

ZHAI YONGMING

Three Poems

Translated from the Chinese by Ondi Lingenfelter

Encapsulated

I am alive I stuff myself into a tiny package
with so many materials creating the capsule of me
this body is hard to swallow

slowly I am stuffed inside a broken kiss
stuffed inside a different person, stuffed into his grinding
packed inside what is overlooked, thus hard to forget
slowly I swallow, reach for a glass of soda water
slowly I break open a kernel
pull apart two trees' worth of plum blossoms, three lives of setting suns
past lives and this life are all accounted for
this body stuffed inside too many autumn winds
I'm not reckless, but all I can do is clutch a spray of suffering bones

Heaven and Earth are boundless
but they are merely a capsule apartment
slowly I pick up a cup of tepid water
slowly pour it into a vast realm made of flesh
the Myriad Things are viscera, so how can I
be anything but a speck, this body
quenched and tempered even if it slowly accretes
into a crafty smile
it would dissolve like a capsule in the end, disappear
even if I could bring down the wrath of Heaven and Earth
in the end everything will turn into an expanse of shifting
sands

take a look: countless capsules are flying this way
shedding their skins as they depart...

March 10, 2014

胶囊之身

我活着 把自我装进微小包装
看多少材料打造出我这颗
难以下咽的胶囊之身

慢慢地我装进破碎的接吻
装进另一个人，装进他的研磨
装进不思量、自难忘
慢慢地我吞下，就着一杯苏打水
慢慢地我掰开一粒果核
掰开两树梨花三生斜阳
我与前世今生都有过交待
此身已装进太多的秋风
不放浪、也只能握紧这一束苦形骸

天地大到无际
也只是胶囊的公寓
慢慢地就着一杯温吞水
慢慢地滚进一片茫然的肉体
万物皆为脏腑，我又岂能
不只是一粒渣滓，此身
浑沌多淬炼 即便慢慢积攒出
一个狡黠笑容
终将胶囊式地溶化、消失
既便能令天地七窍生烟
终将化为一片散沙坠地

看看吧：无数胶囊排空而来
又蜕皮而去……

2014-3-10

For Akhmatova

because of that twilit & boozy yellow apartment
I pay my respects to you
because elegance cannot be made into bread
I pay my respects to you
because among the squirming ranks you tried to stand
I pay my respects to you
because after circling it three times we latecomers finally found your home
I pay my respects to you

you moved around this three-room apartment ¹
where nothing remains but black and white photos staring out
an endless stream of people in a room with no host
a long poem with no hero that no one reads to the end
there is nothing but these three rooms left behind in passion
nothing but the footsteps that once passed through them
skittish, arrhythmic, listless
sweet footsteps
nothing but the thundering, buzzing, shrieking
and a lump of grief the blood and wine of those years could not soften
darkness alone can return to the past

apart from an old leather suitcase still gleaming like the edge of a knife
& stuffed full of letters from another world
apart from the daily narration of docents with parched tongues
& apart from future guests
who will travel a thousand miles to sit beside you and share secrets?
apart from opening up the Fountain Palace ²
for the entire world, what else could you do?

other than writing comments by our names at the turn in the stairwell
I pay my respects other than taking a selfie
other than the lightning fast shutter
and gasping for breath as we merge into the commercial boulevard
what else could I do?

in a third-rate era
snatching a third-rate afternoon is difficult enough ³
many bright people have come here come and gone
many books exquisite and fine
have decorated you like a mosaic
just as this nondescript dwelling ornaments your suffering

only the Soviet mind cannot be ornamented ⁴
only one generation will not have the curtain fall on it
only poetry cannot be bent
standing here
I can hear their voices coming from underground

September 2014

Notes by the poet:

¹ Akhmatova and her husband Nikolai Punin lived in rooms in the Fountain Palace, which had been assigned to them by the Soviet Writers Association. Punin's former wife lived there as well. In later years, Akhmatova would continue to live there, not moving out even after she and Punin had split up. She and Punin's former wife merely traded rooms.

² Fountain Palace: Previously known as Sheremetyevo Palace in Saint Petersburg, Fountain Palace was later occupied by the Soviet Writers Association. Akhmatova's former residence of is now the site of a museum dedicated to her.

