

Mamang Dai

The Voice of the Mountain

From where I sit on the high platform
I can see the ferry lights crossing
criss-crossing the big river.

I know the towns, the estuary mouth.
There, beyond the last bank
where the colour drains from heaven
I can outline the chapters of the world.

The other day a young man arrived from the village.
Because he could not speak
he brought a gift of fish
from the land of rivers.
It seems such acts are repeated:
We live in territories forever ancient and new,
and as we speak in changing languages.

I, also, leave my spear leaning by the tree
and try to make a sign.

I am an old man sipping the breeze
that is forever young.
In my life I have lived many lives.
My voice is sea waves and mountain peaks,
In the transfer of symbols
I am the chance syllable that orders the world
Instructed with history and miracles.

I am the desert and the rain.
The wild bird that sits in the west.
The past that recreates itself
and particles of life that clutch and cling
For thousands of years –
I know, I know these things
as rocks know, burning in the sun's embrace,
about clouds, and sudden rain;
as I know a cloud is a cloud is a cloud,
A cloud is this uncertain pulse
that sits over my heart.

In the end the universe yields nothing
except a dream of permanence.

Peace is a falsity.
A moment of rest comes after long combat:

From the east the warrior returns
with the blood of peonies.
I am the child who died at the edge of the world,
the distance between end and hope.
The star diagram that fell from the sky,
The summer that makes men weep.
I am the woman lost in translation
who survives, with happiness to carry on.

I am the breath that opens the mouth of the canyon,
the sunlight on the tips of trees;
There, where the narrow gorge hastens the wind
I am the place where memory escapes
the myth of time,
I am the sleep in the mind of the mountain.