

By the Moon Gate
Poems from China 1982-3
by Teri Ekland



By the moon gate I sit watching,
Friends, lovers, people.
See me?
Alone, I am waiting.
No one takes my photograph,
By the moon gate.

1982 through 1985 I taught English at universities in China, Thailand, and Kuwait. The story is in my memoir “Moonbeams in Asia.” Central China University of Science and Technology, HUST, was my first overseas teaching position. I arrived at HUST before the semester started and after I had attended a Brahman Bengali wedding in India. No one was around but me and I spent time at the university library trying to improve my writing skills. After a few weeks, the Chinese decided I couldn’t use the library until the semester began (see my poem “Magnolia Trees Adorn Library Lawns.”) Subsequently, HUST became eerily lonely. Then another new teacher arrived. Mrs. Lee was weird and standoffish. She wouldn’t speak to me until I broke loose in the guesthouse dining hall where she sat at another table. “Why is no one talking to me?” I said aloud. Later that day she showed up at my apartment to say hello. But as soon as the other teachers returned to HUST, Mrs. Lee again became aloof (see poem “The Madness of Solitude.”)

In 1982 the Chinese men wore navy-blue Mao suits and clotheslines strung around the city and countryside fluttered hot pink long-johns. Secrecy was the norm and each classroom had a monitor making sure nobody spoke poorly of the Chinese political system--Maoist Communism. For me, the Chinese were a dreamy, romantic, and sentimental people.



Prior to my sojourn in Asia, I wrote a few poems but from the time I landed in Hong Kong and wandered the city, complete poems tumbled from my mind. China inspired my poetry. During voyages up and down the Yangtze River on the Chinese shipping line “The East is Red,” I wrote several poems. When the boat docked at Nanjing, the entire town must have heard that a “foreigner” was on the boat. A young man approached me to practice his English. Most of my river voyages occurred during the bitter chill of winter.

One weekend, HUST took the expats on a trek up Wudong Mountain. All of China must have turned out for the trek. It was a big holiday weekend and the trail up the mountain was packed with hordes of Chinese, including old women with tiny feet bound when they were young. It was so crowded in some places that people were falling down the hillside (my Taoist poem comes from this trek.)



To Ponder Silk Floss
by Li Yu

The deep hall is silent. The little courtyard is deserted.
Off and on go the taps of the cold slabs; Off and on goes the wind.
Unbearable is the night's length and a man's wakefulness,
As a few sounds in the moonlight pierce the screened casements.

In the middle of Autumn the moon shines on everyone but me.
Insects sing among the grass for everyone but not for me.
My love lives in the moon.
I call for her, but she does not answer me.

by Mr. Zhi-Tang Tong (class monitor)

The university provided me with a bicycle and I often rode along country roads near the university (see my poem “This Country Road.”) In spring, purple clover and yellow rape seed carpeted the countryside near HUST. I peddled to hillside pagodas and pavilions a thousand years old and picnicked beside lakes where farmers herded ducks with bamboo poles. One special afternoon my class took me on a lakeside outing and we made dumplings among the lilac trees. Other times students brought a famous Calligrapher to my apartment and took me to visit famous painters who gave me one of their paintings. I have many fond memories of China whose echoes bound against the cliffs, resounding in my laden heart.



I am a stranger at this pond

I am a stranger at this pond
Where stranger sounds brought me
To sit and gaze and think upon
The wonders that I see.

Beyond the banks in essence lies
Entwining water grass
From where below effervescences rise
Up through the twisted mass.

Old gossamer ornate the twigs
That winter left behind--
Reflections of the moments
I thought were lost with time.

I am a stranger at this pond
And strangeness is of course
A weapon used against the mass

That's caught up by its force.

(Meaning and Comments 2-23-2022): This is a fitting poem to begin my sojourn in China. The poem should speak for itself, about my feelings in this strange foreign land where I was the stranger, a *wai gua ren*. I must admit, the poem was only partly free flowing from my mind. I also constructed it a bit, which isn't something I like to do with poetry. That's why it might seem a bit construed. It's both literal and figurative. The last stanza seems a good description of China, "the mass caught up by its force" but I wonder about "strangeness" as a weapon. If you didn't fit into the masses of China, if you stand up against their tanks (Tiananmen Square '89), you are eliminated like a character in the Twilight Zone.



Along Forbidden City Walls

Along Forbidden City walls
I watched my feet walk by.
In lieu of all –
Cicada's call:
"from whence does the wind direction blow?"

(Meaning and comments 2-25-2022): I present this little ditty written while I was in Beijing. It sums up the political whim of China, then and now. It also seems to hint at the present world climate out to destroy democracy, an institution I thought was forever. The world is in constant flux even though we believe that things are stable and permanent. But then the wind direction changes. The China I entered in 1983 has such a fierce political culture. It was less than ten years after Mao's Cultural Revolution and the Chinese lived in trepidation. Foreign guests

had Chinese to keep them from influencing the Chinese with “wrong” capitalistic, anti-Maoist ideas. As foreign guests, we had to be careful about what we said in our classroom and to the Chinese in general.



This Lonely Boat is Passing By

A distant junk,
the Yellow Sea,
through mist and haze,
comes clear to me.

East they turn
Sails taut –
Winds of such,
the West has not.

One billion crests
Pierce the sky,
this lonely boat
is passing by.

(Meaning and Comments 2-25-2022): From time to time, I think about this poem and my life. First, let me give some literal background. After I finished teaching English in Wuhan (at HUST), I spent the summer traveling in China with a British colleague named Sara. We sailed down the Yangtze to Shanghai, Suzhou, and Hangzhou, then traveled up to Qingdao which overlooks the Yellow Sea. I was probably sitting on the beach and looking out at the sea when I saw a solitary junk on the horizon. This poem popped from my thoughts. Here's what it means to me. Over the years of my adult life, from my trip to Europe out of high school, my stint in the

Army, college, teaching in Asia, marriage, divorce, and hooking up with a difficult man . . . I have waffled between being a Christian and a Buddhist. I grew up in a Christian family but when I ventured off and while in college, I explored other philosophies that perhaps made more sense to me and my psyche. When I returned home from the Army, Alan Watts became a great influence. Then, while teaching in Thailand, I became quite distraught from culture shock and the missionaries were my only source of friendship. They “saved me” from my turmoil. I returned home as a Christian and married a Unitarian man. I remained religious for a few years but soon felt more in tune with Buddhism, Hinduism, and other Asian philosophies. I never really became a religious Buddhist, per se, but when taking my second trip to Asia in 1995, I collected many Buddhist and Hindu statues and sacred items, including a wooden altar and a hand carved screen from Bali depicting the Mahabharata and Ramayana. I even attended a Buddhist temple with a law school friend who was a devout practitioner, but I never got into the chanting. Several years later I became a Christian again mostly to go along with my second spouse because that is what he believes. I tried being religious, but it never got me anywhere with him anyway. It didn’t make him respect me more. When he rants, he tends to say disparaging things about me that are certainly not religious if religion is about love and goodness. After fifteen years or so of being in a mental stupor from prescription meds, and not recognizing that I was being as traumatized as I had been as a child, I quit the meds and began shedding much of the delusion about myself, my relationship, and my purpose in life. When I began writing my sequel novel “And You Learn How to Live” I explored Pure Land Buddhism and when I refined my novel “Key to 1000 Doors” I returned to the heart of Asian philosophy. I began chanting and meditating on the pictures I drew of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (Shakyamuni, Medicine Buddha, Amitabha, Tara, Vajrasattva, Vajrapani, Avalokitesvara, and

Manjushri.) These days, as I am finishing my novels and providing meaning to the poetry I wrote years ago, I am once again fully embracing the Asian way of viewing life. I disavow most religious dogmas because I had to clear my deluded mind, on my own. Mental clarity is foremost to me, along with physical health which I struggle with at my age. I am stable, calm, sure of who I am, and the journey to arrive in this place has been long and difficult.

Back to the poem's meaning. I am that lone boat sailing the sea of Asia, the sea of life. I was on a short visit to China "this lonely boat is passing by." "Through mist and haze, comes clear to mean" is about gaining mental clarity. Seeing who I really am and not what a religion, a culture, or another person tells me about who I am or how I should be. "East they turn" means looking to Asia, the East, for meaning. "Sails taut" is an interesting choice of words. I think it means the confusion of leaving behind childhood POVs when looking toward new more appropriate views of the self. Here's the heart of the matter. "Winds of such the West has not." I embrace and appreciate the Asian way of seeing existence. "One billion crests pierce the sky" I think means I am part of this vast array of humanity on the sea of life. But only I can determine my reality. And "East I've turned."

