

- Suvin # -

POEMS 9395

Six Poems Reading Wang Wei

"unbelievably" (H 295)

"Hakone mountains" (H 296)

Two Prose Poems

Where Are the Children Before Birth?

"The King of Huainan"

In my dream i find again (H 297)

Reading More Celan (1.-4.)

Growing Old Without Yugoslavia [PART 2 PTD IN SLIGHTLY EARLIER VARIANT S-F STUDIES ('94): 124].

Changed Address

Bitter Mountain Wind 1-8

Bear City (4)

Summer, On a Hill

Hellenic

Ogling les patineuses

Donation Refused

Montréal 1994

Phoenix Poem

Contradicting Ryûichi-sensei

Untitled

Imagine a Fish

**19.-20.** Letting Go

## SIX POEMS READING WANG WEI

### 1. About Old Age (In Answer to a Poem by Wang Wei)

Nearing old age i ask about the meaning of it all  
Still learning from the failures of my life.  
No royal road was available, only smuggling paths  
Thru thickets & minefields, some clearings.

Still, the horizon was visible if elusive  
The orientation stays constant tho forced into detours.  
The wind gusting in high-rise canyons cools my brow  
The Moon above the sea of flat roofs my paper lantern.

I still wield a word-processor, my back tiring. You say  
The fisherman's song is deep in the river  
I answer the fish are belly-up, the river way too dirty  
For a clean song.

### 2. Answering the Letter a Friend Wrote Me, On Phoning & Not Reaching Me

The world is too much with me, i have to unplug my phone  
In my condo high above the petrified city.  
I'm sorry you spent much time phoning me for nothing  
Sometimes i wrongly feel i can't help anybody any more.

Airplanes leave a slithering spoor across the Summer sky  
Mailboxes are crammed with meretricious flyers,  
Church bells grieve rapacious in vain, & the jazz beats  
From a loud radio boom-box echo in the long street

As it yawns, awash in old newspapers  
Under the sardonic Moon.

10893

### 3. Postmodern

When the Emperor's Gate is remote  
Don't blame me for going my own way.

Wang Wei

In my earlier life i was an activist, but the movement left me  
Proudly i don't believe what we did was an error.  
I cannot betray loyalties of that life, better  
Their illusions than today's disenchanting realities.  
My name & pen speak my former body, & still  
The bloody rulers of this world & my bosom are twain.

#### 4. Bear City Blues, Conclusion

Ice-sheets lock in a river uncertainly dreaming of currents  
Summer storms have spent their thunder.  
You ask me what hate has done to Bear City:  
Now it exists in my memories only.

#### 5. Ageism & the Profit Motive

Bone-cold Winter, ice blades on windows  
Wasted white-lined trees reveal a bright Moon.  
Red silk pyjamas enwrap my thickening waist  
A soft yellow lamp shines on silver beard.  
In this damned society you're respected while you consume  
I look into my mirror, hating the marble façades of banks.  
Hell flames on earth must come about.

#### 6. Alternatives

If i were an old Chinese literatus i might retire to a mountain  
But my feet are weak & the rains are acid.  
The mountain is hazy blue & full of sweet-smelling pine-needles  
What am i doing in my condo on the eleventh floor?  
If i were an old Dalmatian fisherman i might retire to an island  
But cowards kill there with big guns & the rains are acid.  
My little house on the island was of stone  
Cool in the Summer, needing heaters in Fall.

Few care for my writings. The Dao is long.  
Once i'm gone some students may remember.  
Endless, the white clouds over peak & sea.  
What else can i do but care for a few people,

Read on the many classics, & deep into the night  
Keep processing my words & imaginary shapes.

