

# PATHLIGHT

NEW CHINESE WRITING

No. 1

*You Are on the Highland*  
*Stephen's Back*  
*The Road to Weeping Spring*

*The Sugar Blower*  
*Williams' Tomb*  
*A Word is Worth Ten Thousand Words*

The Eighth  
Mao Dun  
Literature Prize  
2011

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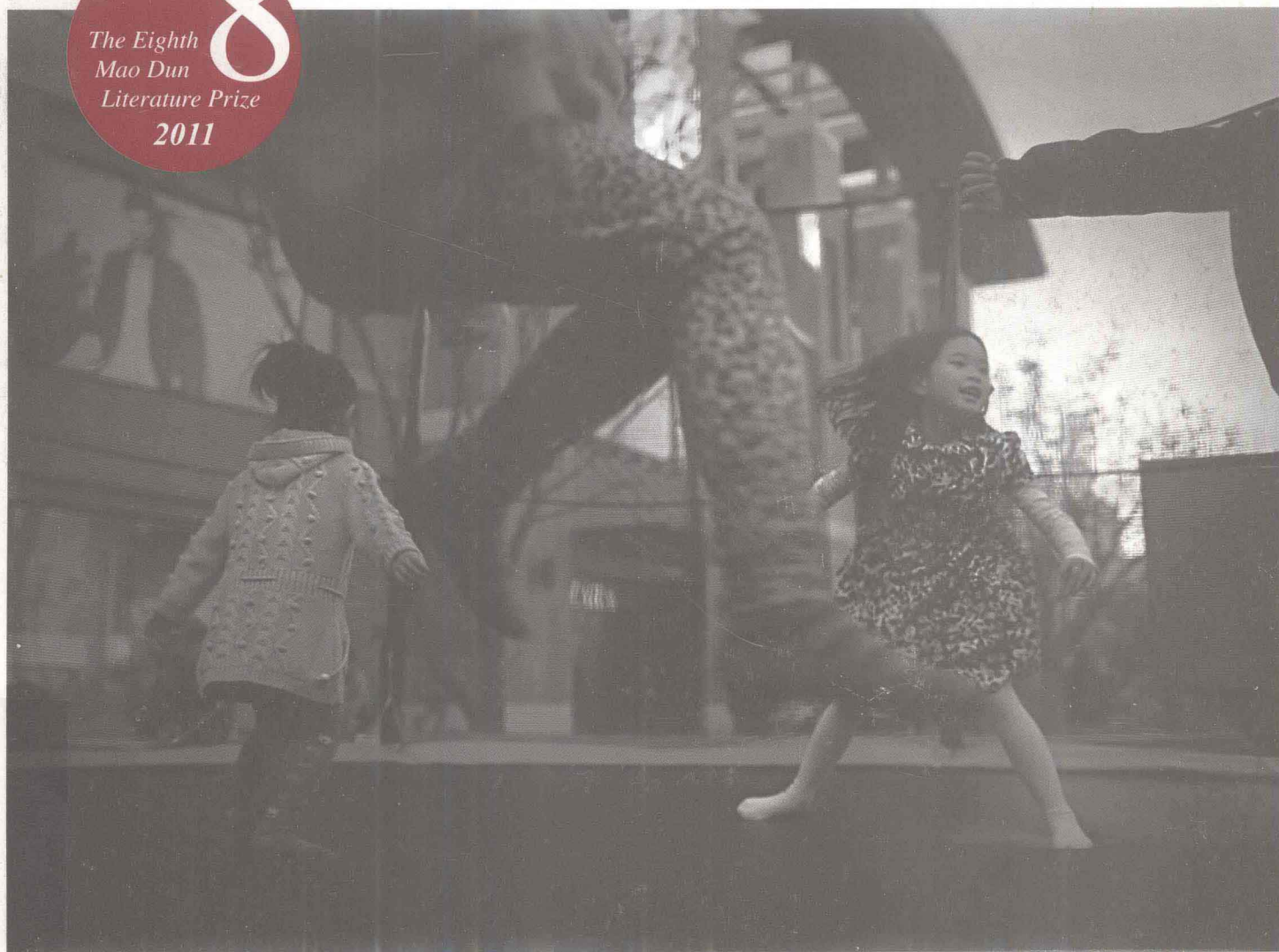


