

## Yang Lian

### For a Nine-Year-Old Girl Killed in the Massacre

they say you were tripped by a strip of red elastic  
as you skipped from the square of white chalk  
on a day of frighteningly loud rain

on your body nine bullet holes grew sweet  
they say you played with the moon until you lost it  
grass green on the grave      the new teeth you grew

budding in a place where grief is not needed  
you didn't die      they say  
you still sit behind a little wooden desk

vision clatters against the blackboard  
the recess bell, astonishingly, is loosed off  
a blast of blank space      your death is killed

they say      now    you are a woman, a mother  
each year there is a birthday without you  
the way it was when you were alive

## **Death's Angle**

a blank, the place where you fell forward  
and the body in the dark  
bent into death's angle

gunshots hide inside, weeping  
names hide still further in so timid they  
hope to be forgotten

submerging everyone  
each evening  
at zero hour dripping blood again

## **Bloodstains in Heaven**

in this moment the laughing of angels is gunfire  
laughing tears            a bloody daybreak  
cold rainfall in the cellars

devils warm themselves around a chrysanthemum  
cursing the bad June weather  
gutters are going crazy            spewing put severed limbs  
the stinking ooze of hailstones and the setting moon  
the soup spoons lift out a deaf ear  
death id not transparent, anyhow

angels sit in iron chairs, laughing  
the laughter of angels shoots the flying birds down  
above stairs and below

the dead, naked as tongues  
are chased by black cats into a corner  
massacred once again by the instant of forgetting  
chrysanthemums see  
a garden of bones at every address  
death is not transparent, anyhow

blood flows away            vanishes at daybreak  
the dead roar with laughter  
heaven shinningly licks its lips

chrysanthemums open amid the sound of decomposing laughter  
gunfire behind a door tightly shut  
knocks on bloodless bodies  
this deaf world the sole beach of bloodstains  
angels and devils clink their glasses  
death id not transparent, anyhow

## Missing

they are only two hours in this long and tedious life  
dying and then being forgotten  
in the end I am a vacuum in the multitude of faces

that night was more obscure than death  
the fatal shots were silent fire burned ever colder  
all the bodies were gently tapped to pieces  
and all the blood announced a kind of white  
like a name that never came home  
the great maw of the stone tunnel swallowed the scarlet mud

that night is lost to history now  
shadows waved, but their arms fell off  
the sky was dizzy yet eyes melted  
the spoken word walked secretly about mouths  
buried underground sunlight multiplied into overt taboo

I died for the second time in the morning  
my face pocked with bulletholes, pocked over again with phraseology  
bright day an even blacker entrance wound  
a still more wanton slaughter lies stripped the dead bare  
till I could only live a bogus, inauthentic life

that unacknowledged dying day has to be ever-present, everywhere

at the same time as everyone died an authentic death  
my flesh and blood went missing, became someone else's flesh and  
blood  
revised death revising life  
so the multitude of faces were a vacuum, white bone jagged and thin  
each skull becoming a tomb  
the deepest burials possessing all death  
like forgetting washing the hands with scarlet mud  
filtered through saturated silence  
as the corpses were finally stolen that night was eternal

outside of time  
I come back to carry on dying

## The Sound of Bells

struck so long            the sound of bells ought to have been rotten  
                                 wood long ago  
a brain looking down on everyone tottering to and fro

tightly stopped ears    rotting in the hand  
the circular arena of the sky   lit up by these footlights

to trump up a world with an accusation  
each day the same expression

as crows circle            melt into tightly-knotted water  
the bells sound            each stroke shifting you a little further

you daren't move but are shifted    like the springtime  
children run flying through the mud   never heeding their socks

tombstones    wearing ancestral insignia of long green vines  
bodies            changed time and again by hungry clothes

the sound of bells    is a place    let you and the dead converse  
sitting inside the rock speculating

what just struck there            is a tongue cut out by the sunlight  
what still hasn't rung            is a house ghosts are sick of living in

in this instant            silence comes quick    like the very last breath  
this god is on his deathbed    to which gods is he wordlessly praying?

Translated by Brian Holton