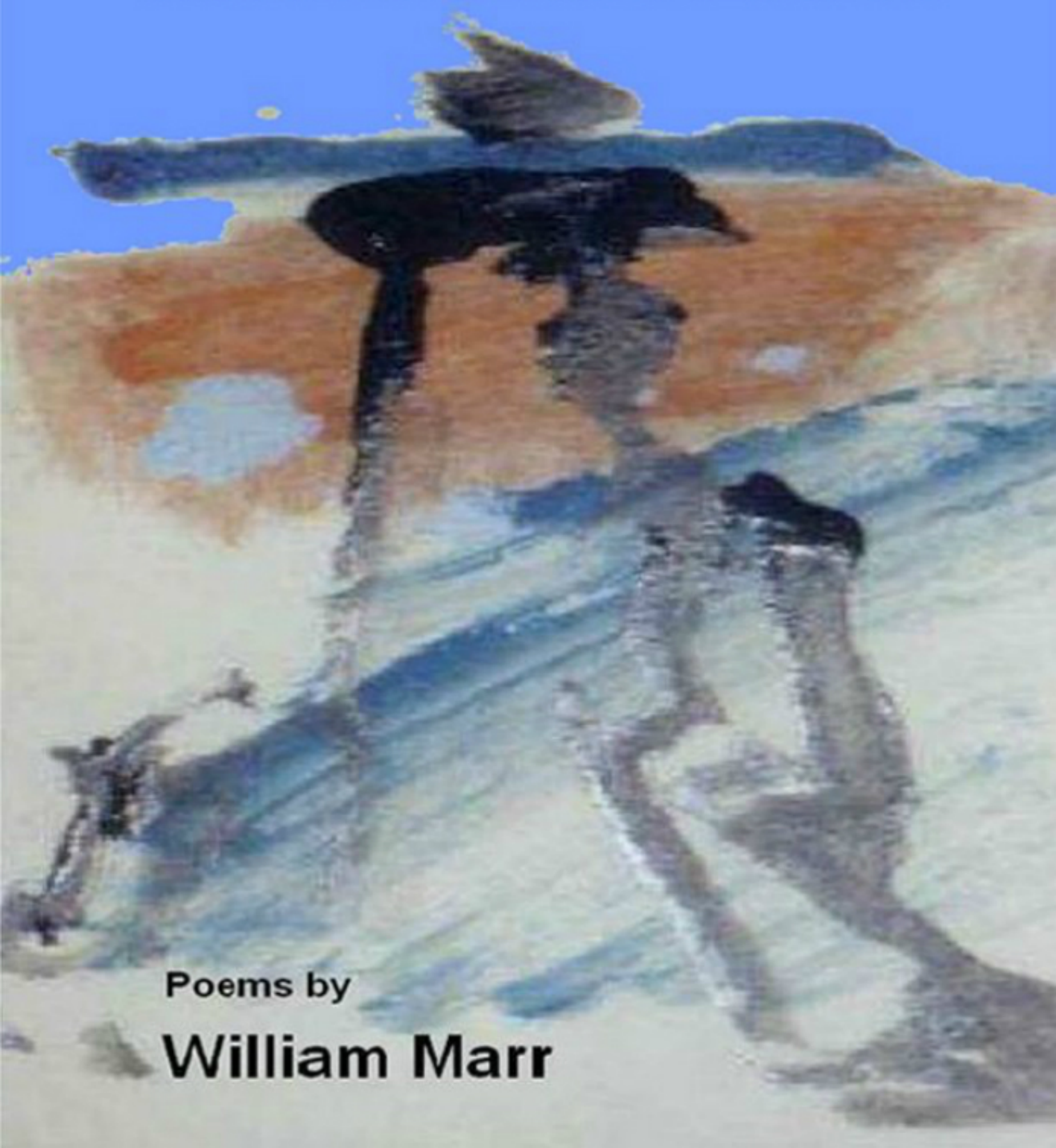


**Between**  
**Heaven and Earth**



Poems by  
**William Marr**

# **BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH**

Poems

by

William Marr

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I.

From

AUTUMN WINDOW

## **Sharing an Umbrella**

Sharing an umbrella  
I suddenly realize the difference between us

Yet bending over to kiss you  
give me such joy  
as you try to meet me halfway  
on tiptoe

## **Dandelion**

The horizon is so far away  
that the dandelion makes its roaming dream  
a relay event

from

generation

to

generation

## **Bird Cage**

open  
the  
cage  
let the bird fly

away

give  
freedom back  
to the  
bird  
cage



## Mountain

It's still there  
for me to  
climb

Looming from my childhood  
my father's  
back

## Necktie

Before the mirror  
he carefully makes himself  
a tight knot

to let the hairy hand  
of civilization  
drag him  
on

## **Kissing**

It makes no difference  
your lips kissing my lips  
or my lips kissing yours

What is important  
is that we still have something to say  
to each other  
and try to say it  
well

## **The Thinker**

Holding his chin  
thinking  
how to  
hold the chin  
and watch the computer  
do  
the thinking

## Reading

Upon opening the book  
words lead the way  
sentences follow  
All disappear in a flash

Only the best-selling title  
and the hot name  
of the author  
remain

What a great book



## Story

The dog has her eyes closed  
but the old man knows she's listening

Her warm back is moving  
closer and closer

## **A Post-It Note**

I've put some  
poems  
in the icebox

They'll be cold  
and sweet  
when you get home

## Tree

Day and night  
I hear  
the annual rings  
inside my heart  
rumbling  
and wheeling  
on the rugged road  
toward the sky

## **A Flower Dropping its Petals**

Never  
can I listen calmly  
to you counting

forget me  
forget me not  
forget me  
forget me not...

to the last petal

## Yellow River

If you trace up the turbid current, you will find  
as any geography book can tell you  
the Kunlun Mountains in Qinghai

Yet according to history's bloody accounts  
this river  
which turns clear at most  
once in a thousand years  
has its origin in millions of eye sockets  
of suffering human beings

## **Drinking Tea at a Family Reunion**

-- After Thirty Long Years of Separation

Down at one gulp  
how unbearable it would have been  
to taste drop by drop  
the cup of thirty bitter years

You smile and say to me  
good tea  
should be sipped  
and savored

## **Terraced Paddies**

Toiling hard  
to build green-carpeted stairs  
on a steep slope  
for the heaven-ascending gods  
to step on

## **The Homesick Drunk**

He has walked a short alley  
into a tortuous  
writhing intestine  
of ten thousand miles

One step left  
ten years  
one step right  
ten years  
O Mother  
I am struggling  
toward  
you



## Watching Snow

1

As the footprints in the snow  
get deeper and deeper  
they become harder and harder  
to comprehend

2

Falling on the feverish face of  
a homesick boy  
the snow melts and turns into  
a warm tropical shower

3

A sudden toll  
of the steeple bell  
shakes down  
the snow  
from the Cross

## **Hopscotch**

Standing in the way  
of a bullet's joyflight  
another little girl fell  
on a blood-stained pavement

A triumphant smile  
crossed her twisted face  
as she finally managed  
to plant both feet  
neatly  
in the chalked squares

## Chicago Serenade

Evening  
a desolate street

A car with its windows tightly rolled up  
stops for the red lights

Suddenly  
in the rear-view mirror  
a dark figure  
looming

Sir, buy...

