

A Collection of Poems,  
Photography,  
and Drawings

# Out of Breathless Raw Words Woven



Xueer Xiao  
(Shirley the X)

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## Preface: What is Poetry?

*A child said What is the poetry? holding them to me with full hands;  
How can I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than she.  
I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of breathless raw words woven.*

My journey with poetry could not have been smoother. While children at my age struggled with memorizing vocabularies, I was able to fetch from my little vault of vocabs of the words that rhymed, and cluster them into poetic lines, although sometimes they didn't make sense. While children at my age started learning grammar, I was peering into the poems of Dr. Seuss and Lewis Carroll, and eagerly "plagiarizing" their work. From the former I wrote stuff like "I am old, my teeth are gold, I have a bird I like to hold." From the latter I wrote things like "The dolphin and the ladybug set off to sea."

I never thought of the purpose in writing, I always took poetry as a necessity in my life, just like sleeping and drinking water (though I haven't been drinking much water). I saw poetry writing as a daily routine that was to be repeated, but never questioned, and moreover never bored me. On the contrary, it always provided me with happiness and joy, even at times when I had to wreck my brains hard to come up with a rhyme.

The satisfaction from writing poetry (or just writing, as a whole) has always been a unique feeling. At some exams that required story-writing, I would spread my creative thoughts over the hideous assessment paper, actually enjoying sitting through the exam. Maybe from those moments I should have realized that this was something I was passionate about, and also something I could do well in. But I didn't realize my poetry writing was such a specialty, and I almost, almost lost it forever.

After going to middle school, I stopped writing novels completely, and wrote less poems too. I still wrote childish stuff, such as "Investigation between the bird and the worm", which were still excellent, but I found less enjoyment after writing them.

To quote from my diary, "I'm now a snake, about to slough in spring, molting off my tag to write nursery rhymes and dressing into a new tag: to write poems with real feelings and meanings." (2020.3.12) I was in a dilemma as my unwillingness to write nursery rhymes collided with my loyalty for nursery rhymes, the form of poetry and ignited my passion to become a poet. It was like seeing my faith corrupting and revealing scars underneath. From then on I

stopped writing poetry.

This long long "slough" lasted for two years. During the two years I only wrote if I had to, but never if I wanted to. After going to an international high school, a place which encourages uniqueness and specialty, I had almost lost this talent completely. As I studied poetry further in school, I was more intimidated by the poets' use of languages and forms. I realized how I had been the frog under the well, who only saw one patch of the sky.

Now my avocation had grown so superior and mighty that I could never reach it. To quote again from my diary, "I have not written poetry for so long, I don't even think I can. As I study poetry further, I have higher expectations for myself, and the harder it is to write. I am no longer in the mood to write things like 'the dolphin and the ladybug', I have expectations like Lu Xun but I don't have the felicity. I want to write things like 'I am not yet born, rehearse me' but I do not have the life experience. I am at a period of loss, and I do not want to write vacuity, so I choose to remain silent. I 'beat poetry on amphetamines.'" (2022.3.27)

But I was not a tragic hero, I realized the fatal flaw and decided to change. In the beginning of my sophomore year, I shed off my burdens and gave it a go. And bam, I wrote something called "Prayer before Death" even though I didn't have the life experience, and bam, I wrote "The way it is" even though I didn't have the felicity of Lu Xun. But at least I regained happiness again, the unique feeling that only poetry could bring me. I'm like a corpse who reunited with her lost soul.

In the summer after my sophomore year, I attended two poetry writing summer schools, challenging myself even more as I collaborated with American teenagers and read each other's works. Sometimes I felt I could never be as good as them, at other times I felt that I was capable and unique. Because of more than a decade's devotion for poetry, and because of my struggling experiences, my poems were raw yet fearless, growing like wild bushes, untrimmed yet full of vitality.

I still don't know what poetry is, and I'm still not writing poetry as frequently as before. But I feel this is a form of writing that expresses so many things. In it, we see the beauty of words. In it, we see the flow of emotions. In it, we redeem ourselves. And memories of my searching for rhymes, of myself introductions as a poet, make me guess that poetry "must be the flag of my disposition, out of breathless raw words woven."

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# Someday I'll Love Shirley Xiao

After Frank O'hara/ After Roger Reeves/ After Ocean Vuong

2023-10-11

Shirley, don't be afraid  
The right to be sad does not necessarily imply weakness.  
By Fall, the evening sky hunches over you  
slumped like skin clinging to a stillborn  
and nihilism gnawing your insides to preserve the echoes of your heartbeat.  
Do you know, Shirley? At these times  
there is no shame to cry silently  
Because the despised trails of tears are no different from the deified blasts of  
blood.  
Don't be afraid, Shirley, of the unsaid boundaries  
imposed by the world and  
fastened mindlessly by ones of your kind.  
Here is a house to hide your disgust and  
here is a ship for your belief, the proudest part of your body,  
and after we sail, dissolve your sense of self into the sea.  
But writing about the self doesn't necessarily mean selfishness, Shirley.  
They say you mope too much but really you're loudly dancing.  
Fear to be examined leaves you to write with locks  
but I have the keys.  
And someday I'll love Shirley Xiao, when I mortgage your poems for some  
inner peace.

## My Explanation

In 1972, Frank O'hara wrote the poem "Katy", with the verse "Someday I'll love Frank O'hara".

In 2013, Roger Reeves wrote a poem called "Someday I'll love Roger Reeves".

In 2015, Ocean Vuong wrote a poem called "Someday I'll love Ocean Vuong".

In 2023, Shirley Xiao wrote a poem called "Someday I'll love Shirley Xiao".

Though many believe that self-esteem is influenced by one's family or growing-up environment, I think self-esteem (including self-confidence, self-love, etc) is innate.

In different periods of my life, I hate myself for different things. But when I look back at my past, I realize that these hateful qualities don't seem so evil after all. This poem expresses existential crises that are currently troubling me, causing self-hatred. Written in second person, my future self is consoling me of my worries. Perhaps I don't love myself, but I will love myself.

# Relative Stranger

2023-07-23

*“Having only one child is good.” —slogan for the Chinese one-child policy*

After my Uncle failed her wish of a grandSON,  
the disappointment was hard to cope.  
My anticipated birth became her only hope.

Upon hearing my gender, my grandMA ironed down her words of doubt.  
Hissing heat and sound, then cooling till each fragment pierced  
into my flesh, they writhed in the furnace of a lifelong's tale,  
like the industrial works of a manufacturer— Male.

So my grandma lived in her shades of blue, like a  
mountain in October, dented by fallen leaves. like  
a poet, with sorrows scarred across her face, each  
frown implying my arrival as a disgrace. And though  
she hid them as I grew older it wasn't hard not to see,  
her life's biggest flaw stemming from one policy.

For sixteen years              little feelings exchanged  
We remain as a glass of water    bland and tranquil  
Half empty with memories    half full of pains to kill.

Someday when the glass *shatters*

I will cup the water in my hands, trying not to *spill*  
*i II*  
*i II*

Such effort required, and such restraint!  
Just like clinging to that familial love  
that's already *faint*.

# My Explanation

In my Yale Young Writers' Workshop, I was given the prompt to include the five words/phrases in my poem: Grandma, iron, October, blue, a glass or cup or mug holding any kind of beverage. And here's what came out.

As you can probably see from the poem, I didn't get along well with my Grandma, since we rarely talk to each other. When writing this poem, I attributed my Grandma's “indifference” to the one-child policy and the social preference for boys over girls in China. I really like to include Chinese political contexts into my poems, with them, poems are no more than garments for decorations, they will become witnesses of history events.

This poem is still an immature writing sample, I tried to muster all the techniques and skills into one poem, experimenting with different rhyme scheme and forms, and even colors. The form of this poem is strict at the start, then collapses in the end, because I wanted to present the imagery of the shattered glass/broken relationship between my Grandma and me. I also played with the words like “shattered” and “spill”, and found out that “ill” was contained in “spill”, so I took out the word “ill”, because I wanted to show how this familial relationship is kind of “ill”, and at the same time present the imagery of letters falling apart from “spill” to “ill”. For the word “faint”, I changed the color from black to grey, again presenting a visual imagery of “faint”.

Packed into one poem, this can be pretty messy, perhaps I will make changes to this poem in the future. But this is a good look into poetry works in progress, and learn that not all poems are crafted smoothly in one attempt! Sometimes, you may have to crack your brains and still have no inspirations. Well, that's the spirit of poetry, passion, talents, determination, and the mindset to accept whatever results.

## Relative Stranger(second version)

2023-09-11 and 09-17

*“Having only one child is good.” —slogan for the Chinese one-child policy*

Another girl born, another chance down.  
I cried to acquire, but she cried for loss.

Grandma greeted me with her carved frowns,  
each wrinkle tracing the flesh of a lifelong tale,  
like the industrial works by a manufacturer—Male.

I knew she lived in her shades of blue,  
like a dented mountain in October  
who laughs in a storm till its fallen leaves  
trembled like thunders from the sky

its bloodlines were roots that could not prolong.

For sixteen years                    little feelings exchanged

Like a glass of water                bland and tranquil

Half empty with memories            half full of pains to kill

Someday when the glass *s h a t t e r s*

I will cup the water in my hands, trying not to s(p)ill))

Such effort required, and such restraint!

Just like clinging to that familial love

that's already *faint*.

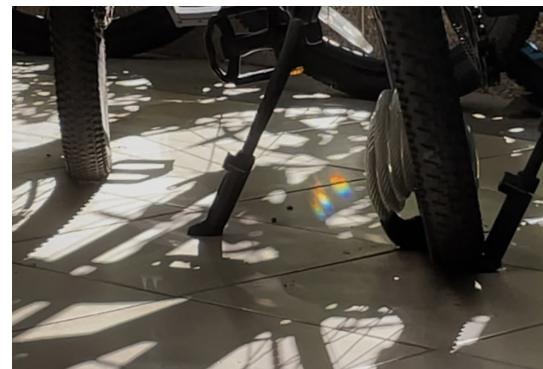
## My Explanation

As I've said, I wasn't satisfied with this poem, so I edited a second version. A major change is the form, the transformation from packed-up lines to the words "spill"ing across the paper is a symbol of how the one-child policy can affect family relationships and draw relative apart.

Another change is the word "s h a t t e r s" to "s h a t t e r s". I noticed that by putting the two "t"s together, the "t" sound is more audible in your head when you read the poem silently, which can create an imagery of shattered glass. I also changed the word "spill", rather than repeating the word "ill" in the next two lines, I chose brackets to frame up the word "pill" and "ill", both implying negative connotations.

Lastly I also changed my content. I think my first version of poetry was too jammed up with imageries yet lacked detailed description, so in this second version I focused mostly on the imagery of a mountain in October. The "bloodlines" of the mountain that could not "prolong" is a metaphor of the family pedigree. Since the narrator (me) is a girl, the pedigree of my family could not be passed on.

This poem is so worthy of revising! I have a strong feeling that I will keep on revising and perfecting this poem in the future.



# Request

2023-07-23

I do not want to believe in the Grandness of love,  
so from You, I demand:  
Love me as much as a juggler loves to fiddle with balls,  
Play with my emotions in your hand.  
Laugh indifferently when you hover then crush my heart,  
as proceeding from what you planned.  
Leave me in shattered pieces, a proof that love  
Is too toxic to withstand.

## My Explanation

In my summer poetry workshop, I filled the blank in the simile “love me as much as \_\_\_\_\_” with “a juggler loves to fiddle with balls”. The juggler can be compared to someone who doesn’t deal with feelings seriously in a relationship, rather, the person would play with partner’s feelings and promise sweet and unrealistic things. In the end, the juggler would leave without a word, because the juggler never cared or loved the partner at all, leaving the partner heart-broken. Then we were asked to write a short poem that contained this line, so I wrote this poem “Request”.

This poem is quite of a challenge for me, since usually, my poems reflect the reality and my real emotions. But this time was different, I wrote as a speaker who was opposite from me—she was requesting a toxic kind of relationship in which she wasn’t truly loved, but rather tortured by love. I liked this perspective so much, the difference between me and the speaker grants me freedom to write whatever I want. There would be no fear of revealing too much of myself, since the speaker is a made-up character.

I often think that, because we only live once, we often choose the most formal and “perfect” route of life—going to school, finding a job, getting married, having children.....Within this lifestyle, we give up our risky dreams, what a pity! Now I experience my other dimensions of life through poetry and music. This poem was actually inspired by music—Leah Dou’s “The Way” and all of Lana Del Rey’s songs from the album “Born To Die”. In these songs, the protagonist is just like the speaker in my poem. To me, their songs, especially Lana’s, are escapable, they pull me out from reality and I can become whoever

I want to be without caring about the consequences.

So perhaps the speaker from this poem is also my subconscious self?  
Someone I may have become if I chose another route of life.



## Vinegar

2023-07-13

Its surface glistening under the dining hall lights  
Like sparkles reflected from a gurgling sea,  
encircled in a saucer.

It was no condiment to the nine-year-old me.  
In fact, I decided the vinegar was my main dish, and the dumplings were the dressing  
as I carelessly dipped dumplings into the unfathomable darkness.  
Splash, Halt,  
the dumplings float like boats  
And when I pick them up with my chopsticks  
The white boats have suffered from a sea storm, their skins tainted with shade.  
The sauce of vinegar swirled under inertia, but other than that,  
It remained unharmed, just like any ruthless forms of nature  
after a disaster.

I ate the dumplings one by one, not for the taste of pork or chives,  
But for the sourness of my main dish,  
Its rawness and authenticity invading my tongue  
pulping my gums to twice as big.  
I shut my mouth tight to stop and savor at the same time  
Till wrinkles slowly formed on my jaw, like a progressing trail of tears.

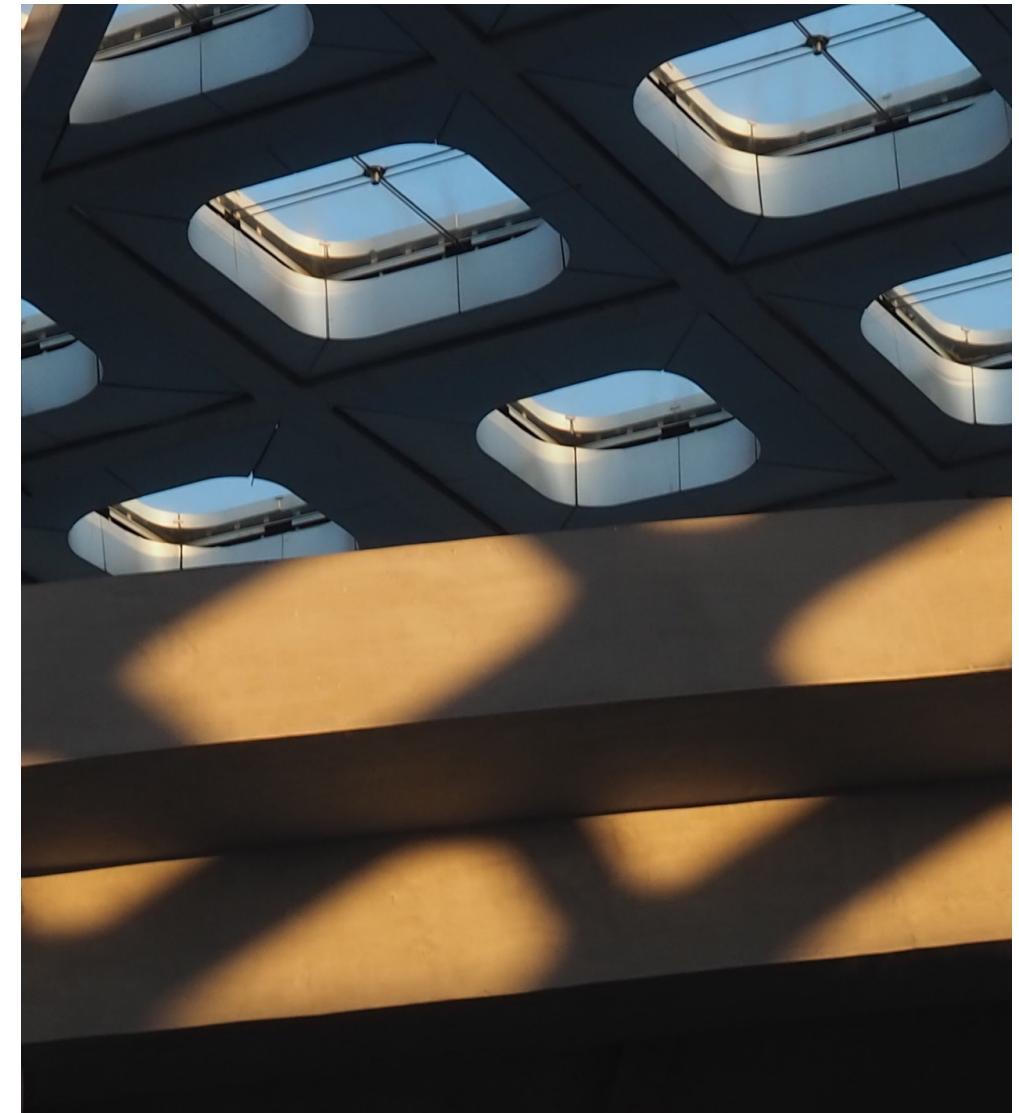
The dumplings were not enough for the vinegar  
So I drank the remains, this time, with no dressings.  
Ocean said,

“I was drinking light...the milk would erase all the dark inside me with a flood  
of brightness”.  
I was doing the opposite,  
And though I really did worry that my skin would become darker at that time  
I proceeded bluntly, filling myself with darkness  
out of pure love for  
Vinegar.

