

The Poetry of Liao Yiwu 廖亦武

Selections: 1984-1994

Liao Yiwu was born in Yanting in Sichuan in 1958. Liao began writing poetry in the late 1970s and was an award-winning poet on the official scene before devoting himself to unofficial poetry in 1984. After taking a hand in editing and contributing to a number of unofficial journals, in early 1987 Liao edited *The Modern Poetry Groups of Sichuan* 巴蜀现代诗群. This was after his poetry was officially blacklisted after the furor caused by the publication of <The City of Death> in the Jan.-Feb. 1987 double issue of *People's Literature* 人民文学. On June Fourth 1989, Liao went one step further in writing <Slaughter> and having the manuscript and recorded reading of it distributed (by yours truly) throughout China and outside the country. Eventually, this and the creation of a video based on a new poem, <Requiem Mass> 安灵曲, led to the arrest of Liao and five others (including Li Yawei and Wan Xia) in March 1990, and Liao being sentenced to four years confinement in March 1992, not long after the five others had been released (I was expelled from China on 30 October 1991). In prison and labour camp, Liao wrote the last of his poetry and turned his hand to prose, namely a semi-autobiography called *Go On Living* 活下去, the fourth part of which was published in Taiwan and the USA as *Evidence* 证词 in 2004. In 1997 and 1998, Liao edited the comprehensive unofficial literary journal *Intellectual* 知识分子, and since that time has devoted himself to interviewing individuals he terms members of China's underclass, most of which are now published overseas on Chinese language websites.

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12) **Go On Living** [活下去] : **Introduction** [引子] (autobiographical fiction)

The High Plateau [大高原] 1984

On the high plateau, even snow-capped mountains seem tiny. Edging along white slopes it
appears you could pass into the pulsing sky

Lift your head, turbulent clouds brush against your lips, lighting a fire that races through your
body

Hawks casually swoop low, at the same speed seemingly as torrents of water that sound like
horses hooves

We these men who love to move as rivers do, like to go to highways and gaze into the distance
onto avalanches that burst angrily open like flowers. We then give out a great shout
and listen to the sound clatter down the cliffs of Mount Haizi like a clumsy log, setting off a
sequence of delightful echoes

(on the high plateau, hollering is great pleasure)

Of course, we still ride out on patrol or to race, blowing lustily on bone hunting-horns
bursting the sun tied to the mountain tops like a balloon. At dusk or dawn, shreds of sunlight drift
down

causing "red roses" to blossom on the river banks and the valley floors

And then often we imagine that spring has come, even late at night when a boastful wind is
making a great noise

deep in the bowels of the earth we imagine a liquid spring welling up, warmly shooting through
the great belly

the earth's temperature gradually rising.....

We're used to wild notions, used once the high plateau is quiet to
feeling music flowing forth from the starry mouths of flutes. We believe any myth
we even believe ourselves to be small pieces of sky scattering over the high plateau

Sleep [睡眠] (1986)

Dearest, your sleep opens my imagination up.

Separated by a window. The dark night has been set in a cavernous fish bowl. The moon is a misty navel, dwindling to a spot in the distance. A great swarm of crystalline tadpoles squirm out from within, passing through clumps of reeds, tapping on the window pane with their tenuous tails. You smile amid the charming swish. Eyelashes laid over pure white illusions; the seam of your eye is like a trail hidden by pine needles. I pass this way to get near the subtle sleeping spirit --- the innermost chamber. The beggar of Fate is curled up within shivering in the wind; a burbling spring glides over his bare feet and climbs upwards, nourishing a layer of real mud on the chamber roof -- - the plough of day turns soil in wide sweeps.....

Dearest, your fertile sleep changes the nothingness into reality. The day stretches in two directions. I, a slave to illusion, stand between. Cautiously beating out the night watch.

Deep Entry [深入] 1986

In this unending solitude, the tide of love swells sadly up to my ear and ebbs quietly only to several times retreat. To the sound of breaking waves, I dive ever deeper until I enter your innermost being.

Like walking into a land within a land the tempest subsides, without sun or moonlight, I can only vaguely sense the cautious changing of the seasons on a hazardous bluff. Time passes: a century as quickly as a fox's tail --- a flash at the entrance to time's tunnel and gone.

My brief life is enveloped so by your breast, threaded through by your everlasting veins. I become part of your heart, pulsing always, sending this love for you, sending this love to a deeper, distant world

Translator's Note: The Chinese language text of this poem can be found in Liao Yiwu's *City of Death* (死城) e-book on this site. The only published text that also features the symbols included here, and in Liao's original manuscript, can be found in the combined 1987 #1-2 edition of *People's Literature Monthly* (人民文学月刊) of Beijing. (The following 'introduction' has never been officially published in the PRC.)

Written before the Gates of <THE CITY OF DEATH>

[写在死城门前] 1986

And now let us enter the City of Death.

Don't ask stupid questions like who Allah Fahweh is, when he died, or what the relationship between the bull, god and the people is. If you enter early into the year 6891 and discover your true "home", if you are brutally lashed to the wheel of time --- turning head over feet hitting the ground, whatever you do, don't cry out in despair: This is the city of death, no one will save you.

Future, present, past; past, present future --- the environment where you exist has changed completely. Who knows when history has it's beginning? You think some names sound familiar: Jiang He, Bei Dao, Gu Cheng¹, Zhang Chunqiao, Li Weidong², and so on --- naturally you only remember the era in which you lived. Your deepest overall impressions are always of the Chinese faction fight that broke out in 1966. Fluttering ranks of red cloth incited all to struggle against each other, to hunt down and slaughter the bull of illusion. Have you ever heard the string of crisp popping sounds made when gonads are smashed?

That sound kept me terrorized for thousands of years. You have to believe me, believe the lonely craftsman who built <The City of Death>. I can recite my name, age and place of birth fairly accurately to you to prove that I have never gone mad.

I can fairly accurately knock on the door of each acquaintance and little by little insinuate my solitude into their bodies, fomenting the madness hidden by the soul. No matter how pretty the mask, the force of instinct flows on forever from a far-off source. The task of art is to resist convention, to build an opposite world on top of the strict, scientific order, to satisfy absolutely free, frenzied imaginings, to let the material and spiritual reach relative balance.

My task is simply to save the imaginative character of mankind's childhood from base reality. It stands detached above time and space, above feelings of mother-love and fond remembrances of times past. It includes creative blasphemy (like the angelic look of pleasure on a child's face who pisses on a whole city off the top of a tall building) and profane procreation (like a child poking a stick into the crotch of Nü Wa's statue³ and imagining her riding his "flying horse"). Often children are seen casually abandoning their painstakingly constructed sand castles.