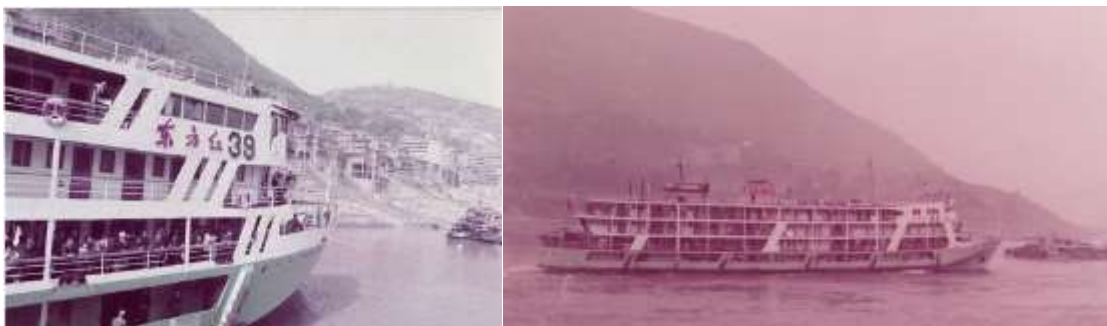
I have one more thing to say about my Eastern/Asian poetry in general. I find that my past was as wise and coherent as my present. I've always possessed the wisdom of myself, it was merely covered up by delusions, by inappropriate beliefs about myself, and by accepting what others would have me believe. Through these poems I hear my past speaking to me now. In other words, my basic core has always been the same. That's my true nature. In Buddhism it's called Buddhahood. But I think this basic wisdom is eternal and has been with humanity since our incipience, whenever that was. I am now no wiser than anyone else or than I have ever been. I

have merely cleared away the mist and haze that deluded my perceptions. Please enjoy my poems and welcome to the philosophies best embraced by the “East.”



Part I: Yangtze River Poems: Traveling on the East is Red

I traveled up and down the Yangtze River four or five times. In 1982, only a few years after Mao’s Cultural Revolution, the Chinese called their river passenger boats “the East is Red.” These are some of my favorite poems and almost all of them popped from my thoughts free flowing and non-constructed. I was consumed by the spirit of China’s great river, by everything surrounding me. How could I not become poetic? And, for most of these voyages, I traveled alone among the masses and so I had plenty of space in my head, not in my physical space, perhaps, to absorb whatever came my way through my six senses. The poems are filled with word images, feelings, tastes, and textures. Hopefully, that’s what makes a good poem.



Sunset on the Yangtze

Along the river
A yellow soldier ends the sky.
Now people's boat
Is passing by.

In silence sits the shadows still,
Along the river, upon my will.

By demure are jagged peaks and broken points
In silhouette, enjoys the river.

The soldier goes before the land
Beside the river
And not by the sight of these hills . . .

But moved by empty colored haze
Then vanquished by domestic grays.
A soldier's torn within his hue,
A river night remembers you.

Again, we've left another day
When a silent soldier slips away.

(Meaning and Comments 2-23-2022): My description of a sunset on the Yangtze is both literal and filled with imagery evoking my deepest emotions about what I am beholding. I must admit, the soldier metaphor for the sun comes from the "Red Badge of Courage" by Stephen Crane, a book I studied in college. But it fit the setting and also the sense of China's militarism. I certainly never intended to be racist by saying "yellow" soldier. But the sun is yellow.

"By demure" is an interesting word choice. I think it means the setting of the jagged peaks is soft, not bombastic, not as dramatic and sharp as the peaks would be under the midday sun.

Sometimes when you analyze a poem too much, as in an English class, you detract from the simplicity and majesty of the word images. You're supposed to just enjoy the visualization of

the poem, not break it into components. But nevertheless, we of modern society are deductive and need a pinch of help to understand the artist's intent. "Not by the sight of these hills" the poet (me) is the seer of the sunset. The reader is the seer of the poem. I'm moved by the fading colors. "Empty colored haze." Why is the colored haze "empty?" This sounds very Buddhist. I think it means if I try to label what I see, I am not seeing what really is. Beauty is empty of words and is simply what we see and experience in our existence. Wisdom is empty of overthinking.

"Vanquished by domestic grays." Why did I use the word "domestic?" Seems to mean that when the spectacular colors of a sunset disappear and are vanquished, or over-taken by ordinary (domestic), mundane grays or non-colors, the sun has set. "Soldier's torn within his hue." The sun is torn away from the empty colored haze, another reference to the sun has set. "A river's night remembers you." It seems that the poem is what I've experienced, the most splendid sight imaginable, and I have recorded the experience, this sunset, and that makes it "remembered" by me and by the readers of my poetry.



1000 Seagulls

Along the dock at Nanking,
I began to draw one thousand seagulls.
The first had been drawn before.
So, I drew another, a third . . .
But all had been drawn before.

To catch life, I must be quick.
By less than a moment the seagull has changed.
But the gull doesn't stop,

Except to die,
Ah, such splendid beauty,
To watch a seagull fly.

(Meaning and Comments 2-23-2022): I've written three or four poems about seagulls.

Why? What does the seagull represent? Total freedom when they soar above the seashore in the cool misty ocean breeze. And of course, the sea is the vast array of existence, of our lives, the matter which we raft upon and cross to the other shore of enlightenment, of gaining wisdom through the difficult lives we live. But the seagull is perhaps already there. A beautiful symbol of attainment. And what's more, seagulls are laughing at us in their loud cawing voices because the masses of people are really quite naive and unaware of their true reality. People are caught up in their belief systems--religion, politics, traditions--constructs that prevent them from appreciating, let alone knowing, the true nature of their own marvelous minds. The powerful human mind which is the human spirit.

This poem is quite literal as you can see from the picture I include. I stood at the ship's bow in Nanjing and sketched the seagulls fluttering, swooping, and soaring at the helm, like they always do. Undoubtedly, person after person approached me with curiosity about what I was sketching. I was probably the only *wai gua ren* on board the liner. "But all had been drawn before." Please, people, readers of this poem, myself included, DO NOT THINK YOU ARE UNIQUE, SPECIAL, UNUSUAL, AN INNOVATOR OF TRUTHS because it's all been processed, said, and done before. You are not special; none of us are. We are each just one of the billions and billions of poor schmucks on a raft sailing the great sea of life. However, life is impermanent and ever changing. Why must I be quick to understand life, to catch it? I must still the mind of all its polluted notions and focus on the moment at hand, a quick thing in itself. An instantaneously thing. Then everything changes. We move ahead on our raft like the seagull who

keeps flying, soaring, cawing, until death. If you catch this reality, understand the “beauty” of existence, perhaps you live life at its fullest, its wisest, even if in a split second. Watch a seagull fly and shut-up. Stop your rambling thoughts that are merely societal constructs and illusions.

The seagull is quite real. Quite lovely to watch.



The little girl is running to be in the picture with her friends. Have you ever seen such mischievous joy when I snap her picture?



Echoes from the People's Boat

Echoes from the People's boat
Remind me I must go,

And all the watchers of the land
Of me, they do not know –
But I know them all.

(Meaning and Comments 2-23-2022): My only comment on this short, literal poem is how can I assume to know “them all”? Seems a bit grandiose. Where must I go? Who are the “watchers of the land?” They are literal people watching the liner. Maybe it’s just all the people who I pass by in life, oblivious to me but fully involved in the world around me. In the Buddhist mind, we are all interconnected even if no one is aware of me. But if I’m wise, and aware of my own self and mind, I understand this interconnectedness of human beings and so I “know them all.” Echoes are my own deepest thoughts reminding me of this reality. I must keep moving on because life isn’t stagnant; it is ever changing, ever moving, like the river.



Shanghai's Winter Scars the Skin

How bitter can be winter's bite
So scolding in its chill.
The harbor caught my wandering sight,
And shook my errant will.

Beneath the boat in Shanghai rests,
Your waters passing life:
Strings of barges – thatched and patched
(my heart is filled with strife).

I cannot count your numbers,
They pass too quick to care,
(and those upon these waters,
are not themselves aware).

Shanghai's winter scars my skin,

And cuts the spirit old.
(if only we could rest a while,
away from all this cold.)

“And who are you – Intruder –
who dares to think of me?
For I’m the soul at Shanghai rests,
One billion memories.”

(Meaning and Comments 2-23-2022): This is one of my favorite poems. It’s very literal and figurative. I was traveling alone to Shanghai during the winter soon after I had first arrived at HUST. Because it was a few weeks before the spring semester began, I was able to get away and take this trip, after I received permission from the Chinese, of course. This free-flowing poem popped from my mind probably as I stood on the frozen and frosty deck outside my first-class room. (Third class was below deck with the masses and quite intolerable for me; the dormitory room was stiflingly crowded, smoke filled, and chaotic with hawking and spitting third-class passengers. I had tried traveling third class, maybe once, then quickly forked out the cash and upgraded). I remember washing my socks by hand in my room’s sink and then hanging them out to dry on the deck and within an hour the socks were frozen stiff. My room had two cots with a table between them where I placed some snacks. During the night, while I slept chilled to the bone under a Chinese quilt, mice nibbled up all of these snacks.