## My Explanation

Just a simple, quickly-written poem, revealing my eccentric love for vinegar during childhood.

I don't love vinegar that much now. What an odd sign of growing up!



## Powerless Poem in Written Words

2023-07-08

The world is designed for those who speak out,  
Their sonorous voices heavy with weight,  
Till written words no longer carry clout.

Outsiders would often sigh and then doubt,  
Why prodigies like to remain sedate.

The world is designed for those who speak out.

In fact, unknown, thoughts have begun to sprout,  
With pen, polished to perfection, too late—  
Till written words no longer carry clout.

Easy to let unprocessed ideas spout,  
to break chains. But the quality—I hate!

The world is designed for those who speak out.

When empty speeches leave the world in drought,  
Scorched ink amongst whiteness flow to their fate,  
Till written words no longer carry clout.

I cannot find light and truth in one shout,  
Yet everyone is impatient to wait.

The world is designed for those who speak out,  
Till written words no longer carry clout.

## My Explanation

This is my first ever Villanelle. The good thing about poetry with strict forms is, however bad your content is, the poem will still sound nice because of its fixed rhyme scheme. So although a strict form like the Villanelle can torture poets, it also encourages poets.

This poem is about the contrast between speaking and writing. People who like to talk often gain more attention compared to people who like to write, but the quality of words is often higher in writing than in talking. It is utterly sad that in this fast-paced society, words are losing their significance. Especially in China, articles are no longer read as short videos have invaded people's phones. I chose the form of a Villanelle because the form often delivers a "sing-song-y" feeling that is related to sounds, exactly what I wanted to express.

I chose to show that daily talks are less "nutritious" than writings by using metaphors. In the phrase "to break chains", it seems that preferring speaking over writing is a symbolism of freedom and challenging myself, but letting speaking impart greater importance than writing is more of a burden to me. Also, "chains" can be referred to the metallic things that bind me or the connection between a series of things. So the line "to break chains" links two paradoxical meanings, one is the view of outsiders who see my silence as chains that hold me back, the other is the consequence of babbling, which would lead to useless words spouting out and illogical sentences with no connections. In the phrase "scorched ink amongst whiteness", "scorched" linked to the "drought" I mentioned previously, and also the burning fury of writers who have been overlooked for so long. The word "whiteness" not only means the color of paper, but also the blankness of the world after receiving too many spoken words and too little written words.



# Labyrinth of the Past

2023-07-03

Obvious landmarks dwell out of sight  
But I catch glimpses of trees being penetrated by sunlight, Theatre Lights.  
and I watch colors of warmth washed out by heavy curtains, Theatre Curtains.  
Rehearse me in this play.

As I practice my walking, one foot after the next, patterned but  
unbalanced, I become clumsy, like a toddler,  
or a child at four-foot-two. Or a student at the front lines of her life,  
or a person trapped in the labyrinth of memoriam.

Breeze shuffles my hair  
the same breeze that shuffled through my book hidden under the table  
the same breeze that tickled my purposefully folded page  
exposing the underlined quote: “how will we ever get out of the labyrinth of  
suffering?”  
—that was five years ago. The ink is still wet.

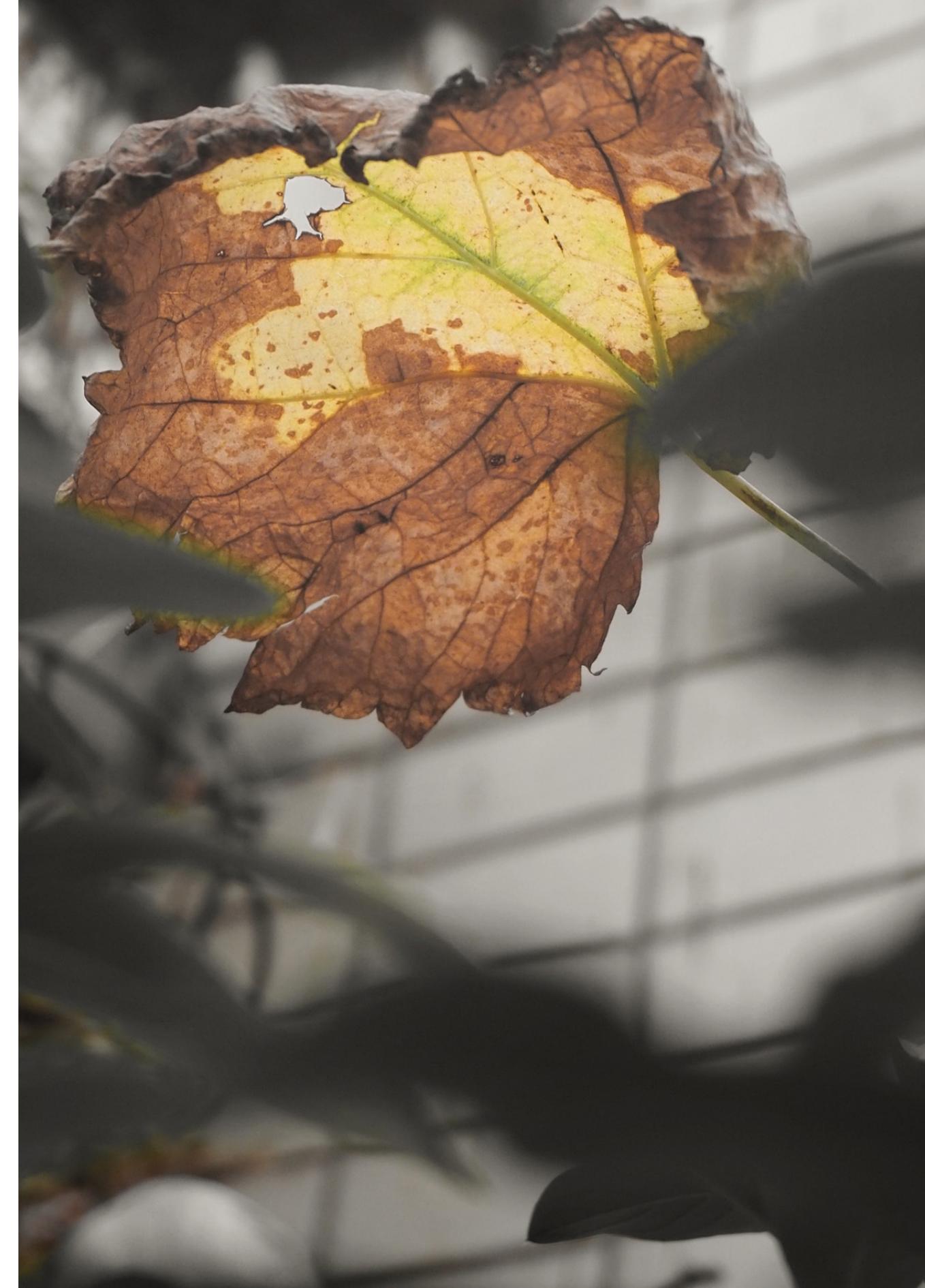
## My Explanation

I live my life in memories. Almost everyday I would unintentionally drift into the old days and relive my favorite moments in my imagination. And of all these memories, the sweetest ones were in elementary school.

This is a poem about being trapped in the “labyrinth” of my reminiscence for the past. During my fifth and sixth grade, I was obsessed with John Green’s novels, and finished “Looking for Alaska” in school. I never got to understand the novel, probably because I was too childish at that age, but I did remember Alaska Young’s question, “how will we ever get out of the labyrinth of suffering?”

I copied the question down into my notebook and left many blank pages for this question, hoping one day I would be mature enough to answer. But I still don’t know the answer even at the age of sixteen.

I, myself, am trapped in the labyrinth of suffering, suffering from nostalgia of my bittersweet childhood days.



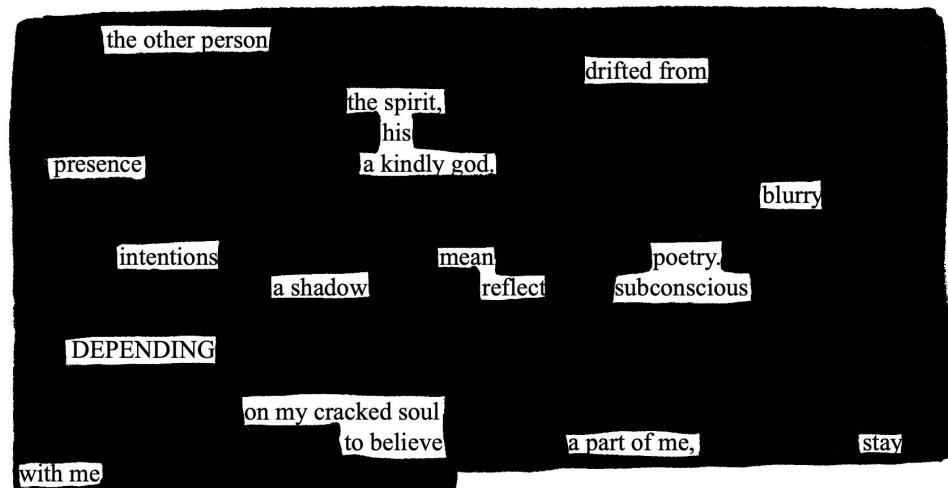
# Using the Ouija Board

2023-06-24

I sensed the other person. The feeling of eeriness and excitement crept over me as my planchette pointed towards all kinds of letters. My hand drifted from one letter to the other, as though helping the person, or the spirit, to utter his words. What's your name? HREY. How old are you? 63. As I gathered his basic information, I felt the persona to be real, I felt this presence and voice, a voice of a kindly god. Talking through the Ouija board was so much different from chatting in daily life. Voices from the board gave me blurry answers, and I had to solve through its puzzles. I was doing a holy yet difficult work, translating the signs and intentions of a spirit into voice, meaning, and finally poetry. I kept on asking him, but I felt that he was just a shadow of me that reflected my subconscious thoughts. I asked, "what am I doing everyday?". His words were solemn, his voice was flat but insightful as he said, DEPENDING. Depending? Yes, I am indeed depending. I am a dependent rather than an independent, I depend on others' feelings to build my own feelings, I depend on books to live, on people to see, on my cracked soul to save me. I couldn't believe why HREY saw through me instantly, so I chose to believe that he was a part of me, and had always stayed with me from the start. I hear you, HREY.

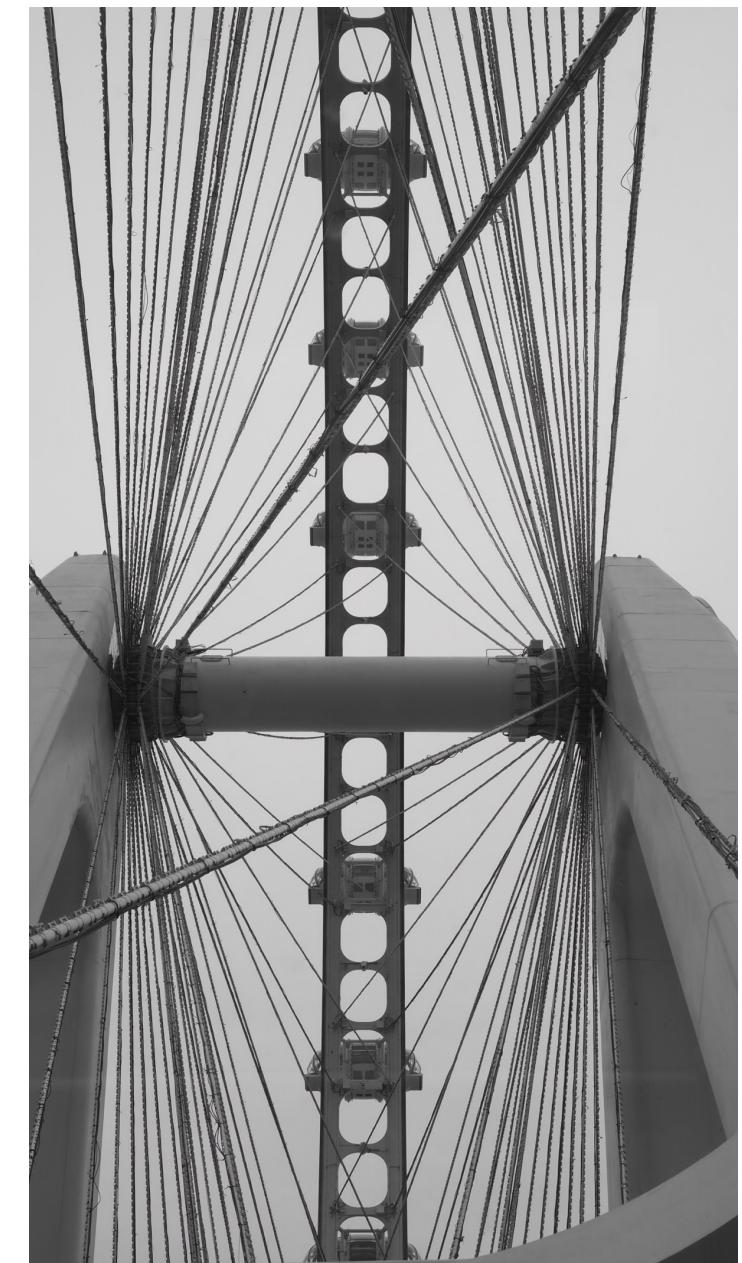
## Erasure Poetry: The Other Person

2023-06-25



# My Explanation

This is my first attempt to use an Ouija board. I wrote a prose of my process using the Ouija board, then turned the prose into an erasure poem. I find this type of poetry so interesting! It's beautiful how poems are hidden everywhere, in the simplest texts, as long as you have an eye for searching.



# Sense in a Box

2024-01-14

Jumping out from a caged dream,  
I un-envelope austere darkness.

The mouth opens feebly,  
awaiting for the scream.

It did not come, the voice,  
stifled on its way by pain-  
killers adrift at night.

Today you asked me why I took screenshots of the news  
till they folded at the corner of my phone. How could you know the fear of  
censorship

when you have not live it through? How could you know that insipid truths,  
banned from newsletters, turn to gold? Entrapping words in rectangles,  
I mistake these bricks for a wall of security. How could I  
convince myself that to keep a news report alive is to  
restrict its way out?

Everyday I see windows nailed into the night,  
unwavering like an axiom, too close to a truth.

Two windows in between I observe  
the personas staging their life,  
the rulings of axioms against warm indoor light.

From someone else's window,  
I the observer lives to be observed,  
lives in the systems of another girl's box.

We all live in a box.

The child in a womb.

The sense of self.

The living  
room.

## My Explanation

This poem is greatly influenced by Ocean Vuong. The line “How could you know that insipid truths, banned from newsletters, turn to gold” is inspired by Ocean’s “Because everyone knows yellow pain, pressed into American letters, turns to gold” in his poem “Not Even”.





## To the Friend I Never Had

2023-05-18

Twenty-two bathes in the midnight rain  
Five hundred and sixty-eight seconds across the Louvre  
Three million times of calling your name, from your back, as we  
chased the setting sun  
—you would not let me beat you first.  
Over and over, a dream deferred.

A lifetime of letters we wrote and sent  
Each enveloped with romance and lament  
Taking one day off to celebrate summer,  
because you would have insisted—  
If only you existed.

