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Penguins

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They stop next to me when the referee raises his hands to the sky
And when the angels of agony put their black trumpets to their lips
In order to proclaim my fifty-fourth win
Before my seconds notice I am dying

Penguins

The protective instinct among the emperor penguins
(Adolf Remane, *Das sozial Leben der Tiere*)

Attains monstrous dimensions:
It reaches a point where one nestling
Is looked after by dozens of parents

The drive to hatch the eggs
And to warm and feed the nestlings
(Observed and described by Adolf Portmann and Sapin-Jaloustre)
Is all-powerful for the emperor penguins
The impulse for possession and care of the nestling
Is so strong among these birds
That the natural historian Wilson calls it most pathetic:

. . . As soon as the nestling leaves the brood-fold on the abdomen of the adult bird or is abandoned by it, a compact throng of excited penguins appears . . . These are birds without progeny who want to appropriate the nestling . . . Converging on the nestling, and furiously pecking away at each other, each adult bird attempts to set it on its feet, to keep it from being exposed on the ice . . .

Their love is touching
And relentless
During this violent adoption
The young are wounded
Some of them fall
Others try to escape
They squeeze into cracks in the ice
And prefer to freeze or starve to death

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) /
T A I W A N

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