

The Poetry of Lu Yimin 陆忆敏

Selections: 1984-1994

Li Yimin was born in Shanghai in 1963, and is married to the poet Wang Yin. Still a university student, she became well known on China's poetry scene in 1985 for the poem <An American Woman's Magazine>. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, Lu was not only a frequent contributor to Shanghai's unofficial poetry journals, but also Sichuan's and Nanjing's *Them* (in the two 1985 issues). Lu is known as a poet whose favorite topic is death, and is frequently cited as an acolyte of the poetry of Sylvia Plath and Ann Sexton. She has written very little poetry since the early 1990s.

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An American Woman's Magazine [美国妇女杂志] 1984

Look out from this window
You know, you've all you could hope for
under a blossomless tree, you watch
the lively people

Braids coiled over the right temple
parted hair falling over both cheeks
ladies with stiff straight or mocking gazes
You identify them, one by one

Which was once me
was a day of mine, a fall day
Who was a spring and several springs of mine
Who? Who once was me

Continually we fall toward the dust or rush back and forth
dictionaries under arms, turning to this page of death
We clip and paste this word, embroider this expression
disassemble its nine strokes and put it together again

People watch this bustling activity
have watched for centuries
they praise us for doing well, bravely, coolly
they describe it in just this way

Whoever was once me
You identify those people
I stand before you
having washed my hands of it all

Sylvia Plath (1984)

Right now I only feel a certain sadness
It immediately wells up in the heart overflows the lips
Right now someone's simply gathering in a thin wind
 (her virtues have surpassed me)
Thick clouds threaten to drip to slip and fall
on the white stone surface of a twilight street
I want to mourn for the entire forest
in my softest voice
 (a sound streaming with tears)
sing her constant grin
her fluttering smile

She died at thirty-one fully satisfied
her corpse and soul
are the purple berries sold on the curb
her breath congeals in poems
 becomes dark red
Fine rain and burning lamplight
melt into a grove of nighttime trees
people all turn their heads to look at the pretty glittering forest
She speaks loudly of death, thinks loudly of it too
I see a purple sunset
and think of their accidental deaths
her shadow so distinct
leans slowly toward my body

On the Street I Quietly Shout Out a Line of Poetry [我在街上轻声叫嚷出一个诗句]

In a dry white meadow I sing

..... a love song.

Hoo, a breeze a warm sun gentle flowing water

also fields clouds and sound

for a long time and far.

The sun has fused all passionate hopes

This is winter's start

The kindest mayors in the world

and their flannel overcoats

on chilly bleak streets

distribute warmth harmony and calm.

I stand alone, like yesterday

the specimen squirrel in the still life.

On the street I quietly shout out a line of poetry

in a wink it surges past the street's canopy of commercial jingles

leaving one with regrets.

Even if the young grass breaks

the joyous life of man

I've already sung a love song as dazzling

as Holy Communion's golden cup

My face's all red.

Gently Dying in This City [温柔地死在本城]

A white-feathered pigeon decked out like a magpie flies close over the flat roof tops
The black-feathered one made up like a crow follows soon after
with a fine rope they lasso my body
the ends held in their beaks they carry out drills and fill the air with shouts and laughter

I dance leisurely in their footprints
chest quivering, skirt swaying
my skin's dazzling full and round in the morning light
and gives off an ever-strengthening fragrance of lychees

When somebody crosses the road, the flock carries me up
people fight to see my dreamy eyes and arms
I see myself made real swooping over the rooftop
and sigh that the wall doesn't glow rosy enough and appears to go green

These children of mine will carry me home
I suppose they'll set me down gently by a window and take the rope away
Crow driving off magpie, magpie chasing crow
I never wake again, as you can see, I die gently in this city

The Plums Come Out and Summer Enters [出梅入夏] 1985

Wandering around all day on your kneecaps
your late-sleeping son plucks at a song without lyrics
A few grains of dust lie idle on the sundeck
I close my eyes
stroking the child at my bosom

He appears all of two inches already
Everyday toward evening he runs around on your chest
climbs up on one arm and soon after
climbs onto the other
We pull down the awning with our arms
and make him play under it
These days, just these past few days
somebody's been plotting against our son

