梁秉鈞:蓮葉七題

Lotus Leaves: Seven Poems

By P. K. Leung

Translated by Kwok Kwan Mun and Lo Kwai Cheung with John Minford

Leaf Contact

By chance we come to this lotus-field Walking an old plank into the thick of leaves Silence, rubbing silence, utters sound This is a wonder, green Answering green, an encounter in this morning of a world There the wind blows open the closed faces Here it sets in motion my cusped leaf-edge We shall make contact And begin clumsy explanations The leaf-veins which language can illuminate Are the only world we have The fresh dews of morning which gradually grow round Make me still, my silence Touches another leaf, each bearing alike The weight of an insect at rest A chance encounter in this world, side by side With no intentional prosody We utter the same sound, then drift apart Rather than explore each other in the wind, Raise our heads naturally, meaning surfaces gradually The frosted snow on the leaves still weighs upon me Growing from the same shallow, narrow water We strive to stand erect on a hollow green stem Extending toward a more genuine space I know we cannot depart from this world and its Language, but neither would we follow it

P. K. Leung studied comparative literature at the University of California, San Diego and is currently teaching comparative literature and translation at the University of Hong Kong. He has published two books of poetry, one novella, two volumes of short stories and six volumes of essays, and has collaborated with artists from various media and held joint exhibitions of poetry and painting with Hong Kong painters Donna Lok and Choi Yan Chi.

Lotus Leaves

When we are silent, there will still be noise Each abiding the seasons' dust Listening attentively, and as we unfurl Sensing the colours of distant waters

Summer 1983



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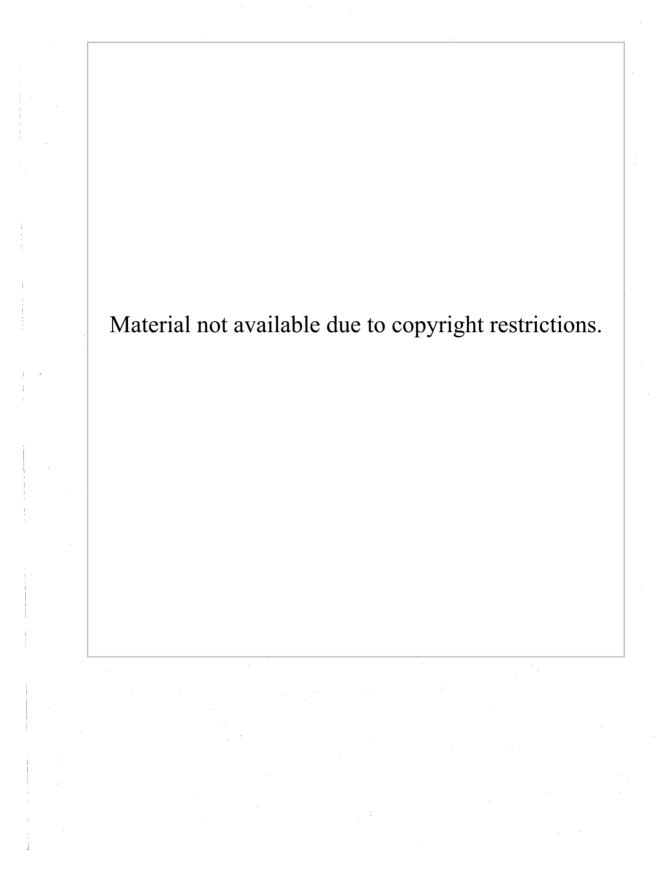
Leaf Crown

The word *lotus* is itself archaic, if We cannot find our own Seeds, bud new flowers. Pointing to this trembling pale red apex, you name It *fuqu*, *handan* Many fine names Beautiful, splendid names. Having no relation with me, what significance Do its beauty and splendour have?

In faith that after a long interval The sepal breath will be heard, I am heavy and clumsy, Thwarted by mud. You drift lightly across the water Shedding the petals of yesterday, a fresh clean face again In a public world, amidst the disseminations of men. The leaves on my stem are loaded too with human clamour, but muddy, Sluggish, caught in private nightmares and Perilous deluges of dawn, and my roots tangled In silt, cannot make themselves clear . . .

