

Matthew CHENG

In the Protestant Cemetery of Macao

1

quiet cemetery time frozen
time is like the lifeless branches
hanging upside down on the white wall sparrows surrounded the gravestone
landed at their leisure pecking the thin afternoon sunlight

stepped on the dry leaves on the ground approaching each desolate grave
there were blessings and names on them
like the leaves long forgotten turned to umbrage overhead
left light occasions
opened eyes

sunshine crossed the cemetery walls
at the end Chinnery's gravestone only forgotten honour left
stepped on leaf fragments green is older and greener
every step folded direction of veins
like a blunt brush drawing the outline of the bay
at the end were heavy shadows

Morrison lay at the cemetery border tourists all forgot him
or recalled his never-ending hope
a sincere missionary from afar sticks to this land with quiet commitment
left his home by oceangoing ship stayed in the unfamiliar foreign land
this cemetery buried his nostalgia
and the hearty prayer to heaven

sunlight never told us again it was dying
roaming sparrows would not stay either flew to the neighbours
and I left my shadow on some of the gravestones
then turned away quietly with myself
thrown into the afternoon cemetery
deeper and deeper

2

old winding octave run through dead leaves
too much death left in silence

I walked quietly again the leaves sounded mysteriously
like many people underground hand in hand
dancing the dance that we never knew
windblown and playing
too much death among branches
death god in black robe
patrolling to and fro a scythe held in his hand

leaves fallen all around
some of them landed on my shoulder
some in the extant sunlight
touched with the air of life

walked to the tired doorframe the white church ahead
like a white-robed missionary praying
until the bell tolled on the tower.....
looked back at the quiet cemetery
in similar weather
dry yellow leaves there had been a devoted young boy
who walked into the meditative lane
and at the end
there were disordered stones
it could have been you or me lying inside

3

there were too many memories hiding in the tree
the fallen leaves were more than they were
the tree grew in death
only in the memory of leaves could the tree come to life again

at dusk I walked out of the Protestant Cemetery
remembering death underground in the branches
and on the feathers of birds forgot about the details
the home of the death god and the ocean of life so far
the trees around here touched with dusk's expression
too much death shook things left to us
and the setting sun was more thrilling

vanishing day glow became lights of houses
the setting sun now like a drunkard dejected
held the broken bottle murmured
I crossed the threshold
saw you were lying there
like a criminal exiled sorry for his conscience
who'd missed the fruits of his homeland harvest

unknown small sound like telling me to close the door quietly
the leaves crooned for the last time
the gardener swept the fallen leaves
they ought to step on the wind and sing or watch
in the tranquil graveyard
afternoon sunlight stubborn unknowing
it was just born
or it was dying

Translated from the Chinese by Iris Fan and Christopher Kit Kelen

A night some years ago

A night some years ago
we sat in circle in a corner of an amusement park
hearing kids indulged in joy chasing each other after
We read poems and discussed them
sharing a few mooncakes telling an anecdote of once upon a time

Again a night some years ago
there might come a sturdy young soldier
alone opening the gate of the Whitfield Barracks
standing by the cannon looking afar
receiving in a foreign land the moon's glow and a sky of twinkling stars

And some years later
Someone from the south to see a sculpture falls into muse
Someone from the north comes to take part in the annual aquatic meet
Someone from the east loses his way in the labyrinth
Someone from the west to see a history exhibition becomes part of history

A night some years ago
three sparrows passed by the park
One broke the cage to throw himself into the world
One stupidly stood on it
One broke the cage to drink water in which the moon falls apart

Translated from the Chinese by Amanda Hsu

The Last Waltz of July 14

The street is the biggest dance floor
A dance for two, leaving no shadow
The night, a drunkard
Not even one street lamp on the street
Only the two of us, dancing under the eaves of Paris
In three beats
A waltz

On July 14
No trace was left
On the stone-paved road we have walked through
Nobody knows
That we have, in the middle of the street, clandestinely

Danced hugged kissed
And tomorrow morning
When the dalmatian passes by
When the old baker passes by
When the school children pass by
Some of them will, I'm sure,
Tread on our dancing footprints
And stamp all the pulsating rhythm into their flat steps

In the evening of July 15
The cat is asleep
The football team leader is asleep
The president and the general is also asleep
Not a single gas lamp lets us see each other
The two of us will still dance in the dark
The pulse of Paris will beat the time for us
The familiar triple time