Late night all asleep
who knows if under a particular leaf
I've laid away a piece of fruit
Who knows if in a certain skirt
I've hidden a few hectares of edible things
Who knows if I will walk out from this street
walk out from people enjoying the coolness
arrive at a place
and squat beside the glad waters
wrapped in incessant chatter, the laughter and tears of the dark
Until you find me
arm around my shoulder listening with me to our son's
gurgling song
and with an arm around my shoulders go home

This is like frequent entry into dreamscape
just like the dust static on the sundeck
I nudge you awake
Before the sky brightens
I hide our son on this sheet of paper
and from this thin paper make a magic box

Die If You Can Die [可以死去就死去] 1985

The paper hawk waits in the air
its silk thread broken by the wind's force
its body sways

On the sundeck an infant yearns
to run in the garden
he lifts a leg and sets off

On a mountain a traveler's foot
steps out on the air
and he drifts down with the waves

No need to dodge if a car comes
no need to get up if the gas isn't off
no need to look back if you swim out to sea

Die if you can die, just as
you succeed if you can

The Sand Castle [沙堡] 1986

A fish
that's walked over a hill
how does it pass its days
if it grows hands, feet and thoughts
an immortal soul
is still nowhere to be had

Being an official is an honor
you can ride on a horse
you can find the source of the water

Why doesn't sand and dust soil you
some flash bright
some are sturdy like stars
caught in hearts
the nearest thing to an answer is beside the well
but we've regressed
and feel the chill of the water darkly

Just Before the Wind and the Rain [风雨欲来] 1986

That was during our most peaceful days
we hadn't gone travelling for a long time
no friends had come to the city
to drink our bottle of wine
someone sent a letter
talked of his sales
someone sent birthday greetings
on a printed card
you've sat on the swivel-chair for a long time now
curtains covered in dust
the sunlight's already left the room

I pass through our vestibule and hallway
I raise my skirt across from you
sit down
and tell you quietly
the cat's gone out back

You Wake Up Early [你醒在清晨] 1986

You wake up early
drop into a seat by the window
and drink from two cups of coffee on the table
in the distance behind a net
hangs a neighbor you know
you're flustered
but proceed to curb your concern and enjoy solitary pleasure

You talk of this business
several years later in front of a cafe in another city
you feel nothing
you've written several deaths
but have never had so little to say
this isn't
the arrival your body and mind usually welcomes

He was crazy, even crazier when dead
you ruminate over fine porcelain cups and saucers
shouldn't let yourself go crazy over him
just think of him as the lunatic

A Wound-Up Person [上线的人] 1986

You're shot into a rare situation
and look out at the people over whirling waters

Eyes shining blue lashes flashing
Looking at you is the same as not
germinating the chilly thought of travel beyond the stars
Telling you isn't worth the trouble
you're in the middle of it
you're used to writing you
you won't fall out of the tree
and break your neck like a hapless bird
you're already wound-up enough
it's hard to learn to speak of feelings with your spouse
you look a long way off at his hasty parting gesture

A Wound-Up Tree [上线的树] 1986

Some feet can cry
some tears get in everywhere
to the dark mysterious core
The calm
usually comes from complete self-absorption
It's the heart pointing out wisdom's path
to a jungle

More lonely than man
carrying sense organs that burn like mountains
the agility of beasts and the dizziness of dancing
Projecting
the feeling of the heat
from behind it in a bright blue sky
leaps out and encircles it
a great swath of earth is folded
into its wings

A Marriage Contract [婚约]

In the study only the marriage contract flashes a noble luster
previewing for you a dreamy auspicious time
when it's brought out from among Buddhist scriptures and the classics
yet another tragedy
peels away from your body and sinks into a river of memories

The marriage contract has affected the passage of light and dark
the air in the room has a yellow hue
You allow this draft to remain high up in the closet
and don't
bury it deep in the mountains
Autumn
You're able to have done with this business
and exchange views with people beyond the room

I Sit in a Car of Dreams and Glory [我坐在光荣与梦想的车上]

I sit in a car of dreams and glory
going to any old distant place

I pray in an unchanging position
and wait in the one direction
I'm like a roll of polyethylene to look at
like a manic-depressive
with a flat facial expression
moving through crowds without their heat burning me