The ashen driver  
steps in fright on the pedal  
and rushes through the red lights  
like a rabbit running for its life

... buy some flowers  
today's Valentine's Day

## **Every Time I See...**

Every time I see a little tree  
budding timidly  
in the spring breeze  
I have an urge  
to hold your thin shoulders in my arms  
and squeeze

a good morning to you

## **Floating Flowers**

On my front lawn  
a swarm of butterflies  
is busy dress-rehearsing  
a midsummer day's dream

But merrily chasing each other in mid-air  
the two in bright yellow  
are in no hurry to come down  
and take their places

## **This Morning's Sunshine Was So Wonderful**

I set up the easel  
enthusiastically started my painting

As soon as I finished covering the canvas with blue sky  
a bird flew into the scene  
I said, good, good, you came at the right time  
please move up a little. Yes, that's it!  
Then a green tree rose from the lower left corner  
just in time to meet a passing white cloud  
and the squirrels chasing each other  
were not hard to catch  
Soon I had a presentable painting at hand

Yet I felt something was missing  
something deep and inharmonious  
to bring out its purity and innocence

As I was busily mixing  
some harsh and bleak color  
a lonesome old man staggered into the picture  
and finished my masterwork  
with a blank stare

## Dialogue

What are you running away from, old woman?

ARMY!

What kind of army? Red army or white army?

ARMY!

What are you hiding from, young mother?

BOMBS!

Which way are the bombs from? East or west?

BOMBS!

What are you crying about, little girl?

BLOOD!

Whose blood? Human or animal?

BLOOD!

## **Watching the Ocean in San Francisco With a Former Red Guard**

Another wave rushed in  
As I was about to ask  
“Did you think of poetry in those days?”  
it crashed on the black rocks  
and retreated with a white sigh

We looked away at the bay  
through a thick fog  
Suddenly the sun appeared  
brilliant and solemn  
as if it were a miracle

but we both knew  
it was there all the time



## Portrait

They kept enlarging  
his image  
until its every pore  
became a great  
hollow

But before it could be put into the big frame  
of history  
Time, the critical old man  
already started the work  
of reduction  
step by step  
as he walked backward  
squinting at it from a distance

## **Picasso Died This Morning**

After frittering away the remaining afternoon  
I walk up to the window many times  
to see if the sky holds any last surprise

As it hangs over my neighbor's roof  
the sun seems almost  
immortal. Picasso died this morning  
I wonder what tunes the three musicians  
are going to play  
which way the dove  
is going to fly

Having shown us the world is still  
soft and kneadable  
the master hands are now withdrawing  
I reach out unconsciously  
but realizing how childish it must be  
I turn my grasping hands to clapping

## **African Boy**

Day and night  
a monstrous stomach  
wriggles in his bloated belly

sucking up  
the unblossomed laughter  
sucking up  
the teardrops that moisten a mother's heart  
sucking up  
the meager flesh under his wrinkled skin  
sucking up  
the indifference in his eyes  
and eventually sucking up  
from his open mouth a ghastly cry  
which we take for soundless  
but is in fact at a pitch  
well beyond the limit  
of our comprehension

## Television

The world  
is easily  
switched off

yet not quite

A spark of hatred  
from the dimming screen  
suddenly bursts into flames  
soon spreading  
over Vietnam  
over the Middle East  
over every feverish face

## **Extraterrestrials**

The evening newscast  
is swarming with images  
of extraterrestrials

Protruding foreheads  
dark and skinny  
and big eyes  
staring straight out  
from sunken sockets

What?  
Starving Africans?  
no wonder they look  
so familiar

## **On the Treacherous Night Sea**

a broken refugee boat appears  
like a ghost  
on the tired sleepless eyelids  
jolting and rolling  
toward the ever-narrowing harbor  
of humanity  
toward the shore  
where lights die out  
one after another

## **Memorial Day**

At Arlington, someone  
Unknown goes down

The thousands, the thousands  
Who have gone down in faraway fields  
But who won't die in the heart—  
How do we bury  
The thousands

## **Vietnam War Memorial**

A block of marble  
and twenty six letters of the alphabet  
etch so many young names  
onto history

Wandering alone  
amid the mass grave  
an old woman has at last found  
her only child  
and with her eyes tightly shut  
her trembling fingers now feel  
for the mortal wound  
on his ice-cold forehead



## **Inflation**

A bundle of bills  
could buy  
a flattering  
smile  
not long ago

Now  
a bundle of bills  
can buy  
more than  
one flattering  
smile

## Performers

The performing monkey  
stretches out its hand  
like a man  
asking the spectators  
for money

The performing man  
stretches out his hand  
like a monkey  
asking the monkey  
for money

## Road

Twisting and turning  
yet the road  
constantly draws people  
forward

It never thinks of itself  
as the only right way—  
at every crossing  
there's always a big sign pointing

TO WHAT TOWN  
HOW MANY MILES

## **Under the Night Sky**

A wolf  
howling at the sky

smells  
the bait  
inside his fence

drops his tail  
and becomes  
a dog

## Composition

If the sea gulls were not given a resting place  
the sea would surely be lonely

And so the daring boats leave ports and sail  
with their high masts

## Old Woman

Like a worn-out record  
the deep grooves  
on her forehead  
repeat and repeat

I want to live  
I want to live  
I want to

## **Spring Thunder**

Waking me up  
in the middle of the night  
just to tell me  
of his rumbling heart

## **Typhoon Season**

Every year at this time  
the woman within me  
rages violently  
with no provocation

And when it's over  
I always hear her licking  
my bleeding heart  
with her tender tongue



## **Fall**

a busy season  
so many dreams  
to sweep up

suddenly she rises  
saying  
it's time to go  
then turns  
and leaves

## Autumn Leaves

Every leaf  
helps  
thicken  
the carpet  
&  
soften

(  
)  
(  
the  
)  
(  
fall

## **Autumn Window**

Now that she is middle-aged, my wife  
likes to stand before the window  
and comb her hair

Her only makeup a trace of cloud  
the landscape of a graceful  
poised maturity

## Spring

If you wish to know  
the shortest distance  
between two woods  
on this bright, enchanting day  
any of the small, swift birds  
can tell you with their twitter

It's not a straight line

## Summer

Lofty season

A thick-plumed bird  
on a branch  
looks about perkily

Just as it should be  
green  
everything green

II.