We dance our happy waltz
We dance our gloomy waltz

'The Last Waltz of July 14' is a photograph by French photographer Robert Doisneau,

Translated from the Chinese by Chan Lai Kuen

Tickets

The door shuts and then opens
The train stops
And moves on
A fast train from Milan to Rome
A football fan loses his ticket three minutes ago
A priest crosses his heart and prays, one minute later
An irritable US military officer
Topples a baby's dinner with a kick

A fussy widow of a general
Expects a cup of espresso

As the train proceeds into a dark tunnel
A woman who loves to play the piano
Disappears in the darkness
Darkness floats in a cup
Whiteness floats in a cup
A professor begins his love letter
That is never finished
The shape of a woman
A few questions, lingers
And became memory, prematurely
The train goes through the tunnel
Dust on the window pane is lit up
Milk on the professor's table, still lukewarm
Can be offered to the mother, in panic about her dinner

The train pulls in the station
Passengers alight with their luggage
On the platform
Many perforated tickets are abandoned
Nobody notices or collects them
Even the kind old janitor
Is not going to sweep them all up

Tickets is a film directed by Abbas Kiarostami, Ken Loach, and Ermanno Olmi,

Translated from the Chinese by Chan Lai Kuen

tiger bombs

the tiger bombs
neatly laid in a military camp
one-eyed doctor's masterpieces

some would blow into steely flowers
some
into pink mushrooms
some
would break gravel paths
some
would build a highrise
some
fake it all
just to bluff

one of them
called 'tiger bomb'
awaits an outbreak
to see how a horrible new world
gives birth to itself
how the old order and things momentarily change
so many liars' souls are emptied
dying winds make a big hole
through it four one-eyed tigers jumped
to scratch the lost passers-by

one day
the one-eyed doctor threw them into the bin
but he might have taken the wrong ones
because they all look alike
he might as well have done it on purpose

the slot machine pours tigers out

Translated from the Chinese by Chris Song

about Osaka

I climbed to the white castle
listening to the re-telling of the Sengoku stories in a foreign tongue
dead men's souls' one and another's cries
as if casting spells on the tourists, and
I ran to the top floor like a defeated general
one and another bizarre lofty buildings suddenly rose
in front of me
and warned me three times against the jump I'd decided on

I turned around and followed others back to the shadeless ground
went below the ground, and took the subway to
Nipponbashi, Dotonbori and Shinsaibashisuji, alone
lost in the subway route map

I remembered
the darkish green telephone burning hot in the Tennoji
I was talking to my only friend in Osaka
I glanced at the slot, time and again relishing
the pitiable hopeless coins in my hand
like a chain of fish jumping down to a dark nest
rustling seemed quick and pleased
and I heard my friend say
- wait -

at that moment the ancient bronze bell tolled from the temple, long and
comforting
bringing to passers-by the dusk slanting sun
the stretched-browed angry-eyed Four Heavenly Kings glared forward
as if urging people to leave
have a good rest at home
but I knew
people would pass by in front of me
leave behind a patch of solitude for me to relish
but tomorrow they would return to their ways

Translated from the Chinese by Chris Song

a goalie's anxiety at the penalty kick

a goalie's anxiety at the penalty kick
comes from a sleepless midnight
the timer's ticktocking
the 90 minutes concealed in the referee's watch

the prescribed square of 8 yards times 8 feet
frames the lonely view of the goalkeeper's back
he's the last man on the cliff
and behind his back is a fishing net

the whistle screams out of the silence
the mistake was made by teammates
pressure is concealed in the thick white gloves
like flesh stuck under the skin

the constant attacks of both sides drag out the anxiety
the joy of scoring doesn't extend beyond the goalkeeper's half-pitch
but desperation puts up in front of him a thick wall in a single colour
corner flags flutter against the wind

the second half is like a sandglass upside down
teammates follow the bad-tempered coach's gesture, from defensive to offensive
the goalkeeper stands under the bar
thinking of the sleeplessness of last night

players crowd in as they turn it over their minds
the twelve yards is the suspicion between the goalkeeper and the penalty
half the court bite their lips
the other half pray to heaven

the ball perhaps spins a little faster than the earth
it will wisp from the white round point following in the way of a question mark
the goalkeeper tries to turn around the predestined fact
imagination and luck crumbling on one side of the balance

The title 'a goalie's anxiety at the penalty kick' was taken from a novel by Peter Handke with the same title. Wim Wenders' first film is an adaptation of it.

Translated from the Chinese by Chris Song

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