1996

Paper boat

Chao
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PAPER BOAT

by

CHAO

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EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
TO

my dearest wife Ah Fen and our only son Yiyi
We are brought down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground. Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love.

Ps. 44: 26, 27
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Acknowledgments are due to Glen Phillips and Toby Metcalfe, who maintained enthusiastic support for the publication of this book over a number of years. Without their practical and editorial assistance I would have given up hope. Thanks to John Kinsella who helped in the selection of this collection, to Megan Shave for word processing and to Wang Xu Ning for providing a selection of his paintings from which the cover illustration has been chosen. I wish to thank Keith Burton for designing this book, especially the cover, and Jan King for the typesetting.

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And to all those others who have given me any kind of help and encouragement I also offer my heartfelt thanks.

CHAO


PREFACE FOR PAPER BOAT

I cannot hope to convey how delighted I am to be given the privilege of addressing the reader of this unique collection of poems. For five years since I met the extraordinary young Chinese poet, Chao, I have been impatiently awaiting the Australian publication of his work.

In 1990 I was on a sabbatical exchange at the Guangdong Foreign Studies University in South China. Only a few days after I had been installed in the so-called Foreign Experts Building in the leafy campus on the slopes of White Cloud Mountain, near Guangzhou, I heard a soft knock at my fourth-floor door. My visitor, a slim but vibrant figure, was Chao, then a member of the French Department at the University. He announced that he was excited to hear there was an Australian poet on campus. Our friendship blossomed from that moment and each of us found the other's poetry intensely interesting. We exchanged our newest poems, almost daily; we explored Australian and Chinese contemporary poetry, we met with local poets, and we organised a number of public readings at which audiences, mainly students, responded very strongly.

Back in those times, my initial delight in reading Chao's poetry had been heightened by the discovery that he wrote directly in his third language, English (as well as in Chinese and French). The poems in Paper Boat, his latest book, provide extraordinary evidence of his ability to perform this feat. Only a select group of writers has such a powerful poetic impulse that it shines as an unquenchable flame in their poetry no matter in which language they choose to write. Chao is such a poet:

CHINESE BLACK
(for Gu Cheng)

black
the colour of our eyes
the colour of our night

in it
only in it
am I destined
to witness light
Yet in his newest poems, especially those responding to Australia, the first overseas country Chao has visited, we find the imagery equally apposite, equally intense, equally controlled:

**AUSTRALIAN NIGHT**

an enormously long granite table just placed
under the moon-flower decked veranda splendoured
with contemporary limelight and ancient torches

an enormously long granite table just mattressed
seats them like an audience watching
fits of wind crossing over time ephemeral and time eternal
with their shirts and blouses bulging
appetite alighting

an enormously long granite table just centred
with gigantic plates of fresh seafood and bricky bread
bottles of wine white yellow brown and red
dotted like a blessed game of chess

an enormously long granite table just gleaming
with forks knives plates glasses clicking
into frail echoes of sparkling tingling lights

an enormously long granite table
like the Swan River carrying them far to the tales of night
the new moon rocking a canoe of cleansed light
over the billowing Indian Ocean

What living poet would not envy here the quicksilver of ideas, the deftness of word-placements, the inventiveness of imagery?

The three ‘parts’ into which this volume has been divided show us many sides of the poet’s life, as well as scenes of contemporary China. We glimpse, as we turn pages, many faces of China itself: childhood and manhood, cities and open fields, and the changing seasons. And also we have incisive views of our own society in Australia, through a mirror which is at the same time riddling and revealing. The final poem in the book, “For Sale”, is an uncompromising but not undeserved satire directed not just at Perth, but perhaps at all the world’s modern cities. Always there is a keen intelligence perceiving, responding, observing, often with a needle sharpness of wit, often with self-effacing shyness. These poems are endearing. We come back to them again and again, like treasured objects:

on to the wall
I poured
basin after basin
yet
my own shadow
I could not
wash off

a chicken
standing in the rain
huddling
on its own
leg

(SELF-PORTRAIT)

I sincerely hope the reader is deeply satisfied with the rewards for the pleasant task of having sailed in this ‘paper boat’.

GLEN PHILLIPS
Associate Professor, English,
Edith Cowan University,
January 1996.
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Part I
CHINESE BLACK
for Gu Cheng

black
the colour of our eyes
the colour of our night

in it
only in it
am I destined
to witness the light
BIRDS

a confusion of leaves boughs
sprigs and twigs
you arise with a shriek
alighting on a branch
begin to sing again

you are never frightened
enough to keep silent
or be sad

DUTIFUL CHILDREN

at midnight
their past parents
appear in their dream
they get up
let off some fireworks
or burn some ghost money
made of cheap paper
then return to sleep
again with relief
as if they knew
their parents
were satisfied
WATCHING BREAST FEEDING

