

STANDING AMID THE EXECRATIONS OF TIME

Ten years after Tiananmen

To me, standing amid the execrations of Time
that day seems so strange

1

Ten years ago this day
dawn, a bloody shirt
sun, a torn calendar
all eyes upon
this single page
the world a single outraged stare
time tolerates no naïveté
the dead rage and howl
till the earth's throat
grows hoarse

Gripping the prison bars
this moment
I must wail in grief
for I fear the next
so much I have no tears for it
remembering them, the innocent dead,

I must thrust a dagger calmly
 into my eyes
 must purchase with blindness
 clarity of the brain
 for that bone-devouring memory
 is best expressed
 by refusal

2

Ten years ago this day
 soldiers stand at attention
 poses dignified and correct, trained
 to uphold a hideous lie
 dawn is a crimson flag
 fluttering in the half-light
 people crane and stand on tiptoe
 curious, awed, earnest
 a young mother
 lifts her baby's hand
 to salute that sky-eclipsing lie

And a white-haired mother
 kisses the image of her son
 delicately pries his fingers apart
 and washes the blood from his nails
 she can find no soil, not even a handful
 in which her son may rest
 she has no choice
 but to hang him on the wall

Now she walks among unmarked graves
 hoping to expose the lie of a century
 from her sealed throat she exhumes
 that long-stifled name
 lets her freedom and dignity be

a denunciation of amnesia
 police listen on the wiretap
 and dog her footsteps

3

The world's largest square
 has been given a new face

When the peasant Liu Bang became
 Han Gaozu, founder of a dynasty
 he invented a tale about his mother and a dragon
 to inflate his family history
 this ancient pattern continues
 from the Ming Tombs to the Memorial Hall
 butchers lie in state
 in resplendent underground palaces
 across millennia, tyrants and autocrats
 exchange tips on dagger technique
 while their entombed vassals
 offer obeisance

In a few months' time
 amid glorious pomp
 murder weapons will roll once again across this square
 and the corpse in the Hall
 and the butchers dreaming their imperial dreams
 will look on with approval
 while beneath the earth the Emperor of Qin
 reviews his clay troops

Still that old ghost
 mulls his past glories
 while his heirs glut themselves
 upon his legacy
 with his blessing they wield scepters of bone

and pray the next century
will be even better

Amid tanks and flowers
salutes and daggers
amid doves and bullets
jackboots and expressionless faces
a century concludes
in blood-reek and darkness
and a new era begins
without a glimmer of life

4

Refuse to eat
refuse to masturbate
pick a book out of the ruins
and admire the humility of the corpse
in a mosquito's innards
dreaming blood-dark dreams
peer through the steel door's peephole
and converse with vampires
no need to be circumspect
your stomach spasms
will give you the courage of the dying
retch out a curse
for fifty years of glory
there has never been a New China
only a Party

In the labor camp, Dalian, June 4, 1999

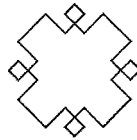
Translated by Isaac P. Hsieh

Editor's Postscript: In the 1950s the Communist Party promoted a song called "Without the Communist Party There Would Be No New China." In 1989, student protesters at Tiananmen sang the song, clearly intending

a sarcastic second-level meaning of "without the Communist Party, there would be no (such disaster as) 'New China.'" (Authorities could not stop them from singing it, because its first-level meaning was unobjectionable.) In the last two lines of this poem, Liu Xiaobo seems to push the students' meaning one step further.

No Enemies, No Hatred

SELECTED ESSAYS AND POEMS



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