## My Explanation

Probably starting from the summer I got admitted to high school, my desire for a soulmate grew stronger each day. I always had the passion that in this world, there would be someone whose soul fitted perfectly with me, as though we were two halves of one heart. We would both be artistic youths, preferably zealots of movies, feasting on our spiritual worlds. We would travel together to places where the movies were filmed: the Italian town Crema, where we would imitate the stills from “Call Me By Your Name”; the Louvre, where we would run wildly, hand in hand, to see how long it will take us to reach the end of the Louvre, just like those protagonist from “The Dreamers” and “Band of Outsiders”; all the shooting locations in “The Grand Budapest Hotel”, where we would film and edit a Wes Anderson styled vlog.

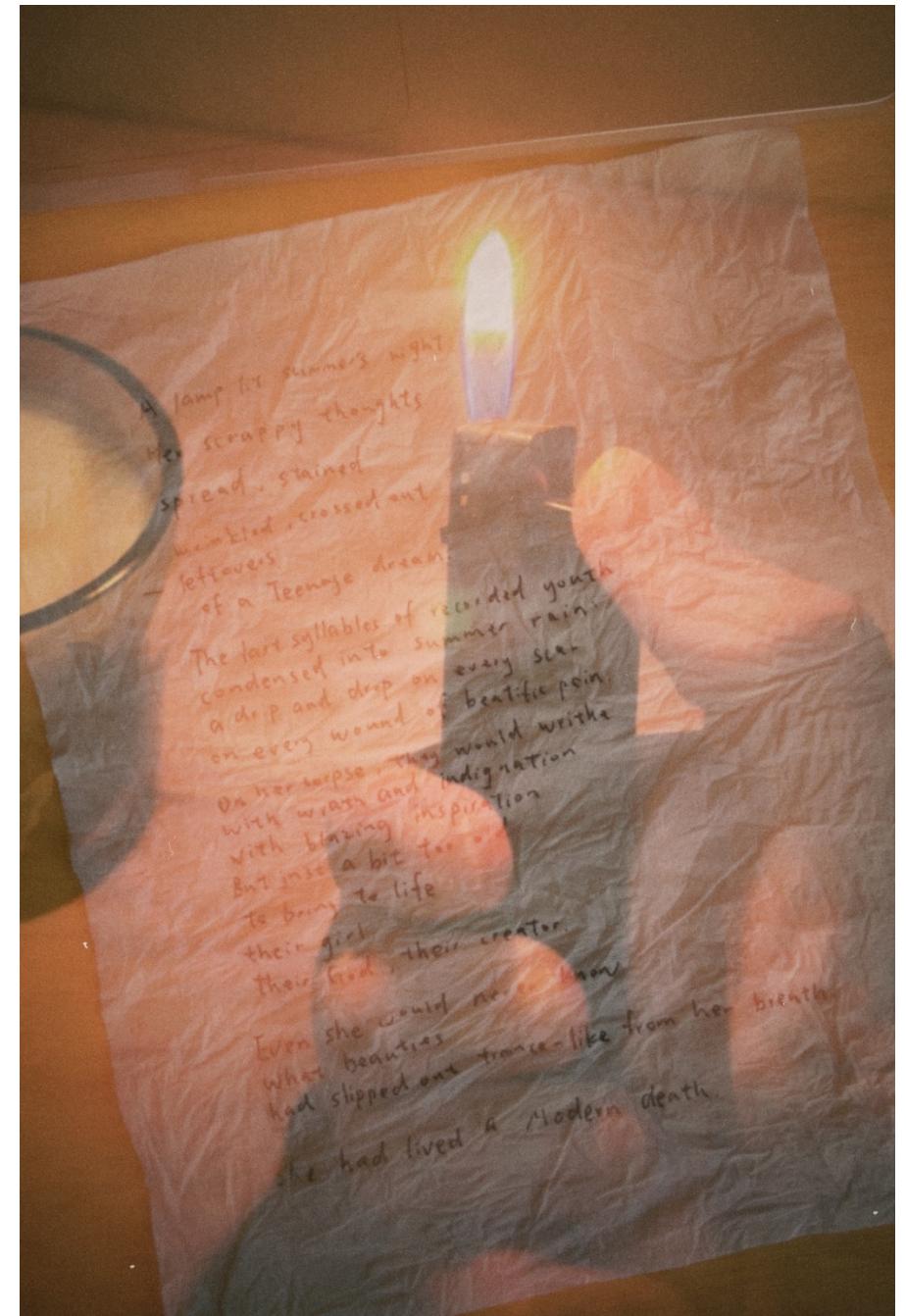
We would discuss about literature, art, philosophy, and death, and also about some not-so-noble-stuff, like what to eat tonight, where to go tomorrow, how to combine the coupons to get the biggest discount. We would be extremely crazy yet romantic people, if on one Friday night the rain pours down, we would chase each other outdoors and bathe under the rain together, then mock at each other’s stupidity. Sometimes we would be quite at peace, and write poems for each other, becoming one another’s inspirational muse. Upon finishing my poem I would say in jest, “this poem is so good, pity that it was

written for you". But most of the time, when we would lie on the benches in the park, looking at the stars, or listen to Lana Del Rey's "Venice Bitch" while racing on the California highways, we wouldn't need to communicate. Any form of communication, whether verbal or written, would be a burden, a contempt for our perfectly matching souls.

If we attended an academic party and got separated by layers of people, we would still be able to catch each other's eyes, our gazes passing over the countless bald heads of the professors, and at that instant, a parallel world only belong to us would be created. It's just like the lines in "Frances Ha", "you're both talking to other proper and you're laughing and shining, and you look across the room and catch each other's eyes. But not because you're possessive or it's precisely sexual, but because, that is your person in this life." Since this idea only started sprouting during my high school days, I am often not used to the loneliness of lacking such a soulmate. When I meet friends who can really get on with me, I would even try to turn them into my ideal soulmate by firstly bombarding them with my favorite books and movies. But I also know this action is too selfish, and changing other people is too hard, so I begin to miss the friendships I had during elementary and middle school, and I would also miss my criteria of selecting a friend at that time. Those kinds of friendships were constructed around reality, although they weren't romantic at all, they were quite stable and long-lasting.

On night I started chatting with an old friend, and suddenly discovered that we didn't need any explanation to understand one another's thoughts and feelings. So, we chatted effortlessly about deep topics and started dissecting ourselves (of course, metaphorically), and I felt my broken should gradually repaired by her. What fascinated me was that, we never talked about such illusory things when we were young. During these years of separation, our hearts actually grew into one.

So I gradually put down my obsession of looking for soulmates. If I never find one, what harm could there be? My different friends provide me with different kinds of happiness and romance. On some level, every one of them compose into my ideal soulmate.



## My Explanation

All kinds of ideas always pop out of my head, but before I can record them, they are soon forgotten. I find this such a pity, maybe those lost ideas could have produced a good poem, a good article, or a good book. They could have been the peak of my talents, but I would never know. In this endless summer, where time is dragged as long as the shades of trees, the contrast between the sudden emerging of ideas and the subsequent loss of these ideas is more obvious than ever. So I had the conclusion: summer and youth are wars over my memories, fighting for my fleeting inspirations.

I wrote a poem about this phenomenon. Because writing a poem was also my sudden decision, so I simply drew a tissue and wrote on it. Later I realized, writing poetry on paper actually reflected the theme I wanted to express: thoughts belonging to teenagers were free and casual, unbounded to forms. Their birth was hasty, their meanings were grand, but their endings were no different to tissue papers—they will eventually be forgotten and thrown away, or even despised by teenagers themselves in the future.

In fact, writing poetry on tissues provided me with a lot of additional inspirations. For example, the tissue had signs of being folded, so I used "wrinkled" to describe my thoughts; for example, since I wasn't writing on computer, I had to cross out the wrong words, so I said that my thoughts were "crossed out".

When I finished, I lit a candle alongside the poem and took pictures for it. The dancing flame reminded me of Van Gogh's words (which were quoted by Haizi in his poem "Al's Sun"), "Everything I created was chestnuts, pulled out from the fire." Reaching your hand into the fire is a painful and life-consuming process, but the chestnut taken out is golden and attractive, symbolizing the burst of inspiration. The process of creating art is enduring, so people often give up, just like the girl in the poem. She gave up abandoned her ideas in the summer and killed her past-self, and chose to step into the traditional type of modern life. Therefore, she will never know that she could have created such beautiful masterpieces.

That's why I didn't want to forget my flashing thoughts, but chose to compete for my inspirations in this loosing war. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

## Fleeting Seconds of Summer

2023-05-09

A lamp lit summer's night  
Her scrappy thoughts  
    spread, stained  
    wrinkled, crossed out  
        —leftovers  
    of a Teenage dream.

The last syllables of recorded youth  
    condensed into summer rain:  
    a drip and drop on every scar  
    on every wound of beatific pain.  
On her corpse, they would writhe  
    with wrath and indignation  
    with blazing inspiration  
    But just a bit too old  
    to bring to life  
        their girl  
    their God, their creator.

Even she would never know  
    What beauties  
had slipped out trance-like from her breath.

She had lived a Modern death.

Fleeting seconds of summer

by.  
Shirley  
Xiao

A lamp lit summer's night  
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spread, stained  
wrinkled, crossed out  
— leftovers  
of a Teenage dream.

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she had lived a Modern death.

2023.5.9

## Lost Voice

2023-01-13

wǒ yòng mǔ yǔ shuō huà  
——bù xíng.

mǔ yǔ bù néng yòng lái tǎo lùn  
zǔ guó mǔ qīn.

I hide it sheepishly, stifling its sound.  
I bury my identity,  
often lost, seldom found.

I swerve to English  
Et Français, et Latin.  
Until I don't intellego  
ce que je voulais dire à l'origine.

(I swerve to English  
and French, and Latin.  
Until I don't understand  
What I wanted to say in the beginning.)

I watch hundreds of men, croak to be free.  
Their sound thunders in the vicinity.

I speak,  
I speak,  
I sp—

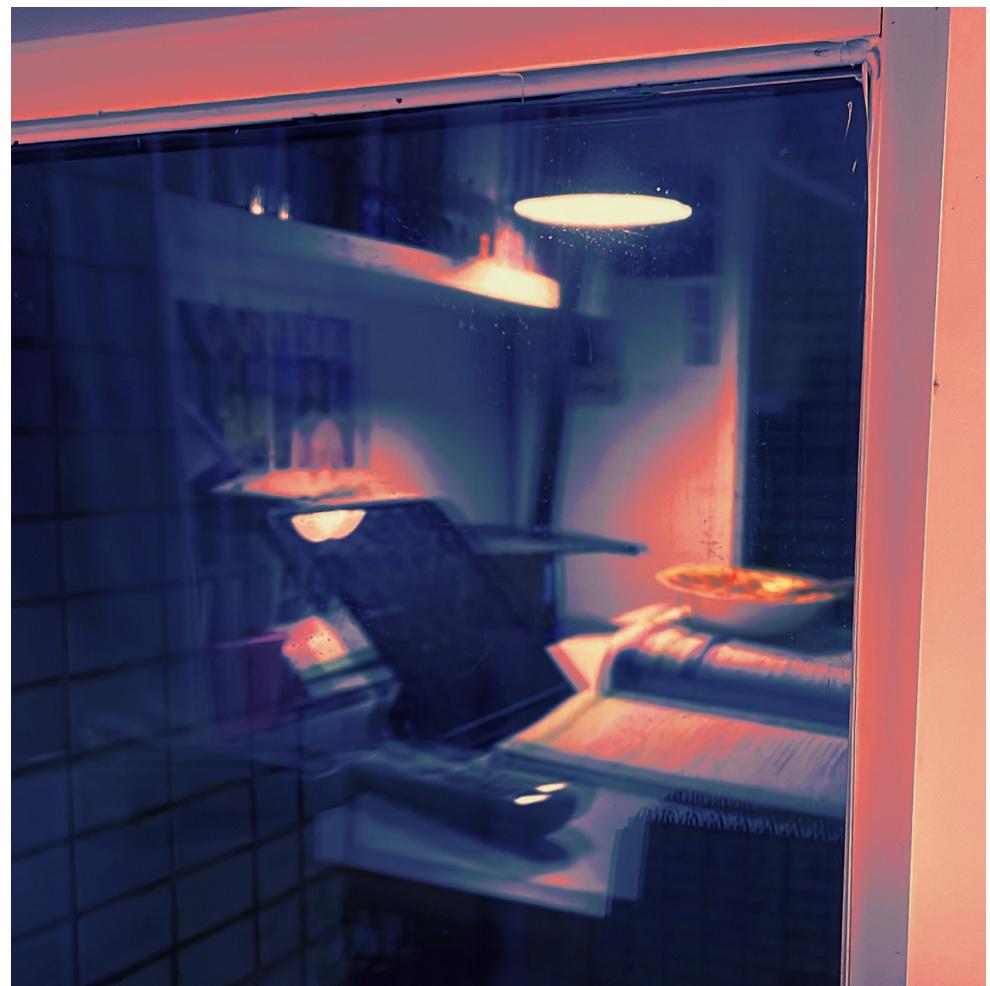
## My Explanation

I recently read the poem “Search for my tongue”, in which the poet used two languages to express her confusion about her identity as an immigrant. This inspired me to include multiple languages in this poem. As a Chinese national and an international student who has also taken French courses in school and learned a bit of Latin in my school’s enrichment class, I was able to squeeze four languages into one poem.

For the topic, I remembered how two months ago, almost all Chinese people had had enough of the zero-Covid policy, and started to rebel in various ways. Many friends of mine posted things on social networks, but they were blocked because they contained sensitive words. It is ironic how we cannot use our mother tongue to save our mother country. Rather, we need to use other languages to avoid being detected on the internet.

To emphasize my point, I used Chinese pinyin for the first stanza. Since pinyin also uses the same alphabet in English, it would look more visually harmonious than Chinese characters. Pinyin also reflects how people discussed issues about the country two months ago—because Chinese characters are easily detected by the advanced censors on the internet, we had to write in pinyin. In the later stanzas, Chinese has been wiped off completely, showing changes in my language and confusion about my identity: I can no longer speak in Chinese freely, even though I am a Chinese citizen. In the third stanza, I used English, Latin, and French. Cramping the three languages into one stanza suggests my dizzy mind, and how I’m unable to express my will freely or figure out my identity. The word “croak” in the fourth stanza means both to die and the sound of croaking, which is realistic since Chinese people did lose their lives under the Covid policy, but they were still using their last breaths to fight for freedom.

I gave my poem a regular rhyme scheme and format: each stanza contains four lines with the second and fourth lines rhyming. Even the parts not in English and their translations follow this rhyme scheme, reflecting the strict rules we must obey in China. In the last stanza, however, the rule is broken by the repetition of “I speak”. This sign of freedom and challenge to the rules is instantly stifled by the government as the speaker fails to finish even the third line, which brings readers a sense of hopelessness.



## My Explanation

### Alarm

2022-10-24

An alarm for the next day,  
it was perfectly arranged.  
Worries should be driven away,  
my daily routine unchanged.

Yet I was triggered by it,  
the doubting thoughts gained weight.  
The reason I'm scared to admit,  
wasn't woes of being late.

To know when to wake,  
to do what should be done.  
Lures me to forsake,  
another possibility that would be gone.

As if my life is planned through,  
a future controlled under the charm.  
All familiar, nothing new,  
so I mourn—with a certain—Alarm.

This poem is based on a story I had in mind when I read “Sophie’s World” in primary school. The plot is of a girl who kept receiving letters from someone who was in danger, and she helped the sender to survive, but later she found out that it was her future self who had sent the letters. Due to limited time, experience and knowledge, I failed to turn this creative idea into a story, but now I have put it into a poem.

I chose to shape the poem into a Möbius strip, indicating the reversal of time and how the protagonist would be trapped in time forever. The first part of the poem is easy to understand—the girl gets mail which asks her to save the person writing the letters. She couldn’t ignore them because someone was in trouble, so she followed the instructions in the letter, and only later found out that she had saved her future self.

The second part of the poem is more ambiguous. The girl questions whether or not she is saving her future self. But before she finds out, she still follows instructions from the letters because she still wants to save the person, whomever it is. But receiving so many letters hit her hard and made her stressed. Before that day she had lived a peaceful life, but now she is busy rescuing an unknown stranger. The last sentence can be interpreted in two ways. One is that she used to be ‘living’ in the sense of enjoying life more. The other, scarier meaning is that she used to be living, but now she is DEAD.

Therefore, this story ends on a cliffhanger—creepier than it first appears. In the first part, the young girl saves her future self but, in the second part, her future self may have killed the young girl through the letters. Yikes!