brown freckles
surround
the breasts

fragrance of milk
lingers
in silent suck

I listen
in hunger

CONVERTS

at last
the sun
sank pressed
into the dried clefts
of the land

my farmers
who were not yet tombstones
kneel on the field
ranked like steles
with their rough hands
lifted up
for rain
VIOLIN

your sobbing violin
human language
has forgotten

the moon
dives mute into the pond
to grope for the root
of the grove

GENERATIONS

we are

fruit
growing in the air
without any branch
branch
without any trunk
trunk
without any root
root
without any soil
**TALE OF THE VOICE**

for my son

you don't know, my boy?
your voice now as an elf
no, as a blind bat
is wildly hovering
now has knocked into a tree
listen, the echo of bumping

now, look
your voice has dropped down
faint
its face must have been
badly wounded
black and blue even
like an almost eaten leaf
o what pitiful eyes
hidden in a strangled face!

so, stop shouting, my boy
or your voice will get shot
by the bullets of the rain

and its soul will become a wolf
breaking into your dream
biting tight your coat
pulling you backward

o my boy
stop shouting and confine your voice
within your own body

---

**LEAPING OVER HISTORY**

my child in my arms
I watched the water
overflowing the stone bridge

my childhood
slowly visualized
carried on the back
of my one-year-and-a-half-older sister
was stopped by a flood

booms of thunder
broke the sky's skull
one of my sandals
slipped into the torrent
was soon washed away

the day was darkened into night
the fitful lightning
was our fear
and only light

I could not cry then
nor can I now
for my child is sitting in my arms
depthly drawn
to the turbulent din

I could not cry then
for tears curdled
huddled in my small mind
at the thought of souls
spirits ghosts and devils
weeping groaning shrieking
revenging and redressing
in a world which man can not see
yet is the watcher
the judge of man
(it is what my Grandpa used to say)
my child in my arms  
I leap over the stone bridge  
the chubby hands of my child  
toss up  
dancing with glee

**THE CAT AND ME**

when I spotted that cat  
squatting, mewing, infant-like  
in the middle of the road  
it was so late a night  
that the road-lamp  
beamed increasingly bright

I, having passed by  
turned back  
she looked up  
her feminine clarity  
assailed my sight  
her feminine serenity  
captured my mind

I stood there gazing  
she was lonely  
yearning without hope  
for delicate hands to gently  
harrow through her furry back

she looked upon me  
I, neither a maid nor less lonely  
felt inarticulate  
while she, a cat, sleepless  
out of the soft arms  
wandered in the night  
I, a man, aged eighteen  
began to imagine  
how it would be  
etwined with a sweet virgin  
at this time of night
SIBLINGS

my twin brother is gone
who used to sing aloud
ancient Chinese poems
his sonorous voice
striking plucking
the strings of moonbeams

my twin brother is gone
who used to stand alone
in the stubby wheat field
envisioning all humans
emerging from the peak
of flesh and desires

my twin brother is gone
who used to remember our father
sitting on the handle of his hoe
in the shadow of a willow
his bamboo pipe extending
from his thick lips
to the edge of a ditch
muffled memories channelling
through puffs of smoke

my twin brother is gone
who used to recall our mother
seated in the warm kitchen
telling tales with her chapped
wrinkled hands
webbing weaving hardships
sufferings into jumpers
for us to huddle in

my twin brother is gone
who committed suicide in Beijing
a place we had dreamt
of visiting to worship Mao
since our childhood

my twin brother is gone
who left a note in his coat
saying his death has nothing
to do with anyone or anything
in this country or
in this history

my twin brother is gone
now I am still alive
like a pair of chopsticks
with one missing
like a pair of glasses
with one cracked
like a pair of compasses
with one broken

my twin brother is gone
I have to survive
like my grandmother
when her sister was raped
then cut open
by a Japanese soldier

my twin brother is gone
I have to survive
like my grandfather
when his brother was shot
while both uniformed
were lying in an ambush
against the Japanese army

my twin brother is gone
I must live on like my mother
when her brother
was flogged to death
in the Cultural Revolution

my twin brother is gone
I must live on like my father
when his sister
was starved to death
in the Great Leap Forward
my twin brother is gone
I am to live on
as a single sleeve
or a single trouser leg
to exhibit to my children
what has been
what was and what is
in this quasi-world

CHILD
for Pastor Ouyang

night
the father was reading Matthew
with his son sitting on his lap
like a cat
the father was inspired
and said to his son
what about playing a game tonight
the son nodded his head
wild with delight
the father rose from the sofa
and moved towards the switch
the son became alert
as the father lifted his hand
the son with a burst of crying
pounced upon his father
like the sudden blackout
the father was touched
by his son’s clutch
and holding him tightly in his arms
was enlightened:
why the Lord asked His disciples
to humble themselves
like a little child
STROLLING THROUGH THE WOODS

two student girls, one in white
the other in orange
I saw in my stroll
through the woods
sitting in a sunny stubbled clearing
bent over their books
and raised their heads
as they sensed my footsteps
to alertly look at me
like two timid birds
I really do not know
why but instinctively
I lowered my head pretending
to have been in thought
arms folded before my chest
like an owlish philosopher
though at the sight of them
my face and inside
blushed immediately
like a tyro lover
I just do not know
why I did not lift a finger
to hi or hello
or just give a smile
or a nod
I just do not know
and now feel sad
as I realise I might be the source
of a nightmare
in this seemingly quiet world