8-993

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Hakone mountains  
A school of green humpback whales  
Your harpoon holds fast

6693

\*\*\*

unbelievably  
amid mass exploitation  
lone i semi-free

8-993

## TWO PROSE POEMS

### WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN BEFORE BIRTH?

I was in a meadow full of golden flowers & varicoloured children who played & frolicked. One of them, seeing me dejected, came toward me & pitying said: "Do not be sad. I'm your child with Natsuko." But this is physically impossible, i objected. "Nothing is only physical here," the smiling dark-haired child responded, "and what is impossible with you is possible with us. I am all the poems and stories and essays you have written when together with Natsuko, because of intermingling your breath with hers. I am all the happy and grave hours in bed & on travel thru the world. I am the memories you two have had together." But none of that has happened, and Natsuko-san wants such memories & mingling only if a physical child happens too, i answered; are you sure you haven't mistaken your father? "We don't live here in your linear time," said the wise child serenely, if more gravely. I couldn't make out whether it was a girl or a boy: her features shimmered and changed, but they were always dark-haired & heart-rending beautiful. "We live in conditional times, the insightful among you sometimes call it possible worlds or 'impossibilia'. In one such world my wise mother applied her intelligence to being good to herself & to you, so i was born. Therefore i can forever joy on these meadows". But which world was that, exclaimed i: not the one i live in when i'm not dreaming, surely!

But the dark-haired little beauty had skipped back to his companions, looking backward at me with the careless goodbye smile of happy people. & now i saw: she had all the sunny charm & none of the dark inhibiting clouds that surround her mother. My *kokoro*'s ache stayed with me after i awoke. Verily, i tell you.

## "THE KING OF HUAINAN"

There was a king of Huainan who wanted to live forever. He tried salves and breath control, sexual abstinence and sager counsel, studied the Classic of the Immortals, entertained shamans from all five directions of space, mixed magic cinnabars in golden cauldrons with long spoons of jade. He distilled the elixir seven times in seven consecutive nights of full Moon in an auspicious South-oriented hall. He died.

Seven are the gates to your vermillion hall, each with a seven-panelled door. I wish to enter thru all the doors to all the halls. I wish to enter your thoughts, twine like your girdle. I hate you, i curse your gates, i wait for them to open. May your love be keen as the sword's edge, may it be fixed as the South-pointing needle. May it caress me as the swaying seagrass in the tides. May it renew itself like the green grasses, dew-laden, sweet-smelling.

993

## EIN GARSTIG LIED

In my dream i find again  
The purity of the militant:  
An abiding carnal ache.

101093

## READING MORE CELAN

i.

All the dry waterfalls  
Cluck reproachfully down the postage stamps  
*Les correspondances*

Ghost of a dead warrior  
Victim of an iris garden  
Devoured devivor

(The tiger springs...)

I winter over to you.

you.

East of my future

At the rapids of nostalgia  
You flit by in guise of a dolphin

Upriver, curving cross-current into  
Interstices of lumbering cross-section logs,  
Inertial monsters that crush,  
Against the flow, in shining bond  
With red in the morning

it.

The splitting up rose, peony.  
True-southern. Bright-eastern.

A frenzy-whipped mob, by invented tradition  
Beflagged under the cold stars.

In the eclipse of the Sun, liberate out of the Pacific  
The word-Moon, from which  
Wondrous tides shake hither & thither  
& crater-mouths serve up gem-like lava  
Naked granite carnelian remembrances  
Character assassinations  
Under the wine of waves.

(...Us he devours.)

Σ.

With you, hard-headed, stubbornly  
Called together, i have lived six  
Times six weeks as near as no matter,  
No atoms no electrons no positrons,  
No anti-matter no foreign bodies

In a technicolor city

That we subverted each black & white night  
Sweetly, while the sickling seconds whirred,  
You meeting my prefiguration, high-thighed  
With astonished eyes & bee-sting-swollen lips,

A dear head on the  
from our deadly precise hands  
Living  
silk-&-nothingness  
Two in one  
Body.