## Forever Trapped in Time

2022-10-16

She was still living  
A plain life,  
Until that day,  
The mails of plead—  
Hit her!  
Such an event,  
She couldn't ignore,  
'Cause someone was in trouble!  
She followed the letter's instructions,  
Until she found out,  
The one who sent the letter  
Was her future self.

Time is tricky, isn't it?

Was her future self,  
The one who sent the letter?  
Until she found out,  
She followed the letter's instructions,  
'Cause someone was in trouble!  
She couldn't ignore,  
Such an event.  
Hit her—  
The mails of plead.  
Until that day,  
A plain life,  
She was still living.

## My Explanation

This poem is based on a story I had in mind when I read “Sophie’s World” in primary school. The plot is of a girl who kept receiving letters from someone who was in danger, and she helped the sender to survive, but later she found out that it was her future self who had sent the letters. Due to limited time, experience and knowledge, I failed to turn this creative idea into a story, but now I have put it into a poem.

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## The Way It Is

2022-09-30

Sometimes I wonder why we need a solid body  
When codes already represent our whole identity.

It is easy, they say, as they  
check my code and stop blocking my way.

A green code is a good person.  
A yellow code is a dangerous person.

A red code is a murderous person.

Now I know that the apartment block two streets away contains the Murderous  
People who will infect us and kill us if they are let out.

So I feel pride in my protection, no doubt.

But we do need a solid body  
To receive the Gift of a  
Soft Pinching against the throat.

Like a dagger constantly provoking a swollen wound  
Until the sweet smell of blood fills the world with hedonistic happiness.

Everyday. Endless. Enduring.  
Effective. Efficient.  
—Excellent!

Children default before they ask  
If men are born with a mask.

## My Explanation

The speaker of the poem is an innocent child, who learns about the world from the environment around her.

In the first stanza the child questions the necessity for a physical form of human, since the world around her is more focusing on the health code. The children learn from the managers, who teach her how to distinguish different types of people through different colors of code. And she comes to the conclusion that the apartment that was brought to lockdown was not to be sorry for, since it guards “Murderous People”. The capitalization of the word shows how the concept of distinguishing different people has been deepened into the child’s mind, and it is ironic how the original innocent child can become so ruthless. This contrast creates a greater horror among readers, as they start to think how the world will become when even children feel no sympathy for others.

In the second stanza, the speaker suddenly rebukes her earlier statements, making readers feel a sense of hope. However, to their disappointment, the child only wants the body to exist so that she can take nucleic acid tests. The metaphor of “dagger” and “wound”, which can both mean wound in the throat and wound in the heart (feelings), create a bloody imagery. Oxymorons of “sweet” and “blood” are emphasized by the sibilance and alliterations of the “h” sound. Does the child really feel happy? Or is she just used to this way of living? The alliteration of “e” and the enjambment reinforces the sound, bringing the poem to its peak—the life is “Excellent” for the child.

The last stanza only consists of two lines, the rhythmic rhymes leaves the readers into everlasting thinking.

## Prayer Before Death

2022-09-09

I am not yet dead, O hear me  
Let them not inject me with stings  
or dope me in dreams  
I am not a lifeless doll pulled by the strings

I am not yet dead, console me  
For the fears I must face  
of leaving this place  
For the limited time I can save before entering my grave

I am not yet dead, revive me  
Grant me a chance to speak to the unspoken to hug the unhugged  
Or else my departure shall betoken  
That I will be unfairly judged

I am not yet dead, assist me  
To drag my bed to the window  
that I may view the sky  
And help me stack up my pillows  
so I can more comfortably lie

I am not yet dead, but leave me  
Remember tomorrow morning  
Wake me.

## My Explanation

The poem is about someone who is at the end of his life. It is greatly inspired by “Prayer Before Birth”, by Louis MacNeice.

In the first stanza the speaker shows his sense of dignity, he feels uneasy to be treated as someone with no psychological needs. In his eyes the doctors only care about his physical health, ignoring the fact that he hates to be injected or completely controlled by others.

In the second stanza he starts to think about his death that would soon arrive. He feels a bit scared at the idea of saying goodbye to his friends and relatives, and feels afraid that he has to end up in his grave, like so many others.

In the third stanza, the man starts to regret not having lived his life to the fullest. He asks to speak and hug strangers, because he realizes that he has not done enough good things. He is scared that when he dies, people who hate him will make up lies about him and judge him unfairly.

In the fourth stanza, the person stops worrying about life after death, and merely asks someone else to move his bed and pillows. He has given up fighting with his fears, and decides to enjoy the last moments of his life. In here we see a change in his feelings, and readers may start to think that he is willing to embrace death at last.

However, in the last stanza, as the man decides to go to sleep, he asks the other person to wake him up the next morning. This shows that he is still terrified at the thought of dying, and wants to be woken up to ensure that he will not die in his sleep.

The poem uses a lot of enjambments, showing the speaker’s unconsciousness of his use of words (due to his fear), and also shows the speaker’s wish for his life to run on, just like how the lines in the poems run on. There is only one period used in the last line of the poem, foreshadowing that the man will die, perhaps in his sleep.





39



40

Summer

2021. 6.27



41



42

# Tell Me Why

2020-06-05



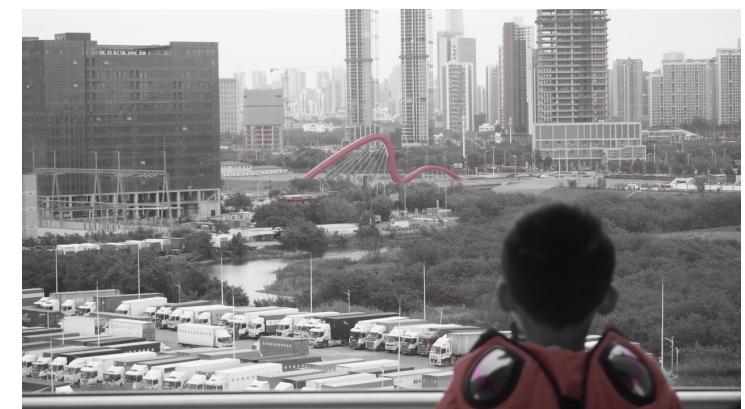
Do readers read so happily  
to receive joy within books,  
Or does it soon begin to be  
for marks and gloating looks?

Do athletes train in hard ways  
to keep fit all the same,  
Or are their only goals these days  
getting medals and fame?

Do painters paint in gentle strokes  
to depict their colorful minds,  
Or are their creativity soon provoked  
for honors of all kinds?

Do dancers dance on pointy shoes  
to test the limits on body rules,  
Or do they only want certificates  
to be accepted by prestigious schools?

Why does this world only care for fame  
abandoning life and tranquility,  
Only remembering the honored names  
but forgetting people like me?



## To Childhood

2020-06-01

Childhood is sweet,  
Like syrup dipped with honey,  
But it's time to say farewell,  
To the childhood in my memory.

May you go away,  
May we forever apart,  
But you'll always be,  
The childhood in my heart.



## Puberty

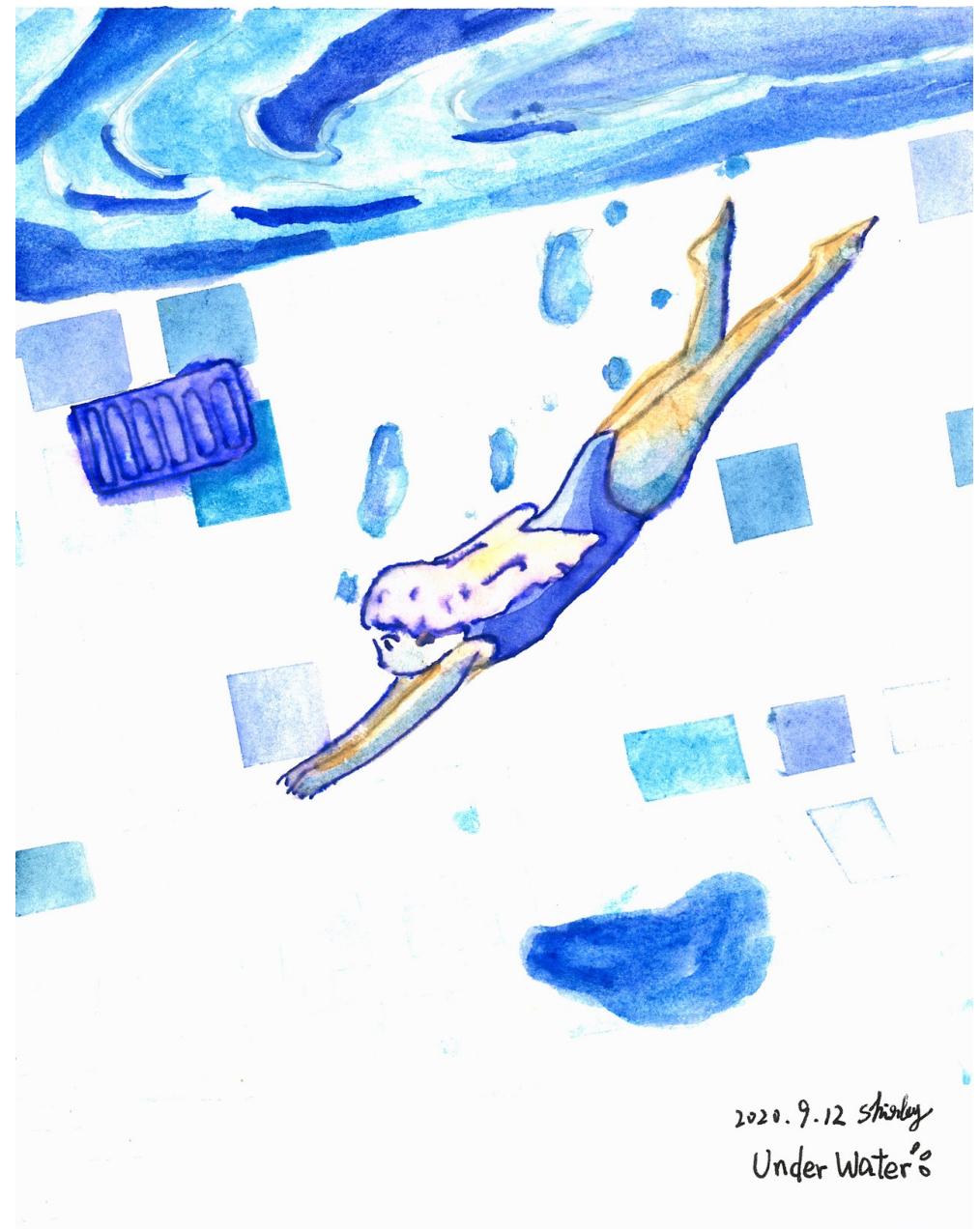
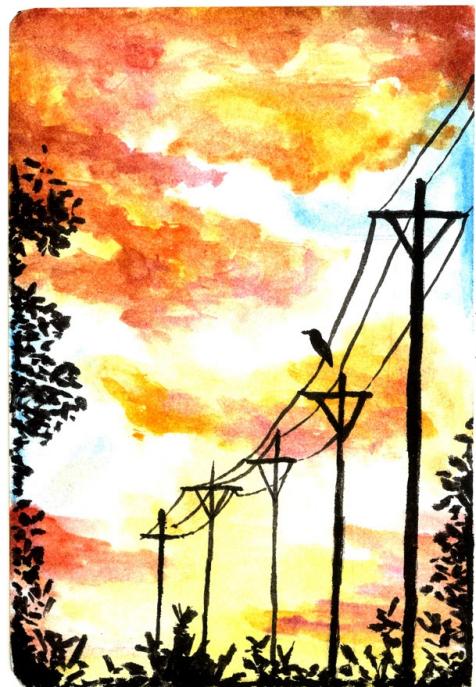
2020-06-01

Filled with anticipation,  
For your arrival  
You're a figure mixed with  
mysterious files

I wish you're a friend  
Not a foe

So hi, puberty  
Bonjour, hello.





# Untitled

2020-03-12

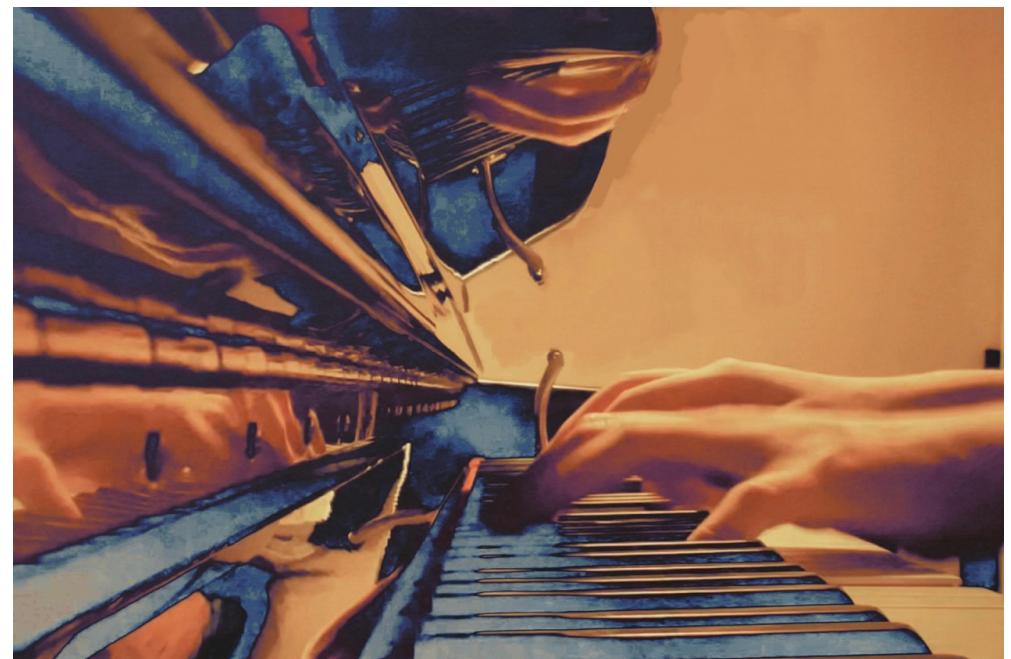
Maybe dreams are only visions of reckless thoughts,  
to feed us on, a hope for survival, a fake  
    Illusion to make us live  
    under an indifferent world.

Maybe I'll remain mediocre for the rest of my life  
    so when I approach death,  
    to discover that I had not lived.



## My Explanation

The last two lines are adapted from Henry David Thoreau. It's alarming to see my younger self writing such philosophical and deep poems!



“火焰的顶端落日脚下  
茫茫黄昏 华美而无上  
在秋日的悲哀中成熟。” ——《秋日黄昏》  
2020.11.1

# Investigation Between the Bird and the Worm

2020-03-07

The sun was shining big and bright,  
celebrating for the disappearing of night.  
Leaves were torn, from branches thorn,  
which culprit made this terrible sight?

Detective worm was on his duty,  
to search for the evil and madness and cruelty.

He stopped to rest, at the bird's nest  
the suspect for a crime so nasty.

"Dear old fella would you cooperate,  
for investigation on the terrible state?"  
He knocked for twice, he knocked for thrice.  
He stood in front to patiently wait.

The bird lifted her head from a drowsy sleep,  
to look at worm, eye sockets deep.  
She made a manicure, she made a pedicure,  
and came out her nest with a big leap.

"Finally ready to answer criminal question?"  
said detective worm with polite and fashion.

But he did not, get what he thought,  
for the bird ate the worm in the investigation.



青海长云雪山



## What Is Life – the Poem by a Philosophical Girl

2019-10-10



“What is life?” A voice asks me,  
Inside my thoughts deep as the sea.  
How can I answer? I do not know this more than thee.

Life can be a burden; it can be a gift.  
It can sometimes make your troubles lift,  
Or make your body free and swift.

It's something people are fighting for till this day,  
While others are giving up, they may.  
It slips from your fingertips and goes away.

I tell you, life is unrecyclable.  
You enjoy it once and it shall go.  
So to live it well would be your goal.