On my sleeve world affairs as changeable as clouds in the wind
arrive slowly in autumn --
In autumn slowly I drift down below the crag
stand up and
go into town to buy new property
I'll darn a great stretch of dead silence

The Red Structures of a Summer Resort in the Mountains [避暑山庄的红色建筑]

17 July 1987

Blood red
structures I come a long way
for you I open up
I arrive deep inside a magic elegant statue
This trip hasn't been for nothing

I enter into high walls
I sit on a slab of blue stone
to my left a well, to my right a well
I look often at a doorway sealed by wuchelm
I scream quietly
as if I've arrived in heaven
I cry as I please
as if I'd prayed to see it
this obsolete overgrown burial mound
is exactly like the remnants of my ancestor's days

The deep courtyards I'm in awe of
the mire I'm close to
the red wash on the walls of my building
the yellow wash on its walls
the white skull of a letter-seal in my boudoir
the summer days received, stacked, collected in a blackened bronze mirror
it still has no grave, nor have I death, crawling the walls

April 10 [四月十日]

The sunlight
has almost sunk into the shade of trees
Hunger, my guest
carries a bright yellow costume
a perplexed expression flashing in his eyes
he rounds a street corner, enters my window

I signal my burly guest
to sit, to not stare at me
I raise a finger, signal him to listen closely
to the music in the inner room
I carry out a tray-full of fresh flowers, set out spoons
and together with him enjoy their splendor

When a key rattles in the door
I fly to it like a butterfly
The guest is like a book
forgotten on the sofa
Just as I'm about to speak someone behind me
catches hold of my hair

April 20 [四月二十日]

Rub my eyes
a dazzle of sunlight
behind the fog inside
wheel upon wheel
of mild suns

I have no way to reach the deep spot behind my eyes
I can feel it without a mirror
at the edge of my forehead scorching hot
but day after day
no boat or car comes near it
through my body
neither is there a secret passageway such as an artery
and no submerged body sneaks along it

My tears are a blank sheet of paper
remote from my eyes
pinned tight to my back

May 10 [五月十日]

Beside the lush riverbank of my thoughts
a clump of white hair bends with the wind
when I comb it, at least three times
fragments like ivory drop out from inside

Meticulously I preserve them
in a delicate paper box
on rainy days I wash and rinse
moistening its segments with water
on the carton's inner walls I paint mountains and rivers
I make them
appear to be placed on my crown

The other day, a big fire overflowed
from the kitchen
destroyed them in a flash
I remember the basin I own
It's been so long since I missed it

May 25 [五月二十五日]

A trove of treasured poems at the bottom of my heart
yet not written for me
I am not even familiar with their buildings and pavilions
which road passes through
or where there's a bridge

Aside from following the song to it
I have no way of approaching
the described life for my hand
the song stops me like a wall
I will never pass through the garden
can't let my hair down can't rock the boat
nor dare I sit a while in a cafe
it's impossible for me to arrive at those states
because the song's sound reaches there before me

The song's sad sounds
I have no way clearly to distinguish if it's actually me
or the poems themselves
who complain more of sorrow who is more sad
and how can I judge
the songs of joy
this group of poems I learnt by heart
when I was young

June 17 [六月十七日]

I sit in a corner of the room, my back to the sundeck
like a china figure baring the new sheen of a perfectly motionless state
elderly cookies and grapes
at hand, flavorless and dull

Just now I face my photo
cherishing impressions of me
searching for the place where I recently set my hand to it
following my imagination
pretty froth
brewing blindly trickles down
and within the apartment sings out with sound

I can keep this position
for at least a few decades
entertaining with old weathered offerings
a folding chair touched by sunlight
eyes shining open wide

June 21[六月二十一日]

At the center of a center there's a center
this phenomenon is merely a lamp
under the lamplight
like a modern white dove I incline on the bed and sleep
like drops of mother's milk sentences dribble from the corner of my mouth

In the quiet I only see your eyes
they stick as close to the wall as paint
I sweep the light over the westside wall
between them I store long sleeves and a dance
I clear off books on the desk
like a red-hot iron sit cross-legged on top
suddenly warm or suddenly cold