³ The Russian émigré poet Joseph Brodsky, a protégé of Akhmatova's, wrote a poem describing his own era as "second rate." In my opinion, the present time has already become a third-rate era.

⁴ The phrase "Soviet mind" is taken from philosopher Isaiah Berlin's (1909-1997) book, *The Soviet Mind* (2004).

致阿赫玛托娃

因为晨昏酗酒般的黄色公寓
我向你致敬
因为优雅不足以烘烤成面包
我向你致敬
因为蜿蜒队伍中你曾佝偻而立
我向你致敬
因为绕行三圈 后人最终辨出这居所
我向你致敬

统共三间的房屋你搬来搬去（注 1）
如今只剩黑白肖像瞪着你
没有主人公的房间人流不息
没有主人公的长诗无人续尾
唯有三间居所遗世而沸腾
唯有当年穿行于此的脚步
鼠窜的、心悸的、懒洋洋的
甜蜜的脚步
唯有当年的咆哮、蝇语、尖叫
以及酒和血都浇不透的心中块垒
唯有黑暗 能回到过去

除了旧皮箱仍在刀锋般闪亮
它塞满另一世界的书信
除了解说员日复一日口干舌燥
除了未来的客人
谁千里迢迢 来与你促膝谈心？
除了把你的生命向全世界敞开
喷泉宫，你还能怎样？（注 2）

除了在楼梯拐角处签下留言
向你致敬 除了自拍
除了风驰电掣般狂按快门
然后气息奄奄地融入商业大街
我还能怎样？

一个三流的时代
争取一个三流的下午已属不易（注 3）

许多聪明人来至这里 来了又走
许多书籍 美丽精致
镶嵌画般装璜了你
如同这幢看似简朴的故居
装潢了你的苦难

唯有苏联的心灵不能装璜 （注 4）
唯有一代人的存在永不落幕
唯有诗 不能弯曲
我立足于此
仍然听见他们来自地底的声音

2014. 9.

注 1：阿赫玛托娃与第三任丈夫尼古拉·普宁住在作协分配的喷泉宫里的房间，普宁的前妻也住在这间三居室。阿赫玛托娃后期一直住在这里，她与普宁分手后也未搬出，而是与普宁前妻调换了房间。

注 2：喷泉宫：圣彼得堡的谢列梅捷夫宫殿，后为苏联作协占用。现为她的故居博物馆。

注 3：布罗茨基曾有诗句“这是一个二流的时代”用以描述他那个时代，在我看来，现在却已是三流时代。

注 4：苏联的心灵，此句来自于以赛亚·伯林的著作《苏联的心灵》。

Parapet

the finest vista is from the top of a wall
it's a regulated field of view
it's a woman's field of view
filtered through leaves and branches it's life from girlhood to womanhood
sisters don their green armor
and stand in this spot inhabiting a space
that isn't the three-quarter perspective of Western painting

within the walls, a courtyard and dim pavilion
where sisters vowed to form an alliance
sitting on cold stones in twos and threes
silken sashes gently trailing
eroded stones from Taihu wrought by nature
natural stones ancient but always new
Taihu stones the skeletons of stones
years later too many men would paint them
and some men would encase them in stainless steel

today the little courtyard, the stones, and the poems
have become timely marriage resisters
sleepwalkers the childless
stones lean on stones
like sisters, leaning on each other
sitting by the water, side by side

fish spirits dart underwater
fairies glimmer behind willows
fox fairies spring from the grass
the ancients called them demons and monsters

there's no sign in this world of the legend of the White Snake
no sign in this world of Nie Xiaoqian
women who composed and chanted poetry
fell in love with scholars grew sick with longing
why did they always appear in female form?
hiding among Taihu stones
hiding behind parapets

they were transformed their blood turned green
they disguised themselves
to meet their true loves

looking out from the top of the wall
on the road to Chang'an they rose up
where scattered bits of tradition converged
wanderers, good men, scholars enroute to the imperial examinations
all have descended descended into dust
while "Qingming on the River" ascends to the heavens

horses galloping towards the parapet
also ascended higher and higher
someone with a face like a peach blossom sits astride that horse
eye brows arched like willow wands
& the horse noses into the garden
& the horse's head and the person's head are the same height
& they cut their skirts short and leave

when the tracing paper in my palm is offered up
to take the bearings of the parapet
on the television next to me, a man is saying:
women who love jewelry modern poetry
and thrill-seeking, women like that
don't interest me

ha! history is like that too
it always has been
stern fathers with starchy collars
supercilious husbands casting judgment
acquiescent brothers ever deferring
serious teachers with their lofty morals
this doesn't interest them, not at all