ROSE POEM
for Yolanda

dearest child
since you asked me to write a poem on rose
my mind has been dangling all the time
unable to settle down like a prose
dearest child
in the adult world
rose has long become a symbol of love
always for sale
cut off from its root and trunk
wrapped with a filmy plastic
it is no longer a flower
with an anointing fragrance
or a fragile life that can year after year
decorate nature with perfumed grace
dearest child
now rose to me is but a verb
the past tense of rise
showing it was once up
and might have been down
or even
past
RECORD OF A RAPER

he was about to flee
when she sat up
saying why not kiss me
he stopped stupefied
yet she hopped up to him
printed her bloody lips
on his still sweating cheek
then flew away
with a pat on his back
he stood there
unable to recall
what had happened
he stood there
the night washed him
with wind and dark
and in the end
he cried

THE ANTS AND I

I sat on a stone ledge
about to write
when some ants
bee-waisted
were seen scurrying towards me
with all their slender feet
I did not want to hurt them
so, gently flicked them off
for I was afraid of stinging
but to my surprise
they would rush back again
showing nothing of fear
as they settled at a distance
one by one I flicked them off again
yet they would never give up
as if I were a mountain of food
they helped one another
so that those fainted
or turned upside down
could be prepared to attack again
I was happy and crazy
happy, they were so loving to each other
crazy, they were so aggressive to me
in the end I picked up the biggest
and shouted to it
can’t I share this land with you?
the ant was shocked
having fallen off my finger
it squatted on the way
pushing with its antenna
all its fellow soldiers away
I looked up at the sky
touched with awe in my mind’s eye
NOSTALGIA I

nerves drunk
dangle
a drop of eyesight
now dark
now bright
like an ember

characters
dribble down
hot
from a candle
then frozen
unknown

Part II
PAPER BOAT

a white dove
turning afloat
on a blurred bluish water

night falls
a heavy fish net has dropped
onto the ground —
hills darken besieging

a small paper boat
turning afloat
like a blanched fish
on blurred blue water

SELF PORTRAIT

on to the wall I poured
basin after basin
yet
my own shadow
I could not
wash off

a chicken
standing in the rain
huddling
on its own

leg
GROANING CREATIONS

the mountain
has been pregnant
without men

the maids
strive to first
bare their breasts

the moon pale
flushes
with sensual
trickles

MY PEN

the rib
taken from my own body
to wife me company
in the solitude
of my one hundred years
RAINY NIGHT

in the rainy night
the world is nothing
but a crushed
confusion

yet when I listen
it begins to glisten

DISTANCE

words
verses
or my self

caught
pulled
loosening
unrolling
like silk vapour
across the lake

to near
and cover
the hills opposite

or
my self
in here
DEATH OF A POET

I came downstairs remembering
that school of models clotheless
had died in graceful pose
their genitals left undone
barren as modern art

I recollected
I had been born naked
and for sale
they were stripped
but me a poet a bachelor
could only earn a living
by selling my blood
from my parents
from my grandparents
and my great great
great grandparents

when
I got that raw profit
my blood ran out
my head flower-wilted
crammed
with joyous noise of children
and all concerning me
and all concerning my family
became a full stop

my final prayer voiceless
was imaged:
twigs of willows
swinging budded
veins drawn out
swaying with death

CREVISE

gaze becomes heavier
a millstone chestbound
expanding

ice of light flowing
anchoring down
merging with water
afloat in the air

like a beast
lust wriggles

consequently
something flushes out of eyes
as if to shed tears

telepathically
you change your pose
head bending down
more like Venus

the glass
before your breasts
thins to a crevice

passion
once stirred up
throws up everything
flesh as trash
TO T.S. ELIOT

draw out a few books at random
from the attic of your brain
to make up a scene a being a poem

or just let go a crow
like a lunatic laughing
sighing to his phantom

when you staggered
out of your book-shaped door
with your pen as a scalpel

all civilisations were threaded
like a studied human corpse

NERVOUSNESS

now flees to my hands
which are soon set to flourish
in the immediate area

now leaps in my calves
making my feet turn out
like Charlie Chaplin

now shoots shivering through my arms
deprived of strength all my fingers
which begin to dangle
like empty gloves

an idea to dance
flashes in my mind
but my heart starts to pound
gripped by the handlebar

my body a door
of too smooth hinges
goes open and closed by itself
MY ROAD

bodies
tossed in a bus
flesh bumping into flesh
bones with bones clashing

thoughts images
darting flourishing
prancing swooping
some vanish swollen
some topple and fall
some smash
splashed into pieces

here like an outsider
I sit against the window
with the pulsing shadows
wondering when my heart
will calmly emerge
from the trap of my brain