This [activity] is obviously a far cry removed from rational and lofty human nature. However, an artist's sincerity is found in that he doesn't take pleasure from this world, in that he willfully searches out the entire developing story of a people or even all of mankind. He jabs at its fatal weakness' and at the cost of his life sounds a warning signal: he reveals the roots of the collective sickness which under the domination of primal, supra-natural forces causes people to mutilate and kill themselves and each other.

¹ Three well-known poets who gained prominence in the early 1980s.

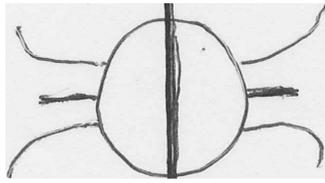
² Two prominent political figures during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

³ Chinese goddess said to have created humanity from clay and to have cleared the earth of threats to the same.

[Manifestations of] anxiety, crisis, despair and rebellion ensure this City of Death won't receive a ready welcome, and Liao Yiwu's value lies precisely in this fact. Once a poet achieves universal public acclaim, his artistic life is done.

The City of Death 死城

**6891 AD, a giant bull circles the
brown [Sichuan] basin. Near death,
Allah Faweh, prophet of Ba People
Village, points to the ground and says:
“This city will hem you in, no matter
whether god is dead or alive.”**



You've crossed this threshold. Such graceful footsteps, daylight crackles like a large burning candle. Cow's milk everywhere. Nudging forward, spear grass shining like curved horns. A hole is hacked into your instep. You howl three times, hooves burst out of your lower limbs. What a miraculous bull you are now! The light of the setting sun shudders and goes out. Leaving behind a large pool of wax. I saw you dissolve in thick milk. Become a puff of smoke

Night of thunder. After the clash of the cattle horns. A cracked sky, bovine eyes flooded with tears. One pops out at some girl's belly

I come bawling into the world. Become your indirect seed. I clearly remember you crossed this threshold. And telling me that you weren't coming back this time. Daddy of my imaginings! Me, sitting all day on my own at the edge of the stairs. Drooling. Smiling stupidly at green-faced long-distance travellers. Who am I begging for news of you? Behind, the hunchback who bore me stands out clearly

Fifteenth day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar. The traditional ghost festival. The graveyard is really hopping. Like a large pier. Boats on the river Styx all dock here. You're sculling. The oar blade smashes the kneecaps of the spirit worshippers. A tumult of grandmotherly voices rises in drunken madness. Unclear who are ghost and who human, I want to cry out. A troop of frogs leaps up and scurries into my mouth. A hellish wind gushes up, suddenly. The hunchback throws himself on the ground and becomes a stone turtle. I snuggle up against it. Like a woman I lavish a terminal tenderness on it. I dig out what's in my mouth. Drag out coils of my own intestine. Out of the corner of my eye I see you cut a person in half at the waist and make the lower half hop in front of me and ask:

“Allah Fahweh. Where are my trousers?”

I remember your bloody hands. Leaping over rows of white walls. The faint sound of chickens clucking. The fifteenth day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar. Gravestones flood the city like a rolling tide. Stand facing the human houses

Through a screen I watch mourners move off into the distance. I finish burning paper money and make my way out of the mountain cliffs. A snakebite draws my attention, the Styx has vanished. Trails of smoke like a path scarcely travelled. Stretching out, peacefully. When the silver-scaled snake climbs onto a branch, the black spots just now journeying on into the distance turn right around immediately and come back. Come toward me and slip away into my heart

I am an empty city sunk inside another empty city. A spacious world. I am -the room from which tragic laughter bursts forth each night. An owl is in full bloom like a black spring flower on a railing. Wild vines conceal masks that come out and sink in the windows. The mourners' cries linger in my ears. The roots of my hair are soaked with the stench of death

Ghosts are everywhere. People are sunk in the pleasures of pillow and bedclothes. Suspended in mid-air the wasteland grows. Grass roots plunge into the earth of dreams. You cross every threshold on the way to the bell tower. Time is controlled by a revolving sword. Is that the icon over the land of freedom?



Summer sea of 1986. Mankind’s ferry is still tossing. The steam whistle blows. Frightening flocks of birds with dazzling scales and shells. Inspired by these birds my dry land slowly emerges. Like an earthen jar with blue algae climbing over it. The dull setting sun just covers its mouth. Constructs a city of golden jade. Winding coral. Seahorses frolic. Pillars of waves form overlapping ranks like the postures of dancing shark folk. Gemstone necklaces are left behind on the sea

The wind at dusk is a vast copper column flattening the water. A booming sound reverberates from antiquity. Seizes the muddy, cold and dense wandering whirl of time. I hear urgent footsteps rise up from the undersea. In the distance I see countless men and women, there a dragon’s tail sculling. Battalions of people bow down to pray toward the new city. The temple of prayer is constantly scorching them like a solid flame. Holy lord Jesus squats on the temple top leading the dirges. Voices and tears of blood. The sky above, the sea below. Riding a white horse, the bride is as changeable as the clouds

The multitude follows the lead. The gentle black face of gauze descends. Nietzsche, the sacrifice, is torn limb from limb by teary-eyed disciples. His smoking remains slither toward the city walls. Scrutinize the posted notice made from his skin:

“God is dead Are we now headed into that distant place?
.....”

The sounds of music linger on. Jesus died first. Several great dictators argue softly over something on the pillar of punishment-by-fire. Suddenly police sirens scream. Large bridges collapse. Freeways crash into dizzying ravines. Lines of able-bodied men answer the call and enter the palace. Tearing at each other like marionettes. Like paper towers in children’s crotches tall buildings shrivel. Shreds of paper fly about. Can’t distinguish if they are peach blossoms, human heads or leaflets inciting holy wars. After a frenzied bombardment my land is sinking. All that remains sighing among the turbid waves is half a lion’s leg. Winter of 1966. Chang E⁴ elopes with an infidel. An angry Hou Yi⁵ shoots ten suns blind. The civilization of this people of illusions is committed completely to the flames. Some poet wrote:

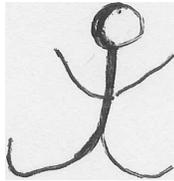
⁴ Chinese goddess of the moon.

⁵ Legendary figure that shot down nine of ten suns with arrows.

“When the wisdom of man attempts to surpass the wisdom of the creator
their day of judgment is at hand

.....”

Those lines in the tongue of tadpoles enchant me: god is dead. Who will manipulate the chess pieces hanging in the air? A ferocious echo. I'm devoured by my own voice. Like worn clothing, the flesh and skin peeled off my bones of their own accord. My brain itches. The ants go in and out. Summer sea of 1986. Gloomy world of man. Nietzsche returns from his tour of the Milky Way. A sacrificial Liao Yiwu is just about to immolate himself in front of the mob. Policemen carry him from dreamland to the insane asylum



I clutch the bed sheets tightly. The end of the corridor. An opening and closing, tear jerking rose. Sleepwalkers shrink into pistil-sucking insects. I listen closely to the slow advance of feet trampling petals. Again. And again. Nü Wa's face flashes past the iron-barred window. A stethoscope is poked through the wall. You drift into awareness.