Beyond

AUTUMN WINDOW

## **Song of Birth and Death**

— for a dying Somali child

He wants to blow up with his last breath  
the collapsing balloons  
that hang listlessly  
from his mother's chest  
and watch them soar  
high into the sky

on this birthday of his  
on this deathday of his

## **The Tree Under the Morning Sun**

I laugh a thousand laughs  
in the morning wind  
my whole body shakes and trembles  
with joy

I know it's you dear  
casting my shadow to the ground  
your gaze burns my nape



## Trees

trying to uphold something  
trying to greet something  
when the wind comes

but the clamors of the sixties are long gone  
the protesting fists now tame as sheep

when the wind passes  
the restless hands drop  
become listless

## **Go-Go Dance**

Shedding shedding shedding  
your arms her hair my loneliness  
Restless heels are red and swollen  
the long journey of life is never ending

Desperate are the besieged souls  
sallying forth at every beat of the war drums  
and the horns are stretching their long necks  
calling you calling you calling you  
a string of ominous names

Darling  
why are you shivering?

## **Midnight Mass**

We then drove to the greenhouse  
to see if the Cross was in bloom  
the Cross that was planted 2000 years ago  
the Cross that was once watered  
with blood

When the pipe organ became the first one  
to break down crying  
we all picked up our coats and headed for the door  
knowing it was another hopeless year

Only the stubborn caretaker refused to give up  
he kept muttering something to himself  
while sprinkling the air with water

## **Anxiety**

The sea's hairy hands  
are climbing up the mossy rocks  
its malicious laughter, bouncing  
between the disheveled wings of sea gulls and the  
unshakable past  
now splashing salty foam on your eyelids

I dare not write on the sand with my finger  
lest you might remember  
like recalling the ancient inscriptions  
on a stone tablet

## Autumn

puzzled by a falling leaf  
he quietly put away  
his guitar  
and pictures of legs  
in miniskirts

*love it or leave it*  
What a choice

## Evening Smokestack

frantically puffs  
his pipe  
under the dying sky  
trying desperately  
to make another ring  
of smoke

## **A Woman**

for a hat  
she tempts men to kill  
seven beautiful peacocks

in full pride

before seven mirrors  
she chases joyfully  
her own tail

## **Menarche**

-- for a girl in a Chicago ghetto

Stumbling on a bumpy sidewalk  
a little girl was hit by a stray bullet

Blood gushed from her immature body  
Her stiffening mouth had yet to ask girlish questions  
of her wailing mother



## **A Star-Studded World**

Soap operas  
of real people and real events  
every day  
from every corner of the earth  
fight ferociously  
for a bloody  
Hollywood  
shot

## Spring

no good no good no good  
shaking violently his head  
the artist whitens his canvas  
for a fresh start

tender green  
just a tentative test stroke

## Confucius Temple in Nanjing

*Having learned the WAY in the morning,  
it's quite all right to DIE that very evening.*

-- Confucius

Inside the dim temple  
the starving Confucius says  
*Having learned the WAY in the morning  
it's quite all right to DINE that very evening*

Outside the temple  
lights hanging over the eatery stalls  
glitter with splendor  
Crowds attracted by the aroma of food  
pour in like ants

## **Masquerade**

Walking in the streets  
he suddenly realizes  
last night's masquerade  
is still going on

Everywhere he turns  
he sees a mask  
fastened to a face  
like a second skin

## **April Fools Day**

April arrived  
with a message on my desk  
“Call Mr. Lyon—  
Urgent!!!”

I dialed the number  
“Sorry Mr. Lion can’t come to the phone right now  
He is in the CAGE!”  
Before I could put down my phone  
her irrepressible laugh jumped out of the line  
and bit off my ear, splashing blood  
all over my face

It then attacked my innocent officemate  
I stood by helplessly and watched him  
roll about and eventually die  
of laughter

## **Canadian Rockies' Pines**

Those unafraid of the cold  
please step up

Immediately  
the whole valley fills with pines  
standing tall and erect

## **Lake Louise**

so delicate  
so vulnerable  
in a chamber  
deep in the high mountains

alone

there's got to be a sign  
guarding  
this little girl  
of God

NO DINOSAURS ALLOWED  
NO NOISY TOURISTS ALLOWED

## **Athabasca Falls**

Maybe  
this is the way  
to deafen  
the arrogant  
ears  
and pound straight  
to the  
heart



## Deer X-ing

You can call me  
a jaywalker if you like  
but I must get to the other side  
of your road  
that divides our woods

When your overspeed rams  
into my underestimate  
you passionately kiss my bones  
with your bumper  
and I, in return, wash  
your windshield  
with my blood

Then you step on your gas  
and are gone  
while I gather all my might  
for a final leap, trying in vain  
to admire  
for the last time, the brilliance  
of the yellow sign

## Silence

When poetic language  
is used to ignite  
hatred  
and bombs  
it's time to abandon  
words  
syllables  
and sounds

To this absurd world  
they really have nothing  
to say

*Note: Many children born and raised in warring Bosnia  
were so traumatized that they lost the ability to speak.  
Ironically, one of the Serbian leaders was said to be a poet.*

## Eclipse

Young at heart  
the old sun  
once in a while  
likes to put on  
his mischievous black mask  
just to scare  
the superstitious jittery  
shadows

He doesn't know  
we now keep shadows  
safely in a world of virtual reality  
where we eat and drink  
make love  
all without benefit  
of a single ray  
of sunlight

## A Leap Second

*With the Earth now rotating more slowly, the Central Bureau of the International Earth Rotation Service in Paris will add an extra "leap second" to the end of 1995.*

*—Reuters, Dec. 18, 1995*

Witnessing mother earth  
stagger away at her advanced age  
you stretch your farewell song  
to the limit of your breath  
and watch a man who is dead broke  
laughing and crying  
clutch in his hands  
the windfall  
of a long long  
second

## Social Event

From the sterile suburban life  
to the drastic climate changes  
they try desperately to find excuses  
for a loud  
burp

and he the originator  
just stands there  
nodding and smiling  
as if nothing happened

## Ghost Story

1

It is said  
that even the most timid listener  
survives

2

The candle flickers near the end of the story  
shadows on the walls stretch then shrink  
swaying right, left, back and forth  
Together we move closer to each other  
as the windows creak behind us  
(are the ghosts too  
moved by their own sad stories? )

Suddenly I am startled  
by the touch of something...  
a cold little hand

## Winter Andante

In order to warm the eyes  
white snow gently embraces  
the naked trees and the fields

Distant mountains tremble softly  
herds of deer with thickened hide  
move slowly  
in the vast empty woods

In the evening wind  
the toll of a bell  
quietly lights up the twinkling stars  
adorning the sky  
becoming a cathedral

## Retirement

1

Finally  
he can call  
the clouds the birds the squirrels the flowers the trees  
and millions of other things  
by their first names  
as now he too  
is qualified for membership  
in ANRB—  
the Association of Never-Retired Beings

2

With a vacant step  
he is surprised to find  
under his feet  
the exercise wheel  
has turned  
into level firm ground  
where children after school  
cheerfully scatter  
to find new adventures



## **Born to Smile**

——for Chelsey Thomas who was born unable to smile but after several operations, she was able to smile for the first time at her 8<sup>th</sup> birthday party.