Before I can finish, you turn impatiently to The attentive gaze of others, the rhetoric habitual, recognized I think eventually my words will be futile, will fail to make you Abandon the demarcations, or feel true cold and warmth. If you are for grandeur You will naturally find my lack of embellishment shabby. Finally I fall silent, looking up to the distant hills Watching the pale blues and greyish greens Rush onwards, breaking the symmetry

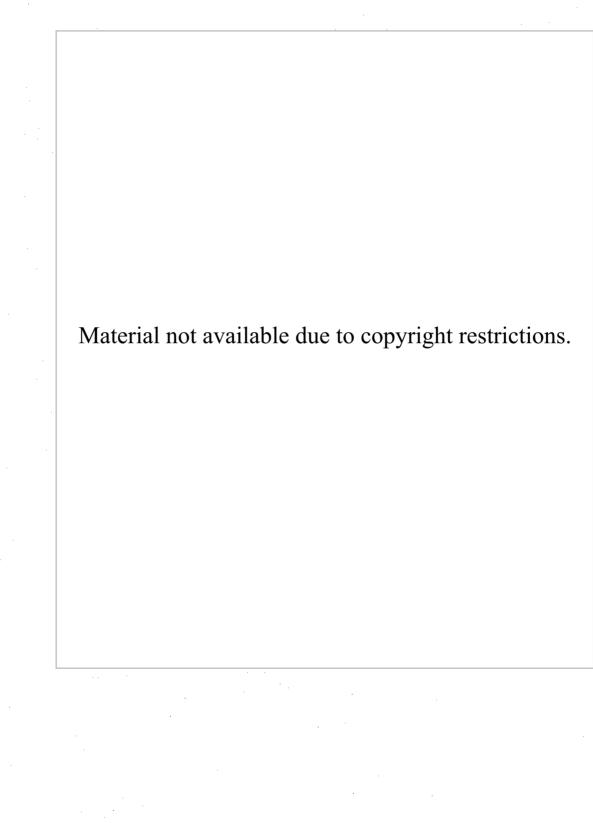
Summers of 1983-4



Leaf Letter

Beside Winding Bridge I glimpse in the distance a cluster Of broad palms, waving gently in the wind. I want to write you a letter, tell you about West Lake, and how we made our way through the jostling sightseers to a pond Of free-furling flowers and leaves. I shall not employ Archaic language to narrate an antique drama Performed on the water, on Duke Ruan's Knoll. In a tourist spot so replete with allusion, I would Rather tell you my story, in serpentine fashion, In faith that beyond the miniature shrubbery We can approach the tranquil pond Within the mind, can bend and stretch at will, beholding The fresh crimson bloom by the withered leaves. When I write, I study the faint patterns of flowers on the paper That seem to contain some hidden conception of their own. I do not wish to stain them with words, how Can I portray the mirages of man in the intertextures Of flowers? Again and again we copy elegance Yet the rubbings fade, stone sculptures Record history and are destroyed in a cultural holocaust Or eroded with graffiti. We follow the dots and strokes And find the hidden scars, lament the fragmentation of language. Beautiful legends still spread far and wide, and ever more Mundane, tall buildings arise to rebuke the leisurely Landscape of the lake; we cross the bridge but cannot Draw near, flower-lovers must tolerate Mockery, when the fish-watchers discover Manipulating hands above the preying mouths, and that moons in the water Are only multiple reflections of artificial light. Myths turn out so differently in the end, I can imagine You sneering at the refined, effete lines on the paper By this lake with its old scars and new bewilderment. Pain and grief lurking in the shadows of Trees, bitter moans swallowed perhaps in the dark swell, But the wind freely articulates her hands, the ripples Unroll scrolls, Heaven and Earth write a graceful though desolate hand Against a boundless misty watermark, we are scattered ink spots. From the broken strokes we vaguely surmise the wash and flow





Leaf Margin

You regret that the nutrient cannot reach the furthest leaf-edge. The admiring gaze should of course focus on the main flower, You are the centre, battlemented crown-petal radiating power, Official history many times revised. I am an ambiguous point On the circumference, smoke of warfare scattered by dust and wind, Rumour of the borderland, vague synopsis of an unofficial history.

Please do not bend down towards us with a condescending look, Singing inspirational songs of rain, or echoing popular ballads in the wind. Leaves and flowers at the margin have their own charm, have you noticed? Will you read them closely? The veins are unique, they intersect like a grid of streets

Countering the preconceived blueprint in your mind: have you ever realized? —Fleeing the attentive gaze of the crowd, beyond the solemn countenance Of the main leaf: connected roots beneath the water, new leaf-buds. In the wind chorus, an obscured lyric demands a new understanding.