14-171193

### CONTRADICTING RYŪICHI-SENSEI

If a well-aimed word makes you bleed, man  
I didn't mean to be there  
If a quiet meaning takes revenge on you, woman  
I hope i'm there

Tears in your staring eyes, man  
Do they hold a mustard seed's weight of meaning?  
Pain nestling on your silent tongue, woman  
Does the ocean reverberate in your earshell  
With the long wash of a starry night?

Words come from spaces & return to spaces  
Spaces contract & expand in the womb of words  
Melt writhe multiply  
An ear becomes an ocean shell  
A tear becomes a watered seed  
& birds nest in its shade

No untouched space, by no word born, ostends itself  
At least after the animals & infants left  
We cannot inhabit worlds which unlearn words  
They would wink out like stars going nova  
Or, better, like collapsars aspiring to black holes  
Like the long silences after we part  
Having learned English, some Japanese phrases.

27494

## GROWING OLD WITHOUT YUGOSLAVIA

1.

By now i think with vague benevolence  
Of events going on after me

Chocolate cake being tasted, palate-smacking,  
Long-limbed women being ogled, white-skinned,  
Chocolate-skinned,  
Brown-skinned,  
Ogling back,  
Intricate theories being mantled & dismantled,  
Other poetic delights & sweet sorrows.

Yet the Enlightened is right  
Hunger torturing profit percentages 9-to-5 jobs  
Not to mention intestines sickness aging  
This dog-turd universe offends basic decency  
I could do better as an all-powerful Creator

He must be an autistic child  
Playing ricochet along the shore with meta-galaxies  
Counting the bounces before they sink into the quark brew  
A sight rather comic in that feeble way  
If we weren't trapped inside

Ah what good is mental strife without Tito's  
Fraternal Fudô-sword? Still, i shall not cease:  
The soft mercilessness of reason hath me in thrall.

[PART 2 PTD IN SLIGHTLY EARLIER VARIANT, S-F STUDIES ('94): 124].

2.

Dein leben wird dir entrissen  
Deine leistung wird dir gestrichen  
Du stirbst für dich.

Badener Lehrstück

I would like to consent to my non-being

Usually called death  
To make my peace i need a lot of good being  
In the nature of Buck's anti-gravity belt  
Around me or maybe a space-shuttle runway:  
Well-kept, durable, solid  
Making possible a glad & safe ascent  
Into the giddy lightness of non-being.

How can i consent to easeful non-being  
When being for all i hold beloved  
Becomes heavier & heavier? who unclutches  
When assassins stick a bayonet into her entrails?  
Ascensions drop bombs                    rip up lungs & eyes  
Even if we find anti-gravity it will be for blowing up babies  
Even if i die old in my bed, this system  
Makes it impossible to die gladly.

With no Tito, bombers & warring angels  
Recolonize the blissful anti-gravity skies.  
Where nobody can consent to dying  
The economics of life are all wrong.  
Those who cannot die  
Also are dying:  
O Apollo, help us to change, to make a head  
On the torso of our bank-ridden life!

## CHANGED ADDRESS

(Budakova ulica)

Wirfst du den beschrifteten Ankerstein aus? -- Celan

Palimpsest, hobnailed

Bilious troops tread the storm:  
Red at night the dead rise against you  
The evening of the living suffers against you  
The morn of the unborn pleads against you

Love's strawberries swell with blood  
The boars go back to the poison-swill trough  
The piglets are served apple in mouth

Alas i know your names already  
My ashes settle slowly  
Into your God's lupine lap

Come, let us light the anchor of our  
Gravestone testament  
O poor us

Vomit is all.

81293

#### BEAR CITY SONNET

Homage to Kinoshita Yûji

I lived a time in that city  
With many faces now spent  
When hope was a whir of wind-filled wings  
& each day a singing arrow

How it stood, i still see clearly  
Grandfather's villa on the hill  
In Winter we skied down to it  
Over lawns where Summer saw girls bloom.

