“Zhai Yongming is primarily a poet of inner psychological darkness and the best way to read her isn’t utter gloom at the heart of Zhai Yongming’s poetry is a certain idea of feminity. Zhai declared that she wished to be a poet rather than a poetess, but that in her life she was first and foremost a woman. The images of darkness, water and the spectral light of moon are on prominent display in Zhai’s work.”
BIOGRAPHY

Zhai Yongming was born in Chengdu, China, in 1955. Alongside Shu Ting and Wang Xiao Ni, she is one of the greatest contemporary women poets in China. In Chengdu she runs the café "White Nights", the name of which she understands as a gesture of respect to Russian literature and to St. Petersburg. In her café she exhibits fine artists and presents video works and performances. Yongming caused a sensation in China's literary circles with her first volume of poetry "Women" (1986). The difficult cycle of poetry was accompanied by a poetological statement entitled "Nighttime Awareness", which brought her a reputation as a feminist. Repeatedly, the experiences of her periods of time spent abroad – from 1990 to 1992 she lived in New York, in 2000 in Berlin – are the subject of her poems, along with politics, social pressures, the horrors of the Cultural Revolution and the end of Communism. (One poem begins: "Sun, I doubt..."). Some critics note a breach between the early, very condensed, painful, highly dramatic cycles of poems and the later work, some of which was written in the West. This they see as more concrete, relating to "real" situations, some with iconic, comprehensible dialogues and a narrative parlando. Zhai Yongming is among the most productive, top-quality but also quietest of China’s young female poets. The style of her poems is often described as black, but this does not mean it can be equated with defeatism. On the contrary, Zhai Yongming often uses the example of woman to investigate – in a critical and highly aesthetic way – mankind’s (self-) endangerment and the fundamental problems of human existence.
her viewpoint shoots from one end of the bed to the other to look as your body makes its way out of clothes mobile phone shoes

and then there are your fingers slender outspoken as if hearing once more that clash of pelvis and daytime

everyone is neutered everyone has lost their health everyone is exposed outside their bodies

bound for a den of suffering even dressed in armour your acupuncture points could not be wrapped up at this moment every inch of your skin could at last grow lazy offered to the touch and she will be happy for a time because of it

turn off the light evolution’s orgasm says time and again: what you are prepared to offer up tonight is not that important to her

(her children will witness the whole process of birth: amniotic fluid blood infant charging out in uproar no drop of sperm left for choice)
you must do all you can to stay calm
a plot detail like the act of vomiting
suspends its arc light in mid-air
while I ask for nothing

the body rises and falls wave-like
resisting, it seems, the invasion of the whole world
handing it over to you
a life this rich in danger, a life unwilling to let go
turns a blind eye to the daily slaughter
from which planet does it shift so dreadfully?
liquid does what it wants on dry land, refusing to vanish
what kind of air-current inhales the sky?
such swollen gifts, such a small cosmos
in which sombre forces are stationed
everything vanishing, everything transparent
but my most secret blood is made known to the public
who threatens me?
something everlasting hidden inside my body
more powerful than night in its summary of people?
tear-drops soar in a blistering hot night
vessels lacking any humanity chill the air
death covers me
death cannot withstand the pain that runs through everything
but that face devoid of vitality must not be disturbed
both terrified and spellbound, while the room is turning black
daytime was once a part of me, now it has been taken away
an orange-red light overhead fixes me with its stare
it stares at the most horrible aspect of this world
we need our worries  to see ghosts
in order to see repeatedly the white human outlines
vanish like mirages at midnight
otherwise, such a commonplace sound
fills the room  blowing things repeatedly around
for one person alone to hear  vast without limit
in the brain  recollection crawls over the crown of the head
spinning its web over things eye-witnessed

each night I feel frightened
faint footsteps in dream
walk unheard of on the stairs
repeatedly in motion  for one person alone to suffer
medicine swallowed before sleep
will cut me off from daytime
the tender, considerate lover at my side goes off to sleep
happy, at ease  oblivious of the fact that my night spirit
lies outside his cuckoo cloud land

we need our worries  to be afraid
in order to discover our checkmates
on day’s headstone
otherwise, the letters of the dead
would not repeatedly score direct hits on my heart
and repeatedly give warning of  the vigorous arrival
of this fundamental invisible
what it excels in:  making its majesty
felt from inside the feelings

