Selections from *A Maze of Stars*

Translated by John Cayley

In the winter of 1919, I sat near the stove as my younger brother Bingzhong read from Rabindranath Tagore's *Stray Birds*. He said to me: “Don't you sometimes complain that your thoughts are too scattered and fragmentary, too difficult to set out in writing? Couldn't they be collected like these?” From then on I recorded such thoughts in a little notebook.

On a summer's day in 1920 my second younger brother Bingshu turned up my little notebook from a pile of other books. When he'd looked it over again he inscribed the words “A Maze of Stars” on the first page.

One day in the autumn of 1921 my youngest brother Bingji asked, “Couldn't these little stories of yours be printed?” So I finished the last stanza and had them published.

Two years' worth of scattered, fragmentary thoughts have passed under the critical gaze of three small children. This will serve as preface to *A Maze of Stars*.

9 January 1921

3
A shimmering expanse, deep darkness near the island – the old Moon rises. The source of life, is there, where death is.

5
How to describe the darkness? The depths of heart and mind, the depths of time and space, where the light’s glory finds its rest.

19
My heart – A lonely vessel cuts through the ebb and swell of time.
21

Outside, the strings are swept and sing:
My heart,
why dwell so deep within that fading sound,
the endless soughing of trees
and limitless moonlight.

27

Poet—
dearest favourite of the world’s illusions,
action’s deepest disappointment.

28

The waves which beat against the coasts of home—
white caps and flying spray—
used to strike our granite shoreline, wave on wave.
Now, wave on wave, they beat against my heart.
32

The thorn of the rose —
bitterness for the gatherer,
comfort for the flower.

34

That which creates the new shoreline
is not the rolling wave
but the tiny grains of sand beneath it.

35

Numberless angels
will rise to sing the praises of a child.
A child —
This fragile flesh
Enfolds a great spirit.
Artist –
between yourself and others,
must there always be this haze of light?

Bright clouds in the sky,
man on the earth –
Thought tyrannized by facts,
the source of bitterness.

Nature,
allow me just one question,
one serious question:
“Haven’t I mistaken you?”
Fragmented lines,
a little spray on the sea of learning.
Yet the lights in them gleam and sparkle:
a maze of stars set into the heavens of the heart.

Most judges and critics
are like a crowd of blind men
guessing at the brightness of the moon behind the clouds.

My heart –
awakening –
Not to lose it in the whirlpools of emptiness.
六十一

風呵！
不要吹滅我手中的蠟燭，
我的家還在這夜長途的盡處。

Wind –
Don’t blow out the candle in my hand. 
Home is at the end of this long dark road.

六十五

造物者呀！
誰能追隨你的筆意呢？
百千萬幅圖畫，
每晚窗外的落日。

Maker –
Who can trace your meaning, follow your strokes?
Countless images
framed in the window – each evening’s setting sun.

七十三

無聊的文字，
拋在爐裏，
也化作無聊的火光。

Worthless words, 
thrown on the fire, 
transformed into worthless light.
七十四

嬰兒，
是偉大的詩人，
在不完全的言語中，
吐出最完全的詩句。

八十一

深夜！
請你替疲乏的我，
放下筆來，
和你有小時寂靜的接觸。

九十六

影兒落在水裏，
句兒落在心裏，
都一般無痕跡。

74
The child
is a great poet,
with an imperfect tongue,
lisping perfect verses.

81
Deep night –
I am tired, let me
lay down my pen
and share a brief quiet moment with you.

96
Shadows falling on the water,
words cast into the heart:
neither leaving the slightest trace.
九十七

是真的是真是？
人的心只是一個琴匣，
不住的唱著反覆的音調！

一〇五

燈呵！
感謝你忽然滅了：
在不思索的摸索裏，
替我拚出了思索的時間。

一一一

太單調了麼？
琴兒，
我原諒你！
你的弦，
本彈不出笛兒的聲音。

111

Too monotonous?
My lute,
I forgive you –
I cannot make your strings,
sound like woodwinds.

Lamp –
Thank you for suddenly going out
in the midst of this ill-considered writing,
for giving me a little time to think.
116
The waves constantly press the cliff.
The rocks are always silent, never answer,
yet this silence, 
has been pondered down the ages.

135
My friend –
Have you scaled a high cliff?
Have you overlooked the ocean?
Up there,
Isn't it desolate, 
alone with wordless “nature”?
Your heart, 
was it full of joy or was it bowed?

145
Strings of the heart –
strike up –
Ask the goddess of memory 
to dance to your tunes.

164
My friend –
Let's part. 
The last leaf, 
I leave you.

一一六
海波不住的向着岩石，
岩石永遠沉默着不曾回答；
然而它這沉默，
已經過百千萬回的思索。

一一五
我的朋友！
你曾登過高山麼？
你曾臨過大海麼？
在那裏，
是否只有寂寥？
只有“自然”無語？
你的心目中
是歡愉還是憂楚？

一一四
心弦呵！
彈起來罷——
讓記憶的女神，
和着你舞兒跳舞。

一一六
我的朋友！
別了，
我把最後一頁，
留與你們！