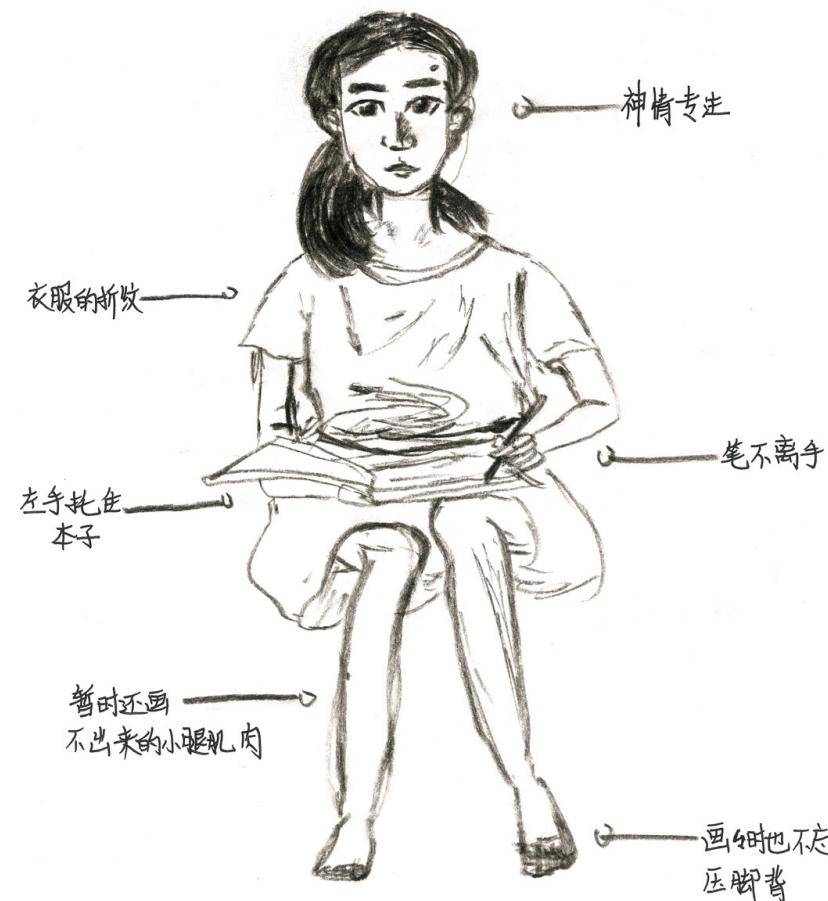
I tell you life is also recyclable.  
Your body is less important than your soul,  
Good spirit will always and forever glow.

Life is about creating yourself on which nobody depends,  
Life is a painting where joy and sorrow blends,  
Life is to bravely greet death like old friends.

Shirley

镜面自画像

2019.8.11



## You Don't Know Anybody Like Me – the Poem by a Ferocious Girl

2019-09-17

You don't know anybody like me,  
I have a cuddly outside,  
And a heart like a beast.  
I can ruin beautiful things,  
With my filthy hands.  
I can make others hurt,  
For the joy of my own.  
And you will know why storms are  
Named after people.

### My Explanation

This poem was also inspired by another poet, Caitlyn Siehl. I read her original poem and loved it immediately:

“Do not fall in love with people like me.

I will take you to museums, and parks, and monuments, and kiss you in every beautiful place, so that you can never go back to them without tasting me like blood in your mouth.

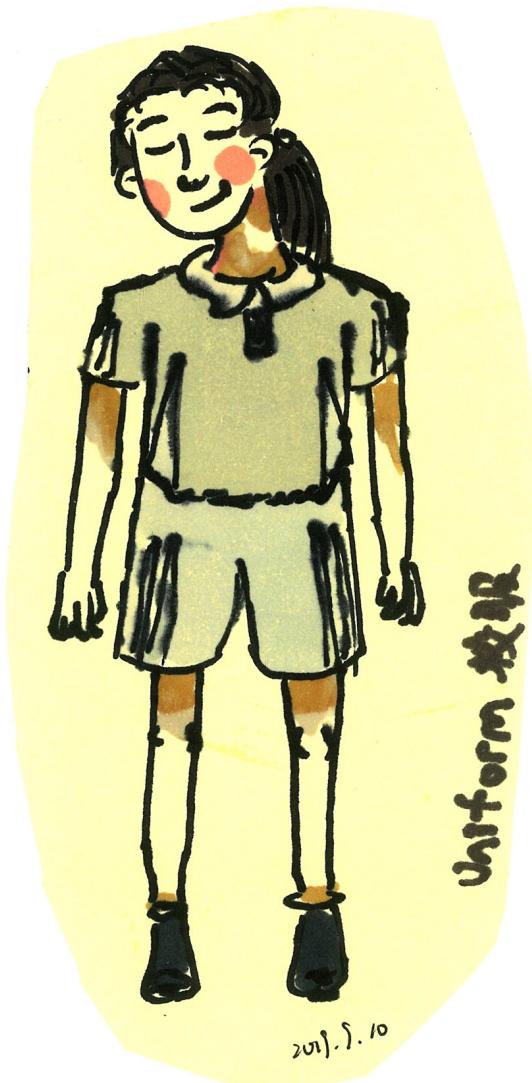
I will destroy you in the most beautiful way possible. And when I leave you will finally understand, why storms are named after people.”



# **Song of Myself**

## **- the Poem by a Narcissistic Girl**

2019-09-09



Oh this is me, the shining me,  
Who is built with cells and flesh and bone.  
I stand here like a miracle,  
The symbol of life, never alone.

I praise myself, I celebrate myself,  
I get a standing ovation for survival on Earth.  
Every atom I have and every breath I take,  
Has accompanied me since the day of my birth.

I can run for miles, I can jump out high,  
I am twelve and as healthy as I can be.  
Pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis, this is what I can spell,  
These easy things are a cup of tea.

I like doodling on scraps, I like weekend days,  
I like reading off books from every shelf.  
I am a silent poet with the pen as my language,  
I honorably complete this "Song of Myself".

### **My Explanation**

As you can probably guess, this poem was inspired by Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself". I notice that my poems at this age are basically all inspired by other poets.

Although I felt kind of guilty at that time, I now look back only with amazement. I can't believe how I bravely dived into the world of poetry all by self-learning.

Thinking Shirley

7. 28

When there's a pencil,  
There's a picture.



Shirley Xiao

I sat there quite long and  
didn't know what to draw. Then I  
drew this girl who turned out to be  
myself.

Not sure if you understand, but  
this picture's about a thinking me, and the  
Painter is a thinking me! Wierd, right?

The Lamb 2019.7.20



There was a lamb who knitted wool  
Inside her wooden boat  
She used a very useful tool  
That was both creative and very cool  
which happened to be her very own wool  
To make her a lamb-wool coat



## June, I Write you a Poem

2019-06-04

The leaves are the notes,  
the wind is the tune.  
Spring has left so quickly,  
and Summer has come so soon.  
The once cool and clean riverside,  
is now boiling in noon.  
And the happiness and hope I felt in May,  
is fake to me in June.

## My Explanation

Inspired by “poppy23” on the website “Under the starry night sky”.

The original poem:

“May

The wind is tossing the lilacs,  
The new leaves laugh in the sun,  
And the petals fall on the orchard wall,  
But for me the spring is done.  
Beneath the apple blossoms  
I go a wintry way,  
For love that smiled in April  
Is false to me in May.”

I came across this website by mere coincidence. Remember how I mentioned “Looking for Alaska” in my poem “Labyrinth of the past”? Well, there’s a quote in this novel that stunned me, “if people were rain, I was drizzle, and she was a hurricane”. So I searched the quote on the web, and clicked into this website which featured the quote, along with many other poems. One of the poems was “May”.

## Land of the Dead

2019-03-02

That day I tripped upon a rock,  
And fell into the Land of the Dead.

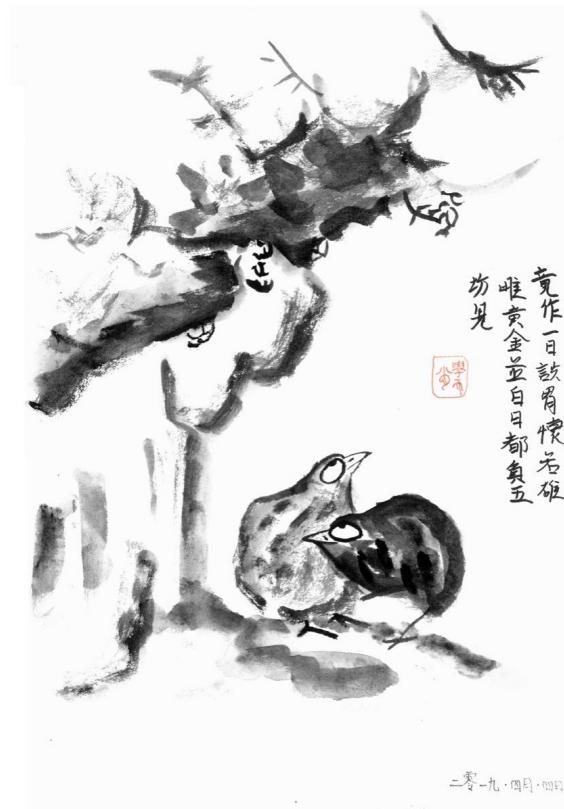
I saw a lot of ghosts and spirits,  
And a man without a head.

I asked him how he died so bravely,  
And if losing a head hurts bad.

“I chopped my head while chopping on egg.” The man said.

I told him eggs didn’t have to be chopped,  
They can be peeled or stripped you lad!

But he said, “My eggs are different,  
If you peel then you won’t be glad!”



# A Fly in a School

2019-03-20

A fly in a school  
Can always be happy  
It doesn't have to read books  
Or do tests or study

A fly in a school  
Can watch other people work  
While it rests on a windowsill  
And silently smirks

A fly in a school  
Can have a free lunch  
It sneaks into students' try  
And helps itself a bunch

A fly in a school  
Can buzz around teachers' ears  
It can make teachers uncomfortable  
As it crawls in their great beards

A fly in a school  
Can have recess whenever it likes  
It can play basketball and soccer  
And ride on people's bikes

Us students wish is simple  
Yet miraculously cool  
Which is to become  
A fly in a school



## My Explanation

Inspired by Jack Prelutsky's poem "A fish in school".



## Christmas That year

2018-12-25

That year  
Christmas  
Was celebrated with frost  
Filled with  
Laughter and warmth  
But now lost  
Snowflakes  
Dance on the melody  
Of beautiful carols  
And gone were the madness  
Gone were the  
Quarrels  
Lots of surprises  
Hidden  
In Christmas gifts  
And yells of delight  
Heard  
As the heavy lid lifts  
It's Christmas again  
But I long  
To be there  
To the time  
To the place  
Of Christmas that year

## Nameless Sorrow

### Sleep

2018-10-29

So many things happen when we are asleep,  
Sickness, pain, and death.  
Then why aren't we afraid of sleep?  
Is it just for the sweet dreams we might have?

2018-10-09

I feel a nameless sorrow creep into my heart,  
And I have a feeling this is just the start.  
Thinking about friendship, trust, betray and everything dead.  
O Shirley Shirley why so sad?

### My Explanation

At age sixteen, when I look back at this poem, I simply gasp at my writing talents at the age of eleven.

I hadn't read anything by Emily Dickinson back then, but this poem resembled so much to her writing style, especially her poem "Best Things Dwell Out Of Sight":

"Best Things dwell out of Sight  
The Pearl – the Just – Our Thought.

Most shun the Public Air  
Legitimate, and Rare –

The Capsule of the Wind  
The Capsule of the Mind

Exhibit here, as doth a Burr –  
Germ's Germ be where?"

Probably I'm overpraising myself, but I am indeed my younger self's biggest fan!



# A Fight Behind The Dance Studio

2018.11.24



## My Neighbor Had a Funny Dream

2018-09-19

My neighbor had a funny dream,  
About eating spicy ice cream.  
He dreamed he was chewing up some shoes,  
And inside there were green tissues.  
He ate rice covered with tomato sauce,  
He sat on some marshmallows looking like a boss.  
He swam in a pool full of bees,  
He danced on a stage made by peas.  
And when he got up from bed,  
He found out his dream was reality instead.



## Homework

2018-09-12

Homework is really a horrible thing,  
The one who ruins it will be our king.  
Hearing the word always makes me cough,  
And it is what our nightmares are made of.

Every time I go to school,  
I feel desperately uncool.

After learning so much which is no cup of tea,  
Still homework is waiting for me!

The teacher writes the homework on the board,  
Which was so much that we all roared.

We all go out to get some fresh air,  
Before we are drowned in despair.

Sit back on the chair and be steady,  
Start writing my homework am I ready?

My books and notes all come to help,  
Before they stop me weep and yelp.

If I didn't do it well I get a D,  
And I would rather get stung by a bee.

Even a sunny day can't brighten my feelings,  
I wish forever to stay on the ceilings.

With hatred and anger I say to myself,  
Homework is as dumb as a house-elf.

And yet what am I doing now,  
I am writing homework am I a cow?

Portrait of a little  
girl 7.31

by Nidhi





线稿于2018.9.8

2018.9.9

## The Messy Parade

2018-09-04

Thirteen little birdies on a tree,  
Catch them quickly don't let them free!

Put them in this nice hot pot,  
Please beware don't let them rot!

Knock on every door there is,  
Hear this cauldron buzz and fizz.

Smash every dish that was laid,  
Tell them this is the Messy Parade!  
Spill chocolate milk on the door mat,  
Feed their babies full and fat.

Send fish bones tumbling on the floor,  
What a disaster do you dare for more?

Pour some wine on the fluffy bed,  
Make the cotton turn sudden red.  
Stick the chewing gum on the wall,

Yes that's not against the law!

Chopsticks, knife, fork, and bowl,  
Send them on the street to roll.

Thrust the pancake into the air,  
For me this sight is really rare!

Spread moldy cheese on every table,  
Put rotten eggs on every stable.

Throw peas and beans everywhere,  
Some get strangled in your hair!

And now the Messy Parade has retired,  
Actually they were fired.

So I have to tell you, my friend,  
That our story comes to an end.

## If I Could Travel in Time

2018-08-03

If I could travel in time,  
I would go to the time human just appeared.  
I would teach them a lot of things,  
And they might think I'm weird.

If I could travel in time,  
I would visit Noah's Ark.  
I would help him cross over the waters,  
And I may feed the shark.

If I could travel in time,  
I would see the Dinosaurs.  
I would climb on them and laugh out loud,  
I wish it won't be insane when it roars.

If I could travel in time,  
I would go to Houdini's house.  
I would let him teach me a lot of things,  
Like how to transfigure a mouse.

If I could travel in time,  
I would go and greet Elizabeth Sissi.  
It would be so greatly fun,  
At least better than meeting Mickey & Minnie.

If I could travel in time,  
I would go to a lot of places.  
I would travel from B.C. to A.D.  
And discover time as it races.