Nearly summer, beside me I smell only the fragrance of cotton cloth
lamplight silence, I conjecture my hand as a leaf
greenly extending to the black keys and bars behind the wall
my parched spirit dimmed to a shadow
living long in this room won't leave any odor

June 24 [六月二十四日]

Two years ago
a miracle fell onto my arm
the strong light turned a tuft of my hair white
my startled hand has stung for several years
in my memory, its sound is
like a wasp flying into the atrium of my heart

Later, I dug my heart's confusion into the dirt
I bound up my long hair guarded my doors and windows
not one lash of wind or rain hit me again from round the back of my head
friends concealed their questions about it
moved well away

Today, it's like a parcel
still there by the head of my bed
You've got to believe
it has never been opened

July 1 [七月一日]

Beyond my sight
wrapped in a dull blue blanket of mist
not one ray of sun shines into the chamber of my heart
through the wall the sound of tossing and turning after the food is cooked
and me I've already died
square pillars of ice are placed everywhere on the island

One or two human shadows
sway in front of my bed
they accompany me but stand off
outside the room summer's hot air
roasts me through the walls
like a pretty pheasant my legs curl
my hair steams
and sizzles

Already I cannot flip through ancient classics
and find a suitable word
to answer people's laments
But I hope you alone come forward
Listen
What will you say to me

July 8 [七月八日]

Love plays a skillful violin
bypasses my garden and walks on to the mountain out back
I herd bundles of thread
in pursuit

He moves fast like a bird
in the twilight I only make out his back
and his fiercely gesticulating hands
even though it's this way, I discover I benefit
after I reach the mountain top

In the mirror
my belly dangles down like a spider
and slowly departs from my body
carrying the dirt and dust he's already jumped down a gully
the sound of the violin vanishes over the plain

July 12 [七月十二日]

Distinguished guests come in a flower-bedecked carriage
they lift aside my door-curtain of silk
and present me with the gorgeous movements of a dance
I open the lunch box
and find a slab of sausage and three crepes
I stand behind a chair and watch their fingers get greasy
and pass them cups brim-full of water

Early on I realized
where the wrinkles on each of their faces were folded
away, but still I smiled timidly
the record I had long ago grown used to hearing
I can't possibly play for them today
I've tried many times already
when the needle starts to slide
I pass through transparency
for me nothing is more difficult than this

But I know an unused secret formula
I go around the crowd and the furniture
and before the record starts to move
I secretly use the needle to prick my index finger
Music fills the room
I only see the blood on my hand
and don't see the thing under my skin

Slowly I turn my head back I succeed
no trace remains of the roomful of guests
outdoors sunlight everywhere
the flower carriage is still parked by the house
I walk to the record player again
watching my two hands I listen to the entire song

August 1 [八月一日]

An isolated shore standing silent by the seaside
a cold wind blows my clothes
how did I get here
and where will I return to

For as far as my eyes can see
I ride a small beast of imagination
that rushes like waves between past and future
From my pockets and gaps between fingers
I lose ornaments, plates and cutlery
and food into the form of dust
I halt, get the idea of searching
but their look has already altered

I have never seen a mid-night so pitch black
the earth and sky stand stock still
as if the moment before their joining is at hand
only my white clothes have a luster still
at this time I wish to become a statue
this wish makes me young again

September 30 [九月三十日]

Put a foot as big as a broad bean forward
put on colorful rubber boots
the sound of this puerile song
drifts all along Nine-Rivers road

He won't look at, me, yet follows me
he looks east to west absentmindedly
but I can never lose him
it's as if I emit a magnetic field
that is conducted through his ears
his attention never wanders from me

Birthing this child is more down-to-earth
no need of exquisite elegance
no need for a whitewash of tranquility
no need of long natural hair
my thoughts end here
only bringing those into being can bring me peace

October 14 [十月十四日]

I wake at the far end of pain
under the light of the lamp still within its range
in front of my table stand two or three stiff sticks
soon also new admirers drop in thoughtlessly

But when I begin to walk again
my tolerance leaves me ceaselessly
my high-pitched voice
spreads out through the corridor

The hand that supports my already broken head
other cracked-up joints as well
grow colorful streaks
my pursuit of you has lasted out the year
and now they have begun to come after me
sitting my face to the wall

Year's End [年终]