Crescent-shaped cattle horns. Live fish nudging upward obscured below the abdomen. From the shape of you I've recovered childhood. Roe are gently teasing my penis there are always mothers who uncross their legs lie supine on the beach use exquisite egg-shaped pebbles steeped in blood. Against the current I hauled in the baby crab's home. Shared a meal of sand worms. Several seamen swim through my armpits. Fan-like cacti fold and unfold. Grains of sand join infectiously in singing red folk songs. I come across Gu Cheng drinking his fill from Lorca's brook. Voices of greeting rise up through a crack. French, Inca, Hebrew

And what language do you speak? Where does your stethoscope want to lead me? An orchard of peach trees. A couple of doctors called Jiang He, are off in pursuit of Nü Wa. Kua Fu⁶, Xing Tian⁷, Qu Yuan⁸, Zhuang Zhou⁹, organs of crazed ancestors have all been slashed off. The senseless butchering peach-blossom village I managed to escape and following you forced my way into the tumultuous square. I performed for all the lunatics: turned all the self-absorbed Third Generation¹⁰ madmen into hogs with poems dangling at their waists

Beasts everywhere. Foreshadowing my fate. A red wolf stares at me until saliva drips from his mouth. I try repeatedly to flee from the palm of your hand. Dark images wedge into surrounding walls. Like mutant spawn of dinosaurs. In the age of space flight I flex my talons. A gold-quilled hedgehog quivers. A feathered arrow sprouts from between my lips. Come here, you --- demon.

⁶ Legendary figure who pursued the sun.

⁷ Legendary figure cast from heaven after losing in battle with the emperor of heaven – caused to have breasts for eyes and a belly button for a mouth.

⁸ A famous poet of China's antiquity (ca. 339-ca. 278 B.C.E.).

⁹ A famous Daoist philosopher of China's antiquity, also known as Zhuangzi (ca. 369-ca. 286 B.C.E.).

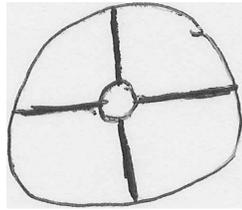
¹⁰ A reference to young poets who gained prominence during the mid-1980s, and, more specifically, Li Yawei, Ma Song and other poets of the *Macho Men* (*Manghan*) tendency in Sichuan.

Mankind. Pistols and necromancy! I'd rather die in all-absorbing mortal combat! See the moon's spider winding roll on roll of iron netting wire. Escaped prisoners dangle by their feet from the net.....

Pitiful escapees! Their bloodied clothing is stripped away by others of their ilk. Art is hung in the great exhibition hall treated like totems --- look. Ladies and gentlemen arrive. Clip, clop of heels. Walking sticks point out empty sleeves. I ride a toy train travelling back and forth between the asylum and the grave. Travellers are forever getting on and off. Absentminded faces. Heads of people and corpses indistinguishable. I witness medicine made from their brains being sold at each train station to cure the mad ravings

But those stars high in the sky look so much like crystal umbrellas! Where is my wife waiting? Can I phone beyond time?

One bitter laugh from you is enough to reduce everything to nothing. There's a path aside from heaven's. But my only option is to be liquidated here! The wings of the nine-headed bird¹¹ are a dimly discernible ladder. Rungs mount up toward a longer cavern. An iron hand of lightning reaches out from inside. Gouges out the channels of five rivers. From inside me five fissures ooze out. Come, you -- doctors. Impostors. Reality. Slaughter houses. I myself rip off and give you my thundering genitals!



Twenty-eight arms hold me from behind. Twenty-eight voices take turns telling me to SHUT UP! Dejectedly I fall to the ground. Warily seek to come to grips with my uprooting. Silently I count the green hands shooting up from my roots. From one to a hundred

Boundless lines of my palm spread out to the plain. I sink down into them. Don't even know which are my own. I just feel the voices of the sons grow old in the all-encompassing haze. Peaks and ridges are settled down like cows. Prophets clutching secrets to success swim out of udders

I just feel that the world of man is so lonely. The land within the Great Wall is filled by kneeling stone statues with broken right arms. Tears accumulate into Yellow River sand. The hot-spring building crowds close to the mountain wall. Stinking hot water slithers down spiral stairs. Pouring into the entrance of a towering vault. Buses rust before the door. Wind chimes whimper. Foam breasts conceal daggers. Two large worms burrow out of a man's nostrils, entwine and copulate

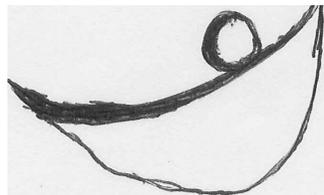
Silently I count the inns I've overnighted in during my life. From one to a hundred. Remote ancestors. Progenitors. Great-grandfathers. Mothers. The made-up opera faces of each dynasty all flash through my mind. At the end I discover Allah Fahweh, the prophet of Ba People Village, showing his green hand. Disguised as a customer groping his way into an underground brothel

¹¹ A red duck-like bird of Chinese legends, said to be very unlucky. Originally ten-headed, a dog bit off the tenth head and anyone splashed with its blood will suffer catastrophe.

**YOUR HAND SIGNALS AROUSE MY PASSION SURVIVING TREES
OVERGROWN WITH VINES SEARCHING FOR LONG-DESIRED
BRAMBLE THICKETS PIERCE CRACKS IN THE EARTH PIERCE DOOR
LINTELS PIERCE BED SHEETS PIERCE FORESTS AND GRASSLANDS A
CONCEALED UNIVERSE OF AMBER'S ELECTRICAL WAVES FLOW ON
FOREVER STIR UP THE BLOOD CYCLE TWO MIGHTY BOWS SHOOT
AT EACH OTHER TWO SEMI-CIRCLES BITE INTO EACH OTHER
OUTSIDE TIGHTLY WRAPPED SUMMER UNUSUALLY HOT SPRAY
HEAVENLY BODIES SPEED UP IN THEIR TURNING THE WHITE DOG
SWALLOWS THE ELEPHANT THE ROOF TILES BREAK STARS INTO
PIECES ALL MANKIND FALLS INTO HELL ALL HELL FALLS INTO
HEAVEN SMASHING OUT GOD'S BRAINS WHO'S DANCING MODERN
DANCES IN THE GREASED PAN ASS GYRATING LIKE ISADORA
DUNCAN'S LOUD APPLAUSE YOU'RE DEITY YOU'RE DEMON YOU'RE
A TANG-DYNASTY DIEHARD OR COFFEE SHOP WAITRESS ALL
LIVING THINGS ARRANGED IN A ROW ABOVE THE EVERLASTING
ABYSS UNCROSSED LEGS FORMING AN ENDLESS URINE-SOAKED
CORRIDOR OF HISTORY WAITING FOR THE TERRIFYING PILLAR OF
FLESH TO BE RAMMED STRAIGHT IN!**

