

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 bullet holes, 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