

Yang Lian
The Journey

From Lee Valley Poems

1.

I wake when the wild goose cries a wild goose crying
thousands of miles away piercing the darkness
of night's whirlpool

the river turns a parched man
thinks of a glass's ink-green rim
wingtips sunk in crystal flap coldly a brittle chill

the hourglass anchors every house to the street
after rain tyres slash long bandages from the road

I listen to the boats in my body
jostling against each other the keels fused into one
when the wild goose cries the city stuck to your eardrum
flies and hangs elsewhere a geography light as a wreck

2.

water has no meaning
the river turns the wind rasps against dry hulls
rats love climbing the davit struts
the sharp tang of rust an exquisite fish-bone
moonlight paints a full arc making-up a corpse's face
quiet as a wooden womb thrown on the bank
a little way from the water's lapping a little way from the gravel
a little way from the rudder which has escaped all bearings among the stars
the oars drawn in like tired questions
bound in a stranglehold around the axle

water has no meaning
but on the porcelain of the water's surface the marina's glaze is fire-painted
time brings the theme of memory
what can a boat cradled by air remember
except to hear the dense embroidery of water
except to be a bell ringing to delete
to delete the engraved ear the ceaseless migrations
but earth falters
the criss-crossed light-years around the nest
no longer know who sails on what river
water sinters into a crust of shatterproof porcelain
long broken fissioning one and every night
fissioning history which so loves to compose

water has no meaning therefore
a terror of raising the periscope
is wakened in the abandoned boat is wakened and peeps
at the sky where billions of orbits clutch lotuses
all close their coral colours when they whisper
they are clutched by a grammar which has no past no nostalgia
the iron organs submit to their internal vacuum
how long can they survive when fish purposefully seek the poison in oxygen
what more can they possibly find in front of an unblinking eye
dawn doesn't have to arrive dawn has already swum elsewhere
an aesthetics cut to the quick a little way from
desolation

where the wild geese cry is the underwater
co-ordinate where a corpse can continue the journey that ended last night

3.
the circle's centre a text secretly watching me
draft another page
the circle a bed floating in a ghost's script
exposed by water and cancelled by water

did the wild geese really cry or is the night so deep it's become timeless
the wild geese's arched and chopped necks
the more afraid I am to listen the easier it's summoned

hearing metaphorizes landscape darkness
metaphorizes matter that confines me
the city's hydromechanics splash out a branch of peach-blossom
the hammering heartbeat still withholds the horizon

a brain metaphorizes the starry sky the bed-edge
metaphorizes the boat's side
a scream locked in a raindrop the pull of dreams
longing for each other over thousands of miles
all in the circle driven out by what isn't yet written

circle back to here

Translated by Pascale Petit

For Yang Lian's essay on the context of 'The Journey', see page 72.