Back to the poem. The first stanza seems literal. Needs no explanation. “Errant will” is my adventuresome youthful wanderlust of those days. Seeking new adventures, new exotic places and cultures, new scenery. Like an errant knight. Although errant can mean wayward, off the path, I was never intentionally misconducting myself. I just didn’t appreciate the status quo because I came from an indifferent, neglectful, and often traumatizing childhood. I had to get away, make it on my own and not by the religious values of my background. If this makes any sense. My life was a struggle between getting away and respecting my parents who really

weren't ideal for my intellectual growth and wellbeing. Anyway, that aside, back to the poem. I guess when you break away from this kind of background and are conflicted about what's true and what's right, life can be scolding and bitter, like a Shanghai winter.

The second stanza summarizes this sentiment. My heart is filled with strife in this struggle, this conflict, while I steady myself on my new course, my new adventure away from what had not been the best environment for my mental development. Always alone. Always had to teach myself and find the right kind of influences to help me understand myself, my mind, and my goals and ambitions. (What a negative childhood I had! But certainly, not unlike that of billions of others).

"I cannot count your numbers; They pass too quick to care." Again, this seems to be the theme that life is everchanging and interconnected even though we can't possibly be cognizant of all that exists around us. No one can (and those upon these waters, are not themselves aware).

"Shanghai's winter scars my skin, And cuts the spirit old." This means that ancient wisdom comes to the errant knight, the traveler, during her quest to find a more meaningful existence. However, the new encounters, the foreignness all around, are overwhelming and vast. Hence--if only we could rest a while, away from all this cold. Notice the poet is saying "we" not "I" because this is not a unique process. Perhaps most people set out in adulthood to discover who they really are independent from their "lame" childhood family.

This is emphasized in the last stanza which came to me on that cold cold deck as if the ancient omniscient spirit of China was accosting my awareness. The spirit of all humanity as epitomized by ancient China, confronts me with "And who are you intruder, who dares to think of me." The errant knight is a daring person simply by taking such a quest of self-realization. The ancient spirit emphasizes that I AM NOT UNIQUE. Untold spirits of humanity have existed

before me and exist now and we are all human beings, brothers and sisters trying to understand our true nature and reality in a very cold and confusing world. Perhaps I am an intruder because I am a foreigner or because not everyone actually ventures away from childhood traditions and constraints, not everyone questions the way in which she was brought up, and when she does, she is intruding on the norms of the status quo, daring to differentiate herself from stupidity (delusions).



Forever Waters Must you Scold?

I'm not for you –
You're growing old
Forever waters,
Must you scold?

Alone I be upon the river
To watch the body come and go,
And be the gull chasing sterns,
The steamboat is my home.

Upon this boat, I sleep alone,
Inside a room that bunks the mass.
I shower from a Morning River,
Remembering where I've made my home.

I'll be the sun inside the haze,
And penetrate the surface gaze,
Allowing for a dazzled dance –
In cellophane spread.

The River many shadows cast,
There are times I do not know
The mountains or the broken clouds
From my own reflected glow.



(Meaning and Comments 2-23-2022): I like this poem and sometimes say the first verse, especially now in my old age. How insightful I was in my youth to come up with such foreboding words and images. But growing old is the nature of being and it is, will be, and always has been, a fact of life. The eternal nature of existence. In the first stanza, the poet (me) is trying to resist this reality by saying, “I’m not for you.”

This is quite a deep literary poem that is taking me some moments of thought to dissect. “Alone I be” seems a predominant theme in my poetry. I rejected my dissatisfactory childhood where I was really quite alone in my little girl struggle to make sense of my negative and often abusive environment. I’ve been “alone” without a mentor most of my adult life while trying to further know myself in this so often negative world. Marriage tried to make me a union of two, which on the surface and deeper levels of my consciousness, I’ve always rejected. I’m not one with the spouse, especially when he becomes irrational, domineering, controlling or what not. I am what I am, singularly. What’s important is mutual respect for each other, or one another, as equal human beings. But so much of marriage, the world’s view of it, is very out dated. The man is “the man” and the woman is his property, his vessel, his caretaker, his source of “home.” Oh, well. It’s been a struggle to maintain my identity, a lone struggle at times. I really haven’t been with someone of like mind, or if I have, as in a friend, it’s been rare. So alone I be.

The river can be nothing else but the flow of life from birth to death. “Watch the body come and go.” At least I’m aware of this. But I’m a dreamer, an artist of imagination and I, as the poet, see myself as being a free spirit chasing dreams. “Sterns” is an interesting word with two meanings. A great choice in a poem. It’s the back end of a ship and it means being firm, unrelenting, and rigid in convictions. I am chasing the boat I travel upon, my home; maybe I’m looking for a home because a dreamer can never settle down. However, even though I chase dreams “the steamboat is my home.” I am still a human being in the world and cannot escape this no matter how wonderful I think I am. I am still just another person trying to get on in a difficult world. My home is life, my home is Earth, my home is the steamboat on the river of life. I am immersed in this life although I sleep alone (am born alone, die alone) I am among the masses, “inside the room that bunks the mass.” Both literal and literary because I probably wrote this poem during the one time I tried to travel third class on the East is Red line among the riff raff. Literally, I tried to take a shower in the first-class bathroom which used water from the river. I was kicked out and that’s probably when I bought a first-class upgrade. “Shower in the morning river,” figuratively, means trying to keep to my youth, which is not possible to do. “Remembering where I’ve made my home,” I cannot forget this fact; or am I remembering that I am a dreamer, a seagull chasing sterns, a vessel of my own making.

Yes, because then I go back to being the dreamer “I’ll be the sun inside the haze.” This is probably what I actually saw. Seeing myself as being bold and brilliant capable of penetrating the haze and surface gaze. Go deeper into my mind, into knowing my true nature. The reality of who I am in a hazy confusing world. I’ll venture beyond surface stupidity and dream further into a spectacular dance. Cellophane spread. Fake? Not real? But also, what came to mind as I looked from the ship onto the river reflecting the brilliant sun. My mind is at work. It is powerful and

can penetrate delusions but then, does it create more of the same by being such a dreamer, by imagining beyond what is real and spreading the mind, the dance, in a synthetic diaphanous wrap? Interesting question. Kind of a Buddhist logic puzzle.

These ideas neatly fall into the last stanza. Life, the river, casts many shadows. Are these delusions of what's real? But then, shadows are real. The sun, the mind, casts them. Shadows are remnants of the past? Shadows can cause tricks on the sight. Illusions. And at times I, the poet, can't tell what is real "the mountains or the broken clouds" from what is unreal. "Broken clouds" are a partial clearing of the haze of delusion. "From my own reflected glow" upon the river of life. This poem is too deep. Too filled with imagery that was actual. I'm sure I saw all this in the river. Reflected glow seems to mean my deepest penetrating thoughts, a reflection on my past brings what I've learned to the forefront. Is this poet sometimes confused by the world, by the river of life? No wonder I wrote poems that were merely fun with words (tumid, timid, daft, deft) so my mind could get away from all this deep reflection and philosophical thinking about reality. Truth be told, we are born alone, journey on the river of life until we grow old and die. Alone, yet interconnected.

All this being said, I must make note that when these poems popped from my head, there wasn't all this deep thought put into them. Like a constructed and contrived poem. A manufactured poem. The word images simply grasp my senses, be it the subtle consciousness or the deeper subconscious. Don't really know. I'm just an artist, a poet, who thinks a certain way. It's a lovely way to think, the way of an artist.



People's Boat to Shanghai Stop

Away from me
Down the river
Goes people's boat
To Shanghai stop.

The boat is a package
Of people:
Young to old;
Severed, sealed, strung, and twined.

Still,
Someone could have
Watched the sun fold
Inside gray fogs and broken peaks
Drawn near.

But people, mostly,
They
Eat, sleep, and wait
For Shanghai
To finally appear.

Only while I am Here

Only,
While I am here,
Only lasting,
The length of Now's stay.

The evening sun,
Shines along the river,
On the fading domes,
That cut short
A winding horizon,
Of golds into soft blues,

Sold for whites and grays.

Only now,
Do I feel the lazy warmth,
Of Momentary tranquility,
Of Immeasurable thoughts.

I've been here before,
On the East is Red.

(Meaning and comments 2-24-2022): I clearly remember that when writing this poem, I wanted to capture the moment forever. Immortalize it. Which is something that can't be done because moments of the present are ever changing, transitory, impermanent, and so on. But I tried. I think the poem speaks for itself.