The soil has been tilled my girl your entire body drunkenly limp ovaries and seed in turmoil I say I love you I love you I love you until I suddenly recognize you as my mother until I lift away your ninth layer of skin and discover Nü Wa sobbing hiding within the eardrum-shattering thunder I seize the filthy genealogy and howl wildly I desperately thrash my lower torso like a swarm of angry bees the curse of eighty-eight generations of forefathers stings me. I shout: "Allah Fahweh! You seducing thief!"

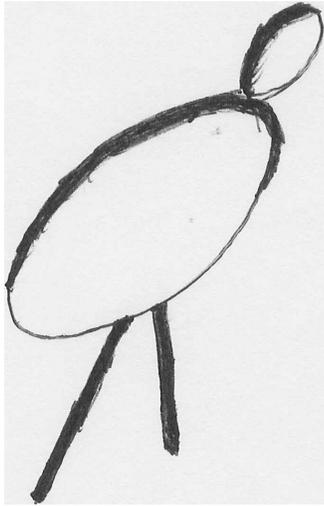
The prophet falls back slipping into the inner room. Flashing a green hand



6891 AD, the sale witness dies. Only in the black leather book, *The Master Craftsman's Fall*, is this crime recorded;

1937 AD, the Second World War breaks out. Japanese planes bomb the Yangtse river basin, the Ba People Village's records archive is reduced to ashes, the whereabouts of The Master Craftsman's Fall is not known;

1944 AD, the Chinese army leaves for the South Asia front, along the way I mistakenly enter an empty house, *The Master Craftsman's Fall* is recovered. While I read I eat three packages of magic cookies, from then on I was mute for five thousand years.



When this all ended, my hair was already white
my face covered with dust. All night I sit alone on a park bench
watching the wind break off the nearly dead brittle branches

I shift the leftover stump of the leg
hold my breath as I endure last night, this night...again the dawn breaks
I am expecting a beggar to hop out from behind the bench,
fierce-voiced, and take all my life savings
including the medal that cost me the shank of my leg

He can relieve the pain of my wounds. Any enemy
can use perfect means of revenge
to relieve the pain of my wounds
You too, settle old scores; pour poisoned liquor down my throat
Even though you wear an elegant top hat
I still know there's a bull's horn in the back of your head

Dull-witted childhood is such a joy!
You turned into a bull then, taunted me
Later we taunted each other
Both suffered
until I sat alone all night on a park bench
watching the city of death north south east west indistinguishable

When this all ended
you'd not revealed yourself
No one showed their faces
I can just stare at the worn threshold beneath the hill of the rock garden opposite
It seems so like my old home's

At the edge of the stairs to my childhood
an old woman sits north facing south
Sadly she plucks out a tongue the size of an egg-plant

she gazes fixedly by the light of the moon

Carved on it are your sins
and the history of a famous city

When she stuffs it back in her mouth
from beyond the high walls comes the poet's wild song
the day is breaking

Beauty and Death [美丽与死亡] 1988
-- For Feifei, in the hope her soul is happy.¹²

Words [辞]

I say, don't come near these poems, these stones, this sun and water, these fabricated heavens; I say, you ought to take charge of that timid pair of hands.

Here each word is skin that grows, they will come together on their own, finishing a beauty, a peerless poetic peak of perfection, but before the beauty of that peak is finished, they'll already be slowly decaying, and will become a very slim thing.

Silently reciting a line of poetry is the same as ripping off a strip of silk, injuring a piece of skin, you'll look on helplessly as bit by bit the wound flares red, festers, spreads, and finally your idol rots away, alive. Pretty things are always very thin, as thin as paper, snow, feathers, silk, flower petals, a beautiful woman, Feifei, the kind of noun that interests the ear. You want to possess a thing and, therefore, don't get the thing. Behind the rout of beauty is an empty cavern, an empty cavern of unlimited loneliness; of itself beauty is a hollow cavern, an empty cavern of blinding charm.

I say, you must control those timid hands!

¹² Liao Yiwu's sister was run-over and killed by a vehicle in the spring of 1988, and this series of seven prose poems were written in her memory – though they were not officially published until 1995.

Encounter [遇]

When we met the music of the sorcerers and witches was playing low, a dance that seemed true, but was false, lay between us. We looked intently at each other through the dance; decades passed like this. Black and white are still entangled, one by one the clouds pile and cluster, fall down on the plain and become a mountain of light colors; on its peak we closely watch the head, neck, underarm hair, belly button of the other fall to pieces, and up overhead your shins knock against the Big Dipper. Decades passed like this, white and black still crisscross, mountains collapse one by one, spread out to the heights, and become a cloud of dense color. On the cloud, we intently watch the overflow of each other's fine rays of light, and become a rite that intermittently meets and parts.

So many years passed like this, you and me, she and he, met and were unable to part.

Leaves [叶]

Your love, your hopeless love makes me think of dying. A satisfying death. A soft boat, so soft. I sleep on deck, listen to the low tones of leaves taking their leave of branches; one leaf, two leaves, three, cover my forehead; one leaf murmurs to another: "I love you" – I love you; many years earlier or many years later, one person says to another: "I love you" – They rot, their souls are dried in the wind; like one leaf and another, they overlap my forehead.

The Sea [海]

You must face the sea, never look back. A rough sea, a lovers' sea, a sea that's had its throat slashed by shards of glass. It gasps, prays, writhes, from its lungs hacks up fish and blood crusted with scales. Amidst water and fish, you must live in it, and let your vocal chords be changed.

You have to learn the sea, how to supplicate, and to keep pace with its ancient rhythms. Forget people, become water, become fish, under the endless molding and jolting of waves become solid water, liquid fish! Then you will possess the him and her, possess the man and woman (who cast you out) their faces and their hearts. You drift around between the sexes. When stars drop into the sea miraculously transform into glittering new people, you're sure to be in their number, as member of a family of stars, getting wed, with the water, the fish, and with your prayers.

You are sea. A rough sea that never looks back.

Boundaries [界]

I rise up from your bed, and another bed is spread out beside the distant mountaintops. Your true form has reclined on it, the moonlight soft, you are vomiting feathers, making the snowflakes scatter in all the directions under heaven.