each night I wake  eyes shut tight
human forms with clouded faces appear repeatedly
the enclosing walls and that wall overhead
coming together in error
continually the head drops from the shoulders of my companion
crying and weeping in panic on my behalf
my next life becoming a burden in his dreams
strange spaces float in the dark
adding weight to my familiar taste

we need our worries  to die
in order not to recognize the face of the world even to this day
otherwise our ancestors would repeatedly question us
about that miserable  all-concentrating fate
the death of one encompasses the history of everyone
a dream encompasses every possible method of dying

each night I dream  at two in the morning
the winding moon wraps me tightly
in its huge tongue  so that I cannot get going
I have seen the snake’s face  human faces
the intact body of the goat
the trace of the crawling spider
no happiness in any of them!
and I know  all that from dream
to gentle, considerate hands
will cut me off from night
MONOLOGUE

**English test**

I, a rhapsodist, am full of the charm of the abyss
given fortuitous birth to by you. earth and sky
unite as one, you call me a woman
and strengthen my body

I am as soft as the white-feathered body of the water
carrying me in your hands, I hold this world
dressed in a corporeal mortal-embryo, in sunlight
I am bedazzled, although you find it hard to believe

the gentlest, most understanding of women
I have seen through everything yet wish to shoulder my share
yearning for a winter, an enormous night
heart taken as the world, I want to hold your hand
but before you my pose is one of crushing defeat

when you leave, my pain
vomits my heart from my breast
to murder you with love, whose taboo is this?
the sun rises for the whole of the world! for you alone
I concentrate the most vengeful tenderness on your whole body
from head to toe, I have means of my own

calls for help, can the soul reach out its hands?
as my blood, the ocean is able to lift me up
to the foot of the sunset, does anyone remember me?
but what I remember is much more than this lifetime

**Chinese test**

我，一个狂想，充满深渊的魅力
偶然被你诞生。泥土和天空
二者合一，你把我叫作女人
并强化了我的身体

我是软得像水的白色羽毛体
你把我捧在手上，我就容纳这个世界
穿着肉体凡胎，在阳光下
我是如此眩目，是你难以置信

我是最温柔最懂事的女人
看穿一切却愿分担一切
渴望一个冬天，一个巨大的黑夜
以心为界，我想握住你的手
但在你的面前我的姿态就是一种惨败

当你走时，我的痛苦
要把我的心从口中呕出
用爱杀死你，这是谁的禁忌？
太阳为全世界升起！我只为了你
以最仇恨的柔情蜜意贯注你全身
从脚至顶，我有我的方式

一片呼救声，灵魂也能伸出手？
大海作为我的血液就能把我
高举到落日脚下，有谁记得我？
但我所记得的，绝不仅仅是一生
there are too many places one is powerless to reach, the feet ache, mother, you never
 taught me how to catch that ancient sadness in the greedy pink of dawn. my heart is like you only
 you are my mother, I am even your blood bleeding out at daybreak
 a pool of blood forces you, astonished, to see yourself, you wake me up

to hear the sound of this world, you allow me to be born, you let me form twins
 with misfortune, terrible twins of this world. for many years, I have had no recollection of
 tonight’s weeping

the light that made you pregnant came from so far away, so suspicious, standing between life
 and death, your eyes possess darkness and how heavy the shadows that penetrate our soles

in your arms, I once laughed as if revealing the answer to a riddle, who is it knows
 that you allow me to realize everything virginally, but I remained unmoved

I regard this world as a virgin, but could it be true that my heart-felt laughing at you
 did not ignite sufficient summers? didn’t it?