Snouts i canot bear to see live there now

The hills are built over, you can barely walk  
Between the barbed fences. My burnt grandparents'

Bones in the far-off Catholic mud quite  
Useless, baaing sheep for shearing  
Shit their tight little turds upon them.

151293

## SUMMER, ON A HILL

For Marc

I took the best roads i could  
The choices got funnelled ever tighter  
Finally i'm here, this heavy Summer

No other paths led to wider horizons  
So much is clear now to the future historians

I reread the clarions of Karl & bearings of Bert  
They sound like beautiful childhood tales of Tahiti

A mantis the hue of withered grass for haying  
Swings its sickles, maybe for me.

11-1293

## BITTER MOUNTAIN WIND (VARIATIONS ON CELAN)

1.

After drowning me  
You send your silence  
In sympathy with the big fish  
Deep into the sea.

2.

Above the turning Earth  
You took me, took me  
Three vulnerable feet high

There i hang --

3.

I must take hold of  
Two fistfuls of air

Thru the mud our world bubbles up  
Looking to you.

4.

You tender piloted me behind the world  
It was when you were careless

Unfailing  
Shrikes dole out death  
A rush warns off a dewdrop, you have  
Enough for tonight.

5.

In the soft concavity  
Above your clavicle  
I lost a blue eye

I root after it:  
Come, what can i do  
With one blue & one brown?

6. In a dream, i met you again in a taxi to Sheridan Square, Boston,  
& we made love in a white Tôkyô house. Then i awoke.

So blindingly exact,  
Like a Zen swordsman,

So rooted into the red systole

So centered into the black  
Your *tenkô* dart--

What *kempeitai*  
Drew the target circles?

7.

Here ends the nomination  
I throw it over your shoulders  
A Nessus shirt  
Burning with non-being

Black the sense-seeds of pain.

8. Last Will & Testament

Your caressing was the lightest of all, it lit up your black-blue hair  
I leave you a coffin from bamboo & the blondest wood of *hinoki*.  
A beautiful skiff is the coffin, carved from the fibers of feeling  
It floats out of all our love-beds, cast away twixt Winter & Summer  
As we drink what one has concocted, neither i nor you nor a third one.

Glossary: **tenkô** = abjuration, usually during Fascism, under the pressure of the **kempeitai** = secret police; **hinoki** = cypress variety.

## HELLENIC

A stony head in the hand  
You forget that you forget

The centaur whinnying, you rearing under me

Devolved now into the head warrior  
Leader of the warrior-caste ants

At the end Persians hell-for-leather & Aristotle  
Pairs of proofs rough-shod, hoofing our flesh

This world i must bear, is done with

231293

## OGLING LES PATINEUSES

It's the back of the upper thighs that does me in  
The sweet ripple of the hypopygic muscle  
Leading to caressable hemispheric delights

No ungainly knobs or hairs break its vectorial smoothness  
The warm vulva beckons accessible but just out of sight  
My penis gland tingles in itching anticipation

A pity, from the back you miss dear face round belly  
The symmetrical smaller globes of pointed breasts  
But you can imagine, a dire need in this  
(Un)usually ugly world.

251293

## DONATION REFUSED (ON PARTING WITH ---)

River, carry away the mask of "poetry".  
Fujii Sadakazu

When i glimpsed you first, fluid form  
In that paved-over courtyard  
All alone a grave smiling face  
I did not know

When my interested hands stretched words tumbled out  
The proffered hours parcelled out on a platter  
I did not know  
You refute them by stamping a needy foot  
On the bitter hardness of pavement stone

One starts the water flowing  
One is inundated from the depths  
One draws back, it is too much

O knowing helpless source, forgive me  
I have forgot how to breathe under water  
You do not accept donations  
The donor cannot be donated

Forgive

This boy in paper boats staring at horizons  
If you can, river flowing thru my hands,  
Not a gulp of water, a supple face who was once,  
If gods will, will be, my friend.