EXPRESSION OF LIFE

when I hear the chirps of birds
crystallised by the morning
I desire to sketch a tree
in a way Picasso would do
a tree lush with leaves
leaves shaped and noisy
like hundreds of birds

when night is deadly calm
I will stare at the drawing
and think of life
living in bunches of lights
SKETCHING

a bundle of grass
-growing among the stones
strikes me so vehement so sprightly
that I come to examine carefully
the location of each stem
but nothing could be more confusing

either the blades or their shades
or the variations of their length
distract my eyes
and make dizzy my breath

knowing it is hard for me to sketch
I just murmur on the ledge:
-a bundle of grass appears
so sprightly with force

that they seem to have sprung up
-in a twinkle of eyes
their sudden coming up
that still quivers can be sensed

LOVE

when he thought of her
he smashed into the door
when he thought of her
he smashed up the floor

whenever he thought of her that day
he smashed her or something
until the next morning he woke up
the house was found so ruined
without her
THOSE DAYS

above us
beamed the mute moon
as a foil
to the dark void

and we
driven by our hunger in emptiness
ate and ate

one by one
the plates were eaten
cold
and greasy
as a contrast
to our warmed
substantiated
mind

THE HEAD AND ME

walking upstairs
I met and greeted him
he flashed me a smile
not knowing my name

he stood above me
a position of a patron
I tried to smile back
but only grinned
a facial expression
not easily made or unmade
but to my surprise
he managed the same

my head flashed blank
the trees outside the window
looked green to the sky
but silent and lonely
**FINAL GLOW**

heart abandoned
maybe still throbbing
amid such a pack of rusted parts
as springs and strings

small stones
keep throwing at a stem of grass
which trembles violently
when accidentally hit

the final glow
by the strip of earth
dies away
at the deathly grey water

**UNTITLED**

we were talking about God
he in the corner of the house
an artist
burst out laughing
like a lunatic

we looked at him quietly
with a grinning face he said
if God was here listening
it is how
He would be laughing
the flash of cameras
now and then
sliced his vision
he did not move

you said with a smile
bending down your back and head
looking for a way to come down

and with the smile
still on your face
your right hand still
in greeting position
while your left hand
stretched up backward
as a sort of balance stick

I was just afraid
your body or your match-stick
propped limbs
might collapse at any time

not until you reached down to me
did you raise your head
and the smile was still there
as newly put on like glee
exclaiming refreshedly
“what a beautiful scene
even if night is falling”

“Just because you are too civilized
have journeyed through
too much garbage”
I was to murmur to myself
but was silenced
OTHERLAND

jobless
he came across
a classmate from his childhood
in foreign Sydney
he was wild with joy
wanted to wake up
and write a poem about death

he tried to open his eyes
yet they were a bar of iron
he tried to turn his head
yet it was rusted on the ground
he tried to sit up
yet could not find his trunk
crawling in a tunnel
he was an under-river without water
red misty
smelling of blood

his classmate asked what are you doing
he said I come as an exchange
supposed to teach at a uni
but it turns out to be no vacancy

the hair of his classmate
dated from his teenage
suddenly began to change
from black to ginger
two Aussie children there
one girl one boy
his classmate's pupils
began to sing London Bridge
with a cheering voice

he wept underground
as if listening
to his national anthem

UNDIFFERENTIATING

today
ten years later
I met you by the Swan River.
waves were tugging
a net of undifferentiating memories

today
ten years later
we met in a foreign land
marvelling at an exotic landscape
thinking in mind of settling down
the lawn was pulling long a tree shadow

today
ten years later
we stood in the depth of being
white seagulls were staring up at us
with their small blood-ringed eyes
you concerned for your tomorrow did not notice
and I directed my eyes up
at the alien but pure blue sky
BEING

chased
by a ghost
I shot through
door after door
with horror
HO­llowing,
Echo­ing
in the dark
corridor
until I fell over
awakened on the soil
that man lives
always pursued
by death
then
everything was still
dumb deaf
as before

CIVILIZATION

for the foreign teachers
of my campus

“hey, listen!
the frogs have stopped”
alertly she slows down
her head poses askew
lips tightly sealed
outside the window
It is dark and static
the whole world
is nerve-tied by her listening
“last year” finally she spoke up
“a French teacher almost went mad”
her voice sounding forced
“and he had to leave”
spontaneously she stands up
steps to the window
and then abruptly turns back
her mouth gaping
hands cupped before
eyes appalled
I sense a cold breath
and become tense
thinking she must have seen
a burglar or a murderer
“anything wrong?” I pretend boldly
my head stretching curled
“I feel the pond down there”
after a long pause she stammers
“is filled with frogs
they are to croak with a start
at any time they feel
they are being watched”
every word is squeezed out
from her flat jaws
I really wish to laugh
but was once told it is rough
and luckily have recalled
what my friend remarked:
all westerners are just born
actors and actresses
and it shows a higher degree
of being civilized
and now I cannot but agree