I wrote it (6-27-83) while traveling the Yangtze with an English colleague named Sara. She glanced at the poem I was writing and gave me a positive comment. This was in contrast to what she often said, "Oh, I love teaching you vocabulary words," or, "you sound like John Wayne," or she would simply correct my misuse of a word. She and I traveled together after we finished our semester at HUST. However, in Bangkok we had a sort of falling out. She had annoyed me because in Hong Kong, after we'd been traveling together for a few months, she stayed with her British friends and said to me, "You can do what you like." Maybe she wasn't being rude. Maybe she was just being British. But nevertheless, by the time we were in Thailand I said perhaps we needed a break from each other. I suggested we meet up again in a week. I gave her the precise time, date, and place to do so, but she never showed up and I "carried on" with my journey, to use a British phrase.



Yangtze River Locks

An old face
I have just seen
One which
I shall never see again.
A face by time
Withered to crevices.

22 meters
down I go
slowly down.
Into fumes, (effluvium, miasma --
Like the high school wine made
From Welch's grape drink)
drenching walls
slowly
I go down.

Three men have found a corner
Beside the iron gate
they are locked away from me –
Essentially.
They play a game with cards,
On a Chongqing spread.

Slowly
I go down.
The old face
Elusive eminence,
Fades away from me,
Old fissures fuse
Together – un-profound.

I shall never again
See this old face,

The one which
Has never seen mine.
And the doors of the
Locks,
Close – forever
Behind
The “East is Red.”

(Meaning and comments 2-24-2022): This poem seems somewhat constructed and is literal with some literary meaning. I have used a few lines of this poem in a novel to describe descent into depression “I go down.”

Chimes of the Quarryman’s Labor

Ching cur ching chink chink cur ching . . .
Little mud hovels
Nestle
Into hewn banks beside
Shouting, flowing water.
Farmers have cultivated every patch of turf
With an ancient man’s hope.

How do these oarsmen
Battle up your eddies and furrows?
Five in unison,
Affront, a thatched cabin.
A few trackers
pull the boats along paths
Cut deep into these cliffs.

Is it not your stubborn will
That makes you meander?
You are what you are.
How old is your heart?
How deep is this limestone crux?
Do I know you, Yangtze?

I have seen your waters,
Although I am not of your vein,
I am of your soul.

Oh, Yangtze,
I shall never work so hard
By your means.

I shall never harvest a future here,
Need never survive your torments –
Your eddies and furrows.
Nor, shiver in your quaver,
Or quail in your quakes.

Yet, I know you,
As though you are the life in me.

The earth comes to meet your face--
green slants of sod, crops and trees
(pointing toward the endless sea).
Who knows, besides I,
That an old lone pine
Twists around an empty peak?

And for what
Shall all this limestone be used?
Chimes of the quarrymen's laden:
Ching, cur ching, chink, chink, cur ching.
Could it be
That you provide tombstones
For your children?

(Meaning and comments 2-24-2022): Often during my Yangtze River journeys, even while the speakers played Chinese music or “Red River Valley,” I could hear the clinking sounds of quarrymen breaking stone along the shores. In a way, it was a beautiful sound that matched the music and the mystical setting. Most of the poem is descriptive of the setting and the mood it renders to the poet, me. The poet is speaking to the river. Talking about her life, about the toils of life in general. The last line “could it be. . .” popped into my head. I think it means that we toil in life for our future generations who will also toil and die. That is what our life is about, with a most realistic perspective. There is no escape from this reality.



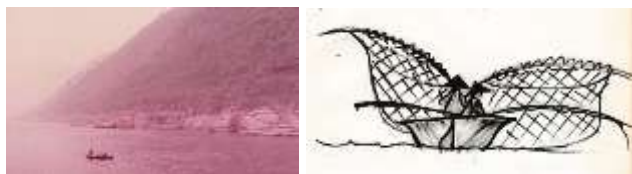
Early Morning River on “the East is Red”

Early morning river
On “the East is Red”
Where banks are shoal
And the sun rests
A quarter to zenith:

A blaze
Out of murky morning haze
Lights a path
To a few ginkgoes
And a metasequoia
On the flat land, straight and narrow.

Early morning river boat,
Fresh air awakens sleep.
At the bow,
A deep breath
Beholds fervent scenes
I swallow.

The river puts the sun
On the opposite bank
Where a brown cow
Grazes alone
Beside sod cliffs.



A fishing craft, crude,
Is oaring away from the cow--
Bamboo fishing poles

On either side.

Early morning river – Yangtze
One day past Yi Chang.
Serene –
A moment's breeze
A wisp of cirrus clouds
Weave a blue horizon.

Intermittent buoys are
White triangles with
Red circle crowns.
On the bank
Are brown squares
Of past harvest--
Some neatly stacked
Some heaped in erratic plies.

Now the sun returns
To the other side.
Fire –
Shoots off
Crests of water.

In Chunlinqi
We dock:
Off goes bamboo and wicker
Mats, furniture, baskets,
All from Wu Xian
Two days gone by.

Clatter, clank, chatter.
What concern?
Across every forth shoulder
Rests a bamboo pole
To balance
Bags, sacks, baggage, packs, hammocks . . .
(little old ladies manage the best –
especially she, in red socks).

Among the buildings ashore
Are tall chimney stacks
Glazing the sun pale
And frothing the river water.

The echoes of

The People's boat
Are quickly lost
As we putter away from the docks.

Here –
Land is almost level
To the water.
The sun is lost
(In morning thoughts).
The air is stained
(with chimney's smoke)
but –
when the boat gains speed
the air revives.

At the bow,
Our sun peeks
From puffs of gray moisture
Outlined in white.



A lone pagoda
Admonishes a certain bank.
It has seven increasing stages
To a round broken top.
Its reflection in the river
Is a path to the boat, to me.

The hills beyond the flatland
Are ragged, jagged peaks
That break a soft gray sky.

An old gentleman
Likes to speak English with me.
He watches the morning pass.
Fifty years he's known my language.
What does he hold in those years?
History,
Opinions.
He's going down river
To visit an old friend.

Strings of vapors
Sent by the hidden sun
Find segments of land.
The boat is not silent.
It causes waves to swirl and roll
A nearby sampan.

Now at port
The river is a sullen mist.
Gazing downstream
The flat land fades into
The water.
Approaching voidness is calming.



A junk sails in silence
And the Red flies high on my ship.
Early morning has passed
Along the river
And the sun is at zenith.

I have traveled as far
As this morning will allow.

(Meaning and comments 2-24-2022): What a long poem! I'm sure it took me all morning to write and I started it at sunrise. I have always been an early riser. In fact, these days I'm getting up between 2:30 and 3 AM. However, I am going to bed just after six. Love to rise early. It's how my mind and body operate. This poem, at least to me at this point in my life, is almost purely descriptive of what it's about. I was very contemplative during these river voyages, mystified by my surroundings. What a marvelous country China is, in its beauty and historic weight. One thing I didn't mention in the poem is that speakers on the ship most often played Chinese music that appropriately fit the mood that possessed me. The only English tune I remember being played was "Red River Valley" and the lyrics rang through my mind and swept

me with sentimental emotion. Although the song was English and foreign to China, it seemed to fit the setting. I knew I would one day be leaving this mystical place. This Red River Valley.



The Three Gorges

The three gorges
Chongqing away
A day past night.
The sun's alive now
And the Yangtze stews amid:
Zutang, Wushan, Xiling.

Pandemonium breaks
Turgid whirlpools,
Hewn perpendicular walls,
Rapids and narrow channels.
Trackers – 1000 feet high,
Are below twelve peaks.
Boulders are legends:
Witch Mountain demons,
Fairy Maiden Peak,
Guimen Pass,
(I missed the Ox shaped rock,
or most likely I just couldn't make it out).
Qutang Gorge, Baidi Chang – city of the white Emperor:
Swirl of white mist and dragon shapes.
Kui Dragon Gate – flanked by two precipitous cliffs:
Box like objects – goats
Sorcerer's Gorge – Wuxia – twelve mountain tops.
Lofty Goddess Peak.
Xiling George:
Precious sword George,
Bin Shu Baijian Xia.

It has been a long
Time ago
But they are all still there,

under the dam cut waters.

(The last verse was obviously added after the dam covered up the gorges. A big chunk of this poem is missing and I must search my boxes and trunk for the original.



Part II: Poems at HUST



Bats from my balcony

Bats from my balcony
 The time was dusk
 Fluttered, swished, swooffed, and puffed.
 I couldn't catch them.
 Bats
 Almost,
 Missing my balcony.
 One
 Another
 Five perhaps more.

Who cares about bats?
 Who likes to see them
 At dusk?
 These bats
 Are small.
 I could hold one
 In my hand
 But it would bite me
 Before I let it go.

