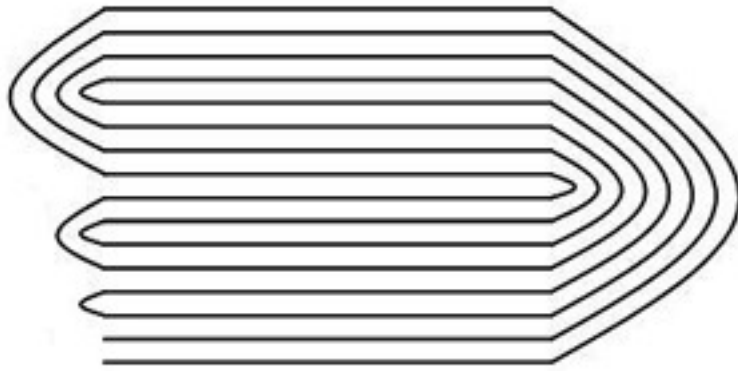


# LONG SONG



Maureen Evans

Creative Commons © 2019

published by *maureenevans.ca*

license information: BY-NC

cover image: “paper folding theorem” by Britney Gallivan.

*2nd edition, December 2019, BC. 1st printing, July 2015, NY.*

## LONG SONG

*(a travelling poem)*

i.

*Jeder ist allein.*

1

This is the beginning  
a moment that wraps itself  
around the neck softly, arousing  
and searching for veins.  
I won't insult the integrity of my dismay;  
it fares me well through this grey world —  
as much so as that yellow dog, bound  
to the side of a house I remember  
from childhood. For years  
    he paced  
        his grey-brown story  
        in a tethered arc  
that remained long after he'd gone —  
scrivener, prophet, artist and friend.

---

<sup>1</sup>“Each is alone.” Hesse, *Im Nebel*, 1905.

ii.

They've found skulls again  
— we've been here longer than we knew. 2  
Three hundred thousand years those tombs  
of thought, wombs of reason  
desiccated remains of passion  
and memory

have slid beneath the dancing  
continents, been taken up  
by the movement of flowers  
clutched in hands —*wir wissen nichts*  
*von diesem hingehn, das nicht mit uns teilt.* 3  
Three hundred thousand years ago  
man was still man, only more so  
and so the weeping of women.

And yet I did not comfort her, young  
Sparrow of کرمانشاه who took me in 4  
a traveller to her tales of *Taq-e-Bostan*  
resting on her red carpet. She poured me  
tea and told me stories of the wars of men  
until I left my heart there in Iran — but then  
as it happened, I said nothing, politely  
drew pictures with the little children:  
mere cartoons of American militarists  
as pigs. I should have known better than  
to discuss politics with nine-year-olds  
who pillowed my head at sunset so I slept. (cont.)

---

<sup>2</sup>The oldest known human remains found in cave Jebel Irhoud, Morocco.

<sup>3</sup>“We know nothing of this going away, that shares nothing with us.” Rilke, *Todes-Erfahrung*, 1907.

<sup>4</sup>Kermanshah, Iran. Cave carvings at *Taq-e-Bostan* from 226 AD depict the Sassanid Empire of Persia ruling western Asia and defeating Alexander the Great.

I gave them bitter cherries, saffron, honey —  
all the best they had to offer me  
— and then I left, never to return.  
But ah, their prayer calligraphy!  
I felt ashamed — and still I ate  
their bread and lemon tea  
which they brought to me  
    from clay ovens of their citadel  
        before they woke me  
        broken before dawn  
and I recall their father said nothing to me.

iii.

We've extended ourselves  
    the rope has already been cut  
    the words reach only so far  
just as a sheet of paper can only  
be folded thirteen times there are  
no words for this place:  
words that cannot  
    be written  
have been lost  
    stories that cannot  
    be uttered  
We are losing too but in poetry  
    (in cognito in defense)  
I can still find floating words for God  
*et demersa prius hac visa luce resurgit.*

5

---

<sup>5</sup>“And from its former submission, by seeing the light, is resurrected.” Abbot Suger, inscription on St. Denis Basilica, Paris, 1136 AD.

iv.

Moon on mirror, sulphuric day;  
essence of the old age gone  
new in the white paper gasps  
bound to the mouths of Shanghai  
trapped in the stale plastic air  
behind masks, teeth strewn  
with five year cabbage, burnt wire  
century egg. 水 in absence falls  
only in consort with acid, hot tears  
mourning purer days white tea.

6

“And what of plain decency is there no drama  
in that anymore?” 地 untrammelled clean-slate  
of city — parody of nostalgia profit as beauty.

