那是我們僅存的一點奢望  
就是那兩隻可憐的腰子  
它們吸收我們體內的最後一點營養  
就像一小截貪婪的腸子

而，我們應當有過的品格  
早被剝製成乾果  
就和乾辣椒、蔥頭一塊兒  
掛到門前的小釘上  
一些把尾巴也一塊兒  
穿到褲子裏的男人  
在時時向它張望

噢，我們這些頭髮曾經燃燒的男人呵

我們唯一忘記的就是人

我們終於戒掉了人

關心別人的壞習慣

當你的手搭到別人肩上

準會感到皮革般的隔膜

當你看到別人的臉

已變得這般冷漠

你準會感到人

對人有過的祝福

已成爲一樁古老的丑事——當然

世界上留下你和我

也只是一對普通的交易者

——我們已經很少議論太陽了

如果價錢合適

我們會把它

也一塊兒賣掉！

(The Crocodile Market)

而我們原是拾撿海螵精美皮殼的少年人呵

我們原是夢想成爲神奇樂師的人呵

\* \* \*

直到有一天有人喚着我們的名字：白痴

噢，白痴

梳你們的鬍子

拔你們鼻子眼兒裏的毛

剪你們的腳指甲吧

你們這些

往皮夾克上打油

在女人枕上留下皮屑的男人呵

往腋下擦除臭劑

把絲襪帶勒進脂肪的女人呵 (The Crocodile Market)

把你們香腸般的手指  
再浸到油鍋裏炸一遍吧  
用你們翹起來的小指頭  
喝你們的湯  
割你們的雙眼皮兒  
拔光你們的眉毛吧！

再用小刀  
細細地刮淨你們的小腿吧！

大口大口地——你們  
吞噬橡皮或者脂肪  
有着腫大的嚇人的甲狀腺  
和再吞吃掉十萬隻蝸牛的饑餓感

可你們——有誰  
敢再提到那兒  
去尋找一個出租勇氣的地方  
找到那家經營貪婪的商店  
讓二十萬頭肉牛  
一齊爛死在裏邊？

當你們看到皮  
怎樣從牛身上剝下  
牛頭，怎樣和牛身分家  
歲月的屠夫，怎樣  
在皮圍裙上揩擦血手  
就悄悄地  
背過身子，把牙齒吐到池子裏去吧  
吐到池子中間  
漂着油花的剩粥裏去吧



別忘了吐掉的  
 是你早年不馴的性格  
 是你浪子往日的掘強！

(The Crocodile Market)

哎，那時候——你還敢  
 推開盛在小碟中的貓魚  
 抹在麵包上的愚蠢  
 和寄賣商店出售的大號壽衣  
 還敢從地上拾起針  
 追着諷刺假奶、髮套  
 還敢從指甲縫中剔出你的詛咒：  
 中風吧——拐杖！  
 沉到杯底吧——假牙！  
 還敢用屁股  
 對準前面的世界  
 還敢把它稱為：抗議！

你們這些永遠失去吸吮檸檬快樂的男人呵  
 你們這些屁股大大的男人呵  
 你們這些認為哭泣無用的男人呵  
 而且，你們是多麼想念女人胸前美好的水果呵  
 而且，你們是多麼想念  
 大嘴巴女人的歌唱呵：  
 再給我們一點羞恥吧！  
 再給我們一點無用的羞恥吧！

噢，當眼睛大大的孩子注視我們的時候  
 我們，我們是多麼多麼地懷念  
 我們是多麼多麼地懷念  
 我們童年的那架大管風琴啊——

(1982)