The fear of bats
 Appears to be
 Rabies –
 Rewarding my

Caresses
I go crazy
By the sounds of
Rushing, flushing, swooshing
Water.

I did enjoy seeing
Bats
Fly by
My balcony at dusk.

(Meaning and comments 2-24-2022): I'm going to leave this poem as quite literal and allow the reader to make their own determinations about what it means. My Chinese hosts at HUST provided me with a very nice apartment with a bedroom, front room with a TV, a kitchen with a tile floor, and a balcony overlooking the Friendship store, a pond, and the campus. I loved the balcony and often sat on it. This poem came to me because at dusk these little bats swooped near to where I sat enjoying the setting sun. On the balcony I hung out my handwashed clothes and one morning I dared to venture onto it with just a blanket wrapped around me. I think I was simply gathering my clothes. Anyway, a group of Chinese men below saw me and pointed and laughed at the sight of an inappropriately clothed, or unclothed, *wei gua ren*.

Before the Rain

Before the Rain
The thunder cracks,
Green treetops alight--
fresh spring-air foliage,
At night.

Then the rains come,
(After we considered the day unnecessarily hot)
Magenta, fuchsia, turquoise, and tangerine
Chinese undergarments
Hang true to their lines.
In the rain.

No one expected the rains,
Sent by a Mongolian front.

But I can feel the rain,
When it finally arrives,
More than I felt
The sun before the rain.

(Meaning and comments 2-24-2022): This feels like a constructed and contrived poem that I tried to write. Don't know why. Maybe it works. It's primarily descriptive and the Chinese did have clotheslines of such colorful undergarments. The poem's mood seems depressive. The poet feels more gloomy than bright.

Before the CAAI flight to Chungking

If death you know
I've come to meet
Before my days aspire –
Please – settle down
And sit with me
And let's let life retire.

Away from you
I've gone to stay
But as I write this poem –
I tell you all of modern times
This Earth was not my home.

(or is it, “on Earth I made my home?”)

(Meaning and comments 2-24-2022): This is more or less a fun poem about my concern for flying on one of China's old airplanes. I was taking a short trip somewhere, perhaps it's when I flew to Sichuan with Sara for a weekend. The last line is kind of up in the air, for me. “This Earth was not my home” seems very Christian which I've been, from time to time. “On Earth I made my home” seems more Buddhist, more real. I mean, we're here on Earth. Truly, this is all we know. Why wouldn't we consider it our home?

A Pure and Simple Sound

A funny sort of sound

To my ear was introduced,
Enrapturing, un-fashioning,
A sound to reproduce.

This poem I recite at the end of a Buddhist meditation session when I gong my chimes.
(2-5-22). While working on my novel “Key to 1000 Doors” I began meditating each morning by chanting to my own drawings of Shakyamuni, Manjushri, White and Green Tara, and Medicine Buddha. It goes along with the philosophy of my novel and helps me to have a calm, clear, and peaceful mind that slashes the ignorance that has plagued me for years—that of seeing myself as having mental issues. In my sequel novel “And You Learn How to Live” I explore Pure Land Buddhism and Amitabha. Back to this poem. Instead of the first line that I wrote in China forty years ago (A funny sort of sound...), I am chanting “A pure and simple sound to my ear was introduced, enrapturing, un-fashioning, a sound to reproduce.”

A short ditty

A stately man was given –
In ecstasy his own,
Demoralizing answer,
Ascension to the throne.

(Meaning and comments 2-24-2022): I’m not sure where the source of this poem came from. Perhaps it’s just my sentiment of Maoist politics and propaganda. I use this ditty in my novel “Guardian of the Maya Tree.” It seems to fit into the magical realism chapter when Hillary dances to the images of the Bonampak temples.

An Atrabilious Walk

I was on a melancholy walk
Until the Chinese man hastened
Past me while eating his
Bowl of rice.
Then I smiled.

(Meaning and comments 2-24-2022): I arrived at HUST weeks before the semester began. All the other Western teachers were away traveling. My Chinese hosts did not permit me to venture off campus and I felt rather confined and isolated. Nevertheless, I took daily walks around the campus. This is a literal poem. I'll leave any meaning to the reader. Except, maybe seeing other human beings getting on with their lives takes one away from their self-inflicted mental depression.

You cannot stop my song

You cannot stop my song
Internal vows sing too long.
This music is my destiny
Unburdened by humanity,
You cannot stop my song.

And do not look at me
As though I lack your sanity.

Talk about an odd sort of
Looking guy—
I'd like to know what that is, resting on your eye.

(Meaning and comments 2-25-2022): I think Jesus said something about the log in your eye. Look at yourself, your own shortcomings before you make judgments about others. Before you think of another as inferior. Rings of Trumpism and people seeing their race and beliefs as superior to others. Rings of misogynistic men seeing themselves as superior to women, rings of society looking down on a person and labeling them with psychological terms because they have a different manner of thinking. This is one of the poems I sent to my sister after I felt she had dishonored me by lifting my military picture off my Facebook page and putting it on her own FB banner without so much as a "like" to me. She did so because the picture was of me in uniform with her before our childhood house. I was on leave from basic training. On her FB page, she made no mention of me; she merely pointed out to her FB family and fans "This is me before my

childhood home.” Her indifference bothered me so much that I sent her five of my poems and wrote posts on her FB page that let her know how her indifference affected me. I address my childhood family in my collection of poems titled “Family Secrets.”

Friends in University Halls

Friends here are like lovers
I see in my mind.
They remind me of far from home,
of a different time.
Their closeness arrayed –
Touching, smiling,
All in frolic.
Young men in university halls.

Holding hands
Embracing, playing drop back –
Hugs and tugs.
Here is the warmth of lovers
I saw back home.
Here they are true friends,
I suppose.
Seems so natural to touch and hold
In this way, so far away.
Smiles, closeness, warmth,

I like to pass lovers,
In these university halls,
Lovers, who are really just friends.

(Meaning and comments 2-25-2022): One vast contrast I found between the Chinese culture and my own was the physical closeness between friends. There was no shame in men holding hands with men, women with women. It didn’t mean they were gay. Just meant they were close friends. It was rather refreshing to behold.

Through the classroom window

Through the classroom window
I noticed a sparrow
Light upon the top most elm branch.
Small creature,

Bobbed its head
And made me laugh inside.

(through the classroom looking glass
he lit upon the tree
creating such commotion
when he bobbed his head at me).

(Meaning and comments 2-25-2022): A literal poem. Happened during class one day.

This poem reminds me of one I wrote while in Thailand, about my class (I grade not on the curve).

They used to pour my tea

They used to pour my tea
But anymore
That's up to me –
So now I go without
The taste
(Attention, I appreciate).
2-4-6-8
Who do you appreciate?
We like you George.
We like you George.

(Meaning and comments 2-25-2022): At HUST my students poured my tea the first part of semester. Then they stopped. I suppose “George” is G. Washington, the epitome of an American. Rather like John Wayne.



Mr. Lee with calligrapher. Mr. Yang, me, the artist, Sara, and Mr. Lee.

I thought it was just for me

I thought it was
Just for me
He showed attention to.

And I was liked
Because of me
We shared an interest new.

But then I learned
That thrice before
He presented him the same.
And now as he
Draws near to me
I wish he never came.

At HUST one of my handsome Chinese students became very active with showing me the sites of Wuhan and introducing me to different artists. I doubt he was doing this out of the kindness of his heart or because he had a crush on me. His cadres had probably assigned him to me. Anyway, he brought to my apartment a famous Calligrapher who made me a personalized wall hanging. He also took me to painter's house where the artist made me a simple painting of little chicks. His name was Mr. Lee and this poem should reveal the thoughts and sentiments I had about him.

While at HUST, at least two Chinese men caught my fancy. Mr. Lee and another monitor named Mr. Jiu. In 1982-3 China was a secretive society and nothing romantic ever happened to me, except with a Romanian contractor named Romeo. I probably tell that story in my memoir "Moonbeams in Asia."



Mr. Jiu on Wudong Shan. A picture he choreographed with me to capture some kind of Chinese sentiment. We had no romantic leanings. He was simply one of the Chinese monitors assigned to *wei gua rens*. Nevertheless, I found him attractive and probably hoped for a spark of romance.

My Secret Heart

My secret heart
I cannot share
When he's around.
Like the echoes of the sea
He comes to me
In waves of vibrant sound.

This evening takes
Away the shame
I care not for social prim.
And as I wake by
Gander's call,
My heart remembers him.

I wander from my window,
Through wooded environs,
And find a path to take me from,
The pangs of social prongs.

My secret heart is with me
To drink of morning dew
And watch the herds undo the flocks,
In pairs go two by two.

Magnolia Trees Adorn Library Lawns

Magnolia trees
Adorn library lawns:
Flowers full and white,
Like lilies on a pond.

