

Zhou Zan

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Mr. Zhang San Rides through Town on a Minibus

1.

5 p.m. Do what you want to your heart's content. The destination's unknown: one often meets his sober introspection; he puts his best foot forward, already knowing the cost of his travels: what guides him is an imagined freedom that promptly stops beckoning, its bargain: mind drills. He gives the hawker

his ferry boat fare. This paragraph requires a path enriched with imagining; first he seeks out a seat for his self. Facts of his being on the road needn't be handed over like those of the official in a picaresque novel, narrated by an ant army and read by saliva, knot woven into culture and history by the printing press.

Setting down his drab briefcase, he shifts his gaze outside the window. His new p.o.v. replaces the double-sized scorched fantasy photos. Like a painter who yearns to be a robot, he'd rather be a speeding camcorder, discarding a smudged post-Expressionist oil painting.

2.

Please imagine a machine's relaxed mood. Death, which alters appearances, wields fragmentary limbs and body, but each part represents the whole, says, "If it only listens attentively to death, my entire life is not life, but suffering." Harboring his cautious

dread, he returns to people: Li Ke Long's second floor resembles a weary dyspeptic stomach, directly across from Shuang An Department Store, where one pair of huge kids cut from paper emit intermittent mutters distorted by car horns.

Cross the street; skywalk the stiff underside of a dog's belly, the road cut up in paperbacks; open the back cover to offer sacrifices to the blue-clothed god who reads, analyzes, drafts

anew a complete oeuvre on human behavior in ten moralizing commandments. He thinks his mood is Dante's entering the forest, as he steps into the exclusive minibus.

3.

"We ourselves become lines of poetry written by books..."
Case in point: at this section of road, we're unable to locate the imagined components of narrative, a plot.
Alone, the minibus's lyrical rhythm can't lull the post-industrial masses. He endures his fleeting nature at the bus-stop, as if it were a self-indulgent fever.

Bus stops: Taiping Zhuang, Nonglin Ju, Madian, Jing'an Zhuang: they're either the city's mosquitoes or fluttering characters in the midst of a crowd's raucousness; yet this silk brush might as well stop him from using women around him to bear the complicated experience of the gaze. He, Mr. Zhang San, an ordinary man, is possessed of some natural rights.

"Among women, who is most fond of shopping where: Qiancun Department Store, Insteq, or the Lufthansa Center?" You can only guess by the clothing... his darling wife stays at home, and she knows her women's hobbies; one among these women was in love with traitor Yu Yongze; his arrest stems from his dear gluttonous wife's hobby.

4.

Parcel of pig liver and confidential Party materials, love or revolutionary enterprise,
these are antitheses in the books he's read;
the question he has no time for allegorized
by passengers getting on and off in turn: "Those who want to get on, get on;
if it's your stop, say something" — history's meaning
found in excessive annotations of ordinary speech.

But why must his identity be made clear?
Why does the author not want to discover something about him he cannot find?
He takes a calculator from his briefcase, checks
how much his business has earned.
His youth is promising; is his seat on the minibus
nothing more than a mark of the nouveau riche?

"Will have bread, will have everything." He admires
the Marlboro pressed between his fingers, distinguished emblem
of two esteemed cultures, characters: Act! Victory lies ahead! Yet he
identifies himself with the cigarette: "I am being burned
to the utmost degree by my own flame
and curl up in my own smoke."

5.

“She left home beneath a cloud.”
Now he can't not remember his old love;
this boring era couldn't propagate
the complex desires of postcoloniality: not missing a beat,
Private Second Class Wang Er brings back the past,
like a cigarette's anger and depression;
now elsewhere, she plays the lover's role.

At that time they were thought happily earnest (which, according
to some definitions means “sincere”); it's all been done
before: romance, jealousy, self-pity, hateful eyes, the begging,
giving up no more than indifference with verbs and adjectives—
the emotions they manipulate, keywords of an adolescent thesis.

But always the body first summons wisdom,
prolegomenon of phenomena's ultimate proposition,
inferior to imagination's pleasures as it arrives at the other shore.
Sublimated to her form, however blurred, he draws
the support of a few images: is one woman not all
women? But is he himself?

6.

He savors abstract rain water in the concrete wind:
“If oceans are doomed to break dams, then let
the bitter waters empty into my heart.”
In an instant, he sees his hand holding a spear;
he charges the enemy position,
this old incompetent swerves with astonishing speed,
his misconceived Terminator screams sweeping past
the small hotel and food stalls beside the road.

He stretches. “Our sleep, our hunger.” The corner turns,
he gallops outside God's reasoned commandments, the field of civil rule
colored lights that wind around branches, like ads on public billboards
lining up to guard the country's great festivals.
“The world related to me, oh!”
But who, based on his immaculate dress, gleans his classical
view of the whole world? Odysseus is finally returning home.

Getting along in years, nearing death in a scenic poem,
Mr. Zhang San gets off at Nongzhan Guan, changes buses,
jumps on another minibus;
after half an hour, the mousy-haired missus opens the many-locked door
and greets him—the color of the sky darkened long ago, maze of asphalt
debauched with red lanterns, green wine;
in the next poem he encounters Méphistophélès, but for now
he shakes off the glare of three lights at the intersection, following

me as I trudge into
night's dim territory.