## 我姨夫

My Uncle

當我從茅坑高高的童年的廁所往下看  
我姨夫正與一頭公牛對視  
在他們共同使用的目光中  
我認爲有一個目的：  
讓處於陰影中的一切光線都無處躲藏！

當一個飛翔的足球場經過學校上方  
一種解散現實的可能性  
放大了我姨夫的雙眼  
可以一直望到凍在北極上空的太陽  
而我姨夫要用鑷子——把它夾回歷史

爲此我相信天空是可以移動的  
我姨夫常從那裏歸來  
邁着設計者走出他的設計的步伐  
我就更信：我姨夫要用開門聲  
關閉自己——用一種倒敘的方法

我姨夫要修理時鐘  
似在事先已把預感吸足  
他所要糾正的那個錯誤  
已被錯過的時間完成：  
我們全體都因此淪爲被解放者！

至今那悶在雲朵中的煙草味儿仍在嗆我  
循着有軌電車軌跡消失的方向  
我看到一塊麥地長出我姨夫的鬍子  
我姨夫早已繫着紅領巾  
一直跑出了地球——

(1988)

## 噢怕，我怕

*Oh Afraid, I'm Afraid*

噢怕，我怕  
甚麼？是我在問你  
——你怕麼？  
是我在問自己。

判斷是可怕的  
敵人

我沒有敵人。可我  
更怕。假使夜  
是一塊巨大的橘皮  
而橘肉在我嘴裏  
我怕——這是可能的

這是可能的。你怕麼？  
我的臉是透明的，其中有你  
在看我。我倆互相看着  
肉芽在同一張臉上迅速生長

除非瞎了，就要一直  
看——互相看  
在一杯漆黑的奶裏  
看。除非瞎了。瞎了

我更怕——被  
一個簡單的護士  
縫着，在一張移植他人  
眼睛的手術單下  
會露出兩個孩子的頭

一個叫  
或是一同叫  
我都怕·想想都怕：

(*Oh Afraid, I'm Afraid*)

從打碎的窗子裏拔出  
我只有  
一顆插滿玻璃碴的頭  
還有兩隻可憎的手  
會卡在棺蓋外  
而那是你的·我  
不願意去想

從一棵樹的上半截  
鋸下我  
的下半截，而你疼着  
叫着，你在叫：  
我不再害怕·不疼  
我並不疼，也跟着叫：  
噢是的，你不再害怕·

(1983)

■

是

*It Is*

是 黎明在天邊糟蹋的  
一塊多好的料子  
是黑夜與白晝  
互相佔有的時刻  
是曙光 從殘缺的金屬大牆背後  
露出的殘廢的 臉

我愛你  
我永不收回去

(It Is)

是 爐子傾斜 太陽崩潰在山脊  
孤獨奔向地裂

是風  
一個盲人郵差 走入地心深處

它綠色的血  
抹去了一切聲音 我信  
它帶走的字：

我愛你  
我永不收回去

是昔日的歌聲 一串瞪着眼睛的鈴鐺

是河水的鏗鏘聲

打着小鼓

是你的藍眼睛兩個太陽

從天而降

我愛你  
我永不收回去

是兩把錘子 輪流擊打

來自同一個夢中的火光

是月亮 重如一粒子彈

把我們坐過的船 壓沉

是睫毛膏 永恆地貼住

我愛你  
我永不收回去

是失去的一切

腫脹成河流

是火焰 火焰是另一條河流

火焰 永恆的鉤子

鉤爪全都向上翹起

是火焰的形狀  
 碎裂 碎在星形的  
 伸出去 而繼續燃燒的手指上 是  
     我愛你  
     我永不收回去

(It Is)

(1985)

## 只允許

*No More than One Allowed*

    只允許有一個記憶  
 向着鐵軌無力到達的方向延伸——教你  
 用穀子測量前程，用布匹鋪展道路  
     只允許有一個季節  
 種麥時節——五月的陽光  
 從一張赤裸的脊背上，把土地扯向四方  
     只允許有一隻手  
 教你低頭看——你的掌上有犁溝  
 土地的想法，已被另一隻手慢慢展平  
     只允許有一匹馬  
 被下午五點鐘女人的目光麻痺  
 教你的脾氣，忍受你的肉體  
     只允許有一個人  
 教你死的人，已經死了  
 風，教你熟悉這個死亡  
     只允許有一種死亡  
 每一個字，是一隻撞碎頭的鳥  
 大海，從一隻跌破的瓦罐中繼續溢出……