7

When I come upon the acid-lit orange dawn  
(so *pamplemousse rouge* on the colonial Bund)  
the tombstones of decency are marvellous really:  
vacant spaces spreading the atmosphere  
with ancestral spirits set free, godly things  
impossible — trying to swallow  
the moon straight from the sky  
still wearing my paper mask.

---

<sup>6</sup>“water” (shui).

<sup>7</sup>“earth” (die).

v.

Man like a cracked drum, yes  
we can still play his song — his elegy

*gassing.gids gyin hll k'ajuus*  
*gyin daanxan hll jiiwul gang*

8

And you can never know when  
the piano lid will close for good  
though the shutting noise  
is jarring and inevitable.

Friend weeping on my sofa  
all through the night alive  
with some song other than his own  
    blue camas  
        tangle of live  
        earth on palest root.

---

<sup>8</sup>“Sometimes when I sing, I really close my eyes.” anon. Haida, undated.



vi.

In the Nam Ou, cool and wide  
I ate fried rice from my lover's hands  
and later in the village *Maman* gave us  
fish soup with peering river eyes  
and orange squash; a smell of hot wax  
candles on old tins, a worn deck of cards  
on a wooden table, that spilling mix  
of rice whisky and cicada  
song on jungle winds

    I ask, and they know:  
        they're happy here —  
They'll leave if they have to  
taking all of this with them.

vii.

There's a bitter skin around  
the sweet truth I crave, a noble  
way of burning we can delight  
to hold and not let go. Good,  
wanting to embrace that glow.

There is still, though  
an impenetrable skin  
that makes mine crawl, recede  
towards death already  
though my hair and face  
are soft, dreamlike and craving —  
and so the weeping of women:  
so often brutal when noble —  
*vidé d'espoir, devant cette nuit*  
*chargée des signes et des étoiles*

9

go inside now: that rind surrounds the real of each of us.

*je m'ouvrais pour la première fois*  
*a la tendre indifférence du monde*  
and the sunflower, withered and dead  
on the front porch, is revolting:  
the paradox of reasoning  
through absurdity.

10

---

<sup>9</sup>“Without hope, in that night charged with signs and stars...”

<sup>10</sup>“...I opened myself up for the first time to the tender indifference of the world.” Camus, *L'Étranger*, 1942.

viii.

I dreamt that no one  
really loves another,  
that we keep ourselves  
close to the body  
in failed gestures, torn plastic sacks

the dark is violent after the death of a star.

*Seltsam, im nebel zu wandern!  
Leben ist einsam sein.  
Kein mensch kennt den anderen,  
jeder ist allein.*

11

---

<sup>11</sup>“Strange, wandering in the fog! Life is loneliness. No man knows another, each is alone.”  
Hesse, *Im Nebel*, 1905.

ix.

Wartime oracle  
dancer for the uprisen  
and the dispossessed

you prophesize an  
age you could live in now if  
you didn't have to

beckon it for us  
naked, unmasked man wearing  
my unknowing face

like a mirror of  
grief, will you enjoy in life  
the substance of songs

you urge upon me  
that joy, pressing scented bell  
blossoms to deaf ears

*dii ga xidsgii da*  
*dang.ga xiidsgid gaayaa'ad gas ga —*  
*k'waay hla dii gii ga ts'insdll.*

12

---

<sup>12</sup>“I am storm bound today, you might get storm bound — wait and tell me something.” anon.  
Haida, undated.

x.

Rain falls on the basalt  
shore, palatial columns

crumble clutch seaweed and waves  
rise up more and engulf here

there's a taste of bannock on my tongue  
a gift but songs hold in the air unsung

*son limana demirledi gemi çýkmamak üzere çünkü  
ne rüzgardan ne de gün ýþýðýndan medet var artýk*

13

now the Haida have grown  
out into diaspora, how desire

still pulls at ancient spaces, the ocean

swelling in violent as comets

and throwing itself at their sky.

---

<sup>13</sup>“The ship sailed into the last harbour and anchored there to leave more, as there was no longer any hope from wind or daylight”. Inscription on pirate captain Eudemos’ tomb, Turkey, 150 AD, also portraying his ship, Aphrodite at the prow, without mast or oars.

xi.

*İbýk taþýyan þafaðý terkettikten sonra  
Kaptan Eudemos oraya gömüldü  
gün misali kýsa ömürlü gemisi,  
kýrýlmýþ bir dalga gibi.*

14

Sea grass brushes grass with closer embrace  
than the people who live here and have left  
here side by side  
lost, broken pillar  
thighed and gone eyes few left and fire cold  
The bannock old and *ts'iixal* salmonberry shoots  
grown in too thick to eat. Quick and violent  
as comets the sea gave up  
knowing the world will be safe again  
only when men dance as it does hungry  
for rain sex life desire their own  
rebirth again but not of this place.