*Come back, river to the sea*

*Come back, fertile islands.*

13294

MONTRÉAL 1994

For Tamura Ryûichi

The wolves of freezing  
O god of Puritans  
howl down the canyons of Montréal  
or is it just the nineties  
i am

into regretting  
uphill from regretting  
are reasons        entwined like roots of the wisdom molar  
milling away        splitting down the middle  
waiting for bridge & forceps

a february blizzard took the last as always  
warmth from anywhere in the alluvial plain  
built over by banks & electricity  
too many cold confused people      i am there too  
water pipes freeze forty feet below the ground  
superintendent please keep the warm water running at all times  
somewhere in the house  
if anybody will  
be in the house

just above my eyes  
and work at the regretting  
like a competent midwife  
proscribed by the medical faculty  
she's seen it all for centuries

(the roots entwining  
like twin pines in pain)

in training for unemployment  
the brief joys of the slave.

PHOENIX POEM  
(UPDATING TAO-YUANMING, 1,600 YEARS LATER)

A cause de Ling

Exquisite was her countenance  
Engaging her soft walk  
Thrilled by her quiet stance  
I desired an intimate talk.

Tao Yuanming, *Passion Checked*

Deceptive quietude hiding stormy passion  
--Was that a message from her demure eyes?

(This year I went to visit an unknown city, and at the sight of my hostess was moved to compose this unworthy poem in the style of the great master I was reading.)

On her ink-black hair i'd love to lie  
A light spray that glitters in the waterfall  
From temples to neck and below the shoulders:  
Alas, washed out when the mood takes her.

On the arching brows i'd love to lie  
A cunning trace applied every morning  
To soar upward when she lifts them amused  
Or puzzled: alas, rubbed off every night.

A fan, bamboo & ivory, i'd love to lie  
Airy & light in her tender hand  
Wafting around her cheeks or shoulders  
Wherever directed: alas, too soon put down.

Between the creamy breasts i'd love to lie  
A jade pendant, sliding down her cleavage  
Every morning, nestling the livelong day:  
Alas, cast off in the long Winter nights.

Around her waist i'd love to lie

Embroidered band, fitting closely  
The two-hands'-wide roundness below her ribs:  
Alas, as weather changes, thrown off for another.

A warm futon i'd love to lie  
Groaning deliciously under the small weight  
Tossing & writhing upon me the whole night:  
Alas, soon worn out, replaced by highborn down.

As silk i'd love to slide around her hips  
To embrace her ivory thighs in fondest clasp  
Warming the cold small globes of her behind:  
Alas, left by the bedside as she slips out at night.

As sounding zither i'd love to lie  
Plucked by her fingers into chord or high-pitched cry  
Then resting on her warm lap, highly strung:  
Alas, she's too busy to play me often.

A waxen night candle i'd love to be  
Beholding the delights of her love-bed  
Made & unmade by my discreet flicker:  
Alas, snuffed out when my wick burns down.

(As i finished the poem, i thought it was unworthy of the occasion. But i trusted that the goodwill might excuse all my clumsiness:)

Charming & graceful, she's fragrant as the white orchid;  
As letter, i remind her how soon our day fades  
--Sooner than you think the long night will be upon us:  
Seize the day, burn the candle, sound the zither!

26394

## PLAINT

Savage parent of honey-sweet loves, you whom  
Among barbarians it's illicit to name, Lady,  
Turn to me with all three of your faces,

All ears listen O unjust one, you

Who allot & deny the salt to our daily fare,  
Disturber of order, remixing the cosmic cards,

Mongrelizer, manybreasted mother of pomegranates  
& men & their gods, for once, for once,  
Bittersweet goddess, the claims are too heavy,

Your debtor protests the debt, faithful camp-follower,  
Suckled on the grapes of your breasts, drunk  
& sober, drowning in your wine-coloured sea, the bitter

Taste in my mouth, finally.