AU COUCHER DU SOLEIL

with a poem
to stay the cooling of the sun
at the top
of the mountain

a bugle
bubbles afar

the moon
quiet
up in the sky

with a poem
to sing departures
of a heart

the mood
of a still life
THE ANT AND THE BOOK

An ant is crawling upon my open book fully covered with characters shiny and sticky as not yet dried ink so that every step of the ant resembles a struggle a clambering for its fine feet now look it has again stopped nothing is moving but its antennae like the ends of straw or grass left outside the chewing mouth of a thinking ox like the ends of the nerves in reading of a thinking ox like the ends of straw or grass nothing is moving but its antennae yet never could you suspect that there is a hole bored in the character 'book' and that it is I instead of the word who have suffered the tiny pain

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Part III

who have suffered the tiny pain of being pierced who have suffered the tiny pain who have suffered the tiny pain who have suffered the tiny pain...
a flag weltering in blood
flounders
beats
twists
like any beast

art crouching aside
barks
barks
barks
the howl
of any hound
or sound
NOSTALGIA II

sleepless
I sat up by Lake Monger

a violent wind
tossed up
a troop of seagulls

pieces of lost white
wrote
a skyful of cries

all the long necks
of black swans
were twisted
upon the crumbled
water

a sharp pain
crackled in my brain
as if the root
of my nostalgia
was to be pulled up
like my hair

MIDNIGHT

a bang of the door
I turned back
nobody was there

my shadow started up
shrouded
then with a flop
fell
face down
on to the floor
MORNING

remnants of dreams
raked out
by trills of birds

until my soul
wakes up
clear and clean
as morning

THE SETTING SUN

the bare passion
comesslowly
col-
d

then
hung upsidedown
from a bony branch
peering
at the
worl-
d
MOON IMAGE

when the desert face
shines innocence
the whole world
becomes night
and mute

THE STONE LION
for my grandfather

though carved by you
I could not shed a tear at your death
nor could I tread on this raised paw
to attend your funeral
or to resume your last step

who am I
meditating here?
nothing but a stone
standing trapped on a block
my ancestry, my descent
and my only foothold

and now night has fallen
shrouded every road
it is nothing to those homeless
as I

yet who am I
with this leg pretending to step
yet have never set off
though I have stepped over generations?

for whom am I poised
walking?
ON HEARING OF THE SUICIDE OF HAIZI
“our friend Haizi committed suicide
by lying on the railway at Shan Hai Guan”
letter from Xichuan, 1989

the braking shrieks of despair
stop and incline
heart flinging out
hit
bouncing back
tears flopping within —

where you arise
my brother and stranger
in the depth faint and sick
standing stunned
by the railway track
your hair in the wind
blazing black

history
that rumbles by
like the train
could cut off your body
but not
your soul

COUNSELED PROFESSOR

he walked in sideways
looking sideways
just at my loose dogeared
dictionaries
or dictionary-like books
which were piled up paralysed
before me
with my shed hairs
protruding from between
like bookmarks

eyet without addressing me
he turned back
hurried straight out
with an achieved or released smile
NO, I WON'T GET UP

no, I won't get up
I'm waiting for the dream
to again play me the poem
as it appeared line by line
on the screen

no voice was heard
it moved mute this time
as in mourning
from down to above
like the souls of the poets
who had committed suicide

I was watching
repressing my legs stiffening
I knew it was a long poem
I knew it was a great poem

but they kept moving up
deaf to my pounding heart
I could not stop
as those brother poets in grief
one by one had vanished
from this world

oh, don't disturb me any more
I need nothing
but a dream and a poem
the spirit of my dead friends
at this helpless time
in the awaking morning

TOWN

the china Buddha
seated by the road
behind empty cups
sipping
its glassy
purity
LOOKING TOWARDS THE SHORE
for Glen

the land a huge raft stagnant
deep
sunk

knowing not
where to take,
all those buildings
cars
creatures
and wisdoms

"DEATH IS TWO INCHES FROM THE GROUND"

her two fingers
U-shaped squeezing before my eyes
looked so forceful
as likely to narrow
a little bit more

"anyhow
whenever your two walking feet
fail to touch this ground"
(she trod hers with a thud
accordingly her hand flopped palm down
onto the table
a muffled slap)

"then you become a shadow
darkened windy hollow
amplified there in the window"
(her thumb pointed beyond my shoulder
white foam flapped
at the corners of her mouth)

I was amazed by her metaphor
and subconsciously looked back
saw a raven black
standing there on the sill