I was abandoned in this world, all alone, the rays of the sun enveloped me
 did you lose something when, mournfully, you bent down over the world?

time puts me in its mill, and lets me watch myself being pulverized
 ah, mother, will you be happy when I finally fall silent?

no one knows how I love you so wide of the mark, this secret
 comes from part of you, my eyes gaze at you painfully like two wounds

living for the sake of living, I court destruction to oppose an immemorial love
 a stone is forsaken, until it dries like marrow in the wind, this world

has its orphans, exposing all blessings mercilessly, but who understands best?
 all those who have stood on their mother’s hands will finally die from birth

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 all those who have stood on their mother’s hands will finally die from birth
in it:
a man has just finished
his promiscuous game today
he has thrown out half a dozen condoms
he relies on them the way
he relies on his own toys
he relies on them the way
women rely on their high-heeled boots

on the back:
a man in the dark
fondles his old age appreciatively he believes
the tabloid data that ever increasing
sexual potency makes his hair stand erect
and so for the sake of statistics
his only choice is to feel like a young man again

lighting a cigarette
I place the photograph in a drawer
now I continue to manipulate
that naked blue body
his muscles (built recently)
grips tightly that hand which digs into it
his skin (again washed)
casts off the skins east and western within
my spleen and my stomach
sniff at his cheap eau de toilette
my shutter, however, is unwilling
this goes to show: your fade ins and fade outs
have nothing to do with me

at any time he is prepared to pounce
penetrating that piece of glass
to become my thin pancake
THE BLACK ROOM

English test

all crows are black-hearted
I’m feeling timid: they have so many relatives, the numbers are with them, irresistible

however, we four sisters are indispensable
we are the snare in the black room
slim and graceful, back and forth we pace
looking as if victory were within our grasp
yet I play dirty tricks, I am mean inside
while on the surface maintaining a girl’s good temper
walking the same old road to defeat each day

unmarried denizens of the boudoir, we are maidens of a reputable family
smiling resentfully, racking our brains
to give ourselves new airs and graces
young, beautiful, like raging fires
cooking up black and single-minded traps
(those who have crossed borders and schemed meticulously
those with sharpened teeth and bolt upright vision
does that face devoid of undulations belong to the husband of my elder sister?)

at night, I sense
danger lurking in our room
cats and mice wake
we go to sleep, searching in dreams for strange house numbers, at night
we are ripe, ready to be settled
husbands confounded with wives, and so on and so forth
we four sisters change with each passing day
marriage is still centered on choosing a spouse
the light in the bedroom makes the newlyweds downcast
put it all on the line, I say to myself
home is the place to set out from

Chinese test

天下乌鸦一般黑
我感到胆怯，它们有如此多的亲戚，它们人多势众，难以抗拒

我们却必不可少，我们姐妹四人
我们是黑色房间里的圈套
亭亭玉立，来回踱步
胜券在握的模样
我却有使坏，内心刻薄
表面保持当女儿的好脾气
重蹈每天的失败

待字闺中，我们是名门淑女
悻悻地微笑，挖空心思
使自己变得多姿多彩
年轻、美貌，如火如荼
炮制很黑、很专心的圈套
（那些越过边境、精心策划的人
牙齿犀利、眼光笔直的好人
毫无起伏的面容是我的姐夫？）

在夜晚，我感到
我们的房间危机四伏
猫和老鼠都醒着
我们去睡，在梦中寻找陌生的门牌号码，在夜晚
我们是瓜熟蒂落的女人
颠鸾倒凤，如此等等
我们姐妹四人，我们日新月异
婚姻，依然是择偶的中心
卧室的光线使新婚夫妇沮丧
孤注一掷，我对自己说
家是出发的地方
I’ve written several lines not quite to the point
on the princess
time is a second-rate it is only in yesterdays
the princess can die and be crushed
by matter packed into one instant
her death obliterates her obscure enemy
—youth, everything
begins from this moment, just as a butterfly
is more beautiful pinned and mounted

the princess is dead a vulgar dream
tails the blood component of youth
with nowhere to go vulgar lovers will
wonder at her living morbid fear of dirt
and be scared witless by her dying

the princess’ death calls to my mind
those close-set typefaces
the manufacturers and an innate quality of beauty
took direct aim at a life they (the typefaces)
fell with a crash and buried
an entire evening
should I mourn for her? of course
and at the same time I think that it could
get to the point where I cannot make my own ends meet
so I smile and say good-bye to
a case of cancer and
a car crash
THE LIGHTLY INJURED