Today, I have read too much.
Now I stand and gaze
From the third-floor gallery.
I think about white flowers.

I could make a garland
And wear it for you –
A visual velvet
(and you shall desire my love).

But where are you – my love?
Who will you be?
I have prepared a fresh garland for your hair.
When will you come for it to wear?

I arrived at HUST before the semester started. No one was around so I spent time at the university library trying to improve my writing skills which was something I aspired to do since my stint in the Army where I drafted my first memoir, my first book “The Trouble with Brass.” My elementary and HS training were really quite inadequate perhaps because I had no guidance from home, no mentors, and as a shy child, I was typically lazy when it came to academics and discipline. After a few weeks of researching in the campus library, the Chinese said I couldn’t use the library until after the semester began. This made me feel even more lonely and distraught. I wrote this poem from the library mezzanine at HUST.

Careless Voices in Empty Halls

Of hours long,
In days of late,
Only careless voices
Greet me
In empty halls.

Half-hearted
Injustice
brings my stomach
spiral calls.

And the book I selected
Was not to be borrowed
A careless voice
Explained the way.

Solace
Was the pleasure
Of an earnest bed
Where a soliloquy came into play.

I gave myself
A funeral,
Inviting friends
From far away
(some near).

Pathos
Was my pleasure,
With not a careless voice
In an empty hall
To hear.

(the eulogy had a lovely ending.)

A Rainy Day I Want to Die

A rainy day I want to die
Alone among the trees,
And snuggle deep into the mud
Where sanction is appeased.

A Dying Moment

In a dying moment
I looked another way,
To catch a different point on Earth,
But then it slipped away.

Phantasmagoria

Last night
I dreamt
I wrote a poem
About a dream.

My dream was short
But the poem was long
And I was
In between.

The voice was old
Patterned full--
A promise of
A sullen null.

Tonight, I dreamt
to forget the dream.

What's Happened to this Morning?

What's happened to
This morning?

There's not a single soul around.
As I waited for my breakfast,
I heard not the morning sound.
Where are the others just like me?
Have they let the dawning fall?
As for me, I never really could
Forsake the rooster's call.

(Meaning and comments 2-25-2022): Self-explanatory poem about how lonely I was
feeling after I first arrived at HUST.

Solitude Madness

The solitude had driven me
To madness.
But, it was-not-my fault!
They – had locked library doors
Behind my footsteps.
They – never gave me the promised bike,
Nor the tape player,
Nor the typewriter.
And the toilet never did stop running.

It was – their – fault that
I disclose this madness.

Then she arrived
Only to ignore me.
Silence hurts deeper than
words ever can.
I hated her –
And she was my only cohort.
I wished her to go away
Better yet – to die.
But she is the paranoid schizophrenic –
Not I.

Then she said “hello.”
And I forgot about the bike, the tape player, the typewriter,
The toilet, and the library.
I even forgot who was mad.

HUST was an eerie lonely time for me, in the strange world of China, Winter 1983. All
the other teachers were away until the spring semester started. An American United Nations

teacher, Mrs. Lee (no relation to Mr. Lee), arrived soon after me. She was weird and more than standoffish. She wouldn't speak to me or even acknowledge my presence until I broke loose in the guesthouse dining hall one morning as we sat at different tables. I had a manic diatribe about being lonely, ignored and what not. In response, the weird Mrs. Lee showed up at my apartment to say hello. I think the reasoning behind her behavior was she came to China to immerse herself in the Chinese culture and not be tainted by other Americans. Because when the other Western teachers returned, she wanted nothing to do with any of us.

Conceited by their flesh

Conceited by their flesh,
Why why why?
They think I'm here
To get them.
They see me here to
Try try try,
In hopes to
Snag or net them.

Embarrassed by myself,
Shy shy shy,
They think I think they think.
Clumsy in their wit,
They think they're such
Twits a twit a twit.

Encouraged by a name
Gamey gamey game.
They watch my words
To catch me,
The snob (obs.) from
Portland,
Not from Maine.

While teaching in China, I often mingled with the ex-patriated community of foreign teachers in Wuhan. A few times I met teachers from Yale who were primarily Ken-doll gents who thought highly of themselves. These Yale elitists inspired this "word play" poem. They had

made me feel like a hick from Oregon who lived in a log cabin and pined over their Ivy League East Coast wonderfulness. Obs. (obsolete??? An observation???) I'm not from the East coast.

I'm a hick from Portland, Oregon. Where's that? Where they live in log cabins?

Clumsy Words Clumsy Me Clumsy Reality (another word play poem which perhaps sums up how the elitist snobs made me feel)

Words
Put together
Clumsy
I am clumsy.
They --
Sounded conceited
By manner
Of response.

Message
As such,
I never meant.
I think.
I am clumsy.

Upon
Reflection,
My words
You understood
Before did I.
Oh, clumsy words
Clumsy me
Clumsy is reality.

New acquaintances, Old friends

New acquaintances,
Old friends,
Sitting around the lunch table
Finishing coffee.
This day --
I am new.
How was your trip?
(carried-on conversations)
and the kids?
Where are you from?
(familiarizing interjections)

How long have you lived here?

Of course,
At this table
All are friendly.
I am new.
New acquaintances are nice.
I am missing
Old friends.

This poem came about after one of my daily lunches at the HUST guesthouse dining hall. All the foreign guests, teachers, (except for Mrs. Lee) put together tables so we could sit together and socialize, have conversations while the kitchen staff brought us our Chinese dishes. There were about eight or ten of us, all from America except for Sara from England.

A Melancholic Slice

Why do you love your loneliness?
So callow is this vice.
In crowds you speak of solitude
(a melancholic slice).

This comes from a conversation at the lunch table. Someone said something about feeling lonely in a crowd. Very cliché, I thought, especially in China.



Country Road

This country road is growing small
if not by nature's will,
And as I hear two sparrows call

I see tombstones on the hill.

The people are forgotten here,
Among the lilac sprigs,
Where the gentle slope provides,
A view of Autumn fishing rigs.

These lakes are called
“Our Eastern Shore”
an old man once told me.
And what I know,
He knows no more,
Here rests eternity.

At HUST, the Chinese provided me with a bicycle that I rode along country roads beyond campus, beside lakes and fields of yellow rape and purple clover, and hillsides with lilac trees in bloom. The setting inspired this poem.



An Ordinance for You

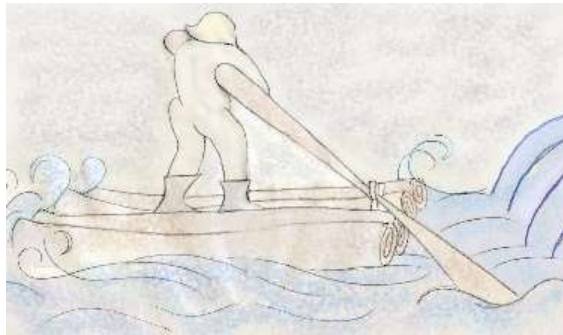
I'm taking off my angry hat
To write these words for you
And pluck a moment off of time
Before the hour's through.

Where are you from?
These morning troops?
All visions in a line,
That come to me
To set them free
Inside a captured rhyme.

Many faces have you all,
In colors lost in hue,

Must I select a stratagem
Before the hour's through?
And plot the plummet I design
An ordinance for you.

Written while traveling in China. Seems to have military imagery that probably comes from my own background in the Army.



Sentimental Solitude

Sentimental solitude
Seduction of an artist's mood:
Segregating facts of Earth –
Acute sensations span from birth.

Colors, shapes, and time untold –
In visions left to manifold.
(And rain provides another sound –
to reproduce, so to be found).

This raft of sense, you cannot force,
The helmsman knows her own due course.
Impossible to choke the stream
(or leave to wallow in a dream).

So lonely is the artist's mood –
As she escapes in solitude.
As well as ardent is her vein –
Forlorn adrift upon the Main.

I compare this poem to the Buddhist metaphor of an individual's life being on a raft drifting on the sea of dharma taking the practitioner to the far shore of enlightenment. The 8 winds of Buddhism--the worldly conditions of gain and loss, fame and infamy, praise and blame,

and pleasure and pain--propel the raft. The raft trip at sea is lonely. But when I wrote the poem, it was about my being an artist who is peculiar to most of the world.



Clever is Dexterity

Clever is dexterity
Of grace and strength combined
A movement swift with clarity
In every motion timed.

Balance is your only care,
To juggle forms around
In circles, gyros of the air
Not uttering a sound.

And if I came to know you
I doubt you'd even share
That one exalted moment,
A tableau of the air.

Our Chinese hosts took us Wuhan foreign guests to operas, dramas, acrobatic shows, factories, community houses, and on various trips. I was so impressed with the acrobats that this poem came to mind as did this picture I created. They are extremely focused and balanced. Good Buddhists!