(1992)

## 北方的聲音

*Voice of the North*

許多遼闊與寬廣的聯合着，使用它的肺  
它的前爪，向後彎曲，臥在它的胸上  
它的呼吸，促進冬天的溫暖  
可它更愛使用嚴寒——

我，是在風暴中長大的  
風暴摟着我讓我呼吸  
好像一個孩子在我體內哭泣  
我想瞭解他的哭泣像用耙犁耙我自己  
粒粒沙子張開了嘴  
母親不讓河流哭泣  
    可我承認這個聲音  
    可以統治一切權威！

一些聲音，甚至是所有的  
都被用來埋進地裏  
我們在它們的頭頂上走路  
它們在地下恢復強大的喘息  
沒有腳也沒有腳步聲的大地  
也隆隆走動起來了  
    一切語言  
    都將被無言的聲音粉碎！

(1985)

## 北方的土地

*Soil of the North*

總是數着脈搏，目送河流遠去  
總是依着木桌，思念大雪  
斧聲和劈出木柴的蝗蟲  
總是在觸到過冬的凍土，腳  
就認定，我屬於這裏  
我屬於這裏，我記錄，我測量，我飼喂  
儀器以生肉，我認定：這裏，在這裏  
總是在這裏——

在，一個石頭國王背向陽光屹立的國度  
在，一個大打麥場，一個空空的放假的教室  
在，大雪從天空的最深處出發之前  
五十朵壞雲，經過摘棉人的頭頂  
一百個老婦人向天外飛去  
一千個男孩子，站在天邊撒尿  
一億個星球，繼續荒涼着  
一個世紀了——

祖先陰沉的臉色，遮暗了排排石像  
石頭們，在彼此的距離間安放  
樺木林內，吊着件件黑呢大衣  
麥穗上，繫着收割婦的紅頭巾  
季節，季節  
用永不消逝的紀律  
把我們種到歷史要去的路上——



總是在這個季節，冬天的閱讀  
放慢了，田野的書頁  
不再翻動，每個讀書人的頭  
都陷入了隱秘——得到公開後的激動：

(*Soil of the North*)

北方的土地  
你的荒涼，枕在挖你的坑中  
你的記憶，已被挖走  
你的寬廣，因為缺少哀愁  
而枯槁，你，就是哀愁自身——

你在哪裏，哪裏就有哀愁  
從，那塊失敗的麥地的額角  
七十畝玉米地，毀了你的腦子  
更加廣大的菜地，靜寂無聲  
比草更弱的，你已不再能夠聽見  
你要對自己說的，繼續涌出：  
“那是你們的福音……”

(1988)

## 笨女兒

*Her Stupid Daughter*

在漆黑的夜裏爲母親染髮，馬蹄聲  
近了，母親的棺材  
開始爲母親穿衣  
母親的鞋，獨自向樹上爬去  
留給母親的風，向鐵一樣不肯散開  
母親的終結  
    意味着冬天  
    從仇恨中解體

冬天，已把它的壓力完成  
馬蹄聲，在響亮的鐵板上開了花  
在被雪擦亮的大地之上，風  
說風殘忍  
意味着另一種殘忍：說  
逃向天空的東西  
被麻痺在半空  
意味着母親的一生  
只是十根腳趾同時折斷  
說母親往火中投着木炭  
就是投着孩子，意味着笨女兒  
同情爐火中的灰燼  
    說這就是罪，意味着：  
    “我會再犯！”

(1988)

## 早晨

*Morning*

是早晨或是任何時間，是早晨  
你夢到你醒了，你害怕你醒來  
所以你說：你害怕繩子，害怕臉  
像鳥兒的女人，所以你夢到你父親  
說鳥兒語，喝鳥兒奶  
你夢到你父親是個獨身者  
在偶然中而不是在夢中  
有了你，你夢到你父親作過的夢  
你夢到你父親說：這是死人作過的夢。