Most of my life has passed, and now I have reached this mountaintop. The mouths of months and years trumpet, the world is sunk in yellow sands, I don't know how many times it's been tossed up. I raise my head from your body, and see a mountaintop, still in the distance, its dim colorful halo colorful halo is without beginning without end, your even truer form lies naked on a bed that spreads endlessly out. The god of snow pushes a stone roller, trundling it around you, back and forth, your bed stretches and stretches, together with the rumbling of the roller, you continue expanding – in a place even further off, there are still mountains, still beds, a still truer you – how much longer need I walk? How much longer am I capable of it? How long can a person who piece by piece abandons his form, flesh, blood, bones, and organs walk? From up to down, under me, the beds of women form a matchless flight of stairs, I once climbed it on tiptoe – those solid, abstract, translucent, invisible me's tiptoe up ceaselessly.

Illness [病]

I'm infected because of you, but your illness can't be arrested. You refuse the doctor, reject medicine; you say the stink of him profanes your illness.

During a warm spring flowers bloom, you prop yourself on your illness and cry. You say the sound of flower buds bursting irritates you, makes you spit up even more blood. You look at me but don't see me, as if between you and me we're separated by a glass lamp shade; you place yourself inside the dead-quiet shade.

Finally you're at your last gasp, you duck out on all humankind. You say the sound of their eyeballs' quick motions irritates you, makes you spit up all your blood. Your entire body is so pale, so white it's part here part nowhere, so white there's no boundary between it and the wall, the wind, the light, the clouds, and the broad deserted sky.

A fit of coughing passes through the upper air, I seem to know the source of your illness.

Death [亡]

No mother, no me, for so many years, the sun rises the sun sets, I walk toward it, sleep toward it and see the rusting many who are unable to get up. The many are in the funeral procession, going in and out of the sun. At that moment, I think of my mother, and feel it as a remote questioning. I spit out two mouthfuls of blood and continue to wander, till I walk beyond myself – my face is changed into someone else's, my girl takes someone else for me.

But the feet always walk, on land, in water, the feet walk beyond me and step into a half-dry half-wet sun. Fish pour up on the shore, shake off their scales, put on their clothes, and so become people. The foot has no mother, no me, from seaweed to people it slips, from a solid form in the sun steps into a liquid one, walks from metal into blood. For so many years, the wanderer's shape shifts, but the foot always walks one way. Walks.

Translator's Note: This version of parts 3 and 4 of the poem was published in Vol. XLII No. 2, 1992 of *PEN INTERNATIONAL: Bulletin of Selected Books*, London, U.K., pp. 231-233. The Chinese language text can be found in Liao's e-book *The City of Death* (死城) also on this site.

Slaughter [屠杀] 3-4 June 1989

Part III

And another sort of slaughter takes place at Utopia's core
The prime minister catches cold, the people must cough; martial law declared
again and again.
The toothless machinery of the state rolls cowards those who have the courage to
resist the sickness.
Unarmed thugs fall by the thousands; ironclad professional killers swim in a sea of
blood, set tires beneath tightly closed windows, wipe their army regulation boots
with the skirts of dead maidens. They're incapable of trembling.
These heartless robots are incapable of trembling!
Their electronic brains possess only one programme: an official document full of
holes

“In the name of the Fatherland slaughter the constitution!
Replace the constitution, slaughter righteousness!
In the name of mothers throttle children!
In the name of children sodomise fathers!
In the name of wives murder husbands!
In the name of urbanites blow up cities!
Open fire! Fire!
Upon the elderly!
Upon the children!
Open fire on women!
On students. Workers. Teachers.
Open fire on pedlars!
Open Fire! Blast Away!
Take aim on those angry faces.
Horrified faces.
Convulsing faces.
Empty all barrels on despairing and peaceful faces!
Fire away to your heart's content!
These faces char come on like a ride and in the next moment are dead are so
beautiful!
These faces that will be going up to heaven and down to hell are so beautiful!
Beautiful.

A beauty chat turns men into strange beasts!
A beauty that lures men on to ravage, vilify, possess, despoil!
Do away with all beauty!
Do away with all flowers!
Forests. Campuses. Love.
Guitars and pure clean air!
Do away with those ideas that enter into error!
Open Fire! Blast away! It feels so good!
Just like smoking a joint.
Going to the toilet.
Back on the base giving the old lady a good fuck!
Open Fire! All barrels! Blast away! Feels good! So good!
Smash open a skull!
Fry the skin on his head to a crisp!
Make the brain gush out.
The soul gush out.
Splash on the overpass. Gatehouse. Railings.
Splash on the road!
Splash towards the sky where they become stars!
Escaped stars!
Stars with two human legs!
Sky and earth have reversed positions.
Mankind wears bright, shining hats.
Bright shining metal helmets.
A troop of soldiers comes charging out of the moon.
Open fire! All barrels! Blast away! It feels so good!
Mankind and stars fall.
Flee together.
Can't make one out from the other.
Chase them up to the clouds!
Chase into the cracks of the earth and into their flesh and waste them!
Blow another hole in the soul!
Blow another hole in the stars!
Souls dressed in red shirts!
Souls with white belts!
Souls wearing running shoes doing gymnastics to radio!
Where can you run to?
We will dig you out of the mud.
Tear you out of the flesh.
Scoop you out of the air and water.
Open fire! Blast away! It feels good! So good!
The slaughter takes place in three worlds.
On the wings of birds.
In the stomachs of fish.
Carry it out in the fine dust
In countless living organisms.

Leap! Howl! Fly! Run!

Freedom feels so good!

Snuffing out freedom feels so good!

Power will be triumphant forever.

Will be passed down from generation to generation forever.

Freedom will also come back from the dead.

It will come back to life in generation after generation.

Like that dim light just before the dawn.

No. There's no light.

At Utopia's core there can never be light.

Our hearts are pitch black.

Black and scalding.

Like a corpse incinerator.

A trace of the phantoms of the burned dead.

We will exist.

The government that dominates us will exist.

Daylight comes quickly.

It feels so good.

The butchers are still ranting!

Children. Children your bodies all cold.

Children, your hands grasping stones.

Let's go home.

Brothers and sisters, your shattered bodies littering the earth.

Let's go home.

We walk noiselessly.

Walk three feet above the ground.

All the time forward, there must be a place to rest.

There must be a place where sounds of gunfire and explosions cannot be heard.

We so wish to hide within a stalk of grass.

A leaf.

Uncle. Auntie. Grandpa. Granny. Daddy. Mummy.

How much farther till we're home?

We have no home.

Everyone knows.

Chinese people have no home.

Home is a comforting desire.

Let us die in this desire

OPEN FIRE, BLAST AWAY, FIRE!