Photo by Wang Yan



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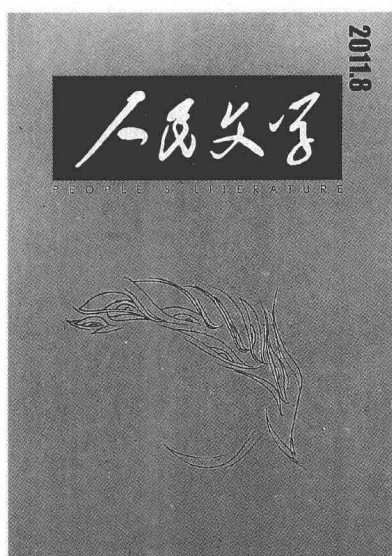
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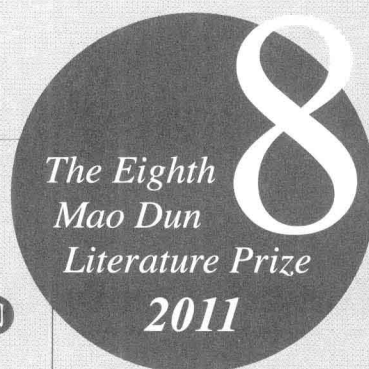
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# Feature



The Eighth  
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*You Are on the Highland*

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Zhang Wei

*The Sky Walkers*

刘



Liu Xinglong

*Frog*

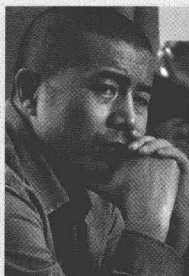
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Mo Yan

*Massage*

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Bi Feiyu

*A Word is Worth  
Ten Thousand Words*

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Liu Zhenyun

01 The Mao Dun Literature Prize  
China's most prestigious  
award for novels

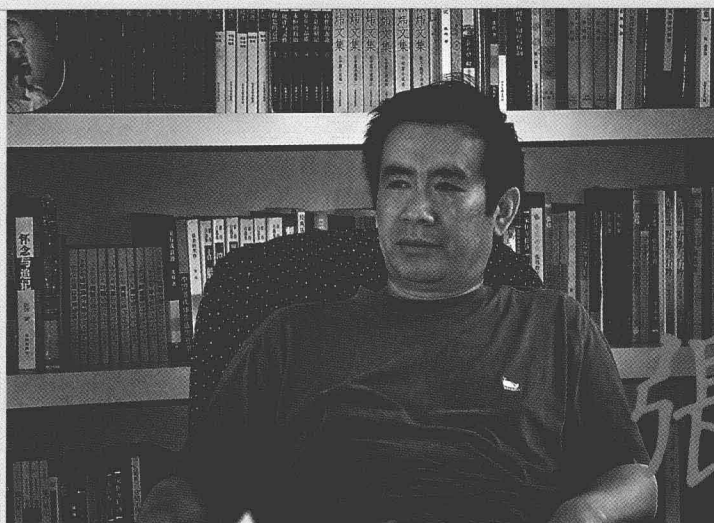
# Foreword to the Mao Dun Literature Prize

by Li Jingze



The award ceremony of the Mao Dun Literature Prize was held in Beijing on September 19th, 2011. The Mao Dun prize was established 30 years ago according to the final wishes of the renowned Chinese writer Mao Dun. The Mao Dun Literature Prize is the most authoritative and influential literary award in China, akin to the Prix Goncourt.

It is awarded once every four years for excellence in novel writing, to at most five writers. The winners of this year's prize are Zhang Wei, Liu Xinglong, Mo Yan, Bi Feiyu and Liu Zhenyun. Each writer will receive 500,000 yuan.