你不相信但你傾向於相信  
這是夢，僅僅是夢，是你的夢：  
曾經是某種自行車的把手  
保持着被手攥過的形狀  
現在，就牽拉在你父親的小肚子上  
曾經是一個拒絕出生的胎兒  
現在就是你，正爬回那把手  
你夢到了你夢中的一切細節  
像你父親留在地下的牙，閃着光  
笑你，所以你並不是死亡  
只是其中一例：你夢到了你夢的死亡。

(1991)

## 我讀着

*I'm Reading*

十一月的麥地裏我讀着我父親  
我讀着他的頭髮  
他領帶的顏色，他的褲線  
還有他的蹄子，被鞋帶絆着  
一邊溜着冰，一邊拉着小提琴  
陰囊緊縮，頸子因過度的理解伸向天空  
我讀到我父親是一匹眼睛大大的馬

我讀到我父親曾短暫地離開過馬群  
一棵小樹上掛着他的外衣  
還有他的襪子，還有隱現在馬群中  
那些蒼白的屁股，像剝去肉的  
牡蠣殼內盛放的女人洗身的肥皂  
我讀到我父親頭油的氣味  
他身上的煙草味  
還有他的結核，照亮了一匹馬的左肺  
我讀到一個男孩子的疑問  
從一片金色的玉米地裏升起  
我讀到在我懂事的年齡  
曬晾穀粒的紅房屋頂開始下雨  
種麥季節的犁下拖着四條死馬的腿  
馬皮像撐開的傘，還有散於四處的馬牙  
我讀到一張張被時間帶走的臉  
我讀到我父親的歷史在地下靜靜腐爛  
我父親身上的蝗蟲，正獨自存在下去

像一個白髮理髮師摟抱着一株衰老的柿子樹 (I'm Reading)  
 我讀到我父親把我重新放回到一匹馬腹中去  
 當我就要變成倫敦霧中的一條石凳  
 當我的目光越過在銀行大道散步的男人……

(1991)

■

## 五年

*Five Years*

五杯烈酒，五枝蠟燭，五年  
 四十三歲，一陣午夜的大汗  
 五十個巴掌扇像桌面  
 一群攥緊雙拳的鳥從昨天飛來

五掛紅鞭放響五月，五指間雷聲隆隆  
 而四月四匹死馬舌頭上寄生的四朵毒蘑菇不死  
 五日五時五分五枝蠟燭熄滅  
 而黎明時分大叫的風景不死  
 頭髮死而舌頭不死  
 從煮熟的肉中找回的脾氣不死  
 五十年水銀滲透精液而精液不死  
 胎兒自我接生不死  
 五年過去，五年不死  
 五年內，二十代蟲子死光。

(1994)

## 在英格蘭

*In England*

當教堂的尖頂與城市的煙囪沉下地平線後  
英格蘭的天空，比情人的低語聲還要陰暗  
兩個盲人手風琴演奏者，垂首走過

沒有農夫，便不會有晚禱  
沒有墓碑，便不會有朗誦者  
兩行新栽的蘋果樹，刺痛我的心

是我的翅膀使我出名，是英格蘭  
使我到達我被失去的地點  
記憶，但不再留下犁溝

恥辱，那是我的地址  
整個英格蘭，沒有一個女人不會親嘴  
整個英格蘭，容不下我的驕傲

從指甲縫中隱藏的泥土，我  
認出我的祖國——母親  
已被打進一個小包裹，遠遠寄走……

(1989-1990)

## 沒有

*None*

沒有人向我告別  
沒有人彼此告別  
沒有人向死人告別，這早晨開始時

沒有它自身的邊際

(None)

