

Rather than suffer that terrible affection
That murderous excess of care

The ornithologist Schüz once overheard a young penguin crying out in
despair:

Why wasn't I born a stork?
Mother would eat me by mistake
And I could have some peace

Translated by the author with John Batki

CHENG CH'OU-YÜ (CHENG WEN-T'AO) /
TAIWAN

Clear and Bright: In the Grave

I am still drunk, and the quiet night flows within me
As I stop up the ears, myth echoes around in my body
A smell of blossoms percolates through the skin
At this moment of ultimate beauty, I accept their worship
Receiving the sacrifice of a thousand streamers

Stars droop down in string, stirring up the wine between my lips
Fog is crystallizing, as cold as the prayerful eyes
So many so many eyes stream fast on my hair
I must return, to do something with these plants growing on limbs

I have returned: I have always been a stretch of blue hills

Pagoda for Urns

The Dead sit quietly in a small chamber in the matless pagoda
When spring wind rings the wind-bell

The Dead wordlessly lean on the arched window to watch the scenery of
the country temple

I and my comrade are there, crowding among the Dead
Watching, and thinking about the last campaign

Beneath the window, the familiar monk who sweeps fallen leaves goes by
Also, the three wood-cutters go by
Look, my grown-up son is among today's visitors
He has put on my old army uniform dyed in a different color, he's pointing
Squabbling with his science-major girlfriend about how long a pinch of
phosphorus can burn at night

Translated by the author with William Golightly

MARIN SORESCU / ROMANIA

Frames

The walls of my house are covered
with frames
in which my friends
see nothing.
They think I put them there
just to annoy them.

There was an empty place
there, above the bed
and I used to wake with a strange feeling
that somebody was watching me.

In fact, there is a sphere of light
bobbing about in that place.

There is no light anywhere else
no open eye
no phosphor mine.