

# verses versus verses

## versus verses

*by* strannikov

### **poetry less than poverty**

poetry less than poverty:  
fair warning to poets, but a good sign.

poetry—human poverty's speaking voice  
poverty—the substance of each human void  
or the void all share: poetry speaks us poor  
stubborn with stubborn lack—“there has to be more”  
than mouths can find words to fit around  
than senses can learn or throats can speak  
than is culled from somnambulist skulls  
than crazed wailings vivify or paint—  
and always well-pared and properly pruned.

poetry is less than poverty:  
knows no victory, that is,  
does not vanquish with heroes  
(poets don't do well with votes).  
mercifully, poetry's spared from much that's vain,  
but of truth, beauty, good—pale vestige alone.  
poems hide vulnerable remarks in dirt  
that poor stirrings of poor dirt unveil and veil.

what else might explain how thin we can sing?  
—but still must true poets truthful remain,  
and what more true of us than poor we remain?

### **an unnumbered Han-shan**

reading books does not save you from death  
nor does it keep poverty away:  
what explains literacy's appeal?  
reading books equips us to engage.  
you cannot engage if you can't read,  
you'll go not far in this world today.  
dose bitter medicine with garlic,  
the bitterness will soon be forgot.

### **where our howls remain**

galaxies stars beyond all count  
quiet as a crucified god  
quiet as any worshipt god  
quiet as a universe beyond count.

no planet's brakes through ether squeal  
no planets whoosh through space or sky  
—only in bubbled air is sound  
that animals in place of quiet hear.

within this planet's bubbled air  
(our only home to hear home's sounds)  
the tumults of our fellow beasts  
preferred to patient silence that awaits.

what shrieks our souls might howl (had we souls)  
croak quiet in ambiguous throats.  
from the substance of our bodies' deeds,  
we sense how we perish with this flesh:  
our goodbyes began bruit years ago.