張煒

## Zhang Wei

b. 1956

*Born in November 1956 in Longkoushi, Shandong province, Zhang Wei began publishing poetry in 1975, and published his first novel in 1980. He is the chair of the Shandong Writers' Association, and a professional author. His works have been translated into English, Japanese, French, Korean and German. Over two hundred editions have been published in China and overseas.*

*His major works include the novels The Ancient Ship, September's Fable, Another Province, Bohui, Hollyhock, Misconduct or Romance, Hedgehog Song, and You Are On the Highland; essay collections Into the Wild, Night Thoughts, and Heart of Fire; and works on literary theory including Spiritual Background, The Spiritual Direction of Modern Literature, and Midnight Badger. These publications have won over fifty different prizes at home and abroad.*

*His new work You Are on the Highland has won the Ordos Prize, the Chinese Media Prize and the China Publishing Group Special Prize, and topped Asia Weekly's Ten Worldwide Chinese Novels list.*



# Zhang Wei on Winning

I spent a long time writing *You Are on the Highland* – 22 years from conception to completion, and even longer if gestation time is included. For me personally, it was a literary marathon. After running for 22 years I can relax a little. My breathing can return to normal, and I can start something new.

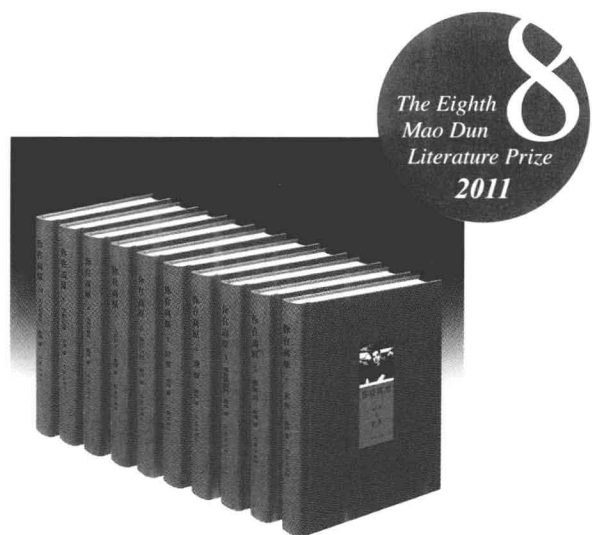
To me, this has been my most complicated work, the one on which I have spent the most mental and physical effort.

This year's Eighth Mao Dun Literature Prize is different from the past. It is transparent and open, and on that basis alone can be considered fair. I hope that the following Prizes continue to get better, not worse. One critic from southern China, whom I will not name, said that the judging this time represents an historic turning point for the Prize. It is a positive turning point, and I hope it will continue along this road, because that is the only way that good works can be nominated and good authors can win.

I don't often go online and haven't read much online fiction. Yet I personally believe that online, as well as in print, artistry in literature is the most important thing. Literary standards formed over thousands of years should not change simply because of changes to the medium. There should be one standard to shoot for, rather than something that changes according to circumstances. Writers of fantasy, science fiction, and the bizarre still use their own personal life experiences as a foundation. It's a basic starting point, and while they can express themselves, their personality, and individual artistic content in different ways, that should not diminish their understanding of life. This is fundamental, and it is the origin and starting point for art.

The Mao Dun Prize gradually introduces works to a larger readership. Sometimes the market aligns with literary quality, but other times these two are not in sync. Larger markets do not necessarily mean better sales. If that were the case, then standards for literary awards would weaken and become simplified.

The enthusiastic feedback I have received from readers has been gratifying. Yet many people have said, "It's so long, how do you read it?" But readers aren't the ones asking this question: the people who ask it don't read. The division of labor in today's society is becoming increasingly marked: some people are professional questioners, while others bury their heads in books. There's no remedy for this. Still, for writers, it's better to have professional questioners than not. There are many voices in society, and it is a fine thing to be continually reminded of that.



*You Are on the Highland*

# Author Statement: My Ambling Book

*by Zhang Wei*

**C**learly, this is a book that ambles along. It's quite long, coming in at 10 volumes, 39 sections, and 4.5 million words. Although each of the volumes could stand alone, this work isn't a series in the ordinary sense. In the body of this story there is one beating heart, one neural net, and one circulatory system.

When I finally completed my work, I felt as though I had traveled a great distance over difficult terrain. Whenever I reflect on this, a sigh rises from deep in my heart. Each and every one of these tales is someone's first-hand experience, and each and every one is also a work of imagination. This book is a grab bag of histories of the heart, spanning time and distance. The bulk of these stories are about people who were born in the 1950s, because the writer felt that this generation had lived through an extremely unique era. Whether before or after, for an extended period of history, and on either side of it, they were key figures in an extraordinary sense. If we aren't able to understand this group of people, if we don't delve deeper into their physical and spiritual existence, then we won't be able to understand the present or future of our nation as a whole. This is decreed by Fate; and that's no exaggeration.