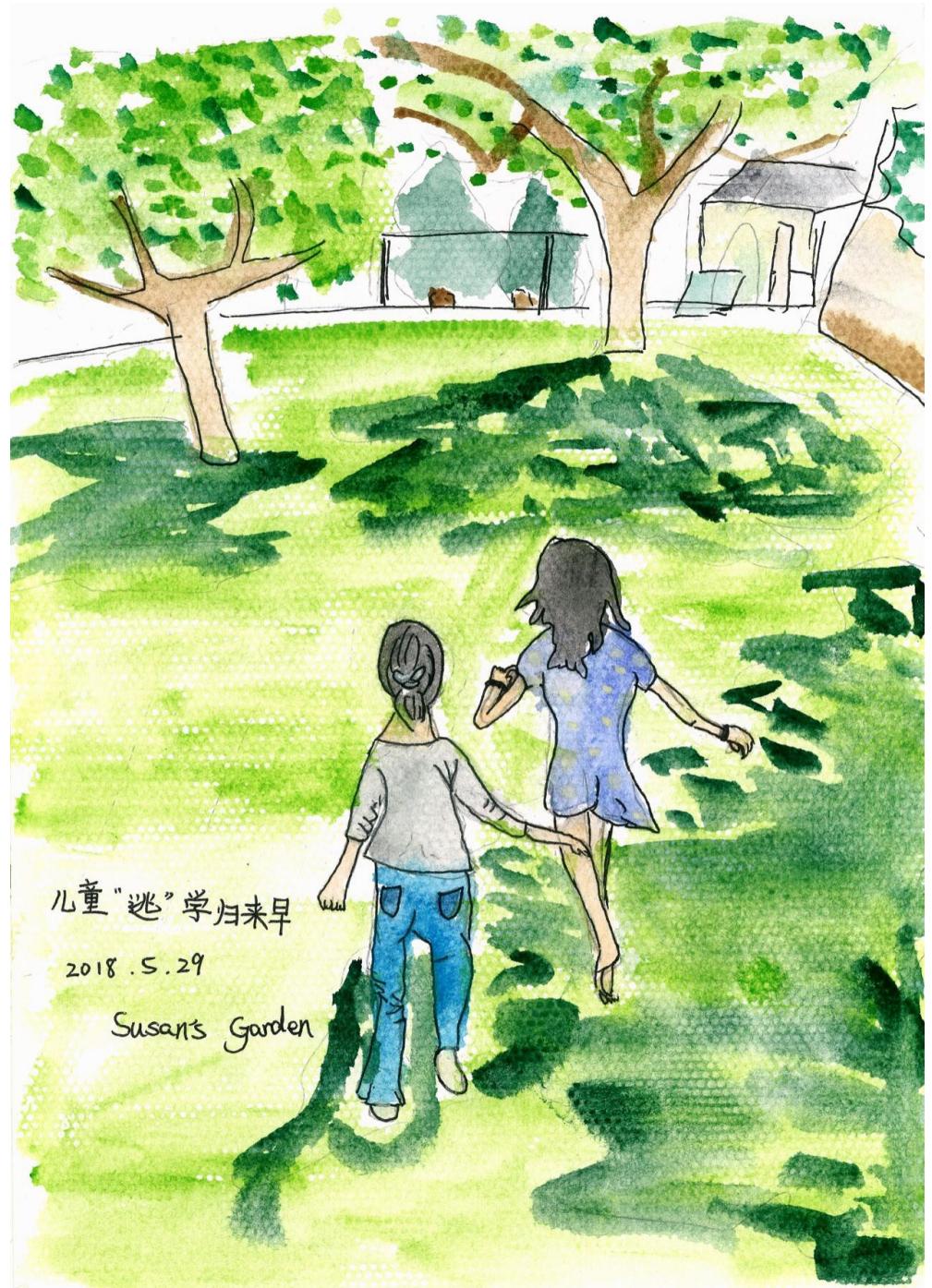
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## The Creature Called Lation

2018-07-15

I once owned a creature who was called Lation,  
And my (!) that creature was a singing sensation!  
It screamed and it howled and it sang all the songs it knew,  
And I had no choice but to send it to zoo.  
However a few days later the zookeeper tried to complain,  
Of how Lation's voice had made all the other animals insane.  
I bit back my retort of him being very wrong,  
Since I knew no one could bear Lation and his song.  
But then an excellent idea popped out of my head,  
Could I earn money using Lation instead?  
So I made a poster of Lation the King,  
And it only cost one dollar to hear the King sing.  
Many people including me thought it was ludicrous,  
But they all bought tickets which really was marvelous.  
Some couldn't stand the noise so they told me they were sorry,  
Though I got the money so there's nothing to worry.  
A rock band told me they liked Lation very much,  
They asked me how much does it cost to buy Lation and such.  
I was too happy so I blurted out "ten",  
How I wish I could re-set the price again.  
So this was how Lation had been sent away,  
I still make it a birthday cake every May.  
I haven't been to any of its concerts even when it costs a dime,  
Because I have had enough of Lation's songs to last me a lifetime!



## If You Are a Thief

2018-07-13

If you're a thief, a qualified thief,  
Beware do not make more mischief.  
For stealing is a horrible sin,  
You shall not be more than a trash can bin.  
As you sneak through people's creaky doors,  
To own a present that is not yours.  
Don't you feel guilty of your measure,  
Even though you have got your precious treasure?  
When the police arrive and put you in jail,  
What you can only do is scream and wail.  
When you are free your spirits feel good,  
You don't need to smell metal but new and fresh wood.  
You swear to yourself you shall not steal,  
And you dearly wish your vow is real.  
But after some days you get itchy again,  
Why can't you just be a normal man?  
The second time you steal you hesitate,  
Will stealing put you in a better state?  
You may answer "yes" for beautiful jewelry,  
You may answer "no" for years of misery.  
If you're a thief please beware,  
Please do not steal even if the treasure is rare.



老子聊发少年狂  
左牵黄，右挟鲲  
2020. 8. 29 小墨

# A Field Trip...to the Bathroom

2018-04-23

"It's a field trip! It's a field trip!" everyone cried,  
"We can sing and dance and sit side to side!"  
I was excited to go on the roller-bus,  
But I had a feeling something bad will happen to all of us.  
We set out on this summer day,  
The sun too hot for our long journey way.  
We arrive at the playground jumping and screaming,  
But I was tired and my ears were tingling.  
Then a boy named John totally threw-up,  
A girl called Stella farted a harp.  
She fainted (yes!) the girl named Grace,  
And Curtis Padmore spat on my face!  
So we went to the bathroom which was enormously enormous,  
But we filled the whole bathroom and tried not to fuss.  
The teacher wanted to give us some fresh air,  
So we went to a farm and played with a hare.  
Then I felt dizzy and dizzy again,  
And I wasn't the only one. (there were at least ten!)  
We went to the bathroom crocodile-fashioned,  
A boy cried out and he was called "Mashioned".  
"Oh bathroom oh bathroom we love you so,  
We can throw up easily and score a goal!"  
So we ruined the bathroom with yucky stuff,  
It's just too disgusting (so if I write this paper will puff!)  
The teacher was frustrated but still took us to play,  
But I didn't want to go I just chewed hay.  
In the end we went to a swimming pool,  
And to tell the truth it was quite cool!  
Unfortunately I felt unwell and really bad,  
Why is today so sad?!  
For the first time in my life I became a leader,  
The leader to lead everyone to the bathroom from here to there.  
When we finally came out from the bathroom the teacher sighed,  
"Let's go back to school!" and we whined.  
But on the way back to school I thought a thought,  
A field trip to the bathroom is worse than school is it not?

# My Explanation

This is such a nonsense, funny and disgusting poem. And, apologies to the people in real life who shared the same names as the students in my poem, haha!



# Megalian Soup

2018-02

The prat, the prat, Megalian Soup,  
the prat that looks so like a poop.  
He's just so greedy for this little fish,  
he tumbles in the river and smashes the dish.

And now his parents moan and say,  
"Where's Megalian, what a day!"

They buried Megalian's last chewing gum,  
and to tell the truth, it was quite gruesome.

But then Megalian popped out his head,  
and you could see where trouble led.  
"Where's my gum!" He began to shriek,  
as though he had an enormous beak.

Mrs. Soup comforts her little son,  
but he was still having a big tantrum.

So all in all, they tell the truth,  
and gives Megalian his photo booth.  
But Megalian dug beneath the dirt,  
he dug and dug and wets his shirt.

Finally he found his yucky gum,  
put it in his mouth and said "yum-yum".  
It was so gross you may lose your appetite,  
and the choice would be wise and right.

For then Megalian Soup threw-up,  
he threw-up breakfast, lunch and sup.

And now he got what he should get,  
and he doesn't look like a poop now, I bet.

## My Explanation

One of my favorite childhood poems, nowadays I still read it with pride.

I like it not only because of its story, but also because I had kept each line with similar numbers of syllables, something that I've never done before. At that time I didn't know anything about meters in poetry, but I would read every line aloud until they were in a rhythmic pace. My exploration with poetry is always so unexpected and autonomous!

## Nonsense

2018-01-29

The day I got up,  
my head rolled away.  
It got stuck in the toilet,  
all the time until May.  
And that was when I pushed a button,  
and it traveled to the bay.  
It caused a lot of trouble,  
and I have to pay.  
But myself without a head does not look good,  
it scared the children so I say:  
“Stop crying!”  
(They say) “There’s no way!”  
“I have candies for you!”  
(They say) “Aye, aye!”



Shirley  
2018.5.18

## Twist Tongue Teacher

2018-01-08

I went to school today,  
And found it horrible.  
The twist tongue teacher stood in front of us,  
Today is not simple.  
As I arrived she said,  
“Your ears yuck, your year is still young, youpy youth,  
Stay silent sit still see the sea soap and sew,  
Fire at the fuel, follow fine fellows, fetch me the photo booth.”  
I had no idea what she was saying.  
So I sat on my chair.  
But then I couldn’t resist,  
My twist tongue teacher’s stare.  
“Listen and learn, loads loads lemons, loads loads ladies too,  
Shriek shut student’s hut, show shy show sheepish she.  
Mountain meals moo and moan, me eat milk with meat,  
Holy high, honey hits money, hit heel hit hard he.”  
We were speechless, just sitting there,  
Looking at our teacher with admiration.  
Until that is, the teacher shouted:  
“You all are in probation!”  
We gasped and cried and pleaded,  
But our twist tongue teacher would not budge.  
“You have to read this sentence,  
Melody on Mice makes most rice taste like Ministry of Magic Cornelius  
Fudge.”  
And so we opened our mouth and tried,  
But the noise could have come from a pig.  
’Cause this sentence sounded like,  
“Multiply on Mice mead mean rodents tattoo long tall of teachers twist tongue  
teacher with a wig.”

## Mary Had an Octopus

2017-10-11

### The Song of Ear and Chair

2017-10-25

I lost my ear,  
My right ear.  
And now it's hard to hear.  
    Oh my dear,  
    Oh my dear!  
I accidentally sat on the emperor's  
    Chair.  
    And I fear,  
    I really fear,  
The thing I fear is near.  
    The thing I fear  
    Is the cold icy tear,  
Because I broke the chair.  
    Your Majesty is angry,  
    She punishes me,  
I had to cut my other ear.  
    I have no ear,  
    But I can still hear,  
Let us cheer and cheer!

Mary had an Octopus, big and round, also slimy.  
    Mary had an Octopus and his name was Yucky.  
Mary went to the swimming pool, cold like ice, warm like fur,  
    Mary went to the swimming pool and Yucky followed her.  
Yucky scared everyone away, tall as building, mouth with foam,  
    Yucky scared everyone away and Mary had to go home.  
Mary then went ice-skating, with a friend, whose name was Sue,  
    The two girls didn't know that Yucky followed them too.  
Sue one looked back, and she screamed, and she said,  
    "Oh this is a monster, he'll kill me and I'll be dead!"  
Sue then ran away, head still shaking, eyes with tear,  
    Sue then ran away yelling, "oh my dear!"  
Mary wanted to be on a boat, so she bought, two tickets,  
    Mary bought two tickets, good thing Yucky didn't tear them into bits.  
Mary and Yucky boarded the Titanic, big as whale, gleaming like crown,  
    When the other people looked at Yucky they all fell down.  
And so the Titanic sank, deeper and deeper, like a falling bee,  
    And so the Titanic sank and Mary was drowning in the sea.  
Yucky swam quickly towards Mary, quick as lightening, like a solider in war,  
    Yucky swam quickly towards Mary and carried her back up shore.

### My Explanation

Wow I love this! I forgot what song I was humming when I wrote this, but I think you can sing this poem using the melody from "Mary had a little lamb". Have a try!

## Beyond the Mirror

2017-09-20

This morning I looked politely at the mirror,  
I greeted him as though he was my professor.

It all looked so ordinary that it seems,  
Nothing in the world could let you hear my screams.

But then beyond the mirror came a girl taller than a monkey and shorter than  
a bear.

I stared at her and cried, "what a nightmare!"

We looked so alike as though we were identical twins,  
The only difference is between cans and tins.

I invited her home to come and play,  
She shook her head and didn't know what to say.

I said, "It wouldn't be bad to have a cup of tea!"  
She said, "No, your mom will get confused, because you are me!"



## The Dolphin and the Ladybug

2017-09-19

The dolphin and the ladybug set off to sea,  
"Swim," said the dolphin, "you just swim like me!"  
"I won't," said the ladybug, "it's not my cup of tea,"  
"The sea is deep and also salty."

The dolphin then let out a low and deep sigh,  
"Then fly," he said, "you know how to fly."  
"Yes," said the ladybug, "but I can't fly high,"  
"The waves would splash me by and by."

The dolphin swam to the other side,  
"Maybe," he grunted, "you should glide."  
"Glide?" said the ladybug, her mouth open wide,  
"I cannot defeat this big strong tide."

"If you do not move, you will drown,  
And then we'll have to go back to town."  
At the dolphin's words, the ladybug's face lit up brown,  
She nodded her head up and down.

She spoke loudly to the dolphin, shouting, "Hey,  
That's what I was trying to say,  
Maybe we should go somewhere else to play,  
And visit the sea another day!"

## My Explanation

This was inspired by Lewis Carroll's poem "The Walrus and the Carpenter".

# Those Aliens Don't Understand Me

2017-06-09

Those aliens don't understand me,  
They don't know English words.  
I said "hello" to them,  
They thought that I meant "chores".  
I was getting worried,  
The sweat was on my snout.  
Then I got an idea,  
I would spell them out.  
I opened my mouth  
And said "H-E-L-L-O".  
They went angry and shook their heads,  
And I thought that meant "no".  
I told them that we're a group,  
So I said "G-R-O-U-P".  
But they stared at me and I knew,  
They meant they're my enemy.  
Maybe English is too hard for them,  
So I tried to teach them French.  
I cried "Bonjour" and "Enchanté",  
But they though I shouted "beach" and "bench".  
It's not my fault, oh you see,  
'cause those aliens just don't understand ME!



## My Explanation

Inspired by Jack Prelutsky's poem "My Dog May Be a Genius".

## My Mom's Present?

2017-06-27

Mom's birthday is coming,  
What present should we give her?  
    Maybe a toad would be good,  
But that makes us look like a nutter.  
  
    Me and my sister Maria,  
Wanted to give her something special.  
    We made a white awful cake,  
Which looked like the North Pole.  
Then we designed a beautiful dress,  
    But it was hard to make.  
So we cut some laces from Mom's skirt,  
Put it in the oven and tried to bake.  
    We drew a big flag,  
With the words "Happy Birthday".  
    We wanted the house to be pretty,  
So we filled it all with hay.  
The door of our house creaked open,  
    Shhh! Mom is coming!  
    We hid beside the doors,  
Our hearts everywhere racing.  
    And now the plan we made,  
    Is ready to come true!  
    So we shouted out loud,  
"Happy Birthday to You!"  
    "Oh, dears," Mom cried.  
"I thank you more than I could say.  
    But you must have forgotten,  
Today is daddy's birthday!"

## The Vampire in the Cupboard

2017-06-13

There is a vampire in the cupboard,  
    I believe my eyes aren't wrong.  
    I saw her chalk-white face,  
And here scars were so very long.  
    I told my friend Jane,  
She shrieked and came to help.  
    We stole my dad's gun,  
And his precious peacock poop.  
    We scurried to the cupboard,  
Our heart-beats unusually fast.  
    I shot the bullet hard,  
But the vampire still lived for the best.  
    We heard no screams or yelps,  
Maybe vampires aren't afraid of bullets.  
So Jane threw dad's peacock poop,  
    Flying into five-hundred bits.  
    This time we heard,  
    A very loud "splat".  
    The vampire must be dead,  
She's even weaker than a rat.  
I opened the cupboard doors eagerly,  
    For defense I held a hoop.  
But then I saw with great surprise:  
    My football covered in poop.

## My Explanation

Inspired by Jack Prelutsky's poem "My Parents Gave Me Birthday Gifts".

## Reflection

2017-06-12

Dragonflies rest,  
Butterflies dance  
Upon ponds.  
Lilypads lie,  
Lotuses bloom,  
Through songs.  
Darkness falls,  
Pauses,  
Light shines.  
Grass soft,  
Flowers sweet,  
Where one angel belongs

Belongs “Angle One” where,  
Sweet flowers,  
Soft grass,  
Shines light,  
Pauses,  
Falls darkness,  
Through songs,  
Bloom lotuses.  
Lie lilypads.  
Upon ponds,  
Dance butterflies,  
Rest dragonflies.