In front of Life's big mirror  
she has been practicing  
for eight long years

just to show us  
how to make  
a hearty  
smile

## **Mirror Lake**

--Yosemite National Park

The mirror  
dry and ragged  
is made of stones

reflecting  
the jutting face  
of the sky

## Sky Burial

1

At the Tibetan sky-burial site  
the starting point  
of reincarnation  
they let his body soar  
with his soul  
piece by piece  
to heaven

For the sake of the hooked beaks  
of the circling vultures  
which they believe to be  
the Emissary of Death  
they feverishly crush his stubborn skull  
with a hammer  
lest it should miss its last chance  
and fall  
into the everlasting deep

2

Huffing and puffing  
they carried the corpse  
of a poem  
onto the sky-burial site  
Without the touch of an ax or a knife  
it fell to pieces by itself

Embalmed with aromatic oil  
they tossed high into the sky  
words and phrases  
that were once beautiful and in good rhyme  
hoping the Emissary of Death  
would catch and take them  
to heaven

Without even casting a glance  
the vultures with their wings folded  
just perched on the dead branches nearby  
They had been taken in too many times  
by such tasteless stuff  
devoid of flesh and blood

## **Christmas Eve**

a peaceful night

the gasping earth prays  
for

a peaceful night

## **Installation Art**

--for a visitor who has never seen snow before

Such a gigantic undertaking  
needless to say is far beyond  
the capability of an artist  
like me

The snow on the grass  
must be thick and soft and pure  
tempting your innocent feet  
to tread to sink to burst out laughing  
The sun should make the icicles sparkle  
in your dreaming eyes  
and the breeze caressing your face  
has to ripple your memory pond

On the top of Sears Tower  
everything far and near  
must be clear  
The distant purple haze should not be  
a blush of pollution but the flushed air  
of this bustling city of steel

The floating ice on Lake Michigan needs to support  
a flock of sun-bathing gulls  
The tropical fish in the aquarium  
should weave a colorful fairy tale  
just for you

And of course  
this masterful installation art  
must be dismantled  
right after you leave

## Clone Songs

1

I love  
you

I love  
you you

I love  
you you you you you you you you...

Would you please slow down a bit

2

With the same  
clonal expression  
a group of clones  
solemnly gather  
to witness the burial  
of their original  
dead of exhaustion



3

Ambitious politicians  
will mass reproduce themselves  
to gather votes

And once in power  
they will without doubt eliminate  
their blood replicas  
knowing full well  
that they are every cell  
as power hungry  
as themselves

## **Spring Snow**

I know you love to dream

Standing in front of my window  
I watch the snow  
swirling in your dream  
a sweet smile rippling  
on your mouth

How I'd love to place an overseas call  
raise the receiver towards the sky  
and let you listen in your dream  
to the sound of the snow  
wafting and drifting

## **A Dreamless Night**

From every angle  
I tried to capture your bright smiles  
for a colorful dream

Overexposed  
the images overlapped  
and I had a sweet dark sleep  
till dawn

## Temple

Only after its wooden roof has rotted  
and collapsed  
allowing the marble pillars to emerge  
and prop up the sky  
is the temple complete

## A Midsummer Day's Dream

In his "Old Mistress Apologue," Franklin advises a friend to take an old mistress, saying, as in the dark all cats are grey, it is impossible of two women to know an old from a young one.

He holds her laziness in his hand  
and plays with it for a long time  
as if he is holding his favorite cat on his knee  
stroking her silky fur

From a shadow in the glaring sun  
suddenly words leap out  
*In the dark all cats are grey*  
which blind and hurt his eyes  
He feels a pause  
under his stroking hand  
He then watches her take a long stretch  
and with her half-closed eyes full of languor  
her mouth slowly opens and is about to yawn  
yet with the speed of a grey flash  
she snatches at him and holds him in her mouth  
like a rat

## **The Moonless Moon Festival**

How do I know, tonight  
above the heavy layers of dark clouds  
the moon is a round ball, not a flat pancake  
or a square or triangle block  
or some formless mass  
And how can I be sure  
that there is only one moon  
not a cluster  
of man-made satellites

And of course in today's digital world  
I can't rule out the possibility  
of the old moon being now  
a virtual image

Yet I know in my heart  
that thousands of miles away  
your gaze, penetrating the thick clouds  
has filled the virtual image  
with a pure brilliance  
guiding my eyes  
to the true moon

## **A Dark Horse**

Not a single hair  
is unbecoming  
No particle of dust  
clings to its polished eyes

If not for the glistening nose  
and the rousing mane  
you probably cannot tell  
that it has just run all the way  
from the depth  
of a midnight dream

## El Nino

Even God is weary  
of the day-after-day  
repetitions  
and becomes a deconstructive  
postmodernist

With a casual stir  
the cradle  
secure and stable  
immediately goes  
topsy-turvy



## **Morning Web**

Every thread  
flashes  
the message of life  
beautifully simple

while a fly  
tries desperately  
to decode  
online

## **White House Sex Scandal**

R-rated soap opera

red-faced

we are the audience

we are the supporting cast

## Gravity

After thinking the matter through  
the apple gracefully let itself  
go

Oops  
it landed right on the head  
of Mr. Newton  
dozing under the tree

## **Four Seasons**

### **Spring**

Such commotion  
it can only be  
first love

I don't recall ever seeing  
so fresh a green

### **Summer**

To say that your smile  
lights up the whole garden  
is of course an exaggeration

but I did indeed see  
a flower bloom  
at your approach

### **Autumn**

Harvest season

not all flowers

need to bear  
fruit

## **Winter**

If not for the night's snow  
how are the venturous feet to find  
knee-deep shouts and laughter

or to look beyond  
the vast white

## **A Dry Quiescent Afternoon**

When wind comes  
it brings hearsay of rain  
and when rain comes  
it brings hearsay of wind

