

Returning to Kashgar

I see Kashgar's mysterious unknown figure
and shudder in terror of grand nights.
Girls that have married, friends that have died, a dry spring.
Eyes are a pinch of earth that has vanished from the land:
a television, moxorka, a dirty sock, the original of a translation.
The green bridge and the greengrocer market are dim in my memory,
I lie stretched out like a boneless animal,
my stomach is hungry, my face is black, my heart is empty!
But in far Ürümqi someone chews an icy stone,
her eyes, her face are damp; sin before her, and God behind.
Clear steam rises from sugared cornmeal gruel,
sparrows step slowly along the power lines,
in the low sky a frightening heaviness,
dejected elders, wayward youths, eager children,
in just three years all have grown old and ugly.
Kashgar is the moment between eyebrow and eyelash,
paper stuck to the face of the sun, eternal black ink,
a festering old wound, pathetic love.

But you
balled up wind and threw it at the sky,
then you looked at me,
rain drips from a coin-sized hole in our thoughts.

—March 1998, Kashgar

Note: Moxorka, from Russian махорка (makhorka), is a strong smokable substance made from the dried, mashed leaves and stems of the tobacco plant. Substantially cheaper and stronger than commercially-produced cigarettes, it is widely smoked in Xinjiang's Uyghur communities, often rolled in old newspaper.