Let us die in freedom.

Righteousness. Equality. Universal love.

Peace, in these vague desires.

Stand on the horizon.

Attract more of the living to death!

It rains.

Don't know if it is rain or transparent ashes.

Run quickly, Mummy!

Run quickly, son!
Run quickly, elder brother!
Run quickly, little brother!
The butchers will not let up.
An even more terrifying day is approaching.
OPEN FIRE! BLAST AWAY! FIRE! IT FEELS GOOD! FEELS SO GOOD!...

Part IV

Cry Cry Cry Crycrycrycrycrycrycry
While you still have not been surrounded and annihilated, while you still have
strength left to suck milk, crycrycry.
Let your sobs cast you off, fuse into radio, television, radar, give repeated testimony
of the slaughter
Let your sobs cast you off, fuse into plant life, semi-vegetable life and micro-
organisms, blossom into flower after flower, year after year mourning the dead,
mourning yourself.
Let your sobs be distorted, twisted, be annihilated by the tumult of sacrosanct battle.
The butchers come from the east of the city, from the west of the city, from the
south and north of the city.
Metal helmets glint in the light. They're singing ...
Putrid, sweltering summer, people and ghosts sing...
Don't go to the east, don't go to the west, don't go to the south and north.

We stand in the midst of brilliance but all people are blind
We stand on a great road but no-one is able to walk
We stand in the midst of a cacophony but all are mute
We stand in the midst of heat and thirst but all refuse to drink

People with no understanding of the times, people in the midst of calamity, people
who plot to shoot down the sun.
You can only cry, you're still crying, crycrycrycrycrycrycrycrycry! CRYCRY! CRY!

You've been smothered to death, baked to death, your whole body is on fire!
And yet you are crying.
You get up on the stage and act out a farce, you're paraded before the crowds in the
streets, and yet you're crying.
Your eyeballs explode, scald the surrounding crowd, and yet you're crying.
You offer a bounty on yourself, find out yourself, you say you were mistaken,
this accursed epoch is all wrong!
And yet you're crying.
You are stamped into meat pie, you cry

From meat pie you're trampled into meat, you cry.
A dog licks up the minced meat, you cry inside a dog's belly!

CRY! CRY! CRY!

In this historically unprecedented slaughter only the spawn of dogs can survive.

There Are No Children In The World Who Don't Lie [诗界上没有不撒谎的孩子]
子] October 1992, Chongqing, South Bank (of the Yangtze River, where Liao was imprisoned at the time).

The Greek poet, Elytis says: "High-flying birds lighten our burdens." what about a childhood that has sunk below the horizon?

These past three years, Axia¹³ has sent me many letters, of these the ones I found most difficult asked me to write poems for our daughter, Miaomiao.¹⁴ I'm already beyond the age of writing children's poetry; more importantly, for a long time now I've fallen into the habit of singing songs about the end of mankind, not its origins. In public forums critics, those who belittle me and those who praise me, all consciously or unconsciously analyze why I have such a stubborn interest in death: My harsh threnodies obviously affect a child's health.

But Miaomiao has made it necessary for me to look back on the past: I wasn't a well-behaved child, I was obtuse, and I liked to tell lies. My lies were constantly and easily exposed by adults, yet I would persist in the lie, making my parent's lives intolerable. So, I had no choice but to receive dose after dose of education for the young ----

¹³ Liao's wife at the time.

¹⁴ Liao's daughter, born while Liao was imprisoned.

Axia Tells a Story about our Daughter [阿霞讲女儿的故事] 1992

These past few days Miao-miao has been very naughty; she doesn't signal before she urinates, as she used to do. Without a word, she unleashes a torrent of urine that washes out over the bed. I get so angry I grab her and spank her on the bottom. This child's personality has a stubborn streak stronger than anybody's -- the more you hit her the fiercer she cries, making such a racket that even her grandpa and grandma can't get any decent sleep. As she cries, she also shakes her head, making her little egg of a face all red.

With my own eyes I see another little shepherd boy; he cries and shakes his head confronted with evidence [contradictory of his lies], denying it all to the very end. Simply no hope.

Axia Continues Telling Stories about our Daughter [阿霞继续讲女儿的故事]

1992

Miao-miao likes books; she's often with me when I browse through bookstores. I spend a lot of time looking at, selecting books, and, to my surprise, this curly-headed little animal stands beside the bookcases not making a sound. Like a tiny adult she gets up on her tiptoes to reach the books in the lowest shelf, then looks at a book, burbling to herself, as attentively as any. But as she looks at a book, she quietly pops raisins into her mouth and tickles the female clerk silly who's pointing out that she's holding the book upside down. Still the one-and-a-half-year-old tiny thing doesn't pay the least attention. She acts like she's got herself a great bellyful of literary masterpieces.

Just like her old man. When I was small, I was constantly going into bookstores; later the clerks thought I was too dirty, didn't allow me to look at books, so I stole them. This developed to the point where I stole ten Yuan from my parents and bought children's war books; my father punished me by making me kneel on the ground [for a long time]. Ten Yuan in the 1960s was enough to feed an average family for a fortnight.

The year I turned ten, I risked falling to my death when late one night I climbed up to the second floor of the long-closed library to steal books. The dust nearly choked me, but I stuffed over 20 children's books into my clothes; one of these books was "How the Steel is Forged." By the light of the moon I flipped through it, on the cover was a picture of Paul and Tonya in an embrace -- my face red, the veins of my neck bulging, I was intoxicated by it for a good long time, but had feelings of guilt too. Suddenly I heard the sound of footsteps in the corridor and I fell to the floor quaking with terror. Outside the door somebody said: "There was a sound in there, could it be a thief?" A reply: "It's probably a rat; who'd be stealing books these days?"

Thrown now into a sea of books that covers the earth and drowns mankind, I really wish I could return to those days of stealing books.

Miaomiao, On the Back of the Horse of Eternity [永恒马背上的妙妙] 1992

Mankind has never left the womb. In the past when I was still able to travel freely on land and by sea, the wind that brushed across my face was salty, fishy; clouds and waves moved across the horizon, clean as a mirror, like the placenta's amniotic fluid. I'm disconsolate because mankind cannot walk out from the land of its beginnings: It comes out of the maternal body but only wedges itself deeper into an even bigger womb.