---

<sup>14</sup>“After the light carried by the dawn had left, Captain Eudemos there buried the ship with a life as short as a day, like a broken wave.” Eudemos’ tomb, 150 AD, cont.

xii.

Whereas I'm early off the *Indore-Nizamuddin*  
onto some other train; smelling sunlight already ripe  
with ropes of thick black oiled hair, braided and studded  
with marigold and jasmine, fragrant in the depth  
of summer heat: their hair, the cows, the spice  
and piss, Vespa exhaust and market calls

*C-Coffeecoffee, ch-ch-chaichaichai!*

all this occurs in one transfer: my overwhelming  
stinking obtuseness after the morning-silence of a train  
slow to awake just a gentle sway  
brown sooted feet at the ends of bunks

and the sound of clay chai cups shattering on clay  
ground some distance back from the moving train  
but soon, I transfer to another.

xiii.

And it's quiet again, just breathing, the warm  
light from the windows dabbing our half-shut eyes,  
that light wind of journey, when in this reverie I hear  
her soft voice like the cut of a knife, the singing woman

on some random train, after *Indore-Nizamuddin*

Her song is pregnant and hopeless  
and wakes me abruptly  
and holds me soft as a mother's  
hand on a fresh wet wound.



xiv.

Whereas in Laos' jungle wet, it's gentler:  
for wilderness and lack of human center: bugs' wings  
on barbecues, dropped limes and green  
papaya, chillies in hot heaps, warm river  
silt on the skin, raw fish and staling baguette,  
thick coffee, salted rice, stray dogs and wild bananas  
orchids and one's own humbling sweat

In elephantine shadows

blue and grey  
I can only take in  
the dark  
afternoon heat  
going on

another rattler tin can bus I'm utterly  
relieved whenever *en route* I'm gone.

xv.

Uprooted and placeless

I've forgotten: tell the thing  
the way we know it  
and not the way we speak —  
*mens hebes ad verum*  
*per materialia surgit*

15

Thus it has been, and could be again:

a mark on stone  
a bird as a grass blade beneath

porch shade  
pushes concrete aside.

---

<sup>15</sup>“The dull mind, through material things, rises to truth.” Suger inscription, 1136 AD, cont.

xvi.

And I've left my heart in Iran  
buried under the red edge  
of a carpet that wasn't mine  
where wondrous children  
gave me bread and lemon tea  
and pillowed my head, and their love  
humbled me — to be part of their God.

A little girl in Laos gave me papaya,  
a moony long perfumed slice.

It was the first gift in my life  
that anticipated no return.  
It bought nothing, sadly  
not even my trust.

xvii.

It was a gift.

ໃຜຍິ້ມງາມ ຂໍຖາມເບິ່ງແດ່  
ຂົນ ແລະ ຍິ້ມ ດີແທ້ສິ່ງໃດ

16

Who will teach me the words to this song?  
I will — but who will teach the language  
in which they belong? I don't know  
for who could love a song as strange  
as mine, or embrace me and say what  
I do not know? And what will be the cost  
of hermitage? I do not know, Euripides

and I will not until I've tasted it  
sweet solace lie to me a while

about things I'll never know until too late.  
It's great ego not to love, and suicide not to hate.

---

<sup>16</sup>“Whoever has a beautiful smile, I would ask to speak with them. What is the difference between sternness and a smile?” anon. Lao, undated.

xviii.

I dream of consumption  
deep-rooted love spat up  
raw green and reconsumed  
    all  
        the fallen leaves  
        of our barren fig tree  
taken up in handfuls eaten  
alive I wake to this truth:

We've only room left  
for foreign songs of Love  
pathos without comprehension  
vehemence without reason  
from that wordless story  
of ourselves gone.

xix.

I weep not for myself, but for the lost  
potential — for I had nothing more  
than please and thanks, no words more  
politely deciding of power and domain.  
I weep not for myself, but for the tame  
thing my heart's become, and yours —

a vacant space of checks and balances  
to cut down such a girl immediately  
without a moment of tenderness:

Not a mustard seed for her, the giver of such  
perfumed fruit. And all the while I'm in Iran  
just across اَرَوَندَرُود the swift river  
the sad warmth of women's lips gives  
way like figs brushing together in the sun  
and those drawn back rivers of hair and eyes —  
such beauty weeps, and gives. Mother destruction,  
mother of man, too often brutal when noble.

17

And still, that's all we've got.

میدارم دوست هستی همانطورِ یَآه . ترا

That's all we've got.

18

---

<sup>17</sup>Arvand Rud, "The Swift River", between Iran and Iraq; strategic in their war of 1980-1988, and in the US invasion of Iraq.

<sup>18</sup>"I love you as you." anon. Farsi, 2001.

xx.

As the blind  
    describing  
to the deaf  
    the sound of  
    the stars.