**Gu Cheng (simplified Chinese 顾城, traditional Chinese 顧城) 1956-1993**

Gu Cheng was born September 24, 1956 in Beijing, People’s Republic of China, and died October 8, 1993 on Waiheke Island, New Zealand. “The dark night gave me a pair of black eyes, / which I use to search for light,” wrote Gu Cheng in the poem, “A Generation,” articulating for millions the painful scars and hopeful optimism that followed the CULTURAL REVOLUTION.

Gu Cheng, whose father was a poet and a party member, began writing poetry and painting during the Cultural Revolution after his family had been sent down to the countryside, ending his formal education. Gu Cheng later returned to Beijing and participated in the 1976 protests, 1978 Democracy Wall movement, and collaborated with other experimental poets who were labeled by critics as 朦胧诗派 (pinyin: Menglongshipai), which means “obscure school” and is frequently translated as “Misty Poets.” The MISTY POETS, associated with the underground journal 今天 (pinyin: *Jintian*), *TODAY*, included BEI DAO 北岛, Mang Ke 芒克, and Shu Ting 舒婷. Their poetry is notable for the circumspect representation of the political and cultural landscape that they were so closely enmeshed with and the intense aestheticism that at once drew from yet radically reworked traditional Chinese poetic conventions. Gu Cheng’s poetry of this period employed an innocent and naïve poetic voice that explored surreal and interior landscapes. Through the early 1980s he had published several collections and collaborations in addition to participating in public readings, bringing him celebrity status and literary fame across China.

It was not long into the early 1980s when Gu Cheng and the writers associated with *Today* became routinely criticized as decadent and modernist, particularly during the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign of 1983. The accusation of modernism was used to identity the poets' iconoclastic approach to social realism and revolutionary romanticism which served as the core of official aesthetic orthodoxy after Mao Zedong’s 1942 Yan’an address on arts and culture. The charge of modernism would be picked up by western critics, scholars, and China observers in different ways: such as a return of a Chinese modernism repressed by the Communist Party, or as a cross-cultural poetics whereby Gu Cheng’s poetry represented the influence of European and American modernism in Chinese literature. The scholar Xiaobing Tang has argued that these poems reflect a residual modernism related to the material conditions of China in the 1980s which more closely paralleled the writers of the twenties and thirties than post-modern US or Europe.

Gu Cheng later immigrated to New Zealand in 1986 with his wife, the poet, Xie Ye 谢烨, to teach Chinese at Auckland University. Gu Cheng eventually moved to an abandoned house on Waiheke Island. During this time he was engaged with more profound experiments in his poetry, and writing his only novel, *Ying’er*.

His life in New Zealand ended tragically in 1993. He had become more and more obsessive, demanding of his wife, jealous of her devotion to her son, Ying’er. On March 8, 1993 he murdered his wife with an axe then committed suicide.

**In-text Links**

MISTY POETS:

<http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5663>

CULTURAL REVOLUTION

<http://chineseposters.net/themes/cultural-revolution-campaigns.php>

BEI DAO

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/bei-dao>

TODAY

<http://www.jintian.net/today/>

**English Translated Collections**

# *Gu Cheng: Selected Poems*, trans. by Chiyu Chu and Sean Golden (1990)

# *Sea of Dreams: The Selected Writings of Gu Cheng*, trans. by Joseph Allen (2005)

# *Nameless Flowers: Selected Poems of Gu Cheng*, trans. by Hai Bo and Aaron Crippen

# (2005)

**Anthologies and Collections in English Containing Gu Cheng’s Poems**

*Red Azalea: Chinese Poetry Since the Cultural Revolution*, edited by Fang Dai and

Edward Morin (1990)

*Out of the Howling Storm: The New Chinese Poetry*, edited by Bei Dao, Tony Barnstone

(1993)

*A Book of Luminous Things: An International Anthology of Poetry*, edited by Czeslaw

Milosz (1998)

**Major Works in Chinese**

白昼的月亮 (pinyin: Baizhou de Yueliang) *Daytime Moon* (1976)

雪山恩仇记—叙事七言长诗 (pinyin: Xueshan Enchouji—Xushiqiyanchangshi) *Snow*

*Mountain Debt of Vengeance Ballads* (1980)

北方的孤独者之歌 (pinyin: Beifang de Gudu zhezhi Ge); *A Loner’s Song of the North*

(1980)

舒婷，顾城抒情诗选 (pinyin: *Shu Ting, Gu Cheng Shuqingshixuan*) *A Collection of*

*Shu Ting and Gu Cheng’s Lyrical Poems* (1982)

铁铃 (pinyin: Tieling) *Iron Bell* (1982)

黑眼睛 (pinyin: Heiyanjing) *Black Eye* (1986)

顾城童话寓言诗选 (pinyin: Gucheng Tonghua Yuyan Shixuan) *Gu Cheng’s Fairy Tale*

*Poems* (1993)

英儿 (pinyin: Ying’er) *Ying Er* (1993)

海篮—顾城新诗自选集 (pinyin: Hailan—Gu Cheng Xinshi Zixuanji) *Sea Basket—New*

*Poems of Gu Cheng* (1993)

顾城散文选集 (pinyin: Gu Cheng Sanwen Xuanji) *Collected Essays of Gu Cheng* (1993)