And when you don't come  
in this dry quiescent afternoon  
I sit here and fabricate  
all the hearsays  
for the wind  
and the rain

## Scent

A short while ago  
thousands of miles away  
you were standing in the wind  
facing me

Such keen sense  
God bestows upon all animals  
hungry  
in cold dark nights

## **The Game of Blocks**

It was right here  
on this ruin of hearts  
they built with their own hands  
using sturdy colorful blocks  
a magnificent lofty temple

As to what happened later  
whether it was carelessly pushed over  
by a bored hand  
or one of the blocks  
was so eroded by the elements  
that it crumbled under its weight...  
since it was such a long time ago  
nobody could really tell



## **Carrying No Map I Travel**

In this land of beautiful scenery  
there's no starting point  
nor ending point

Hills, lakes, gentle slopes, unfathomable valleys  
all try to lure my adventurous soul  
into a perplexing maze

Under the tender strokes of hands  
and exploring gaze  
the water in the springs  
the lava in the volcanoes  
all rush to the surface in response  
Come! Come!  
Everywhere gates open with greeting arms

And to make sure I won't lose my way  
you spread yourself like a roadmap  
on the path of my life

## **A Mosquito's Ode to a Toad**

With a soft moist tongue  
you set up a sensuous trap  
waiting for careless little me  
to drop in

and be shocked  
at the discovery  
that I am such  
a tasty prey

## The Four-Sided Buddhist Idol in Macao

After she put together her palms  
and offered a silent prayer on each side  
she smiled at him shaking her head  
*secrets of heaven are not to be revealed*

but he can tell from the duration and her facial expression  
she has made four different wishes

Secretly he feels complacent  
knowing the silent prayers he made on all sides  
would have a fourfold chance of being fulfilled --

Wishing her a boundless happiness  
Wishing her a boundless happiness  
Wishing her a boundless happiness  
Wishing her a boundless happiness

## **A Fallen Goddess**

He could not find the slightest crack  
on the idol that he picked up from the floor  
Wiping off the dust  
he put it back in the high niche

Last night's earthquake  
caused the downfall  
that shook his faith

Now that all is well  
no doubt he will go on with his worship

But the goddess who descended to earth last night  
knows the man has failed her test  
By repeatedly turning and inspecting  
he has shattered her inner parts  
irreparably

## **Two Suns or More**

Finally came the news  
the flesh and blood scattered  
during the Big Bang  
might have settled another solar system  
44 light-years away

The possibility of having relatives  
as cultured and peaceful as the human race  
aroused intense excitement throughout the world  
Now just let us pray  
they and we worship  
the same God

## **Smokestack**

How shocking  
the oversexed earth  
still carries on  
with such an erection

## **Between Heaven and Earth**

A falling apple  
suddenly stops midair  
unsure of whether to continue its course  
or return to the treetop  
while the Kansas State Board of Education  
argues over the weighty question  
of gravity

## **A Drunk World**

So much pent-up sorrow  
so many beer cans popping  
and the world froths  
and overflows



## **Aftershock**

The bloody mutilated  
terror  
dug up from the ruins  
by an excavator  
still lies there  
trembling

with intensity  
exceeding the Richter scale  
its epicenter  
right in our heart

## **Cherokee Casino**

A surviving band of Indians  
finally settled  
in the mountains near Cherokee

Using hunting skills handed down  
from generation to generation  
they built a trap with glittering lights  
Now they just sit there and wait  
for people of all colors  
to drop in

## Biltmore Mansion

*Where can I find thousands of spacious buildings to  
house the world's poor scholars and make them look  
happy.*

—Tu Fu, “Song of The Thatched Hut Blown Down  
by Autumn Wind”

This mansion, more spacious than a royal palace  
might not be able to house all the world's poor scholars  
but it can easily make a few hundred of them look  
less unhappy

This morning the wind is calm and the sun bright  
and these people holding tickets in their hands  
with their heads high on their shoulders  
sure don't look like any poor scholars to me  
They move around the ornate furniture and decoration  
admiring the beautiful image  
of the hostess behind the curtains of time  
and sniffing at the still-permeating aroma  
of perfumed hair and wine and food  
from banquets of a hundred years ago

Besides, they probably have never heard  
of the name Tu Fu  
In fact they might even confuse it  
with Tofu, the weight-reducing health food  
also from China

\*Biltmore House, the largest private home built in America at the end of the 19th century, is situated on 8,000 acres in Asheville, North Carolina. It has 250 rooms, 65 fireplaces, 43 bathrooms, 34 bedrooms, and 3 kitchens.

## **Cow & Cowhide**

When a cow is flogged  
with a cowhide

the pain must be bloody  
immediate

## **Mona Lisa**

There must be some d-e-e-p  
secret

Staring at her smile  
a man tilts his head left and right  
Beside him a painted woman  
wears a wide grin

## Cezanne's Still Life

Lying back to back on a plate  
an orange  
and a banana  
each dream  
its own dream

Cezanne comes over  
gives the banana  
a half turn  
Its graceful inner curve now  
embraces the orange's plumpness

Instantly the air softens  
the color fluid  
and rich

## **Breath**

A puff of air  
from your sweet sigh  
must have caused this breeze  
that entices the flowers  
to release their fragrance  
and sends a shudder  
through the leaves  
and me



## Spring Itch

Once again in his adolescence  
the old tree in my backyard  
keeps squeezing the budding acne  
before the vanity mirror  
of the blue sky

## **Super Lightspeed**

A long time ago I discovered in you  
the indubitable proof  
of the existence of super lightspeed

You always knew  
every word I was about to say  
before I opened my mouth

## **Time Difference**

It is morning  
and he paces up and down the room  
in silence

In a distant room  
she too paces up and down  
in silence  
yet it is already evening

Thousands of miles apart  
they walk to a window simultaneously  
and look up at the half-lit sky  
in silence

knowing at this moment  
a flick of the eyelids or a twitch of the lips  
will certainly set off  
an avalanche

## On the Towpath

Cut into the flesh  
the rope  
raw as original sin  
pulls them back  
on the muddy shore  
each step a struggle  
for the last stand

The endless succession of *ayo ayo*  
is neither complaint  
nor song  
just to remind themselves  
still alive

## **Bian-Zhong**

-- An Ancient Chinese Musical Instrument Unearthed

They put in this time capsule  
whispering wind from a bamboo grove  
rippling stream under a wooden bridge  
joyous shouts of children playing  
gentle chat of grownups  
mooing barking crowing chirping cooing  
and the occasional rumbles  
from a distant mountain

All of these and many more  
they sealed and buried in the ground  
to let us hear  
thousands of years later  
the ringing of a tranquil world