Remember this day
wait for the next
at year's end
discover that I shuttle through a forest of days

I stand at the summit of sorrow
I try to get into the spirit, but can't
the breath of a brief rainy season drifts up
Calm and happy
a bird
soars through the territory of the mundane

During the course of a lifetime it's for me not to
light a solitary lamp
to shine on the words in my heart
They rise in a mist, are melted by the sun
like black wooden combs, kindling the dresser
spitting and swallowing blue tongues of flame

By noon, the air's full of miracles
the enthusiasm of sacrifice returns again
a boundless valley, a square, then
poetry is produced, and spreads pestilence

My elder brother, the emperor, a spinning top
whipped by children, suffers from the precision of his words
on his face, I read
the terrible facts of today

Since water that's run away returns
lost souls will also turn back again
flower vases will shatter, at dusk
in fourteen-hundred years

The Old Home [老屋]

Since I moved out of my old home
the former building entrance
has become a dark secret area
over the years in my dreams exposing its perils

When I come back from far-off wearing a pretty cap
traces of my fingers remain on the low-ish walls still
From over where I lived
comes what seems the sound of silk being clipped
just as I experienced it in childhood
I wish to become a bird
to fly in at the window
and smell fragrant memories

But when misfortune approaches
when a suicide sits idly by my side
I am restricted to
its long dark corridors
At all times in my dreams
I'm never able to give up these rooms and go
just like a sickly small beast

Dreams [梦]

Gloomily I go back into the corpse
its soft face looks gold again

Those poets who killed themselves
carrying the lingering warmth of sleep
live next door to us
their souls breathe on the outer wall
not far away

I hope I can be alone after I die
there the earth is parched
sun all year round
and no flying bugs
disturb the breathing of my soul
And no people
come to die in my death

The Course of a Disease [病程] 1992

In the world of dust
I'm stunned speechless
Two birds fly out of the fault in my waist
that's my broken-hearted kidney

It's my grieving kidney
put aside death and lets discuss the funeral
a flaccid yellow birthday is confronted with the prospect of anniversaries of death
A romantic life
some parts are not convincing
When I'm silent
on one side is a hill of sand overgrown with elfin pine trees
on the other
is black earth emerging from a river bed
steel-armoured memories breath like gossamer

Don't ask me
the asking of questions has become a confusing situation

Recall [检索]

Before, I studied
in a clean library
draped in sunlight baring a smile on my teeth
I'd cut costumes out of books

Before, the framed type
laid bare his heroic eyes in a graveyard out there
Before, pitch-black debts
glued together the footsteps of mine that come toward you

My former timidity is still the bright path forward
former sacrifice still a portable snack
former rest still brightens me up
former sound still shines in bright spots

The greatest brilliance is from the waves in the heart
the highest contribution is to take leave of it
conversation is always a legal case kept in back-up
like a soft surreptitious animated cat

The Palm of My Hand [手掌] 1993

What's at the center of my palm?
Could it be that I'm still holding your life?

The lines at its center
possess folk songs that flow like river water
If a stone tablet remains in a creek
the water will submerge it
just as a dream is annihilated in invincible sleep

Be careful of the branches of years
growing in a direction I can't imagine
In the shadows of my hand
there's a small gray beast
moving tearfully into the distance

A Reasonable Explanation of My Whereabouts [理喻行踪]

Anticipate the props needed for a long journey
before starting out
Read aphorisms explain your whereabouts reasonably
your arbitrary losing and forgetting arbitrary gifts
You arbitrarily turn off all sound
arbitrarily try many desserts
Your eyes overflow with color and light
as in a fairy tale
slowly change direction because you see the unforeseen

When you're old
these trivial dreams are realized finally

Death is a Ball of Candy [死亡是一种球形糖果]

I can't just sit down, spread out the paper
and talk about death
Come on, first scribble the sky an orangey-yellow
dispatch the pen, drink a few mouthfuls of stale soup

A life like a small well
loaded with all manner of juices
smelling of fish and vegetable matter the tidewater wells up
a fragrant bitter-sweetness of tonics on wild display on the tip of the tongue

Death is an edible, definitely
a ball of candy full up and happy
from start to finish I've been thinking of my very first topic
in a wink it's all been said