

wounding hapless tongues
in malignancy, silencing
the un-torn scars
littered upon earth-born bodies

no —
wielding vice
to excise inquietude —

for refraction mourns only
in hyphenated keening.

does that count for anything?

here, i lie
as relentless dawn pervades
to polish rent fascia,
unable to grasp

below you
the ninth hell's invocations
breathing
firmly onto tenebrous Elysium

the middle part of loving —
requiem's end in mourning. *please*:
beseech dry nails,
crushing keratin ribs to
banish burden & guilt
unto a distant void,
naked green

searing tendons under
glossy torridity will
grease looking-glass lights &
blink onyx eyes into
iridescence...

further, further, then away.

Reverse Abecedarian for 丹顶鹤¹

Zeitgeist does not stand for zithers baying to sun, nor for bared-bones
yielding to piercing beams of light, blooming red and white. We no longer mouth
xiè xiè² to an empty sky — we will watch your maw raze our willows and
wave goodbye to your wind, weeping against the vermilion
vitriol wherein we become yellow, more yellow. Crimson hunters poach
us in our territory. We break our un-sutured wings, folding toward hollow
tourniquets, viscera tearing from where the blade enters,
shredding flesh pink until our marrow runs dry. Keening, tongueless,
rises in wake of gunshot smoke — but no gun to be found, only ringing in the ear,
quietude never to be quelled. Prayer beads damned beneath lunar tides fall,
pried from your neck, crushing your trophy crane's
origami wings strung tendon highline. Bloodless in irreverence,
never again will we be children, our last speech splattered black on temple walls;
mourners intrude and gift red bills to excuse the bruises on wet skulls, crooning a
lotus-tongued dirge for funeral fruit and joss-paper effigies,
kneeling in wax-thick phlegm, almost drowning. Will we, who subsist on the
jellied yolk of black eggs, leave body-shaped imprints on the pavement,
invisible except for white heat? Will we flee with bursting eyes and flaking beaks,
hewn from the crypt of ultimate un-utterance? Only this sound we know to be true:
grafted bells tolling out of gallowed throats, singing steady through
fire-dragon lineage and stillborn phoenix hatchlings.

Exegesis: leave no eulogies for these unmarked crane bodies. Instead, dig deeper for
diaspora babies, because we smoke our bones last. Find us kissing the
carrion-blessed hand of our beautiful immolators, for under the skin there is more than
bloody ichor clotting. Over the pitted scar tissue, you scorch our names transparent.
Always will red crowns call through the ash, crying still to *never let us go*.

¹ 丹顶鹤 – *Dān dǐng hè* (Mandarin): Red-crowned crane, symbolizing longevity and virtue in Chinese culture.

² *Xiè xiè* – *Xie xie* (Mandarin): Thank you

To Forgotten Calabash Men

For my grandmother, who has surrendered her favorite myth to dementia.

This contrapuntal reads in three ways: individual sides form single poems, and reading columns left to right forms a third poem.

never stop asking me who I am —

a hundred small men bound together

breathing in faded dreamland

in one magic calabash

to escape dying afterthought.

for greed steeped in tarnished ochre,

this loose-tongued grandson tamed

souls howling inside gourd's bind.

soy-sauce-egg breakfasts boiling

from summons of taoist boy's spell, all will die

amidst offal-scented fishmongers' children

upon exit into plain air,

where you taught him to beget simmered warmth,

& yet, the boy casts away care.

to speak merely of truncated *nǐhǎos*¹ & ceramic goodbyes

he invokes his magic force

which, only borrowed to him, liquesce fatedly.

until the hundred-strong hosts dissipate

he wishes to caress you once again

in vain. perhaps when 昆仑² haze unravels into jade

through meager jowls of folly,

he will one day learn

to shoulder the weight you set adrift & recall

道³ means not only path, but

whispered words assuaging wanton

truth: the ways of life proffer

remembrance. This grandson, who fluttered

monochrome goodbyes

¹ *Nǐhǎo* – Nihao (Mandarin): Hello

² 昆仑 – Kūnlún (Mandarin): The Kunlun Mountains, a mythic mountain range symbolizing divinity in Chinese Mythology

³ 道 – Dào (Mandarin): way and/or path. The fundamental concept of Chinese philosophy, also representing the cosmic order.

away from you, will never again surrender

over crusting tears

patchwork tales of calabash men

that stifle veils of afterimage.

you told him at last,

taoist boy mourns in finality, for

though you have forgotten —

each thorn-pierced heart falls still on release.