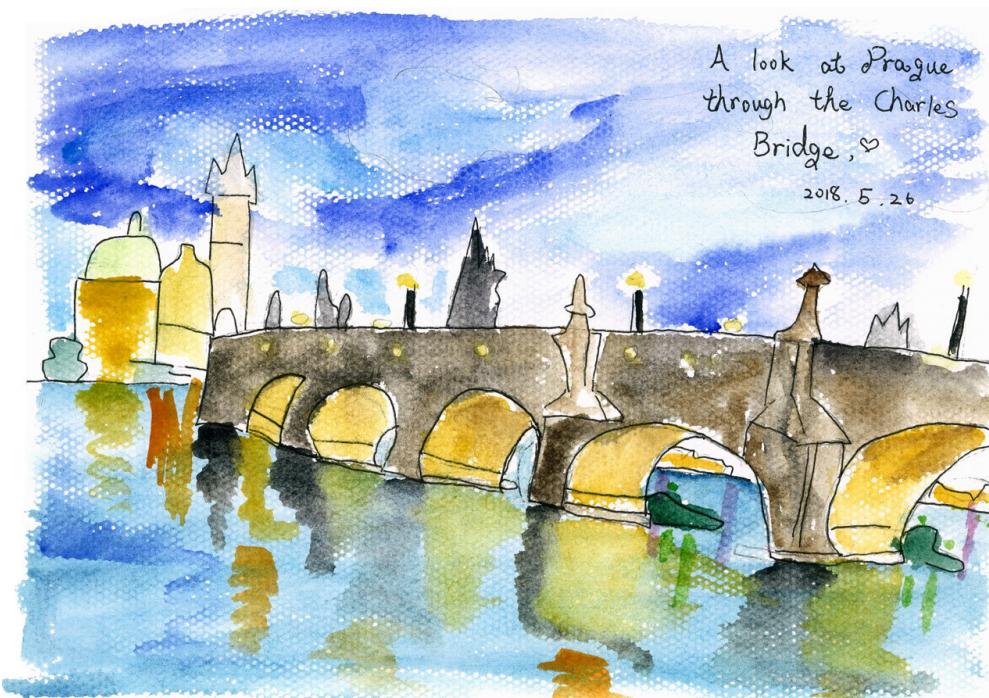


邹族勇士  
2018.2.19

## Valentine's Day

2017-02-14

Romantic festivals are hard to wait,  
And they pass even quicker than washing a plate.  
Mailmen deliver unstoppable letters and roses,  
You than your neighbor Moses for fixing your hoses.  
Friends all over the world try to show you,  
That cards with strong love are not just made by glitter and glue.  
And then you thank them and you say:  
"Happy Valentine's Day!"



## A Sick Week

2016-09-26

This week I was sick.  
From head to foot I was sick.

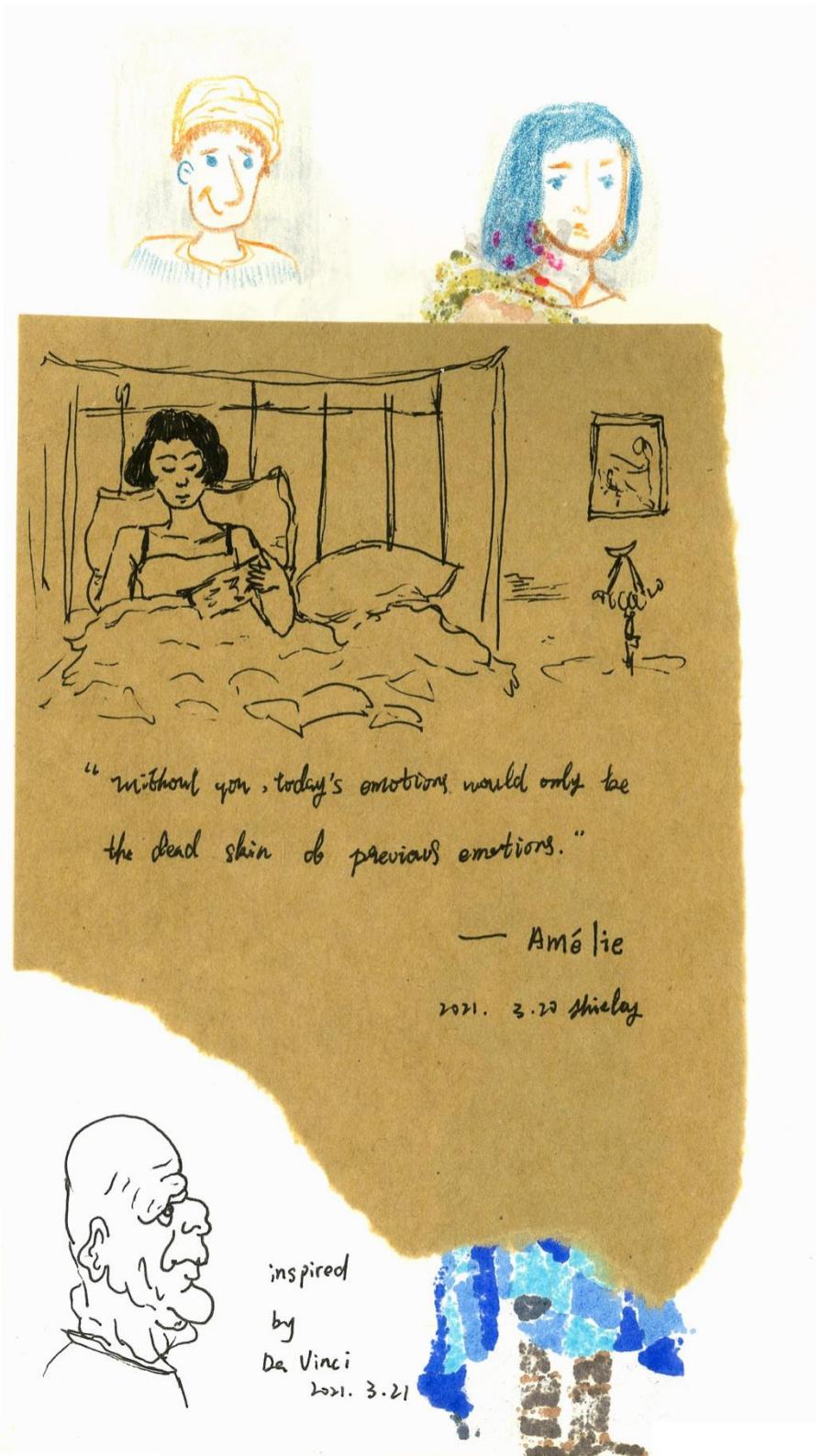
Mom found I got a flu,  
and a headache too.

She made me rest,  
she also said being ill is only my health's test.

I took a bunch of medicine,  
I felt like I became Edison.

But when I woke up one morning I felt wonderful!  
It was like standing on a golden table.

My fever stopped,  
but my medicine did not.



## My Explanation

### No, Not

2016-09

No, no, no...

Dogs are not dogs,  
Hogs are not hogs.  
Cats are not cats,  
Bats are not bats.

No, no, no...

Zoos are not zoos,  
CPUs are not CPUs.  
Schools are not schools,  
Pools are not pools.

No, no, no...

Scarves are not scarves,  
Gloves are not gloves.  
Jeans are not jeans,  
Earrings are not earrings.

No, no, no...

No,  
no,  
no...

This was actually a song. I remember recording myself singing it somewhere. And to this day, I still remember the melody, but I feel too embarrassed to sing it again!



## Girls are Always Better Than Boys

2016-07

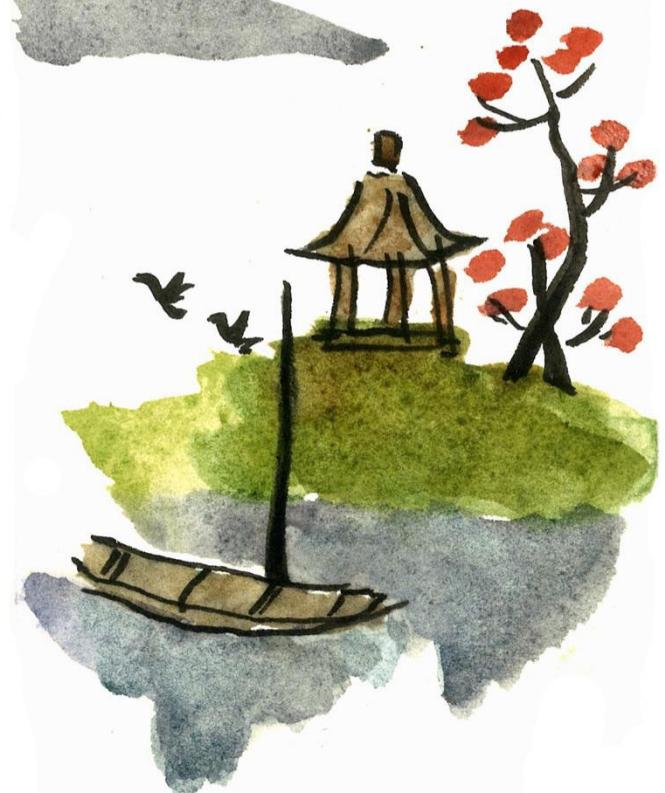
Girls are always better than boys,  
because girls have better toys.

Girls are polite and very nice,  
girls are kind and won't hurt mice.

Girls dance well and love to read,  
girls always plant that pepper seed.

Girls will never make any noise,  
this is why girls are better than boys.

晚登秀江亭登波  
古木侵人得意於塵  
埃之外益人間景幽  
兩相守絕耳



## Earth

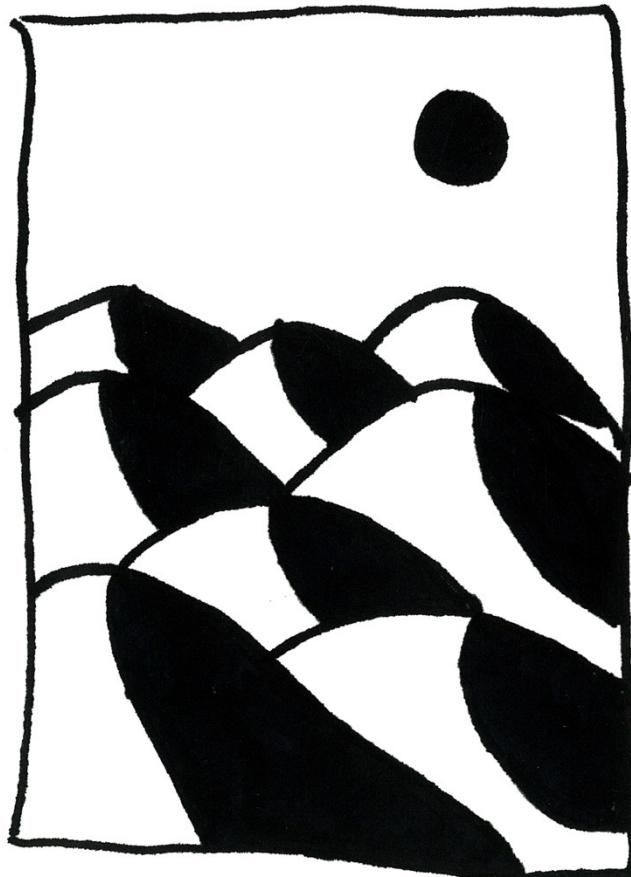
2016-07

Earth,  
you know?  
You live on it!  
It is our mother,  
Our kind beautiful mother.  
But it won't be beautiful anymore.  
Why when't it be?  
Because of me.  
Me?  
Let's say us.  
Yes, it's human.  
Her own children made her ugly.  
But can we turn her beautiful?  
Yes, we can, I think so.  
Do you know how?  
First,  
We must water the plants.  
And seconds is to be a green hero.  
If you're a hero,  
let's save the world!  
Understand?

## My Explanation

This poem was supposed to look like a tree, but after typing it down, it doesn't look like one very much!

This form of poem is called concrete poetry, but I only learnt about it in high school, so the nine-year-old me actually invented this form all by myself! I just felt like playing with the shape of the poem, and here's what I got. Quite unbelievable.



## A Poor Girl

2016-06-20

One day,  
I see  
a girl,  
in sleep.  
Wibbling and wobbling,  
down into  
the street.  
She crashed into,  
a poor black car.  
She lost her feet,  
in one “Ahhh!”  
  
In one “Ahhh!”  
she lost her feet.  
A poor black car,  
she crashed into  
the street.  
Down into,  
wibbling and wobbling.  
In sleep,  
a girl  
I see,  
one day.

## Rain

2016-03-09

Rain is water and water is rain,  
But every drip of rain is not plain.  
  
The first drip came far away from Spain,  
The second was born above a plane.  
  
Then the third drip appeared landing on a train,  
The fourth landed on a dress and got the people’s complain.

The fifth drip came far away from Spain again.  
But the sixth was extraordinary because it’s inside my brain.  
  
Could all raindrops flow away in vain?  
The answer is: I can hardly explain.

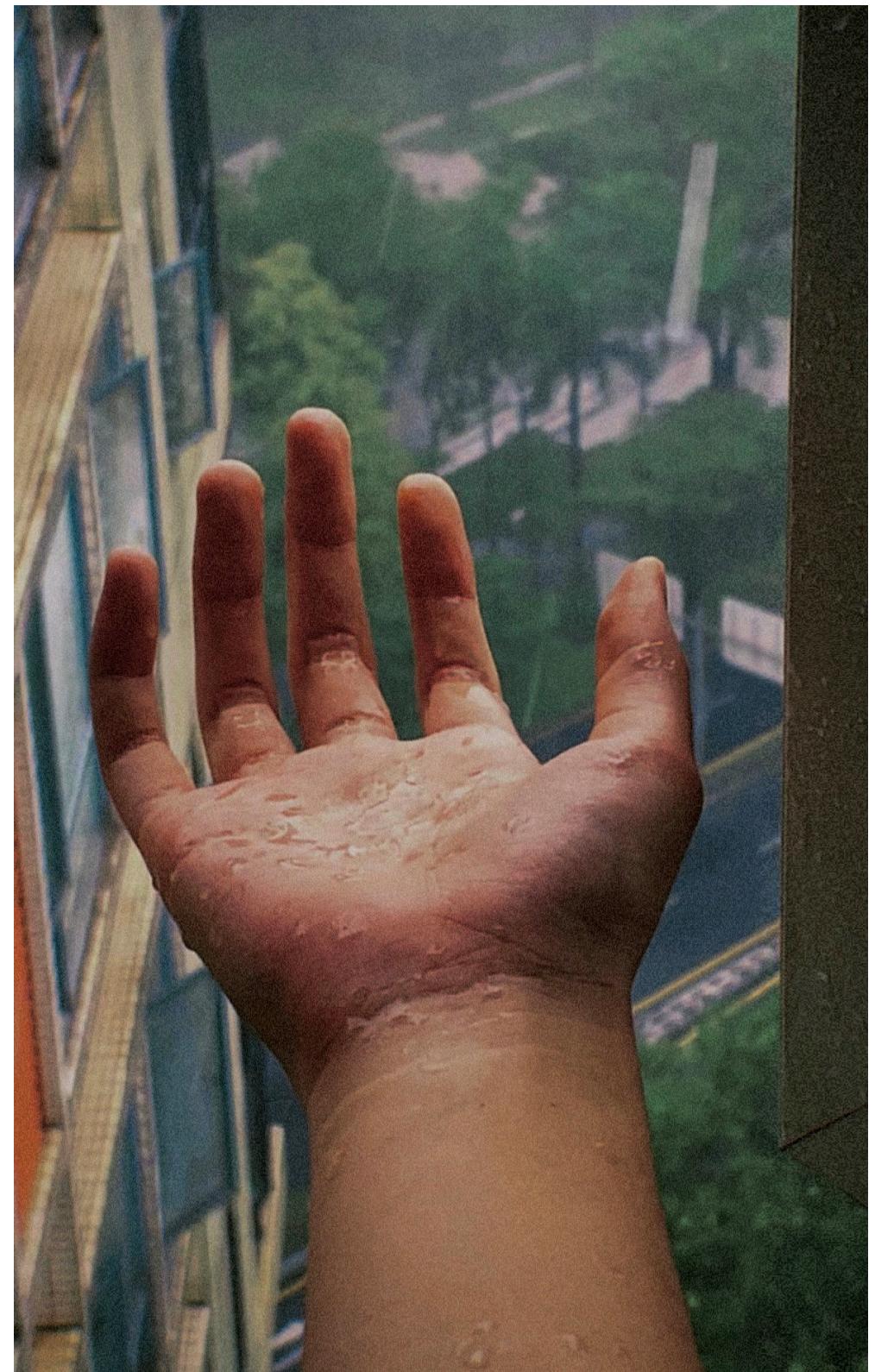
## My Explanation

Welcome to my representative work! I have read and recited and performed and delivered and shown and explained this poem to tons of people over the past few years.

This is a good poem, I keep thinking. Not only because I managed to end every line with the rhyme “-ain”, not only because I wrote it in no more than ten minutes for my English homework, but because of the purity and relaxedness in the words that could only come from a child’s mind. I love the line “Rain is water and water is rain”. How simple! How true! Yet how could I, the more erudite sixteen-year-old think of such a line?

