

Oh what, I wonder, do the postgrads make
of my soft irony, that “humour of slaves”
deep in the Englit soul, after your hard
brilliance? They respect the old nowadays!

We have seen Great Causes come to
curious effects; the cities of the word
overthrown by videogoths; the rational
light turn thick with avarice.

Twilight.

Our voices echo. Flowers have closed.
The cage-birds huddle and the hornets sleep.
Now the cats stretch in their welcome yoga;
we stand and bow; your wife comes home.

The title of this poem is from the Tao Yuanming 365-427 C.E.

FREEWAY

Mid-afternoon, the sun already amber
in Guangzhou’s distant pall,
glints like a lost coin under the delta bridges
of the Pearl, is smashed underfoot by workers
straddling rusted mesh, hunkered down
in exhaust where the concrete pours
eight lanes out to Gong Bei and Macau.

The old dust road bumps and roars
in a barter of horns and bells,
bicyclists balancing ruts between lorries,
tractors, cars, the odd Mercedes enjoying
better air than ours on an express bus,
rolling to rhumbas over the humid plain,
across flyovers where rattan shacks
lean out of the monsoon rain and the Unit’s
migrant youths lie in the vibrating, toxic night,
dreaming of out-reaching Li Bai
when day’s new-minted in the East again.