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## Fishbowl

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## Mother China

A thousand million children she has borne.  
Sometimes she sings, sometime moans  
as her offspring cling to her,  
leaving their fingerprints on her body,  
caressing her sunburned face and hands.  
Gently they pat her knees  
as she squats on flat peasant feet  
her straw sandals pointing obliquely  
like hands on a clock.

Her children  
whisper and sigh in her greenhill skirts.  
They lean on her soft sloping belly.  
they cling to her hips,  
breathing her scent,  
moved by her pulse.  
Held by the moonpale curve of her arms,  
they press for more, hope for more  
with their fingers and hands at her breasts.

In the dusk on a hilltop a woman rests  
by an ancient black cypress and a grove of bamboos.  
Cool mists soothe her forehead,  
touch her temples with gray.

In a quiet pavilion she burns two joss sticks;  
the silvery smoke circles up.  
Drinking strong leaf tea and puffing her pipe,  
she peers in the distance  
with eyes like old planets.

She has seen dynasties fall,  
warlords to battle,  
watched the house of Qin build the Great Wall,  
heard the cries of slaves  
hauling boats on the Yangtse,  
felt cut by north winds sharp as a sword.

Her shoulders are calloused,  
and the weight of five thousand years  
bends her back.

In the sunset a lone crane,  
its wings like great cartwheels, swoops slowly.  
Rainy vapour will soon veil the peaks.

*Helen Westra*

## Iowa Bounty

In periodic courtship,  
the prairie turns again  
to her lovers,  
shaking her springy  
hair in the wind,  
her hips curved against the sky,  
her tawny shoulders to the sun,  
roads like slim belts circling her waist,  
towns nestled between her breasts,  
the fingers of waiting siloes beckoning.

Seductive, fragrant, mysterious,  
the land is ready,  
her flesh pliant over strong limbs,  
her body outstretched, satin  
in moonlight, self-possessed, certain  
to yield.

*Helen Westra*

## Fishbowl

All day I see only ebony hair  
amber skin brown eyes  
tiny waists fine hands  
slight ankles small feet

In a window I meet myself  
pink blouse among grey shirts  
pale eye among black coals  
hello in a collective *ni hao*  
plump goldfish in a school  
of darting tetras.

*Helen Westra*