Wudong Shan

I am not the Tao.
 I am sullen.
 I toss the poem,
 Immortal poem,
 Into the valley below.

I watch it leave me.
 Surly I muse,
 Inside a precipice.
 On the stone,
 I sit alone
 (forever falls from view).

A flock of five
 Soar along the Nadir Green.
 Whose echo sounds,
 Against the cliffs?
 (resounding in my laden heart)
 then,

away again
dowsing down
into beholden scene.

Crimson, lavender azaleas,
Entwined amidst the pines.

Now,
I understand,
Chinese landscape paintings,
(and the hidden man contemplating).
Fallen waters summon
The valley in its crawl.

Salubrious solitude:
A valley as wide as my heart
As deep as my soul,
I fall.

Two birds
With long tapering tails
And black heads
Chatter and call.

Wudang Shan, the Goddess,
Tall, and jagged
Blanketed by immortal mist.
72 green and piercing mountain peaks show
this valley is deep and wide,
(Taoism is the Gingko).

Our university hosts took us ex-pats to Wudang Mountain on a big Chinese holiday weekend. I have never seen so many people in my life forage up a mountain. It was so crowded in some places people fell down the hillside. Many ex-pats quit halfway up; it was so ridiculous. I made it to the top in the stream of people--even old woman with tiny feet bound when they were young climbed the sacred mountain. I imagine all these women are gone now.

I sat at a secluded spot overlooking a valley and jotted down this poem. It's Taoist and Buddhist in essence. Perhaps from the pool of ancient Chinese wisdom lingering deep in my psyche. I am using this poem in my novel "Key to 1000 Doors" where I present it as written by a

Song Dynasty monk. I change the wording a bit because the monk is taking the magic key to a shrine in Tibet and his poem honors Tara, the Heavenly Empress. The pictures include some of the Taoist priests at temples on the mountain.



Part III: Hong Kong poems, my first poems in Asia



I left my teaching position at Portland State University (a TA in the ESL department) even before the semester was quite over so I could attend a Brahman Bengali wedding in Calcutta, India. It was an event I simply couldn't miss so I arranged for a professor emeritus to

finish the last week of my classes and I later learned that this infuriated the head of the department, an Egyptian man named Dr. Greis. Oh well, I had to make a date!

After a month of traveling in India, I ventured toward my prearranged job in Wuhan, China. But first I spent two weeks at the YWCA in Hong Kong. While I was in India, I wrote a few poems, but in HK poems began tumbling from my mind as I wandered and explored the islands, avenues, and streets of this enormous jewel of a city. My mind let loose feeling inspired by the setting, by the newness of my adventure, my escape from my less than satisfying background in PDX.

While in HK I met an old British woman on a ferry and she invited me to stay with her on Landau Island which I did but the old woman turned out to be irascible and I went back to the YWCA. After I left HK and before I made it to Wuhan, I spent a week in Guangzhou at the apartment of the parents of one of my students in PDX. The student, Hao Chen, had lived with my parents for a few months, a situation I had arranged and my parents weren't too comfortable with. Perhaps they felt I forced Hao upon them. Anyway, in reciprocation, the Chens had prearranged my visit to their apartment. They had to get very special permission and were probably able to do so because the father was a famous artist in the city. He was quite feeble because he has suffered during the Cultural Revolution. The mother and her daughter showed me around the city, but they were rather nervous about the arrangement. At places, such as tea houses in parks, I wasn't allowed inside because I was a foreigner. It was a strange experience. Rather uncomfortable to be on the receiving end of such blatant discrimination.



These first poems are at times awkward to me and I'm not as interested in delving into their meaning as I was with the poems I wrote while inside China. For the most part, they should speak for themselves about the mind of a young woman who has ventured forth on a quest of self and world discovery. I felt like a wanderer, an errant knight.

Anywhere

Nomadic Romping –
A drifter through time,
Endlessly wanders –
In search of the mind.

Reason is home –
But logic won't stay –
When factions react
In unfitting ways.

Lost in routine –
By each morning wake –
Prepared by the evening's
Reminder of fate.

Where are you going
Ancient spirit of man?
Possessed by your efforts,
Endless hours you ran.

Aimless is the Clown

Here I am in a manner of woe,
I really can't remember where I wanted to go!
Rest assured, I want to be
But what is this madness that captivates me?

Barbed wire overhead, fences to the side,
The street is narrow but the traffic is wide.
Arrived at the airport, late in the evening,
Just in time to notice, the last bus was leaving.
Wandered away with the weight of my possessions,
So many things to handle in perilous obsession.

Bamboo grows tall and spreads out quick
As it reaches to the sky it becomes less thick.
Never on a venture do I settle down,
The moment I am learning, I have to leave town.

Down these stairs to a better street,
Where chances are more likely I'll find something good to eat.
Romping in the world, aimless is the clown,
Perhaps someday I'll meet someone and try to settle down.

I had to make a date

In the hours of early morning,
I think about Today –
Of what to wear to look just right,
Of what I ought to say.

It really doesn't matter
Which gown which frock or pants,
So, I take my disposition
As the subject to enhance.

The dawn is dead,
My hair is soiled
But I have to make a date
In accordance with my reverence
I mustn't show up late.

I take a scarf and wrap it
In a style to match my skull
And formulate facial facts
To fade away the null.

Who can say that I'm not pretty?
Immaculate is my name.
As I dash in new appearance
Endeavored to remain.

Precarious Plans (a favorite Hong Kong poem that sums up my disposition at the time)

I like my precarious plans –
Allowing whomever I am –
To take each day
In an unknown way –
(unresolved to the frisk of demand).

Tis Sensitivity

I act a certain way
Tis sensitivity
And those who watch my drama
Are unaware of me.

I fool them all because
I'm wont to play their game--
A medley of performances
Where not a line is real
Nor the same.

(Comments 2-26-2022): This is one of the poems I selected to use as a header to chapters in the sequel novel about Lucy Davis "And You Learn How to Live." It has to do with people making degrading judgments on others who don't think, believe, behave in the same manner that they do.

I Like to Take My Morning Slow

I like to take my morning slow
Remembering for a while
Distinctions in my aptitude
And placement of my smile.

Inspiration

It came to me,
By matter of way,
A passing passion,
Out of a play.
Actors all,
Endeared to words,
Except for Passion,
The one absurd.

In glowing glimpses,
I catch his glance,
As he snatches mine,
By fate, less chance.
And inspiration comes to me,
As passion passes
Eternity.

Daft or Deft (one of my word play poems)

Did you just say
That I was daft?
(or is it that
I am deft).
O fare they well
No matter which
For one or the other
Is left.

Now if I'm daft,
As you might agree,
I'm of an
Irregular mind.
But if I'm deft,
I might not see
Consistency to
This rhyme.

Fashions of Fate

Difference is many,
Variety few,
Of pleasures demising,
Divided in two.

Who has the money,
Is lacking the time
To follow his feelings
Of forgotten divine?

Where are the children
Who know little wealth?
Their demands are so simple
Yet they're wanting in health.

There once was a prince

Born out of much more,
His luxurious lifestyle
Looted after a war.

Begotten beggar
Diseased beyond note,
He couldn't stop living
Though vanquished of hope.

A baby is born
To a new mother's death.
Formed hardship and struggle
An experience left.

How sad is the man
Who took all he had,
And gave it to fortune
Then ended up mad.

That woman once knew
The pleasures you find
In confounded moments
Of being unkind.

Education at best
Resolved his sleek mind.
Conditional living
Is the best he could find.

An artist is knowing
Her task's never done
Continual study
'til nothing has won.

Endlessly living
These fashions of fate.
Curious is wanting
For matters too late.

(Comments 2-26-2022): A simplistic poem but the last line "curious is wanting for matters of late" often plays in my mind these days. Why? Because of my health issues, age, and ambitions to finish and refine my literary works and get them published. And because over fifteen years of my life were wasted living in a mental health medication stupor and believing, or

accepting, something I was not. Then I awoke but we only have so much time in life and that message is prominent during the later years of life.

Visions of a Pall

I look forward to the future
Like a shadow on the wall
Vague and dank
A Mystery
With visions of a pall.

Suddenly I look aback,
At prints I've left behind,
Each fading in the distance
While executing time.

Future feelings (Francois poem)

How do you know –
What you might feel?
How can you say –
So far away?
Seized up by past,
Old feelings don't last.
Locked in their room,
(you'll free them too soon),
and shovel away,
what never could stay.
oh, what a play –
these lines of dismay,
Future Feelings.

I have no future feelings,
At present I can say,
As for what the future brings me,
Might it be another day!