This project originated with something that actually happened to my close friend, Ning Jia, and some other friends. I was so inspired by their passion that, to some extent, I became a participant myself. When I came up with the idea of recounting these tales, I wanted to retrace my friends' footsteps and make a thorough investigation. I had a clear and workable plan: I would leave no stone unturned, visiting each

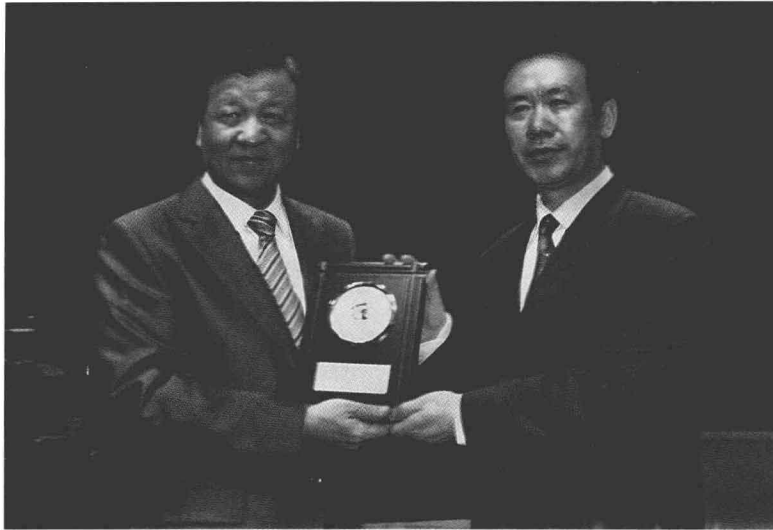
of the towns and villages over a broad geographical area, noting the local environments, both natural and human. I was in the prime of my life, and I had no concept of the magnitude of the undertaking, nor did I foresee the kinds of hardships I would encounter. Later on, due to circumstances beyond my control, I was only able to complete two-thirds my plan, and I had no choice but to stop. There was no way to make up for this, and it is one of my greatest regrets.

This was because a more truthful pursuit required both immersion and imagination, and because weaving such histories of the heart would require one to enter into a particular historical period.

The idea for this book came to me in the mid-1980s, and I first put pen to paper in the later part of that decade. If I'd known then how rough that long and winding road would be, I would have been paralyzed with fear. But, as I said, mine was the impulse of someone in the prime of life. To borrow the words of one of the characters, the book was the product of "lush and abundant thoughts, expansive and varied writing, and a proud and vital heart and mind."

There is no doubt that germinating and nurturing a big idea is never easy, but under no circumstances could I have imagined that I would spend two whole decades on it: twenty years of massaging and cutting, twenty years, day and night...

I belong to the generation born in the 1950s, but when it comes that period, I still can't avoid asking painful questions. I could ramble on and on about what kind of age it was, but I can never begin to describe it. Once again, I'll let one of the characters in



Liu Yunshan presents the Mao Dun Literature Prize to Zhang Wei

the book speak about his experience of that era:

“...Time has passed and the world has changed, it’s all gone today, yes, it’s plain to see – I’m talking about that crazy feeling that commands respect. Whenever that time comes up, I can’t help but draw upon a few disgusting big words. Because without them, I would have no way to articulate my thoughts, so I beg my friends to forgive me... Those times require a prodigious memory! At this point I want to make a special mention of the contingent of people born in the 1950s, that amazing and absolutely essential generation... Take a look and see what kind of cohort they are, what they have accomplished! Their individual heroism, their dreams and ideals, self-respect and feelings of inferiority, their desire to show off and their courageous sacrifices, selfishness and altruism, their elitism and the fifth of them who were shiftless delinquents, their introspection and synthesis, their covering up of their mistakes and the tears caused by sudden pangs of regret, the shameless boasting and the acts of courage and determination that sometimes led to bloodshed – what they endured was all mixed together, and it all became the stuff of these important memories... Today we don’t need to prettify them in any way – they don’t need it! Because they’ve come this far, and those marks cannot be changed, nor can they be wiped away...”

