

II

(for Meira Chand)

The Bared Teeth of Men

When I look now upon the bronze
form of Minnie Vautrin, set here
where Ginling Women's College
once stood, and where she helped save
ten thousand souls—elsewhere
three hundred thousand townsfolk fell,
I see the greatness of one human heart—
the brave rock in a black river of deeds.

Sometimes humankind has other faces
to show: here were once bared teeth,
thirsting for blood, imperious sacrilege
of each rapist's thrust. But no tears
shed for man's darkest acts can purify
defiled river mud, rank effluent
of this human history. Despair then,
until you see even now beside the plinth
someone has left a small white pot

of feeble flowers. See also a few brown
autumn leaves, now wind-strewn
at the foot of the smiling bust
of a woman, who briefly fought
for all womanhood; and shamed
blood lust of men to take up arms.

III

Three Stone Trees

What is such desecration of human mind
and what of the body that brings it on?
A parched courtyard, desolate and lined
with broken stone: stone corpses prone
and three stone trees. Recall a race of men,
glutted with certainty, but of demon kind,
each empowered as Heaven's chosen son
with raised sword to sever flesh and bone.
Don't think just of evil ones with power blind;
think of three hundred thousand confined
to their graves, lives unfinished, every one!
My fellow human, what have we done?

IV

For it is a story of such crime and horror as to be almost unbelievable, the story of the depredations of a horde of degraded criminals of incredible bestiality on a peaceful, kindly, law-abiding people...I believe it has no parallel in modern history (George Fitch, YMCA Secretary in Nanjing, December, 1937)

Panay Incident

These Yangtse reed-beds
were more than man high
and so dense a small army
might hope to be concealed.

But it was here navy crew
and fleeing passengers
spent freezing nights while
bombers dived and strafed.

This was an act of war,
the sinking of USS Panay.
It was wilful provocation,
an assault designed to show

Americans and other western
nations were bound to be
replaced by Japan—as the new
self-chosen Asian colonist.

But still darker motives lay
concealed—foreigners there
witnessed amongst the worst
of a century's mass rapes.

For evidence lay buried
in the riverbank mud
among creaking reeds:
the fifty three spools

of film witnessing
atrocities Nippon
could not deny. Vile proof
of Panay air attack,

and bloody bestiality of
other acts—beheading,
bayoneting, burning,
abduction and rapine.

The sinking of that river
gunboat, though momentous,
beside other atrocities, now
almost a random act.

V

(Everyone became a demon within three months...

Tominaga Shozo, Japanese soldier)

Thirty Seven Wounds

From where Sun Zhongshan* looks down
from brooding heights of Purple Mountain
on to that city walled once like no other,
see restless swarms of these armed men
moving north from sacking of Shanghai
in khaki-clad resistless deadly plague
over the freezing Yangtse's wetlands.

When Chiang Kai-shek fled his capital
and General Matsui Iwani rode his chestnut
from Mountain Gate to the Metropolitan
six days of raping had already passed.
And Li Youying lay weak in hospital with
thirty seven stitched-up bayonet wounds:
her baby miscarried in welter of blood,
her both eyes stabbed, nose torn open
and teeth all smashed. Yet she had fought
for her life, avoided rape by seeming dead;
only at the graveside her father saw life
in the running blood bubbles of breath.
And so she survived those thirty seven

thrusts in her small victory for women
of Nanjing; for women of all China then.
But now for all the women of the world.

2012

*President Sun Yat-sen

FUGITIVE'S TAMBOURINE TUNE

A Prelude

Rattle of death is in the tambourine
and then you hear the beat of snare drum's
volleying fire, played by skeletons, who march
with mocking smiles--leather trappings creak,
black banners flap on jutting staves--and this
rutted road is knived by wheels of carts.
In dusk ahead, red fires among ranked tents reflect
as blood in puddles that the troop stalks through.

Humped behind iron gates of a graveyards,
the already dead peer out like barred inmates,
strait-jacketed now in their own cadavers.
From holes that were their mouths they
clamour aloud to the marchers passing
by. With scabrous claws they rattle the bars
and rave. Indifferent drums maintain their
rate, equipment clanks in the marchers' wake.