

Cantonese idioms

No, you didn't give up
a whole forest for me.
I am not a tree.
I am not even a kind of flora
that nature is willing to keep.

If teeth can be used as gold,
wouldn't everyone melt them
to make jewellery
and replace the teeth
with blue whale bones?

Four horses, all whipped,
fail to chase after an uttered word.
Who knows if the mammals
have not been drugged
or who they really serve?

A dragon is bullied
by baby shrimps in shallow water.
It should inhale deeply and
breathe those lowly creatures in.
That said, who put the dragon there?

If you deceive someone,
you put her in a sealed drum.
Can you also treat her as a feline
and simultaneously experiment
on the physics of quantum?

Poem with Cantonese Sight Rhymes

How not to weave knowledge
into sheer hatred?
To be lenient about bad situations
with pure sentiments?
To slowly make the worst possibilities
disappear and to once again enjoy
the sun in open spaces,

hoping and pretending we're
memorialising? Are we remembered?
I'm afraid of the faint beating
of the heart of home, now loud
only in our vivid memory. Those calligraphied
banners wielded by marchers
are now objects of terror. We touch

many walls: walls of neglect
and indifference, to exchange
for rivers of when, why, and what?
Still steely, despite our frustrations
but graveyards of emotions will open
this lunar month and again.
We've created many angry ghosts

20 August 2021

On the Day of the Eclipse

The sky doesn't open. Uncharged light bulbs explode into glowing fragments. There are three ways to recognise the smell of a sun-shaped onion: boiling, peeling, and crying. Some people look directly at the eclipse and imagine themselves fainting; they dream of thousands of arrows pointing towards a giant clock face, its numbers written in pre-digitised Chinese. ONE (一) is the smooth back of a wet elephant. TWO (二) is a training step for infants. Some say their names or birthdays coincide with the natural phenomenon and ask: Is the moon a sun in another macrocosm? Poets wonder if they should write poems, photographers click their shutters from a distance. A pregnant woman accidentally sees the partially covered sun will give birth to a healthy son. Can the sun really be stolen, eaten and spat out, by an ancient dragon? The seconds and minutes are being counted: all worlds collide, all instances. An invisible and unwanted timeline for this city, like mysterious corpses, washes up in the harbour, cannot be debunked. Tomorrow, once again, the sun calls on us in bed. We make it stand still for a moment, we make it run.

21 June 2020

時間保留

我們何時最終明白時間？
我們真的現在了解時間嗎？
星體，季節。十六世紀
無人理會

時間準確與否。無事甚急。
萬事俱略。現在，
每分每秒
能關鍵迫在眉睫的生存邊緣

與死亡，但是我們的鐘
不響不滴答，
都是電子的展示。我們要
往從前看才能向前看：

放射性碳定年告知
地球年歲：人類歷史骨內存。
聽說將有一個新時鐘
計量文明。一滴答

已一年。我們這代亡了它還在。
希望地球能抵敵重重毀損
而時間繼續給與。
我們可以成為優良祖先嗎？

Time Keep

translated from the Chinese by the poet

When will we finally understand time?
Do we really now understand time?
Solar bodies, seasons. In the 16th century
no one cared about

the accuracy of time. Nothing was urgent.
Everything approximate. Now,
every minute and every second
can mean the imminent verge of life

and death, and yet our clocks now
don't even tick, when we look
at their digital silent displays. We need
to look back to look forward:

Radiocarbon clocks determining the age
of the earth – human histories stored in bone.
I heard a new clock is being created
to measure civilizations. It ticks just once

a year. It will outlast us all.
I hope Earth can weather the damage being done
and time keep giving.
Can we be good ancestors?

The Chinese original was broadcast as part of the “Earthsong: Science-inspired Poetry Against Climate Change” event that took place at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (#COP26) on Monday 1 November 2021.