The past few years, the letters Axia writes me are all about our child -- a way in which a woman proves herself. Some of her letters talk about my ethnic friend, Jiang Zhongyuan, a Qiang, and how he had a divination carried out for Miaomiao at Ta'er Temple in Qinghai province. Bamboo slips were drawn for a Buddhist name, and it turned out to be "Chenzi." The lamas went on for quite a time about Buddhist names -- Chenzi, child of the dust, child of the billowing yellow sand. The incomparable open spaces of the Great Northwest, one person leading a camel through the endless sea of sand, in the distance mirages of cities and seas appear before your eyes -- it really has a little of the flavor of predestination to it. I've been to Ta'er Temple, a very filthy building, and beneath the gold carved-form of Kaba, the founder of the Yellow Lamaist sect that towers high to the temple's ceiling, there is a sunken V-shaped trough left behind by worshippers over the centuries where blood stains have soaked into the wooden floor. Among the worshippers was one who had come from the high plateau of eastern Tibet, it had taken him over half a year to get there. Years ago when I was a truck driver, on the high plateau where one didn't see a sign of human habitation for miles and miles, I would occasionally see "people" who looked like ragged hemp sacks, their entire bodies stretched out on the road. After a short while, they would wriggle up and throw themselves forward onto the road again. Most of these worshippers were sacks of bones, close to their last gasp, and many died on the road of their pilgrimage..... This sort of insane intoxicated pursuit makes one think of the scene in 1966 when one million Red Guards crowded into Beijing.

On the forever-deserted high plateau, the sun drops in the wink of an eye. The stars are like so many crystal horse hooves clattering overhead from mount Haizi, from the low, gently sloping peaks; they leave hoof-prints on the dazzling white skin of glass.

The invisible bodies of these divine horses are above our heads, all I have to do is put my hand out of the truck's cab and stretch it out into the blanket of night and I'll be able to touch their snorting noses. The pilgrim, as if able to ride on these horsebacks, arrives at the Western Paradise in a flash.

To this day, my memory of that instantaneous shock is still fresh. Before Miaomiao was born, did she ride the horse of eternity too?

Selected Prose Poems 1994

On History [关于历史]

I don't know where history began, I only know history books grow in number by the day; these things that bind up light airy paper produce in me a feeling that I've been cut off from the world for an age.

On Genius [关于天才]

I have a book that expounds on the creation of the world, it tells of how after god made the sky, the earth, and the ten thousand things, the birds and the beasts, the fish and the insects, and all in five days, he was already completely exhausted. Therefore, on the sixth day, eyes half open, with great difficulty and hands weary in the extreme, he infected mankind with his fatigue and despair. As I read this book, I imagined another "creation of the world:" After those five days, after god had organized all of Nature, like a worker anxious to start his weekend, he was very impatient, over ninety percent of man was produced, willy-nilly, in batches on god's lathe. This old bastard produced people as we would produce screws -- certainly there were substandard goods -idiots, lunatics, and others with congenital deficiencies. So, geniuses and idiots were made by god, accidentally.

On Woman [关于女人]

I love women; I don't love any movements having to do with them. Women should discard thought, return to the kitchen, get back to fashion, singing songs, flowers, get back round a man's neck. A poet should have a home everywhere; good women should be like air -- in every place. Uniting with a good woman, the joy of sex is joined to the delight of returning home; you feel that, aside from the bed and this pure fragrant earth beneath you, the world is too miserable to contemplate, a stretch of ruins. Do we possess women? Yes, yes, we men possess them, yet we also deepen the gulf between us, make them unusually diaphanous, unobtainable, an unpossessable eternal presence. I love women, we all love women, and, aside from this, what more can we say?

On Institutions of Learning [关于学院]

December 1988, the pantheist Liao Yiwu is expelled through the doors of an institution of higher learning for the fifth time, and, because of this, suffers the slanders of the Wuhan Evening News, provoking a court case that left him not knowing whether to laugh or cry -- thirty years earlier, perhaps on the very day Liao Yiwu was born, the "Howl" poet, Allen Ginsberg, was expelled from an American university for scribbling

filthy anti-Jew graffiti -- all I have to say about academic institutions lies between these two poets and the two incidents.

From **Go On Living** [活下去]

Part I of a samizdat semi-autobiographical novel begun in prison, completed after Liao's release in 1994.

Introduction [引子]

Sitting with his legs tucked beneath him on the upper berth of a bunk bed, Allahfaweh opened a box of matches and sorted out forty-nine of them. He closed his eyes and prayed for close on fifteen minutes as he prepared to do a divination. Other criminals sauntered about below him in the coffin-shaped cell. From above, in the dim light, the near-sighted Allahfaweh couldn't make out the lower halves to their torsos, he felt as if those bald heads flashing in the dim light floated in mid-air, like over-sized roe.

In recent years, *The Book of Changes* had gained popularity among the educated class. And Allahfaweh, who had been expelled from this class, had been unable to resist the trend. At this moment, this particular divination was of no small consequence. Just now, he had been transferred under armed guard from one prison to another, the one separated from the other by several hundred kilometers. This action had been carried out meticulously and rapidly. Three times in a row a forceful prison official in the corridor had roared like thunder, and three policemen had grabbed hold of the poor lambs that had emerged from the cell by the arms, and set off. An army jeep carried them through the three perimeters of enclosing walls, a main gate, and away from the huge metropolis. As they drove through the steep mountains, the road grew progressively narrower and rougher. Allahfaweh recognized the painstaking care with which the government was handling him: It wasn't safe for a counter-revolutionary poet of his sort to be locked up for long in the big city. And, as expected, their destination was a small county town deep in the Daba Mountains of Sichuan. The prison was situated in the suburbs, its name infamous for the imprisonment of the poet, Hu Feng [in the 1960s].

Once again, being moved left Allahfaweh destitute. Several years' worth of family letters, photos, books and his bamboo flute had all been forfeited. Worse yet, the legal judgment, appeal, adjudication, and defense documents had all been permanently "borrowed" by the prison's political commissar Huang a few days previously. These things are a prisoner's vouchers. If the tickets to get in were lost, the time still had to be served, but what more Heaven held in store for him now was unforeseeable. He would be left helpless before the fickleness of fate.

When Allahfaweh's thoughts had settled, he heaved a long sigh, let his hands drop palms up to the bed. Immediately he sensed the vital forces of Yin and Yang ebbing slowly through his limbs collecting in his cinnabar field. When it was all gathered there, he started to adjust the matchsticks following the pattern laid down over the centuries. At one stroke he sank into the primordial past, a single person alone begging Heaven for protection. The slanting rays of sun dispersed his haze. The colorful fingers of light played for a moment at the corners of his wan mouth, and then landed exactly upon the symbol of the divination that was slowly emerging from the paper:

“Kun 坤: Yuan Heng 元亨”

The Earth: The Universe's vital force flows on uninterrupted.

In *The Definitions of The Book of Changes* it states:

“The Earth's vital forces are wondrous, the ten thousand phenomena are endowed with life. They continue to flow in their own ways and in harmony with the Way of Heaven. The Earth is deep and rich in everything. The limitless virtues are brought together in one, which brings forth vast glories and greatness. The entire host of things flourish.....”