English test

here come the lightly injured
gauze white as their white faces
their wounds sewn up more neatly than the war
here come they come
carrying the things they cherish
parts that have not died
they strip off their uniforms  they wash themselves
and use cheques and credit cards

the heavily wounded city seethes with energy
its pulse its temperature rises and falls
faster than war
slower than terror
the heavily wounded city
makes do with artificial legs and bandages
now it bleeds a green secretion
it provides an all-powerful power of stone
one of the lightly injured  lifts up his head
to take a look at those aesthetical constructions

six thousand bombs come crashing down
they leave an arms depot in flames
six thousand bombs burn
like six thousand heavily wounded eyes
hastily lighting up the faces
of those thousands of women with husbands
of men with wives  of unmarried men and women
sulphur asphalt cover their bodies
at their feet, tangled rigid frames

a heavily wounded map in hand
the lightly injured  from this moment on
go separately in search of those
new vessel buildings
thin forms, light forms and pointed
the neck of this city
now stretches out sharply:
a cinch to slice through
and scaring off a good many cuts
tonight all the light is shining for you
tonight you are a small colony
that remains for a long time, melancholy seeping
from your body, with exquisite drops of water
the moon is like a clean, fragrant body
sound asleep, it gives off a seductive smell
a night is pressed on either side by two days
between them all, the dark circles around your eyes
stay joyful

what kind of clamour is piled up into your body?
inconsolable, one feels some substance taking shape
the walls in dreams blacken
so that you see traces of triangular overflow
the pores of the whole body open
ungraspable meaning
stars in the night sky shine with inhuman shine
while your eyes are loaded with
the sadness and content of remote antiquity

and with them the agony of satisfaction
as you look on gracefully, the power of a demon
makes of this moment an indelible memory
L’AMORE HA MOLTE FACCE
TRADUZIONE INEDITA

L’amore ha molte facce.
La faccia da sbronzo quella sí che è grande come tutta la vita può contenere un sacco d’alcolizzati può far salire una marea sempre più su fino alle orbite fino a tutti i tratti del viso e liquidare il tempo non sarebbe né la prima né l’ultima volta e ciò fa impallidire perfino il silenzio A ogni modo una simile faccia intimorisce come quella roba che uno chiama amore il cielo si crivella se colpito dalle pallottole scintilla come un tragico teatro di guerra tornano i fuochi nel 12° mese alla frontiera l’allarme dei fuochi sui monti l’amore portato all’estremo uomini e donne che piangono se danzano e battono le mani sul muro e sanno che il mondo non sarà più forte come prima La faccia da spergiuro tradisce l’amore non desiderato tradisce un sistema che stride e stride perché dentro e fuori tutto vorrebbe spezzarsi tutto vorrebbe crollare ma alla fine tutto vorrebbe ancora funzionare così arriva la disperazione una scossa.

La faccia da furbo matricolato chi se ne frega se si tratta d’una bassa perversione o d’una perversione mentale fatto sta che è frontale tenera e consunta tutte le cose più frustre finiscono per consumarti e così inizia a divorare il tempo la disperazione si è fatta tanto perfetta da prendere tutte le cellule impazzite e generare batteri capaci se non di contagiarti almeno di autocontagiarsi L’amore ha molte facce ma mi siedo tutta brilla al bancone d’un bar e guardo gli uomini e le donne sedersi tutti insieme e piangere con tutto il corpo col viso intermittente di luci tutti i giorni Il mio marito e la mia figliola e c’è pure quel mio caro amico e tutti mi si son nascosti dietro mi guardano se con un piccolo coltello pelo una pera e io divento a ogni taglio quel coltello loro tremano una sola volta e io a ogni taglio una sola volta attorno a un suono che stride ai miei occhi sempre più tristi e così pelo una pera fino in fondo e me la sgrano.
She won the international prize “Piero Bigongiari” for that rhapsodic way that her thought "trigger the energy of poetry" to the force that her poetry to bring forth the future into the past, this time suspending disbelief in a restless, alarming amazement. Poetry is a constant state of alert because present is to open patches of future in the past. Zhai’s poetry live from the obsessive thought of an impending war and the relentless interrogation of a myth, the one for which poetry and painting spring from a common source. The submarine is the central image for Zhai’s poetry, and stands in the name of "freedom from thought." Zhai is able to make us feel glimpses of silence within the interstices of the images, to capture sparking and the vibration of truth. Finally the poet records the hot and cold parts of his body into fragments: her poetry has the same liquid consistency of the images of a tomography.
Alberto Bettini
Valentina Spinelli
Chiara Vezzosi
V°E  a.s. 2016/2017