"death is only a hair thin and away"
she stressed painfully
"from this ground"
her hand suddenly shook into my sight
a hair magically appeared
between her two fingers
being twiddled
POEM OF A BLACK CAT AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

a flash of a black cat
my black ink decisively
catches
and it soon becomes alive
standing in the garden
stretching stiff its black tail
eyes piercing
startling part of my inside
like a shadow
in the interlapping
flux of my thought
my black pen has resolutely
chosen to grab
a pure black cat
and immediately
I myself have become alive

now is night
the black of a black cat
should matter less
yet to my surprise
it has been clawed
by my thought

which is drifting
in the daytime
there I cannot see much
striking me alive
except the black cat
from the neighbour
stealing into the garden
seeking company
or a gentle pat

I must thank my black pen
for its decisive act
to have written down

a black cat
and changed or directed
the life of my tonight

I must also thank
that pure black cat
though it first appeared
in the morning
as my fright

my thanks also go
to the quiet of tonight
which generously allows me
to be exclusively involved
with a black cat
the vagabond or fugitive
of daylight
from the land
of black
THREE POETS

three poets sit by the Swan River having a barbecue
three poets talk about politics chewing their steaks
three poets wear three pairs of sunglasses
the river looks up at them with a mind of the Indian Ocean
three poets like three Chinese fortune-tellers are three blind men

LETTER TO ELIZABETH JOLLEY

dear Elizabeth
when I returned from Mandurah last night saw your letter on my desk
I read it a couple of times in one breath silently and noisily to myself
and later woke up in a dream:
a cock was brooding on a blank paper its claws turned into a pen in my hand
yet nothing but scribbles was seen on my mind
dear Elizabeth
this morning I read your letter a few more times some lines were imaged in my brain
on my way to Mount Lawley Campus
some lines were murmuring in my head on the way back
where a car shot by startled my soul into flight
looking up at the sky I felt thankful as if I had begotten a new life
IN THE LAND WITHOUT A WIFE

without a wife
moustache beard whiskers sprout up like grass
as in jail

time strides by
tramping scrunching a salt-bleached crust
I cannot cry

wires nerves strung cutting into stumps
sustaining a series of crosses
fencing private properties
my cr---y is dr---y

vast expanses of wheat belt yellow
golden as my passion
are gawped at by a few dirtied kangaroos

heat twists into mirage, breath frying forests
she-oaks shedding needles cones, a sound
shuffling above, blistering
sands grinding, patches of pain lingering
my cr---y
is dr---y

I do not have a wife on this sunburnt ground
all my life I have been drifting
from the thirsty outside to the thirsty inside
from the itching hands to the itching feet

as the earth that turns by itself
my days turn by themselves
I cannot cry

for this land too is my flesh
for this land too is my life

I cannot rebel against it
as I could not rebel against my homeland
time presides
a charcoaled grass-tree remains standing
stubborn as stupefied, against the blue
LI FROM MAINLAND CHINA

Li from mainland China is again crackling with laughter on the phone
I look out of the panel door
my happiness like a boxing champion wearing his white cloud
gloves
wildly hitting a vast expanse of purified blue

Li from mainland China is again crackling with laughter on the phone
he used to be considered a symbol of mainland Chinese
speaking like an old creaking windmill
cheeks lips frowning tightened like a ploughing buffalo
every persevering step loaded with vicissitudes of Chinese history

Li from mainland China is again crackling with laughter on the phone
the fake hand in my hand like a shower sprinkler
releases sprinkles of joy
the wires swelling up now and then into a hose
the cracked wrinkles the bored pores the dried holes
all of them begin to hail clapping with splashing

Li from mainland China is again crackling with laughter on the phone
I as a poet from mainland China can sit still no more
I want to write of him I want to record him
as I want to write and record an assured turn of Chinese history
as I want to write and record
the death and resurrection of a nation in an alien but new land

COCKATOOS

a troop of shrill cries stopped our conversation
Pauline with a listening expression spontaneously said parrots
I went out from the verandah
and saw a huge crowd of blanched birds
flying high in the dark sky
springy notes trilled up my mind

Rod down there in jeans calmly said cockatoos
without raising his head from his barbecue
as if he knew them like knowing pets

I was stirred up though I didn’t know what cockatoos were
nor did I know how to spell the word
I was just enthralled, agog, my mood
spreading under the enormous height of darkness

shining like stars
their crystalline lights
pierced the silence of the universe
WATERING

each morning I pick up the hose
as I have touched the blood vessel of Perth

each morning I turn on the tap
as I have felt the pulsation of Perth

each morning I sprinkle the plants
saliva waters my mouth

each morning I see the plants green
I begin to cherish each of my breaths

each morning I stand or stoop by them
I feel my life has again and again risen from death

