

## Zero 零

When I told you that my mouth agape  
could hold all rivers of sorrow—tinted yellow,

I wasn't bluffing. How could I be bluffing  
when my eyes were bleeding corals, red shoals

and dead tomorrows? I began as pictograms.  
I was soaked in radicals of decapitated heads.

I was subtracted from zero. My marrows  
ache in *zero plus zero*—rift in bones inscribed

*what equals zero*—the remnants of rain 雨  
ringing in the echoes of blind orders 令

—I heard them scream *smash the sparrows!*  
*Count!*—how many rodents, how many flies,

how many mosquitoes, how many lives  
and how many more things in this world

can ever be cleared to zero? When I told you  
that I was born out of extermination, I too

wondered, how could I not be joking—cracking  
the funniest jokes in front of pointing gun barrels?

Bursts—of red, red, red—on basins of yellow,  
in the rivers of souls, waves of whips are cracked

—it is where I begin again—flowing again.  
And last night I dreamed, I was crushed again

by tanks: one after one after one, lining  
up in Tiananmen Square, they came cracking

on, and on corpses, into Harcourt Road  
veiled in smoke. Parts of me lay prostrate,

still whispering *be grateful, be grateful*  
that you are not shredded into scraps

of zero.

## The First of Forty-Nine Days

I needed to get groceries, or there'd be no food. But I forgot what do I eat. *Do I eat at all?* The supermarket fridge was cold. I reached for a bunch of withering scallions. Wrinkled lettuces and ginger. Flakes of mud. I heard her saying, *supermarket veggies aren't fresh enough.* What else should I get? Who else could I ask? The pink apples, perhaps. Their wilted leaves clinging to an existence, a brown stem. They do not weep. Nor did they sough like my foot -fall towards the till. But I forgot the eggs. So I hauled myself back to the aisles and shelves. I searched among produce and pieces of flesh, reaped from the living, now dead inside plastic wraps. And the egg cartons—stacked, quiet, grey on an iron rack—were a mural of styrofoam urns—each a cradle of hard-shelled dreams—six, uncracked. I shuffled away with eggs in my basket. Back to the cashier. And I remembered—I was not supposed to eat anything sentient or potentially alive. In these forty-nine days, eating flesh equals eating her flesh. The eggs, her eggs. My feather-like hands were fretting—back to lay the carton down carefully, making sure the eggs wouldn't crack. I returned to the till, once again. To the lights. Beeps. Terminals. Machines in rows... *next please.* The staff gestured for me to proceed. Only then did I realise, I forgot to get her favourite baos. The hoisin baos we ate every Sunday, with lettuce and ramen, topped with ginger, scallion and eggs. I walked myself to the freezers—how many baos should I get? *More, so we won't fight for the last one,* she no longer said.