

# Two Poems from *Choreography of Forgetting*

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拼图<sup>1</sup>

[1] jigsaw puzzle                      [拼] *to command*                      *piece together with the hand*  
*an image / charter of the walled city and its territories*<sup>2</sup>  
memory of parts<sup>3</sup>

[图]                      inside 口 the walled city there is winter 冬  
simplified from    the traditional  
圖 a walled city and                      畺 territory

variations of 畺 exists between  
the Chinese Korean Japanese and Vietnamese uses of the word  
due to national differences

histories of perceiving<sup>4</sup>

*the art of carving a border around the body*                      *cartography of its sums*<sup>5</sup>  
*the earliest puzzles originated from maps*

[2] Winter thaws around the fringes of a country      forgetting its maps  
body and political thought      re-puzzled to become bordered  
on someone else's land

Does a country retain its form  
remember a thing like that

Does it wander familiar streets  
under new names asking *who am i*      *who am i*

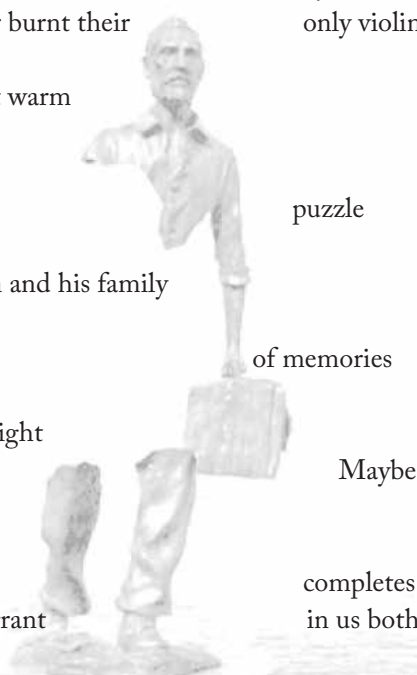
Winter appears the harshest season on paper  
for within 冬  
    ᄃ ice signals      父 the end

Children went ice skating on rivers      their souls left with the fish

But an oral legend foretells of an incoming war  
with the shifting of January to rain

The Tumen River conceals a memory      on public markings  
Korean signs in Chinese nightclubs  
visible to the spaces inside □  
puzzling over the belongings of a former self

- [3] On the news Bruno Catalano's *The Invisible Man*  
bronze immigrant statue with pieces of his body  
missing felt like a confrontation
- Is the man stationed before the sea briefcase in hand  
a puzzle of what's left or what's been left behind?
- [4] Ocean Vuong's parents crossed by boat  
in a poem his father burnt their only violin  
to keep his mother's feet warm
- That violin was a piece  
of his father's puzzle  
that violin and his family
- [5] I had only eight years of memories  
in China  
My mother had thirty-eight Maybe  
the blue sky completes  
our surroundings completes  
the bronze statue immigrant in us both  
The blue sky  
our shared experience also our silences
- She speaks to me in Mandarin I answer in English  
Our words like gentle earthquakes rocking us  
a souvenir puzzle of our old selves in a dream



# 梦想<sup>1</sup>

students	forest	my	my	[梦]
learned	by	father	people	
to	the	a	knew	
write	entrance	木	how	
using	of		to	
ink	his	his	dream	
from	elementary	mother		
rays	school	a	the	
of	yard	木	kind	
moonlight			of	
	sound	also	dream	
over	of	a	where	
the	a	teacher	a	
clear	river		village	
water's	cruising	the	of	
reflection		木木	people	
	under	they	formed	
night	夕	planted	little	
brought	the	formed	trees	
good	moon	a	with	
dreams		little	their	
		jujube	bodies	

<sup>1</sup>Parts of this poem, written in the form of a traditional Chinese scroll, is intended to be read vertically, from right to left.

longingly	[木]	[想]
at		
a	<i>tree</i>	
tree		
and	[目]	
witness		
the	<i>eye</i>	
desires		
of	[心]	
the		
heart	heart	
though		
she	to	
is	want	
no		
longer	to	
here	look	

In a dream the heart's desires manifest  
enough eyes to see past the forest

their tired lids archiving dust precipitating  
from the cargo of an incoming train

the red guards, the arrest, date of interrogation  
nailed over the family's clay hut walls

long scrolls of calligraphy in her handwriting  
formed a little river and were burnt

suddenly there was only one 木  
the tree of a boy age four missing

his mother's complexion  
on the jujube trees planted by his mother

my father wanted to be hugged and carried by her  
to hear her name called one last time

the road to the city bypasses the forests  
of many villages and many dreams

but always the same road to see his father  
take a college entrance exam

my father walked following the trains  
all so his daughter

would not have to make  
the same trek by foot someday