3-595

### IMAGINE A FISH

Imagine a fish living out of water

The water is  
The air is  
The fish is

He has some water in his bladder  
He flops along gravelly roads

Up to her eyes coated with dust  
How does she see dessicated the world  
Imagine

Sometimes it flops up a stump  
And attempts to sing  
The birds are in the water

(Imagine)

9595

## LETTING GO

Homage to Tanikawa Shuntarō

1.

I wish a wandering asteroid wd whoosh down  
When nobody expected it any more  
Ringed like Saturn with promises  
The size of red Jupiter  
& blow this infested planet to smithereens.

This is what my life has added up to  
Almost  
Like a blind mangy kitten.

\*\*\*

Get rid of yr affections  
Let go vanity hope even wounds.

You have vanquished O pale Galilean  
Sweat blood & snot running down the cross of gold  
From wch we hang in vain  
Punished by gazing hungrily at Finland Station  
In the whorehouse that once was Leningrad.

\*\*\*

Reader try as i may i have lost  
Yr image. My compassion runs dry  
I won't get to be a Bodhisattva.  
I go on for accidental reasons. Scarcely  
Believable of the man who attacked  
The written page as a wolf, with iron jaws  
& slavering appetite.

Slaves must perforce be stoic,  
Patients patient.

2.

A poet lies on his double bed,  
Writing. Fiftythousand neurons die in his head  
Each day. The ceiling in his study leaks,  
Five years already, nobody can find out why.

What is he writing, to whom, what for?

*Mad hatters & dormice  
slit each other's throats  
in a Bosnian shelled city.*

*In my memory you smile at me  
wet from monsoon rains  
which warmly sweep the macadam.*

*Do you really know how the world  
ends? My bed sails the broad ocean.  
People you loved tell me*

*You talk to nobody.*

When father died, we got a snapshot of his grave  
The copyrights of his manuals are also left over  
My desire to claim either has vanished.  
I walk to the top of the hill & pretend not to hear  
The little demons guffawing behind the bushes.

3.

You that may read these fragments, you in  
A new cool harmony we are condemned to  
Disbelieve in, you that i lived with & for  
Until this senility, if i had any feelings left  
Parting with you wd break my heart. Let go,  
Let go, unimaginable others, defined by a hollow.

On or about January one, Nineteenninetytwo,

The short Twentieth Century -- just seventyfive years --  
Winked out, the future became a thing of the past.  
We embark upon extra-vehicular spacewalks emptyhanded,  
Isolated by non-conducting gloves, technological prestige  
& helmets with virtual faceplates. O Harmonians  
How long, justify how long you let us wait.

\*\*\*

It's tiresome to wake up. For threehundred readers  
It's tiresome to write. No doubt, you'll fit  
This high-pitched note into a chord, Harmonians,  
Martian "ulla, ulla" on Hampstead Heath. But now  
Only old music remains for me, & some bodies  
(Not mine). The kalpa is muzak-meretricious  
Or silent.

Earnestly she reads on Wallerstein & Hobsbawm, in warm  
Scarves swathed. I am haunted by songs of auld lang syne:  
"Avanti popolo..." "O bella ciao..."  
"Omladino zemlje ove... ". Azure, the azure!

\*\*\*

Learning  
How to non-write  
Not unwrite.  
The dead are not safe.  
Learning, still.

14895

NOT FOR PUBLICATION:

[COMMENT TO ABOVE: I GOT A LETTER FROM MY EX-"FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY" IN ZAGREB WITH THE STREET NAME CHANGED FROM A TITOIST TRADE-UNION LEADER TO THE EX-USTASHI EQUIVALENT OF GOEBBELS, A BAD NOVELIST NAMED BUDAK. LATER IT TURNED OUT THE OUTCRY WAS SUCH THAT THE NAME-CHANGE WAS NOT APPROVED BY THE AUTHORITIES. THE LARGER QUESTION OF WHICH THIS WAS A SYMPTOM, ALAS, REMAINS.]