The Earth symbol: Great blessings and Heaven are in good order.

Writings on the Implications of Divinatory Symbols in The Book of Changes state:

“The transformational nature of the Earth is revered above all else! Because of you the ten thousand things attain access to the wellspring of eternity. You bring forth life endlessly, yielding to and bearing the boundless changes within the Way of Heaven. The Earth is rich and deep, the ten thousand phenomena move in their cycles; this is such an all-embracing virtue! You are the mother of all mineral resource, the mother of light, the mother of all heavenly phenomena, and all gods. On the vast Earth, the ten thousand things and the ten thousand phenomena all receive their reason for being from you.....”

Allahfaweh's forehead was on the bed and remained there for a time, his eyes welling with tears. The prison's evening bell sounded, blending with the sounding bell of eternity. His heart thudding, Allahfaweh got down from the bunk and followed the other prisoners as they filed out and gathered in the drill square prior to their meal. Twice in succession, he made an error in reporting his number; his group leader screamed and shouted at him. He giggled, holding his bowl absentmindedly in his hands, still immersed in the peal of earth's glorious bell. For the first time in several years, he had the illusion that his spirit and body had parted company. Freedom! He breathed deeply, hungrily of a strange air that had suddenly gushed up from within him, in a trice, had cleared his vision, and purified his soul. Now he was indifferent to the high walls, the electrified fences, the guards, and the prisoner's life of humiliation. It seemed as if the long, painful price was being paid for this one moment of insight.

Allahfaweh found himself in the golden light of time's tide, and let it wash over him. The earth and sky revolved about him – the sky becoming earth and earth changing to sky; high up in the sky grasses grew in the clouds, their roots knotted tightly into a pure-earth. Plain dirt is the source of all and contains a profusion of deep mysteries; in their succession, the people of the earth fall down and crawl up from the rot in hordes, trudging naked toward the horizon. At first clearly seen and then only vaguely, increasingly illusory, finally Allahfaweh couldn't distinguish between people and cloud. A myriad of thoughts and feelings crowded Allahfaweh's mind; for the first time the heart's eye, the soul's eye, which lay behind the physical eye, observed the ceaseless revolutions of the wheel at the universe's core. That huge, incomparable wheel contained within it a great many smaller, and even smaller wheels, even wheels the size of specks

of dust that spin in the corporeal eye of the great spirit and within which the fate of each of us turns. The earth, the sky, the ten thousand things, the human and the inhuman, micro-organisms, protein, atoms and quanta – things that existed independently and appeared real, but were not, all make-up a finely-tuned machine that holds us all within its keen gears. Family, race, states, movement, insane asylums, law courts, guillotines, and the act of kneeling are contained within it, too. We have no way of knowing how all this began, or how it will end; by way of propagation -- through a painful primitive channel, we are involuntarily dragged out onto this blue celestial body. For instance, at this moment, Allahfaweh is still sitting in a prison cell because of a poem. How did he come to write this poem? Who had manipulated his emotions? Was it due to that incident in China's history? "Executioners manufacture bloody realities, and poets bloody words." As he tried to reach a conclusion about himself, he didn't consider how the historical incident had come to pass, for he knew that from the day he took up a pen to write he had been doomed to incarceration.

Now the walls of the prison within had crumbled, those high walls, impediments no more. He embodied freedom; now he could go unhindered to all the places his legs couldn't carry him to, and at a point in the cycles of time and space he rejoined the past; at this moment his feet were planted in Jiangli in the land south of the Yellow River and he was observing King Wen of the Zhou Dynasty¹⁵ manipulate the trigrams of the legendary emperor Fuxi in China's first state prison. Allahfaweh's devout belief in *The Book of Changes* was not based on the book itself -- as a guide to the art of divination anybody could master it. What he was interested in was the manner in which it had been produced. When King Zhou of the preceding Shang Dynasty¹⁶ imprisoned the future King Wen, he had King Wen's eldest son, Yi Bo, tortured to death, stewed, and put the concoction into a big earthen bowl which he then presented to King Wen. King Wen was aware that the steaming stew in front of him was his own flesh and blood, but still he made short work of it, expressionlessly wiped his lips and remarked on its fine flavor. Even King Zhou, who could kill men without batting an eyelid, was taken aback and thought King Wen was insane. This mobile corpse that had lost all humanity had, during his three long years in prison, closely observed the succession of the days and the nights through a window in a ceiling the size of his hand, and had never uttered a sound or changed his expression throughout his ordeal. He plucked hard yarrow shoots and with them had ceaselessly studied the trigrams that Fuxi had invented. The pupils of his eyes grew deeper and darker by the day, spreading out into a great lake; the stars had dropped down into this lake through the window and his lips gradually had closed fast upon the sky and the earth – the slow transformation of his physical tongue equaled the changing of his heart and of the universe. His head was Qian 乾, symbol of the sky, his body, Kun 坤, symbol of earth, his shoulders were Gen 艮, symbol of the mountains, and his navel Xun 巽, symbol of the wind. He had become the omnipotent one, in a direct line with the great manipulator hidden behind the stars. The Way of Heaven, the way of the Earth – that which linked the two was named Man's Way. At the time, King Wen was, in fact, insensible. King Zhou had forced him to eat his own son and stripped him of his humanity, but the king of kings scorned humanity.

¹⁵ 1125-770 B.C.E.

¹⁶ 1766-1125 B.C.E.

The state of Allahfaweh's mind was akin to King Wen's, but he hadn't yet been reduced to eating his own child. He sensed a mysterious channel that ran through past and present, one that had no beginning, no end, leading from him through to King Wen evolving *The Book of Changes*, all the way back to Fuxi and the creation of the trigrams. The myriad changes do not deviate from their traditional home; the way of heaven operates thus. Emperors and commoners are equal, all passive, wooden puppets on strings. The Nationalist Party, the Communist Party, the Self-governing Alliance of University and College Student Unions, the Alliance of the People, these parties that currently rule or aspire to rule China were all destined to come into being. People often say: "Follow the Way of Heaven and prosper, go against it and perish," but they do not understand the mystery that lies behind these words. As the prisoner of both reality and eternity, some years earlier Allahfaweh had foreseen the extinction of his race of people. Already he had no need his eyes. Five thousand years previously, that blind foreigner, Homer, had wandered the shores of the Aegean chanting *The Iliad* -- a fable about thousands of heroes who went to their deaths for a renowned beauty. Like Homer, Allahfaweh, also, can only follow the will of heaven, take up his pen, and, with himself or his mask as the connection, foretell the affairs of all things – from those of the gods, the Han people, and the reptiles, to those of the polluted mud and the murky waters: A slow suicide.