May 1986

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Lotus Leaves

Leaf Distinctions

Among the serried lotus leaves there are varieties. We stand by the pond, chatting, you stretch your hand Across layers of prostrate green leaves, pointing to The precious velvet support which props up the perfect pearl Like a king looking disdainfully at the shades of dark and light green below. You say you never expected there to be scenes worth watching on the way

Fondly remembering grey London evenings, you recall Drinking strong tea, by a desolate fireplace You reminisce about the old bookstore and its lingering gloomy charm, a Precious, musty aroma of books I nod and listen

Things past and present cannot be clearly delineated. At this moment the wind is blowing in the leaves, rustling Like students struggling to recite a foreign vocabulary, a Hybrid, inarticulate language, the high branches sway While common folk below strive to arch them

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Leaf Pity

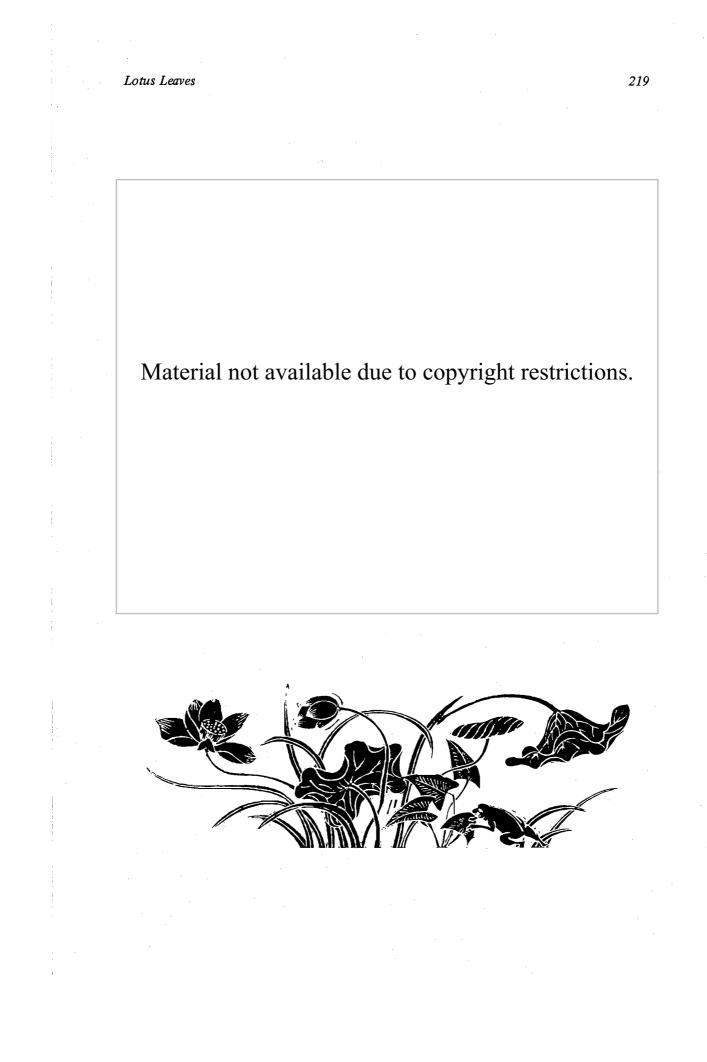
It has not withered But is made acrid and flighty By the sounds of a torrid summer

Spread upon the broad leaf, Are the spots that slowly multiply Light red or faded brown? Specks of dust and bruises Gentle arcs dried to a craggy skeleton Criss-crossing, shielding a spot of green in the centre

Well-meaning raindrops are excluded Petty spider-webs and the ankles of craneflies Are closer Still it does not spread itself out easily. For the dragonflies and flies Even the beckoning of the wind seems an offence

Curling its muddy veins Standing quietly upon the water It reposes in a vague fragrance of its own

Summer 1983



Leaf Enchantment

At this limpid pond in early morning When she bows her head to quench the cravings of thirst Another desire is born in her heart Like the swaying of seaweed, the flapping of gills. Not a shoulder glimpsed amid trees, nor A shattered countenance, but a complete human form Is what she craves sight of, to see the image seen Seeing her. Between us, She says, lies only a film of water Her eyes glisten with strange lustre, her face Flushes, her voice becomes more tender As though she were drunk, she makes strange movements For reasons unknown, she turns her body, raises her hand Caresses her willowy hair, sways her head After a falling leaf; or weaving gracefully, stretches Herself, looking at the mirror of water, looking at her Stretching herself, she reads the oncoming hand, as if beholding A likeable sign. Extending her hand, she tries to unfold it, the sudden contact Shatters the vision to pieces, surprises after surprises, seen Then not seen; thunderbolts and lightning, the tearing agony Of ferocious gales, reunion, then separation, there is always the link in a lotus-Root snapped in two. During the patient waiting, ripples mature Into circles, something always added to the mirror Or omitted? She becomes calm And steady, a secret heaviness transformed into An opulence of seeds, not seen Heavy and opulent, she hangs her head Between the desire of gazing and the depth of water The wind sweeps by **Rippling** language

Lotus Leaves

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