As a member of this group of people, most of the

time I’ve kept these tales to myself. I know that while you can ramble on and on, you can’t begin to describe it.

The last thing I want to say is this: my childhood dream was to be a geologist. Why? Even though no one in the book speaks in such bold terms as – “Capture the mountains and rivers, wouldn’t it be better to take their measure?” – there are innumerable romantic dreams nonetheless. To this day, my friends – my tent and other geological gear – and I are still all here.

When I was young, I spent a lot of time in the geology teams’ tent. I’ll never forget the stories and the surroundings, and whenever I think back on those days, I find myself immersed in beautiful times.

Strictly speaking, this book is the 39-section diary of a geologist.

Is this an age of deep reading? Of course not. But do I want to stop working on something I’ve been at for twenty years? Of course I can’t.

But does a record of the spirit such as this one ultimately need to seek the attention of others? Think for a moment about where that leads – it’s all sacrilege.

I used up twenty years, and, to be sure, there was a reason for it, just as there was a starting point and a destination.

---

*Translated by Andrea Lingenfelter*

# From *The Clans*

by Zhang Wei

I slept in a grass nest that miserable night. The loud song of the autumn insects, that mad rhapsody of carefree creatures, infected me at last. For a time I even forgot the sting, prematurely imagining the strange friendship and consolation yet to come. I firmly believed that, far away, you were waiting for me. And hence there was joy and hope to sweep away the sadness. From that night forth I could even see your eyes. Like purple rose buds, their fuzzy pollen trembling incessantly at the touch of my imaginary finger.

As for me, there should be no fear or regret – who once said that? Can I subscribe to it? I'd like to ask you.

Once again I am on the valley floor; once again I am covered in wounds; once again I am wet with fresh blood. Repeatedly I faint, and repeatedly I come to. I have no more interest in or energy for the struggle. What has pushed me into this valley of torment?

The sound of pleading grows fainter, feebler, feather-like. This is the final strand before life bids farewell – one snap and it breaks off... The sound of pleading is not profane but is the truest, most intimate sound. Longing. You stand upon that distant cliff – the highland – with your skirts fluttering in the wind like the ceaseless pounding of the midnight surf. My highland, my future and my destination. At

this moment I see you ever so clearly. With my last ounce of strength, I seek to break free of that deep valley. Blood flows as sharp stones slice my tendons, and icy snakes whip my body, their lashings like electric shocks. Its cry is the weeping of the netherworld; its cry is the curse of devils. I try to push aside the woven spider web and stand up.

My final thought is of racing to your side. I would lay my head on your legs, even at the risk of a long sleep. Stroking your exquisite knees, I would drift sweetly off into dreamland. Time and again this drill has never failed. I utter sounds as I smile. You speak: You quietly hid away happiness. Those were your mumbled words. Where in the world can one find such a beautiful midnight sound? It is a babbling spring, a brook passing through a patch of hosta, stepping across a moonbeam. Enveloped in it, I remember lovely summer nights – bathing at the riverside, lying beside the mugwort on the white beach, a large fish splashing into the water, its ample glossy body like that of my beloved... Romantic white mugwort smoke drifts and dissipates as the field mosquitoes fly to and fro. Grandpa's stories flow like a gurgling river, never drying up. This is the comfort of life, the noise of human life absorbing water during its jointing stage. "Mama, Mama!" The thought arrives unbidden of that burning connection, of the shouting, the worrying, and the mad

rush. Mama is not far off, a circle of women talk in lazy tones. A child runs headlong into her bosom, and she embraces him, slaps him, and caresses him, her chin resting at times on the top of his round head...

Do you remember moments like that? Can you hear the whoosh of water on a summer night?

And with moments like that – those mornings and summer nights – why then must people still howl? Why? Why?

As I question, tears stream from your eyes. My dearest, do not cry. Your tears are like the blood in my veins. I know from whence they flow. Your lips, your pupils, your lashes – everything of yours is a treasure of mine, and a treasure for the world. You will endure forever. For you and all that you possess, I will change, I will shatter, and I will melt, for I have entered a place any man would fear... Know that I was not at all willing at first. I was compelled by love.

