



BEI DAO

Bei Dao, born in Beijing in 1949, is a graduate of a senior middle school. During the Cultural Revolution, which began in the mid-1960s and had begun to dissipate by the end of the decade, he was a member of the Red Guards, the young activists who engaged in the sociopolitical upheavals. He worked as a forger of iron tools and began writing poetry in 1970. He helped set up the magazine Jintian (Today) and became a voice for the disillusionment and personal pain that followed the Cultural Revolution's collapse. His poetry, criticized by cultural officials as being obscure and too private, uses strategies of juxtaposition and indeterminacy to open up questions on social issues. "Notes from the City of the Sun" comes from the book of the same name, published in English in 1983.

Notes from the City of the Sun

Life

The sun has risen too

Love

Tranquillity. The wild geese have flown
over the virgin wasteland
the old tree has toppled, with a crash
acid, salty rain drifts through the air

5

Freedom

Torn scraps of paper
fluttering

10

Child

A picture holding the whole ocean
is folded into a white crane

Girl

A shimmering rainbow
gathers brightly colored birds' feathers

15

Youth

Red waves
soak a solitary oar

Art	20
A million scintillating suns appear in a shattered mirror	
People	
The moon is torn into gleaming grains of wheat and sown in the honest sky and earth	25
Labor	
A pair of hands, encircling the earth	
Fate	
A child strikes at random at a railing The railing strikes at random at the night	30
Faith	
A flock of sheep spills into a green ditch the shepherd boy pipes his monotonous tune	
Peace	
In the land where the king is dead the old rifle sprouts branches and new shoots and becomes a cripple's cane	35
Motherland	
Cast on a shield of bronze she leans against a darkening museum wall	40
Living	
A net	

Translated from the Chinese by Bonnie S. McDougall

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. "Notes from the City of the Sun" is composed of a series of images attached to a number of common but large abstractions such as life, love, and freedom. Some of these images appear straightforward and simple: "Life / The sun has risen too" and "Labor / A pair of hands, encircling the earth." Some are more complex and suggest ambivalent or ambiguous attitudes. What are the possible meanings in the images associated with Freedom, Fate, and Motherland?
2. The images for child and girl appeal to the romantic senses. In Chinese mythology, the white crane is a symbol of long life. How is a child like