

Jade River

I can walk to it from this rented house.
I have swum across it.
Anyone can borrow a boat and fish there.
Just today, a pudgy old man fell in.
Broke the surface with his backside, trolling for carp.
A bare ass like a bald head
disappeared out of its floating shorts.
His rolling belly below a shrunk shirt,
how cool it must have felt,
after the shock. Nearly naked like Buddha and absent awhile.
He surfaced and did not look around,
except for his skiff. Still there,
lucky for him. He spoke to himself
while he rubbed his face like a little boy.
From this I infer everything about life
because of course
life is a simple matter of failure.
Simply part of a flow,
I know now. Until it happens to me.
Then I forget, thinking it important.
Attracted by a fleeting glance of a fairy
in a chandelier the size of France,
no, of China, one is not really sure
existed. But for a minute.
Then I am bereft again.
As to the river, I understand
jade is a famous Feng Shui mineral.
Confucius wrote that it is like virtue

and its brightness represents heaven.
You see the mass-produced gem shaped
into turtles, dragons and fish too,
when you are in your home country.
Because you are loud and young
in a lithe body with a splashing energy
of a puppy, a stray,
I never thought I could love you.
I sought peace at seventy.
A jade river inside me. Green. Slow.
Long life, I said to friends,
and inside said, Poetry, over.
Money, spent. Parents, buried. Brother,
lost. Childless. And my beloved disappears
inventing day and night in her studio.
As busy as a bee, as the fake poets used to say.
Now they say, busy as a walrus hanging
upside down in the stately tree of death, to be creative
and funny, because of the tragic world.
Must you stand on a bare branch, and why
should I care? None of it matters
a hoot, as is said in imitation
of the great owl, rarely seen
but more important than ever.
More important, rarely seen, great owl,
some things I would never say
before, because they sound
imitative, common. Except now
I get perfectly what is "important."
What is "bare" and "more."
One never knows which words
get one imprisoned
tortured and murdered

so every one is exemplary
and depends on whomever
designates their meaning.
The words skinned alive.
The words sexual freedom.
It's the same in America and China,
the world over. I wake
with a dread of you in a jail
for ten subversions or a hundred
against an emperor or mother.
I blow by every somnambulist
in the dream and fly to you.
Why can't you simply
fear and admire,
rather than wander as smoke,
smoking, rolling bourbon around
your mouth, sucking men's nipples
and more in the ether streets
of your country, only recently a child.
As Rimbaud would say, so much the worse
for the wood that discovers it's a violin.
One of your many instruments,
no doubt, another gift I don't know about.
If your poems survive the age,
if the earth survives us,
may mercy find you
in the mouth of a river
in the lap of an emperor
made of palladium leaf,
steel pins, walnut ink,
and thousands of green glass marbles.
You were born to mutilate the old rules.
The rest is heroic and belongs to you.