No one has experienced so great a force. It is a weight, a weight as heavy as Mount Tai. No violence can compare with your force. Love's urgency is a terrible thing.

But I love you. I love you truly. I love you tirelessly, moment by moment. Looking at the lengthy, weary breeding of the Rose of Sharon, I am over-

come. The Rose of Sharon is the greatest mother in the world. I love you, you Rose of Sharon. Right now I am tender and pure, back at the starting point. I have passed from the first step to the last. I chew the sweetness of life and fortify myself. I love you. You gaze upon my pain and joy, and you blanch because you have not heard groaning. I love you. Before a heart burning in the throes of love can you hear groaning? I must remain silent, for silence is enough. Silence is strong, and the things it embodies are myriad. Do you comprehend my silence?

Illusory hope in miracles leaves a frustration that vain belief soothes away. The miracle has never materialized, yet people still believe. No, I solemnly and firmly tell myself, miracles do not exist, and if they do, they are not mine. The ultimate anxiety and anger may be present, but I have a far, far stronger love: A love for you and not others. It is that specific.

In gentleness and purity, you are a magnolia; in toil and maternal love, you are a Rose of Sharon.

Excerpt from *The Clans*, Volume I of  
*You Are on the Highland*

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Translated by Joel Martinsen



# A Letter to the God of the Sea

*by Zhang Wei*

**I**n the bustle of the marketplace, amid the clamor of the seafarers, you see and hear nothing. You sit in a corner, a picture of grace, breathing in and out. The violet canopy of the sky is more serene, the stars a sweep of condensation. I look off at the three islands and hear the beating of a heart. In the salty night air, my clothing is spattered with spray. The sweep of the oars recedes, my watching eyes have grown dry, their lashes heavy. But still I stare intently in your direction – those three illusory immortal mountains, your dwelling place.

In the world, it is early morning, yet there has never been total silence. It burns intensely, ceaselessly chasing and agitating, incessantly sighing and crying out. Yet none of this makes its way to your ears. On this night, I do not know if you feel any scrap of compassion toward the world, nor do I know whether you have even seen the other shore. The seafarers skirt the immortal mountain and miss their happy fate; or the heavy mist keeps the mountain sealed off. At all times you tempt the living, but contribute nothing to their lives.

I am that child who watched you, a child absorbed in fantasy who has now become middle-aged and dreary. Middle age, its clothing shot through with the autumn wind, does not believe in charming stories.

One scene from my childhood is unforgettable: sitting with grandmother beneath a large plum tree, and a dog curled up beside her – together we listened to your story. It was a legend, a dream world interpreted over millennia. You dwelt at the center of the immortal mountain, wrapped in dazzling radiance; your slender Buddha hands, virgin skin, eyes of sparkling beauty; plump and compassionate, heart as broad

as the ocean. You lured seafarers into the embrace of the waves; you washed your black hair and the sea boiled with turbulence. Your perfect beauty absorbed all, destroyed and overturned all; you would live there always, until the end of the world. There in the east, the land of the world's first light.

I still have not forgotten my grandmother's white hair and the sound of her breathing, and I cannot forget the drifting spring flowers. Once I tried, through gaps in a dense cluster of plum blossoms, to spy on your terrible face.

But today, I no longer believe that those seafarers have truly seen you. You blend into verdant waves, meander through the luminous dust shed by the moon, your crown set with stars. Time and again you survey the boundless crystal land, your skirts passing through aqua ripples and alighting upon peaks and ridges. Penglai, Yingzhou, and Fangzhang, isles of untold splendor. You exchange whispers with a visitor from the moon, the graceful Chang'e. The jade rabbit attends, pestle tapping; Wu Gang the Taoist brings the wine, which immortals drink unaffected. And on so long a night, a massive fleet pitches on the waves, struggling against mortal danger. In the lead is Xu Fu, calm beneath the sails, but he cannot mask the wailing of the three thousand virgin boys and girls. They have voyaged two thousand years by sea, all for the final arrival. Merciful god of the sea, all-powerful god of the sea, can you see that? Do you have compassion?

Merciful god of the sea, ruthless god of the sea, divinely beautiful god of the sea, what did you do to kill off the compassion in your heart? Have you finally broken free of the tedious cycle of life and death, dissolving everything into the flowing surf? Yet day and