除了語言，朝向土地被失去的邊際  
除了鬱金香盛開的鮮肉，朝向深夜不閉的窗戶  
除了我的窗戶，朝向我不再懂得的語言

沒有語言

只有光反覆折磨着，折磨着  
那隻反覆拉動在黎明的鋸  
只有鬱金香騷動着，直至不再騷動

沒有鬱金香

只有光，停滯在黎明  
星光，播灑在疾馳列車沉睡的行李間內  
最後的光，從嬰兒臉上流下

沒有光

我用斧劈開肉，聽到牧人在黎明的尖叫  
我打開窗戶，聽到光與冰的對喊  
是喊聲讓霧的鎖鏈崩裂

沒有喊聲

只有土地  
只有土地和運穀子的人知道  
只在午夜鳴叫的鳥是看到過黎明的鳥

沒有黎明

(1991)

## POEM FINDER LIST

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  - 3 Ai Shan 1980, Bei Dao 1980, Jiang 1980, Mang Ke 1980, Duoduo 1989a
  - 4 On 23 December 1988, the tenth anniversary of the publication of the magazine's first issue, a booklet containing:
    - "Jintian bianji bu chuban faxing kanwu zong mu" [Texts Published and Circulated by the *Today* Editorial Board];
    - "Jintian bianji bu huodong da shi ji" [Chronicle of Activities of the *Today* Editorial Board];
    - "Duzhe lai xin zhai bian" [Selection of Letters to the Editor];
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 1982 *Chou xiao ya* # 9: 28 (2 poems)  
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 1987 *Yi hang* # 3: 57-59 (1 poem)  
 1988 *Yi hang* # 4: 23 (1 poem)  
*Xingcun zhe* # 1: 13-15 (3 poems)  
 1989 *Shikan* # 1: 26-27 (3 poems)  
*Xingcun zhe* # 2: 1-2 (4 poems)  
*Xingcun zhe*, booklet recital 2 April 1989: 13 (1 poem)  
*Yi hang* # 8: 74-76 (2 poems)  
 1990 *Jintian* # 1: 26-28 (6 poems)  
*Jintian* # 2: 45-46 (3 poems)  
 1991 *Jintian* # 1: 50-51 (4 poems)  
*Jintian* # 3-4: 122-123 (1 poem)  
 1992 *Jintian* # 2: 141-145 (5 poems)  
*Jintian* # 4: 113-116 (4 poems)  
 1993 *Jintian* # 1: 141-145 (4 poems)  
*Jintian* # 2: 113-115 (3 poems)  
 1994 *Jintian* # 2: 107-113 (4 poems)  
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*Contributions to Anthologies in Chinese*

- 1985 Lao Mu 1985a: 385-435 (36 poems)  
 1986 Jiang (Jincheng) 1986: 77-79 (3 poems)  
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 1988 Xu, Meng, Cao & Lü 1988: 10-11, 408-411 (5 poems)  
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 1986 *Nimrod* vol. 29 # 2: 56-61 (4 poems in English translation)  
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 Lee 1993c (7 poems in English translation)
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- 1994 Duoduo 1994b: 1-161 (74 poems in German translation)
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*Language Shattered* is both a history of poetry from the People's Republic of China and a case study of the oeuvre of a leading Chinese poet.

After the stifling orthodoxy of the 1950s and early 1960s, the terror of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) brought official Chinese literature to a total standstill. At the same time, disillusioned youths were more or less accidentally exposed to a varied body of foreign literature and began writing underground poetry. In the 1980s this poetry scene, now above ground, became one of pluriformity and proliferation in both official and unofficial circuits. The brutal suppression of the 1989 Protest Movement gave it an exile offshoot.

The historical overview in Part I of this book is complemented in Part II by a discussion of Duoduo's poetry. Duoduo's career as a poet reflects the vicissitudes of Chinese Experimental poetry – and his beautiful, headstrong poems merit attention in themselves. They show that Chinese poetry is not just of interest as a chronicle of Chinese politics, but as literature in its own right.

ISBN 90-73782-51-1 (thesis edition)

ISBN 90-73782-52-X