(Comments 2-26-2022): I wrote several poems with Francois in mind. He was the boyfriend I left in Portland when I ventured to Asia. He was strikingly handsome, French, perhaps thirty years older than me, and a cross-dresser. He and I had a wild time together for a few months. I base one of my characters in my novel "Guardian of the Maya Tree" on him.

While in HK I must have really missed him or thought about him quite a bit. Maybe I received a love letter from him at the American Express HK. That's how I received mail during this time of aimless wandering. Maybe in the letter he said something like "I'll love you forever" and the poem came to mind. I especially like the last line "as for what the future brings me, might it be another day" and sometimes I recite it to myself after someone says something about their future.



A note about these pictures of Francois and me at Portland State University: By the time I finished my semester at HUST and was ready to travel around China for the summer, I decided I no longer wanted these pictures of Francois, the man I left behind in the states, the man who had inspired many of my poems. When I cleared out my guestroom at HUST I simply left these pictures in a drawer. After three months of travel, I returned to HUST primarily because a university cadre, maybe the president at a farewell banquet, told Sara and I that we were always welcome at HUST and whenever we paid them a visit, the university would provide us with free lodging and meals. Maybe we needed a respite from travel. Don't remember. Anyway, Sara and I went back to HUST and as soon as I returned the maid who had cleaned my guestroom excitedly ran up to me. She had these pictures she'd been keeping for me, in case I returned, and she gave them back to me probably feeling certain that I had simply forgotten them, that they must be very important to me. Maybe she thought Francois was my father. I took them back, thanked her, and am now glad that I've kept them. My older French boyfriend was a very handsome man. And a wild and pleasant memory of my youth.

An Empty Lonely Room

In the emptiness
Of this lonely room
I think about you
In fading memories.
Time has taken advantage
And you are now
Fragments of feelings
I thought I once knew.

I am lonely
And missing the days
When only – we – knew
Together.

I don't like roaming aimlessly alone
And writing blended recollections
And enduring countless struggles.

I want to find you once again.
Together, let us
Relinquish those feelings.
Today.

Written while in India soon after I left the states, about Francois, the fling that I left behind when I ventured to Asia. (2-26-2022): I don't really like this poem. It does nothing for me now but it indicates my different feelings during my wandering days on an adventure quest. I don't even feel like giving it a title. The line "fragments of feelings. . ." comes from one of my very first poems in life, one written while I was in the Army. Thus, this little ditty is quite contrived and constructed. But I'm sure I was missing my wild and handsome lover.

A Lonely Flight (another poem about Francois. One I do like because it doesn't feel so contrived.)

Do you still remember me?
Your far away wandering friend?
Do you think of my face
As I outline your smile?
Have you kept all the thoughts,
We once shared for a while?

I miss you my far away friend
And when life's eternity ends,
There's one thing that's true--
One day I met you,
And how can such friendship amend?

When age recoils to whim

A friend of mine
does not grow old
His youth remembers him.
From all of time
Escape is bold
When age recoils to whim.

A friend of mine
Is going young
His gender's passed away.
And now
He takes another hood
To live another way.

A poem about Francois who liked to dress as a woman. I use this poem in my novel

“Guardian of the Maya Tree” to help describe my character based on Francois.

(Another poem about Francois?)

How can you love
In just one day?
A lie is not the way
To her heart.
Relax
I told you from the start.
(but you refuse to hear my words.)

If only I could Find my Friend (Another HK poem about Francois)

If only I could find my friend,
Invite him up for tea,
We'd talk about a journey's end
And what was meant to be.

But all my friends have gone away,
By time or distance take.

(I really can't remember now
what kind of tea to make).

In all, I only could enhance,
To free my errant fire,
Through all my self-indulgence
I forgot a friend's desire.

And now has passed from arcane whim,
To a home where youth is old.
I sit a while and think of him,
Our story never told.

Midnight Draws in Hours Taut (another poem about Francois)

Midnight draws in hours taut –
Endeavored pangs of yore,
And you, who keeps
To twilight's thought,
Are accosted more and more.

Awakened recollections,
Perhaps you never knew –
These hours spent in torment
Were wasted thoughts of you.

With Whom was Who to Try (HK or India about Francois)

With you – my friend
I shared a dream
Of days we'd come to be.
O gentle man
Whom I once knew,
What was that fantasy?

How quickly flies
The sudden heart,
When venture is the ply.
O lonely man
Away from me
With whom was
Who to try?

(Written while in HK and probably another ditty Francois inspired)

I feel you riding on my back,

Arms clasped around my heart.
What would you do if I should fall,
These hours after dark?

So long Mr. Thompson (Written while while traveling in India. I wonder who Mr. Thompson was. And who is his sister? Me? figuratively. And why would he kill me? Probably, this is just a rhyme. Or could this be another Francois poem?)

I hear wedding bells ringing,
And Angels are singing
Late in the morning
Hours after dawn.
But I never liked staying,
In a place meant for praying,
And before you take notice
I'll be moving along.

So long Mr. Thompson,
Take care of your sister
And don't be a fool
And make her leave home,
Someday if you kill me,
Remember I told you,
You can't stop a drifter
From taking to roam.

A Twilight born to set me free

Slowly sleep disturbs my wake,
And breathless hours begin to take.
In shadows midnight summons me,
A twilight born to set me free.

I fall into another room
With self-esteem I dazzle whom
I fancy meet to cause a dance,
Prepared perfection led by chance.

Awaiting by the hallway door,
Stands a lover known before.
He dares to dance a vibrant beat
Along the floor we chance to meet.

His smile has lost me in my sway--
A remarkable fantasy slips away.

The Sun Stele

The Sun Stele has had its wrath,
You know,
Casting shadows far below,
The torpid hills
Where we once lay,
Beyond the voices of today.

But now –
My love –
The rains have come
And lonely nights
Have finally won.

I'm sure this was inspired by Francois and it probably has to do with sexuality. Phallic symbols and what not. I am using it as a chapter heading in my novel "Guardian of the Maya Tree" because it neatly fits into that story, about Francois and Hillary Jacobs.

Impressions (probably a Hong Kong poem. Could be about Francois. It's too construed and deep for me to even want to unpack!)

Impressions came,
Impressions went,
Forgotten homes
Of time once spent.

Days grew new,
As days grew old
with painted castles
Left untold.

Broken beams,
Spiral towers
Asylums built
On passing hours.

I cast away,
This building stone
Bearing shadows
On my home,
And rise to temperaments at peak,
(Less corner stone, the tower's weak).

Impressions twisting
around the moat
Subjected to
The body's float.

Impressions born
From ancient tries.
Who shall suffer?
Who never cries?

Impressions go
Impressions come
Who will be the lonely one?
And mercy cries
For heaven sent
Where folded fated
Moments went.
Demands of simple spirits may
Impress upon the ending day.

About my breasts

And have they been so good to me?
Ballast for integrity.
Demands to order, styles of time
Left for lust, tis such a crime.

The truth lies not in shapes to hold.
How can the wanton be so bold?

Tainted reprieve endless urge,
Tallow hardens to emerge,
So lush is flesh, how dear it be,
Cajoling man's insanity.

This is not me that sets the fire.
A masquerade evokes desire.
They were not born to be treated thus,
Tally-ho the waxen bust.

Needless to say, there's no escape
To ravish the lavished 'tis man's favorite cape.

At the YWCA in HK there was a bookshelf with a variety of books travelers had left behind. I myself donated several travel books I was hauling around needlessly, like a clown.

Anyway, one of the books was about breasts, boobs. It was totally stupid and I of course didn't read it. It reminds me of another book I found at the library, years ago, when I was researching Hinduism for my memoir "Moonbeams in Asia"—a compliment to these poems. Anyway, I was researching the lingam of Shiva and the premise of this library book I found was that everything that's a pillar is a phallic symbol, i.e., the Washington Monument, the Eiffel Tower, telephone poles, ad absurdum. People get carried away with theories and with reasons for writing books. Perhaps this poem came to mind as I tossed aside the book about breasts. In essence, the poem reflects society's obsession with a woman's breasts as sexual objects.



(I wrote the following two poems while visiting two little towns on the HK islands.)

A walk in Ti-O

Took a walk in Ti-O,
Hoping they'd show,
Their junks and a fine bowl of rice.
Instead, what I found,
In exceedment around,
Were TV's and cameras and mice.

Fan Muck was the name,
Of a restaurant that came,
By way of my sight just at noon.
But when I went up,
To order Fu Yuk,
I was served pork fried rice with a spoon.

Good-bye Pi-O! (written fifteen years before the Brits gave it back to the Chinese.)

Good-bye Pi-O!
So far you'll be,
In just one day
Of fancy free.

And who is the mayor of this town?
Who took all the English signs down?
How now can I read,
In a matter of need,
With alien characters found?

Good luck Pi-O,
I'm off today,
You're on your own,
I cannot stay.