Translator's notes:

About the title: The Chinese word for "parapet" is "nü erqiang" 女兒牆, literally "daughter wall". Some have speculated that the name derives from the fact that the crenellations of a parapet are of a height such that a person of small stature, such as a woman or girl, could hide behind them. Zhai Yongming plays on the double meaning of this architectural term and composes a poem about the position of women in Chinese history and in traditional culture, pointing out at the end of the poem that things don't really change.

Lake Tai stones, or Taihu stones: Lake Tai (Chinese, Taihu 太湖) is a large lake on the Yangzi Delta plain famous for its scenery and for the fantastically eroded stones found there. Such stones (or their facsimiles), with their baroque crenellations and numerous holes, are a common feature of traditional Chinese gardens.

Legend of the White Snake: One of the most important and well-known Chinese traditional stories (first committed to paper and published by Feng Menglong in 1624), this tale tells of a snake who transforms herself into a supernatural maiden and falls in love with and has a child with a young scholar. Although she is imprisoned in a pagoda for decades by a vindictive Buddhist monk (himself a transformed turtle), her loyal maidservant (a green snake who has taken human form) rescues her and reunites her with her family.

Nie Xiaoqian 聶小倩: This character (from Pu Songling's 蒲松齡 [1640-1715] c. 1740 collection of short fiction, *Strange Stories from Liao's Studio* 聊齋誌異) is a virtuous ghost maiden whose loyalty to and love for her human lover ultimately restore her to life.

"Qingming on the River": Iconic Northern Song dynasty scroll by Zhang Zeduan 張擇端 (1085-1145) depicting a festival day in the Northern Song capital of Bianjing (present day Kaifeng). The name of the scroll is often translated as "Along the River During the Qingming Festival." Chinese: *Qingming shanghetu* 清明上河圖.

女儿墙

最佳的视野是从墙头望出去
这是规定的视野
这是女人的视野
穿过枝叶 就是少女到妇人的一生
姐妹们都穿上绿色的盔甲
站在这个位置 居中
不是西方绘画的四分之三视点

墙内，小院幽轩
姐妹盟誓结社之地
三三两两坐在冰凉的石头上
丝绸飘带软软地垂下
太湖石 天生好物
它乃自然之石 古老又常新
太湖石 石的骨骼
若干年后 有太多男人画它
有男人给它套上不锈钢

现在 小院和石头以及诗句
适合遁世者 恨嫁者
梦游者 不育者
石头靠着石头
像姐妹靠着姐妹
倚坐在水边

水底下冒出鱼仙
柳树后闪出妖精
草丛中跃出狐仙

古语叫她们：魑魅魍魉

世间已不见白蛇传
世间也已不见聂小倩
她们作诗 吟诗
爱上书生 相思成疾
为何她们总是以女人之身出现？
躲在太湖石旁
或躲在女儿墙后
她们是精灵所化 血变成绿色
为了伪装
为了姻缘

从墙头望出去
通往长安的路升了起来
在传统的散点聚集中
游子、良人、赶考的书生
都低了下来 低到尘埃中
而清明上河图 升到天上

朝着女儿墙奔驰而来的马
也升了起来，越升越高
人面桃花骑在马上
柳叶双眉也升了起来
直到马头伸进花园
直到马头与人头一般高
直到她们断裾而去

当我手拿图纸 伏首案头
丈量女儿墙的位置
在我侧面的电视上，男人正说道：

我对珠宝钗环 现代诗
和行为上追求刺激的女人
都不感兴趣

呵呵，历史也是如此
历来如此
正襟危坐的父亲
举案齐眉的丈夫
分梨让位的兄弟
德高望重的师长
他们对此都不感兴趣