## **On the Viewing Stand of Tian An Men**

From this height  
all look so small  
like ants

Except for the threatening clouds  
and the guards  
I might have raised both my arms  
and proudly announced to the world

TODAY  
I TOO  
AM STANDING TALL

## 911

We really didn't care much about  
the collapse of the Twin Towers  
nor the Pentagon turning into a Tetragon  
but when thousands of innocent lives  
were agonizing in the flames  
we frantically tried to dial for help  
from Allah or whichever God

yet somehow we hesitated --  
there might not be anyone  
on the other end

## **The Cove**

With a sardonic laugh  
the huge wave dashes toward her

She dodges  
swaying slightly her hips

She then turns her head  
and smiles

Immediately  
the sea and sky become boundless  
calm and tranquil



## Bridge

Clasped together  
intimate and tight

We really don't know  
nor care  
who was the first  
to extend  
a hand

## **Night Cruise on River Tuo**

-- Dragon-Boat Festival, 2002

While our memory is still flickering and drifting  
with the water lamps in the stream of time  
our eyes are already filled with fog  
like the chilly surface of tonight's river

The drumbeats pounding our chests all day  
are finally silent  
waves stirred up by thousands of paddles  
have also calmed

Under the hazy starlight  
a couple of mandarin ducks  
are chattering and necking

don't forget tonight

## **Jade Necklace**

A live cinder  
from the Creation

Stroking with your finger tips  
you stir up the green flame  
that flickers on your breast  
then smile  
and walk straight towards me

## Listening to a Childhood Song

Flickering across the dark open space  
a firefly...

then two...

then three...

soon they multiply  
become flashes of lightning  
reveal ragged hills  
and mountains  
overflowing rivers  
and ravines

of a face

## **Neighbor's Flowers**

A week ago our neighbor Eddie passed away  
This morning I saw the potted flowers on their patio  
all drooped and withered

His wife Helen who loves flowers so much  
must not have heard the weather report  
warning of an early frost

## Transmigration

Swaying alone in the evening wind  
a little blue flower in the wilderness

a passing poet with misty eyes  
suddenly turns his head  
and gazes upon her

One evening centuries later  
a faded blue book of poetry  
stands at the corner of a dusty bookshelf

a little blue flower in the wilderness  
swaying alone in the evening wind

## **Songs of You and Me**

1

I let  
the bird  
in your cage  
go

I know you want  
to hear him  
sing

but I believe  
the acoustics are much better  
in the woods

2

I put out  
your lamp

It was kind of you  
to try to illuminate  
the way  
for the moths

but I believe they can see  
far better  
in the dark

3

I snatch the sweet dream  
from a smiling corner  
of your mouth

You turn over  
murmuring something  
strange yet familiar

It turns out to be  
my long lost  
childhood name



## **Someone Must Be Crying**

— for Iris Chang

Someone must be crying  
in such an evening  
wind coming from the west  
rain coming from the west

and she is the one  
who can't hold her tears  
after seeing so many piles  
of white bones in history  
the injustice and the dead silence  
of the world

and she is the one  
who once starts crying  
cannot stop  
human sins surround her like icebergs  
choke her  
with their oppressive shadows

Someone must be crying  
in such an evening  
wind coming from the west  
rain coming from the west

\*Iris Chang was a Chinese-American writer who in 1997 published a book entitled "The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II" telling the story of the murder of more than 250,000 defenseless civilians by the invading Japanese army. In 2004 she committed suicide due to severe depression.

## **Tsunami Time**

When acres and acres of debris  
can no longer be used  
to reconstruct the memories  
of sunshine and laughter

When a bloated body becomes  
the last hope and comfort  
to grief-stricken relatives  
survival is not an option but a miracle

When black tidal waves crash down  
one after another in our nightmares  
we scream helplessly  
and wake up soaking wet

When all fishermen suffer from hydrophobia  
a lone boy picks up a stone  
and throws it toward the sea  
with all his might

When people around the world  
no matter where they are  
instantly become  
orphans

## Melting Icicles

at the mere sight  
of the sun's warm smile  
the frozen tears  
of the lovelorn  
winter  
begin to  
melt  
and  
d  
r  
i  
p

## At the Laundromat

a laundry bag  
stuffed  
with smelly  
days  
of the gone week

he begins his ritual--  
emptying contents into the washer  
adding bleach  
and detergent  
closing the lid  
putting three coins in the slots

the recycle  
of another week

## **Have a Hammock**

The Maya still sleep in hammocks  
between two trees. "Have a hammock"  
is their daily greeting

Bright sunshine above  
cool grass below  
swinging between two trees  
a sweet Mayan dream

Dark sky above  
a sea of lights below  
swinging between two skyscrapers  
an acrophobe's nightmare

## Newborn

The world  
is full of  
light and smiles

Light and smiles  
are the things he sees  
when opening his eyes  
the very first time

## **Bird Fish Poet**

Getting lost  
in the smoky sky  
a bird asks a cloud  
for direction

In the water  
where no sunlight can penetrate  
a bubbling fish desperately seeks  
its own shadow

A poet strolls the brown earth  
looking casually up and down  
now at the bird now at the fish  
finally finds his inspiration  
and composes a beautiful poem



## **Katrina**

With such a name  
of course she had to be  
a wild dancer

A slight swing of her wide skirt  
instantly sent all watchers  
into a daze  
not able to escape  
nor to tell  
if what engulfed the city  
was water from the ruptured levees  
or tears from their eyes

On the turbid water's surface  
there were bloated bodies  
querying the sky  
with outstretched arms

## **Endangered Species**

He can't recall  
when he became  
an endangered species

yet he can sense  
the pitying stares  
behind the scopes  
streaming towards him  
like bullets

flying alone  
in the vast vast sky  
he knows he must utter  
his last cry

like a poet  
who sings  
to confirm his being

## **An Easter Surprise**

Lying magnificently in the nest  
the two blue eggs, still radiant  
with the mother's warmth  
must have been hidden by God  
to give children an Easter surprise  
yet I, no longer a child  
happen to find them

The mother bird startled away  
by my intrusion  
is now standing on the grass  
watching my every move

Though knowing well  
the briefer a beauty is  
the more lasting it can become  
I still want another look  
but promise to let the mother  
get back to her nest  
before her warmth on the eggs  
dissipates completely

## **Jewish Cemetery in Budapest**

Unwilling to be forgotten  
the memories of humanity  
rather inhumanity  
struggle hard  
to emerge  
from layers beneath layers

tombstones  
aslant and askew

## **A Helicopter Upside Down in a Public Place**

To fly from this position  
is of course difficult  
unless  
we too stand on our heads  
and rapidly cross our feet

Sure enough  
we hear the propeller starting to roar  
yippeeeeeee !  
and we soar high into the sky  
above the cheering crowd

5/27/2006 8:06 pm  
cold rain falling hard  
at the Residentsplatz

not a single soul in sight

\* As part of Mozart's 250th birthday celebration activities in Salzburg, "A Helicopter Upside Down In A Public Place" was an art piece displayed at the Residentsplatz. The artist, Paola Pivi, was born in Milan in 1971. Her works are enigmatic, patently absurd and humorous. When displayed in public spaces, her creations are meant to surprise and amuse viewers, lifting them briefly from their ordinary routine.