THE LAST NIGHT OF 1995

precious child
the earthly night is in the revelry of flesh
it is the darkest of human age
hold fast to your Father

precious child
the earthly night is in the howl of ghosts
it is the darkest of human times
hold fast to your Father

or
nightmares will grab you
or
you will not be able
to flee from the grip
of the devil

o precious child
hold fast to your Father
for He is the source of your life
for He is the prop of your life
for He is the light of your life

precious child
hold fast to your Father
hold fast
and you will not sleep in fear
even if
the earthly night is in the darkest time
PERSONAL RELIGION

twice a day he used to pray
spending his gift thinking of the way
God might appear above his head
or convincing himself
God was there

but at eighteen when he found
he was so depending in his prayer
not at all like a man
he was scared

and turned to Buddhism
emptying God
from his mind
like emptying a dustbin

he felt good

his mind, ever since, was set on nothing
but was on everything
he married
as there was no way out
like his birth
he divorced
as there was no way out
like his death

he laughed
where he was expected to mourn
he wept
where he was expected to rejoice

he was totally himself
freed from every bondage
like Jehovah he would claim
I am what I am

and now he felt satisfied
as if he really was
what he was

DOUBLE DREAM AT MOUNT SINAI

in the cool of night
down there I reclined
on the dried-up river-bed
my head against a water trough
stars in clusters with flaky fluff
falling upon me as dew

having been robbed by a monkey
of my only cloak
I was left with nothing to cover me
no shelter from the chilly
and melting disk
of the shrinking moon

unawares
like Job I sighed in tears
but just then arose a wind
softly I was picked up
and carried into the cleft
of a crag very steep

where I was seated like a baby
and saw the back of the Lord
passing by
dark and brilliant
with splendour and glory

amazed I woke up later
fumbling for the staff
which had once struck out water
from the rock of belief
and despised every earthly power

yet now it stood at a distance
far in the wandering wilderness
as the stump of death
in spite of branches barren
of leaves and green
sweetened my mind with a breath
not until then did the day break
a day of faith awake

MORNING DREAM

the twitter of birds
the glitter
by a cluster
of stars
WALKING OUT OF THE WOUND

in the sun
a wound opens my thought
I stray
into the tree shadow
my foot-steps paddling
against the glittering
flow
of the unknown
the wound
enlarges
into a dried-up well
I turn off into a lane
there I meet a stranger
he raises a hand to hi
a familiar face
a smile buds
on mine
the wound
is two thousand years old
yet always looks
newly pricked open
blood still flowing
along the spear
I walk up home
see somebody there
resembling the stranger
or the acquaintance
lift up the wound
as a jar
drinking
like a soldier

MOON FLOWER

when dawn slowly opens on the wall
I see a hand shaped like a kangaroo paw
describing the visual and gradual
blooming of a moon flower
when dawn slowly opens on the wall
the feast of last night now in my stomach
begins to smell
and my memories like the fragrance of my soul
begin to recall
the fully blossomed moon flower
quaking in the wind
cool as pale
when dawn opens on the wall
the imminence of some death I begin to feel
not the moon flower only
but all earthly beauty
is soon to fall
IN THE HILLS

flow flow
the joyous sounds
of the stream
riding ridging racing

my eyes open
cobbles pebbles
egg-shaped
are seen
fresh and frail
as newly hatched

flow flow
the joyous sounds
of the stream
lashing washing my brain
words thoughts
now are but sands

my eyes close
but open in a vision
wondering
where it is
that all creations are glistening
pure and clean
as newly born

flow flow
the joyous sounds
of the stream
fragrance is echoing
my life is following

AUSTRALIAN NIGHT

an enormously long granite table just placed
under the moon-flower decked veranda splendoured
with contemporary limelight and ancient torches

an enormously long granite table just mattresssed
seats them like an audience watching
fits of wind crossing over time ephemeral and time eternal
with their shirts and blouses bulging
appetite alighting

an enormously long granite table just centred
with gigantic plates of fresh seafood and bricky bread
bottles of wine white yellow brown and red
dotted like a blessed game of chess

an enormously long granite table just gleaming
with forks knives plates glasses clicking
into frail echoes of sparkling tingling lights

an enormously long granite table
like the Swan River carrying them far to the tales of night
the new moon rocking a canoe of cleansed light
over the billowing Indian Ocean
GROWN UP

Soliloquy of a Materialist

The subject of this ironic and satiric poem is hedonism. The poem begins with an account of the protagonist's childhood ingenuousness: he used to believe that water could suffer pain, doors feel sorrow, a watch could have sympathy, even a fish could shed tears. In adulthood, finally 'grown up', he finds that the material world is considered to exist only as the object of man's emotions. And this includes, ironically, the ultimate act of hedonism, man's enjoyment of himself.

Glen Phillips
THE POET IN SPRING

now the fog
is scattering
wisps of words
and sounds
disclosing
now and then
a lonely pen
lying at the window
of a sticky dream

AN ELDERLY BACHELOR

a butterfly
alights lily-white
on your foot
her wings waving
in the wind
lowering opening
fan-shaped now
like the long white skirt
your daughter holds out
on her both sides in a photo
the tissue of the wings
tender delicate
as your daughter

a butterfly
alights lily-white
on your foot
strikes you satisfied
as if you had a daughter
都市

夜
高楼的酒楼
像庞然矗立的尸首

挂起的血管
布满穴位闪光
而成串的
流动

一个智慧的民族
用欲望的舌尖
舔亮
成套的房

（1）

被掏空的夜
剩下两只舔净的碟
光体般
堆摆在窗前

晨

（2）

干巴巴的眼睛
望着倒挂梦外的鱼

珠江的灵
蜗牛般
蠕行在水上

隐隐作痛的波浪
掀起乳头的
荡漾

（3）
These five short poems use the modern city both as a metaphor for the human body and the state of the nation.