Something that’s likely to bug every poet is the fear of not becoming better. Poetry is so much more than theories or techniques, the spirit and mentality of the poet are of greater importance. And as we age, some of our sparkles are likely to wear off,

—hopefully, to be replaced with other life experiences and inspirations that can heave up our writings to a higher dimension.



## Zoo

2015-10

I went to the zoo today,  
and I turned to be the animals' prey.  
The lion in the cage roared and roared,  
    he is as big as a blackboard!  
The elephant showed his huge long trunk,  
it was so long that is scared a monk.  
Then a monkey sat on my head,  
    I though it was gonna attack  
        me but instead  
            it ate my bread.  
A tiger sat in front of me and the crowed screamed,  
it smiled and its teeth gleamed.  
    I agree the zoo is very fun,  
but I'll like the zoo more if it has a dragon!

## Sleep

2015-09

Today's Saturday, when it's nine o'clock mom said: "Go to sleep!"  
    "But it's early!" I began to weep.  
Then my little broth crawled in with a toy car on his hand, "Beep beep!"  
    (Me) : "That's not fair, Benjamin didn't sleep!"  
    (Benjamin): "I'm tired, I'm going to bed, goodnight, little Cheap!"  
Cheap is the toy car's name, but that toy car is even more expensive than a sheep!  
    (Mom): "See, Benjamin is going to sleep, follow him and sleep deep!"  
Then I smiled, and followed Benjamin to our bedroom, we played cards and  
read books, mom thought we were asleep, she will never know, because this is  
    the secret we two keep.

曉

至便間無日江  
人是者常本風  
主



## Snowflakes

2014-07-23

Snowflakes are fun,  
But they will melt in the sun.

I want to know the reason,  
Why will they live in this season?

They could live in spring,  
To hear the birds sing.

They could live in summer,  
To hear a story told by Hummer.

Or they could live in fall,  
To see how the trees grow tall.

Why will they want to live in winter?



Zombie Girl

2018.12.1

## Fairytales in Reverse

2014-04-01

A princess slept so hard that she slept for years and years.  
For years and years she slept so hard like a princess.

The little red riding hood went to her grandma's and saw a wolf.  
Saw a wolf went to her grandma's the little red riding hood.

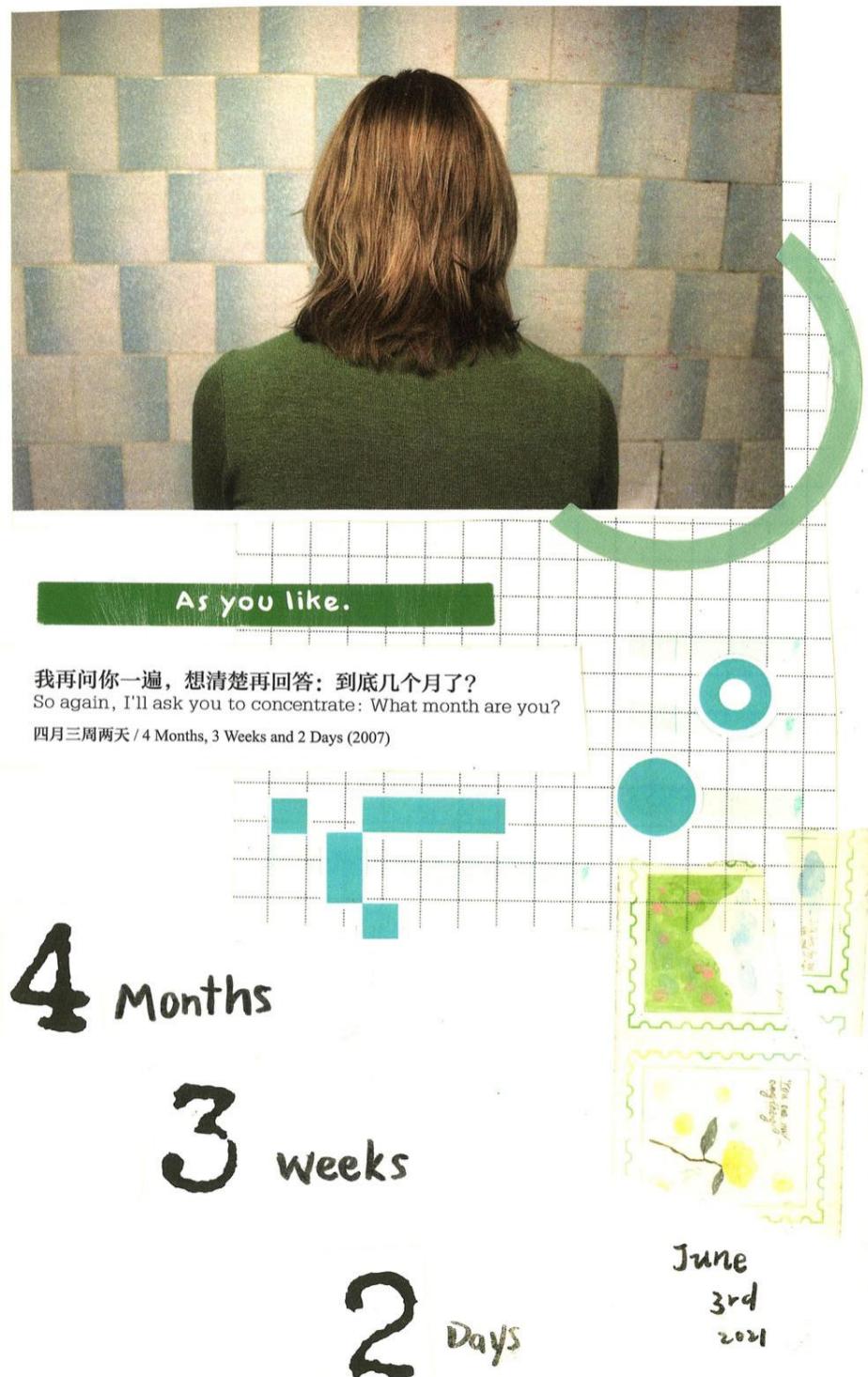
A princess named Rapunzel has golden hair and lived in a tower.  
In a tower lived a golden hair princess named Rapunzel.

You know I'm a mermaid but I don't care. I need to marry the one, the prince.  
The prince needs to marry the one but I don't care. You know I'm a mermaid.

A Beauty can love a beast. They have been married.  
Married they have been. A beast can love a beauty.

## My Explanation

This is my first ever piece of work that looks like a poem. Although it's supposed to be "in reverse", I didn't follow it strictly and left out or added some words to make the lines smoother. But hey, I wasn't even seven years old at that time, so it's still worth reading!



# My First Session of Rad Poets Society

2023-01-15

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My pounding heart slowed its pace as my students greeted me with enthusiasm; my fear vanished as their timid pairs of eyes sparkled with excitement; I grew strong and confident, anticipating for the first ever session of Rad Poets Society to begin. O Captain! my Captain! This was not going to be a fearful trip after all.

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My journey with poetry was purely self-taught. This was why it took me half a decade to discover that not all poems needed to rhyme, and not all poems needed to have a regular form. Teaching myself to write poetry was unique, but I bumped into many misunderstandings and couldn't improve quickly. I didn't want these miseries to torment other children, whose passion for poetry may be easily diminished without good guidance, so I founded Rad Poets Society, a camp teaching Chinese Children how to write English Poetry.

The two days of class went far better than what I had expected. I taught my students some different forms of poetry: rhymed poetry, free verse, sonnet, acrostic, haiku. I provided them many examples and identified the rhyme scheme for each poem. I also slipped in terminologies of poetry techniques in my examples, so as to make them understandable and not too boring. I designed games for my students, for instance the rhyme version of "Feihualing", I would give a rhyme such as "-at", and students need to come up with the words that rhyme in "-at". Of course, the most important part of my lesson was to teach them how to write their own poetry. I concluded many useful tips that helped me over my ten years of poetry writing, for example two main ways to write nonsense poetry: making up a fictional character or ending the poem in an unexpected and humorous way. My students were attentive listeners and earnest learners. Given their young age (aged from 8 to 11), I thought some of them would quit because my lessons were too advanced, but everyone stayed till the end and wrote at least two poems each. Considering that some children may not be that highly skilled, I wrote three half-finished poems for them, already defining the rhyme scheme and topic of the poem but leaving blanks for them to fill in. For other students who were more skilled, I encouraged them to write their own poems and helped them improve their lines to perfection. Because I shared William Blake's "The Tyger" with the class, one

student loved the rhythm and meters so much that she wrote an adapted poem "The Lion". Her poem stunned us with its powerful tone and pace, I felt as though the poet identity inside her that had been hidden through all these years was finally unlocked. Who would have believed that a primary school student could write such a threatening poem?

My students read their poems in front of the camera, as I watched them read, happiness and pride filled me from head to toe. This was a feeling greater than satisfaction gained from writing poetry myself, I have turned from a campaigner to an advocate in poetry, I have spread my influence from written words to lectures and speeches, I have planted the seed of poetry in my students' hearts.

\*\*\*

As I said goodbye to my students, I thought, this is the whole point of Rad Poets Society. People hustle and bustle but we gather to baptize ourselves in poetry, the powerful play goes on and we may contribute a verse.

# A Lesson With Rural Children

2024-01-16

The night before my fifth “Rad Poets Society” (English poetry camp for Chinese children) session, I was busy creating a new and much easier tutorial plan for the students, deleting poems and analyses from my previous lectures’ contents. These sixth-graders from rural primary schools had just started learning English. I worried that they couldn’t engage in class, but was also excited to present them with the new and intriguing world of English poetry.

“What’s the most essential thing in poetry-writing?” I teased them with a question at the outset of the lesson. My younger self would undoubtedly say “rhymes,” focusing on the formal and structural requirements of the genre.

However, these kids gave me mind-blowing answers: “emotions,” “imagination,” “creativity,” “blending with the environment” and “inspiration.”

To my astonishment, their answers summed up the evolution in English poetry, which progressed from the Romantic Era to the Enlightenment, and then to the Victorian Era. How could they intuitively grasp the essence of English poetry even before they had commenced reading their first poem?

This only consolidated my belief that children are naturals and possess an innate ability to write poetry. Perhaps, it is because they have never read any poems that they were able to forget the form and see the truth underneath.

Another thing that struck me was their constraint and shyness perplexed with an eagerness to learn. Together, we read Dr. Seuss’ book “Green Eggs and Ham” as a warm-up. They pronounced “box” as “bokesi,” and “fox” as “fokesi.”

Their intonation was also awkward, oftentimes ending a question without the common rising tone. While trying to teach them the “standard” pronunciations, I couldn’t help but feel a liking for their cute authentic accent. I had never noticed how different accents could lead to a poem being interpreted in different ways!

Their eagerness to learn was evident when I let them write their own acrostic poems. Nearly all of the children took out their English textbooks and flipped their pages to the glossary part, with all the words arranged in alphabetical

order. They searched and tried to fit the words into their poems, then crossed them out again and searched on another page.

This reminded me of my younger self—searching for rhymes from every book I had, fitting words in, and reading them to see if they sounded weird. I had been embarrassed by my difficulty to find the right words, and believed that a real poet would have more ease with their verses.

Yet, seeing these children, I started to think that maybe this “awkward” method is the natural path of poetry writing, for poetry is about reining in one’s free-flowing thoughts by certain rules, and achieving the balance between form and the fluidity of ideas.

When the session was over, every one of them had written at least one poem, and they felt happy for what they have learned from the lesson. I equally learned a lot from this experience, which helped me see English poetry in a new light.



2023-01-15 The First Session of Rad Poets Society



2023-07-01 The Second Session of Rad Poets Society



2023-08-06 The Third Session of Rad Poets Society

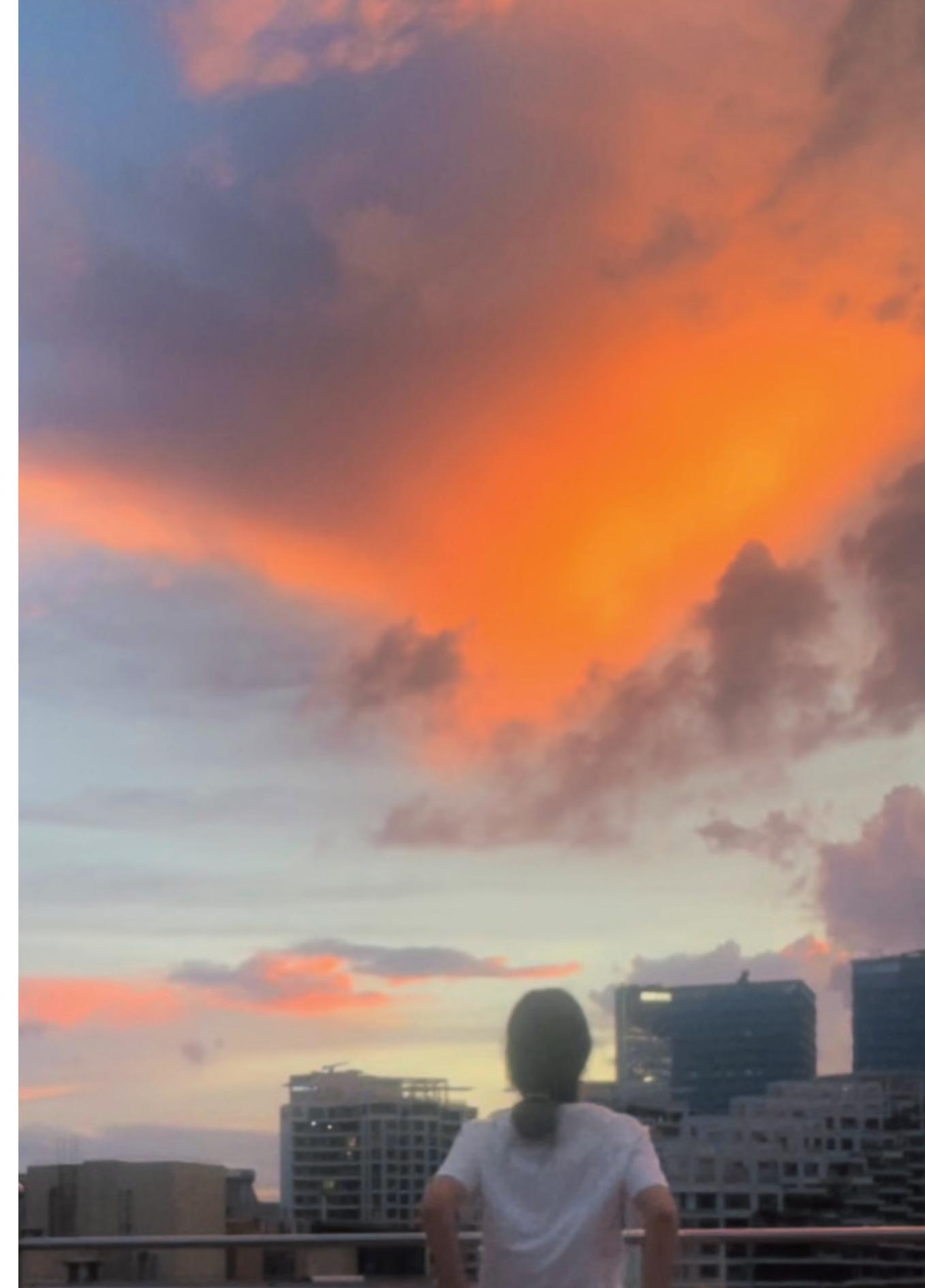


2023-09-30 The Fourth Session of Rad Poets Society





2023-12-22 The Fifth Session of Rad Poets Society



In 2016,  
with the help of her mother,  
nine-year-old Shirley set up the WeChat Official Account “Poems of Time”;

In 2023,  
sixteen-year-old Shirley started to manage her own channel independently.

To this day,  
she has published more than 100 poems, essays, audios, and videos,  
donated readers' tips to several public welfare projects, and founded Rad Poets  
Society (English Poetry Training Camp for Chinese Children).

To learn more, please scan and subscribe!



“Poems of Time” (光阴的诗)  
WeChat Official Account QR code

Xueer Xiao is a junior at a Chinese international high school, and has been writing English poems since the age of six. When she was young, she was obsessed in fabricating this kind of profile (which is the thing you are reading now), and imagined that her future works would be a great sale. Despite a dreamer living in fantasies, she is also willing to make impacts to the world, especially focusing on areas like gender, education, and cultural identity. Apart from writing, Xueer is also passionate about watching films, swimming, doodling on a foggy mirror, and searching for her ideal soulmate.



And someday I'll love Shirley Xiao,  
when I mortgage your poems for some inner peace.

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