## **The Transmigration of a Humorist**

Hi. I am Art Buchwald  
and I just died

no sooner had he finished his words  
than I heard a baby's cry

Hi. I am Art Buchwald  
and I was just born

**Winter Palaces Summer Palaces**  
**Big Palaces Small Palaces**

-- Russian Impression #1

Hoisted to the sky  
a magnificent dome

My upward-looking eyes  
suddenly become blurred  
as drops of sweat and blood  
flying through the dim air of history  
splatter my face

## **Toilet Reality**

-- Russian Impression #2

It took only a few days  
for him to get used to the grandiose dreams  
of Imperial Russia --

the imposing columns  
the onion domes  
the magnificent churches  
the even more magnificent palaces  
the biggest cannon the heaviest bell the tallest  
statue  
and in the five-star hotel  
the insurmountable bathtub  
the elevated toilet...

In fact it was the homely American toilet  
that plunged him back  
to earth



## **Mountain Views**

### **At Dawn**

You have never seen  
    such a fresh world  
rising from bird songs  
    in such a fine morning

every ray of light  
    brilliant and dazzling  
each love  
    the first love

### **At Dusk**

Without the tick of the second hand  
or chirp of birds  
without the changing light moving across the window sill  
or footsteps of the wind rustling the leaves  
I might not have become aware of the darkening twilight  
permeating the corner of your eyes

A rude hand  
carrying a heavy shadow  
is slowly approaching  
your proud and defiant forehead

## **A Butterfly Specimen**

netted with one scoop

dazzling wings ~

bright sunshine ~

gentle breeze ~

flower fragrance ~

soft birdsong ~

fluid glances ~

now a Latin name  
in the dim light  
of the museum

## **Fairy Penguin Parade**

-- A night on Phillip Island, Australia

1

In complete silence  
they march in file onto the stage  
like well-rehearsed kindergarteners  
their white-breasted costumes  
glittering joyously  
under the dim light

Since no flash is allowed  
it is hard to tell  
from which backstage they emerge --  
the boundless ocean  
or the dark night

In wobbling steps  
without any gesture  
or dialogue  
they shake water off their bodies  
and fill the eyes of the audience  
with tears

2

Exultant over their freedom  
they have again spent all day in the Ocean Bar  
celebrating and drinking  
and now pop ashore  
one by one

Oblivious to all furtive eyes in the dark  
they form a line on the beach  
and do their routine exercises  
left.....right...left.....right  
trying strenuously to turn their unsteady steps  
into graceful movements of the waves  
before they reach home

## **Recollection Tricks**

— after sixty years

Raising his foot  
he stepped right into the magnificent palace  
where he was once a happy little prince

Surprised  
he found the tall threshold  
had shrunk and sunk  
and he suddenly became a giant  
trapped in a miniature room  
with crumbling walls

Above the courtyard  
the ever bright vast sky of his memory  
was now downcast  
with sunken shoulders  
and eyes staring blankly  
at his perplexed look

## Curves

an enticing glance  
the profile of a body  
lying on its side

lips parting slightly  
a dialogue  
between  
two distant stars

## **Sea O Sea**

-- Slaughtering pilot whales in the Faroe Islands,  
Denmark

Calm after carnage  
the bloody sea  
finally ceases boiling

Soon the night curtain will fall  
to conceal the savage scene  
letting the glaring red fade  
into the deep dark corner  
of unhumankind's memory



## Sydney Opera House

full sails  
outspread wings  
ready to dispatch  
every note  
to eager ears

lights dim  
silently they wait  
for the baton to rise  
and summon music  
from some mysterious corner  
of the universe

## **Snowstorm**

bury deep  
all unseasonable  
passion

then invite adventurous feet  
to trample  
scribble nonsense

## About the Author

William Marr has published, under the Chinese pen name Fei Ma (非馬), fourteen books of poetry in his native Chinese language. His first book of poems in English, *Autumn Window*, was published by Arbor Hill Press (1995, and 2nd Edition 1996). His poems appear in numerous anthologies -- including *300 Best New Poems 1917-1995*, published in Taiwan, and *300 Best Chinese New Poems*, published in China -- and are widely read in Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, and the United States. His works are included in high school and college textbooks of Chinese Literature in Taiwan and China. A number of his poems have been translated into many languages. In addition to writing poetry, he has also edited several anthologies of Chinese and Taiwanese modern poetry. A former president of the Illinois State Poetry Society and a member of the Poets Club of Chicago, he is a scientist by profession and has lived and worked in the Chicago area since 1970.

Bill Marr is a fellow painter, poet, and all-round great fellow. We met in the '80s before he retired from Argonne National Laboratory in Chicago. With more time to pursue his writing, he soon became the second president of the Illinois State Poetry Society and also joined the Poets Club of Chicago. His poems, always short, sharp and well-aimed, intrigued me early on. Never one to milk his subjects, he goes straight to the heart of his topics and his readers, making his work unforgettable. As in *KATRINA* and *MENARCHE* he deals with tragedy both poignantly and succinctly but with keen insight. His wife, Jane, has inspired tender and memorable poems such as *AUTUMN WINDOW* and *SHARING AN UMBRELLA*. Marr's work is well-known in China, Taiwan and Southeast Asia and he has translated much of his and other writers' works into Chinese. In addition to publishing fourteen books of his own poetry here and abroad, he has edited a number of Chinese and Taiwanese contemporary works. After coming to the U.S.A. in 1961 and receiving a Ph.D. in Nuclear Engineering from the University of Wisconsin in 1969, Bill Marr settled into an American lifestyle, but he never lost the incisive Oriental perspective that defines his poetry and makes it unique.