(1) The new hotels tower in the city like huge corpses, the blood vessels exposed and marbled with their glittering acupuncture points. In a myriad rooms couples are lit up with titillations of sex. The poem concludes with the deeply ironic comment: 'a nation of ancient wisdom'!

(2) This city glimpse is Eliot-like in its imagist presentation of a barren apartment with two plates licked clean after a meal, bleak as the brazen shaft of light through the window. Night in the city is itself as exhausted as this scene of ennui.

(3) In the third poem of the series we are shown the same riverfront city in the harshness of morning, when a restaurant customer's eyes have glazed from gaping, not at the images of this walker's dreams, but at a gigantic misshapen fish suspended in an aquarium. The spirit form incarnate of the Pearl River? the poet wryly asks. But it is reduced in its wriggling to a clumsy cow-like form. The pain of morning is compared to the shuddering of dangling breasts.

(4) This fourth poem continues with the subject of morning in the city, turning to newspapers whose headlines present alternative pronouncements of doom to those which haunted night-time dreams - especially the nation state's version of 'the news'. The columns of printed characters are compared to trails made by blood-sucking mosquitoes.

(5) Finally, the fifth of these brief glimpses of the city turns our gaze through the window to a street tree struggling to break out in green buds. These nodding buds, like beaks, utter muffled sounds from twigs which resemble a network of nerves. In turn, the tree and the viewer are silent, muted, seemingly trapped in the imprisoning shell of both intellect and the reluctantly arriving season.

Glen Phillips
MORNING

in the basin
two fishes
head to head
anchored
in meditation

TREES BY THE ROADS OF GUANGZHOU
DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

each tree hanged a shadow
each tree hanged a soul

each tree was a witness
each tree was helpless

each tree was tossed
each tree was questioned

each tree shed leaves
each tree shed tears

each tree was a victim
each tree was a tombstone
YOUR SMILE IS A TEMPLE
for Laurie

dear brother, in this earthly world
whenever I see your smile
I feel I am in a temple
sensing the love from God

you are dark square and tall
according to the Scottish tale
are most welcomed by any household
as a new year's fortune candidate

yet you as usual just chuckled
even if you were seriously told
your casual joy was a betrayal:
everything is but a sign or a symbol

except the love from God
which is real and substantial
which your life is proving and has proved
visible capable and tangible

dear brother, for me it is a call
set apart from this lusty world
dear brother, for me it is a pull
set apart from this selfish world

dear brother, from your face cheerful
I have been once again revealed
if our love comes from God
It is definitely easy and simple

MOON FESTIVAL

the moon awoke in my dream
a deathly whole was broken
glowing in the darkness of union
pure light bursting with a coloured rim

the moon awoke in my dream
a white lotus was resting close
so beauty's associations quietly arose
which like beauty but a gleam

the moon awoke in my dream
I got up remembering every single thing
and penned it down just wondering
whether I was to use or make a custom

the moon awoke in my dream
where I did not see my body
but I knew for sure it was and would be
though it might take a different form

the moon awoke in my dream
I was not there below as I am
and now my bedlamp it has become
lighting as before my staring up at home
MIND IN WINTER

freckled maple leaves
miniature frayed flags
flap up there showing
winter is to win

the hardened stone benches in the park
long long we gawk
are not foolish enough
to sit there for a cough

in the bar hangs a lamp
its light as thawing
we turn round with a gape
looking up at the Kingdom of Heaven
which was once heard
to be prevailing over the world

believe or not
night is cold everywhere
wind frosting footprints
puffs of our breath in the air
steam our vision and hands

where can we go in this season
to enter our desires frozen
our anxieties iced

and come out
our souls made white as snow
our sin cleansed as wool
so that we have a mind in winter
to await spring?

FOR SALE

Perth is for sale
its land is for sale
its water is for sale
its shops are for sale
its houses are for sale
its banks are for sale
its hospitals are for sale
its museums are for sale
its universities are for sale

Perth is for sale
its penis is for sale
its vagina is for sale
its wombs are for sale
its breasts are for sale
its flesh is for sale
its hips are for sale
its lips are for sale
its soul is for sale

Perth is for sale
nothing cannot be sold in Perth
nothing does not have a price

Perth is for sale
everywhere is empty
everywhere is full
goods goods goods
merchandise merchandise
is carried everywhere

Perth is for sale
Perth is a purse for sale
CENTRE

I throw a pebble into the pool
rousing
a ripple