—Glenna Holloway, founding president  
of Illinois State Poetry Society, author of *NEVER  
FAR FROM WATER and OTHER LOVE STORIES*

When viewing the world as a nuclear physicist and poet, how do the particles of perception intermix, and what does perception say of our world among the stars? The atomic forces, the halos, that surround all objects animate and inanimate inter-relate across boundaries of life, time, and history. The Yellow River of China flows seaward upon the eyes of those who have farmed its banks and wasted its waters upon their lives and land, indeed from those from whom it has sucked its sustenance. The artist, awake as never before to his painting, leaves the easel only to have his work completed by a wandering stranger. Flickering across darkness, a firefly becomes flashes of lightning that reveal hills, mountains, rivers, and the ravines of a human face. An ancient flute lifted from the earth whistles only the sounds of a forgotten time that haunts our bones. No dust clings to the eye of the dark horse which has run all the way from a night dream. A woman snatches at a man and holds him in her mouth like a rat. And only after the wooden roof of a temple has rotted and collapsed are its pillars able to emerge and prop up the sky—the temple complete.

Between Heaven and Earth is the second book of poetry in English by renowned Taiwanese poet Fei Ma, or as his friends at Argonne National Lab know him, William Marr. (He has written 14 volumes of poetry in his native Chinese.) They are the poems of a man who travels widely, observes deeply and speaks sparsely, for there is so much of the world to

look at, and it is the fractal patterns of the world—the spaces between the rough edges of being and non-being that must be looked at and experienced for our lives to have human definition in the open echoing of the stars from which we are born.

—Jared Smith, author of *Grassroots*  
and *The Graves Grow Bigger Between*  
*Generations*

## Some Comments on the Author's Previous Works

Verse has never been freer, yet strong discipline is at work...The human spectrum visible in *Autumn Window* will make readers nod, smile and perhaps wipe an eye.

--- *Chicago Tribune*

Collectible Chicago poets, one finds, start with Eugene Field, Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, Harriet Monroe, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ana Castillo, David Hernandez, Li-Young Lee, William Wei-Yi Marr, and a raft of more recent poets...

--- *AB Bookman's Weekly, For The Specialist Book World*

He uses fluently and clearly the language of the common people...gives profound meaning to common objects and events.

--- *The Isle Full of Noises*  
*Modern Chinese Poetry from Taiwan*  
Columbia University Press

Unquestionably among the best contemporary Chinese poets...He is unique and without peer in the arena of short poems.

--- *Huaxia Poetry* (China)

A master of lyrical layers along with the beauty and brevity of his Chinese heritage, he enhances his skill with the spontaneity and flavor of his adopted American homeland. His humor, insight and tenderness are universal; his control of such rich ingredients is sure-handed.

--- Glenna Holloway

Each (poem) is a window opening onto beauty and fluency. There is every shade of happiness and sadness, anger and peace... Their effortless renderings of a civilized mind in touch with an often mad world are part of their mystery.

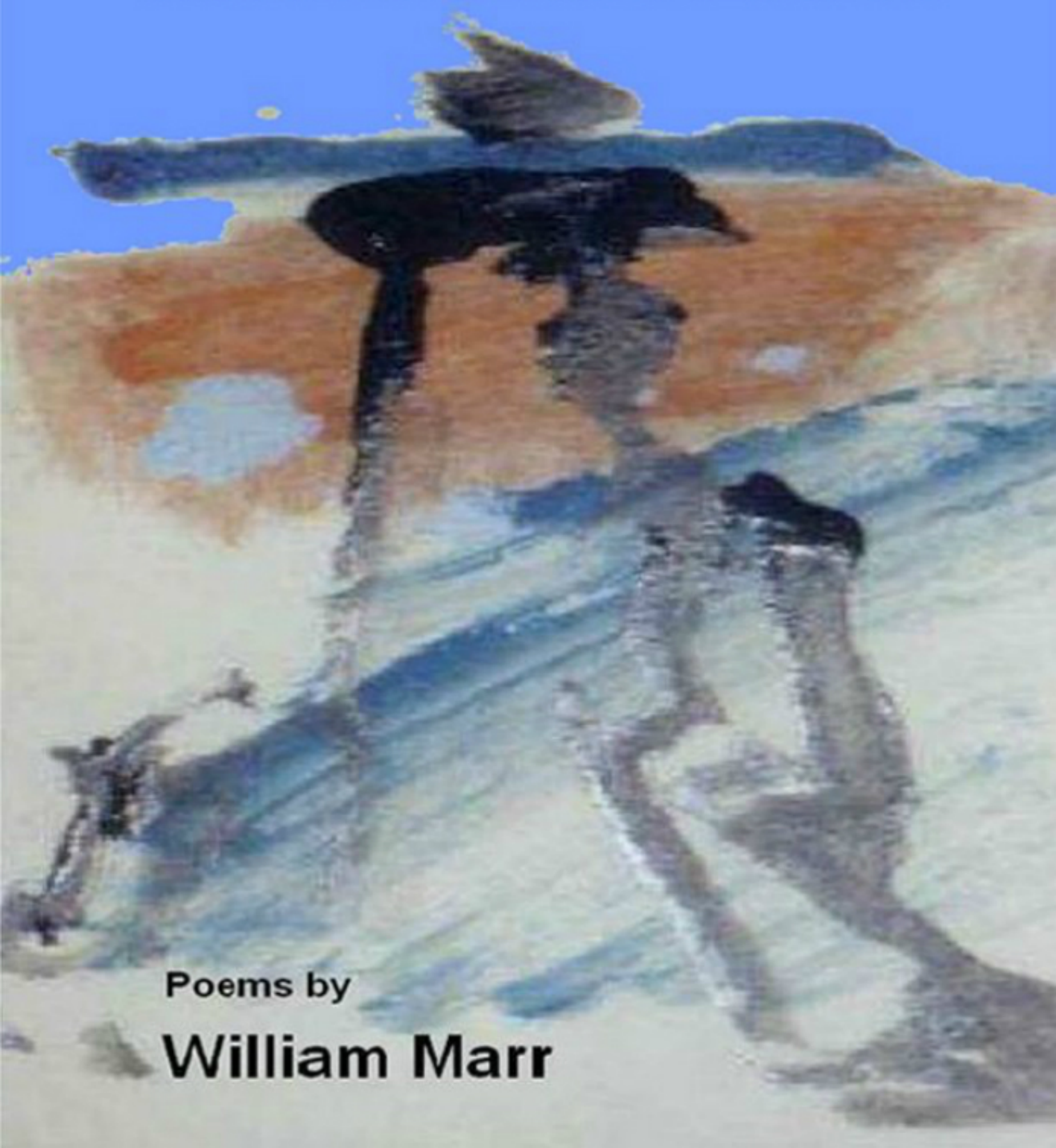
--- Li-Young Lee

His concise yet highly symbolic poetry, with a deep sense of humanity, adds a new dimension to the rich tradition of Chinese poetry... He bridges the gap between new and old, and between East and West.

--- *Hong Kong Literature Monthly*



**Between**  
**Heaven and Earth**



Poems by  
**William Marr**