

As a child, Duanwu loved fog [雾 *wu*]... In late spring or early summer, every time Duanwu woke up in the morning, he'd see clouds and mist resembling flying willow catkins, enshrouding the reeds just about to turn green, blurring the bold profiles of the temple walls and lush trees. After the rain, floating clouds [云霭 *yun'ai*] would rise between the mountains and the shadows of sails on the river. White and light, they'd linger for a while, fluffy and soft like cotton candy, pure and white like rabbit hair.

His brother Wang Yuanqing, who was then in middle school, told him that it was neither fog [雾 *wu*] nor clouds [云 *yun*], but that it had a special name, mountain mist [岚 *lan*]. When he was going to college in Shanghai, it was exactly the time when "misty poetry" was the rage. In Duanwu's writings, *wu* was always combined with *lan* to form a disyllabic word: *wulan* 雾岚, mist. This was his homage to his brother. This word, which the latter cherished so much, endowed that bustling age with strong emotions and a sentimental atmosphere.

At that time, members of the literary association would often meet in a secret facility room of the audiovisual education building to watch the videotapes of banned foreign movies on a 29-inch Sony TV. Alain Resnais's 1956 [sic] famous film was the first to connect fog [*wu*] and crime [罪恶 *zui'e*]. It was after seeing it that Duanwu blurrily [朦朦胧胧的 *mengmeng longlong de*] began to say goodbye to his youth. Fog [*wu*] and mist [*wulan*] for a while disappeared from his works. He no longer liked the cloying style of misty poetry.

Today, whenever the image of 'fog' [*wu*] reappeared in his poems, it had become a completely unconscious reflex. Whenever he raised his pen to depict the surrounding landscape, the first word that came to his mind was "fog" [*wu*], as if he were afflicted by an obsession. At the same time, the characters with which he'd combine *wu* had changed. For the people living in Hepu, the meaning of the words "mountain mist" [*lan*] had long been locked up in the dictionary, just like the proverb "being contented with poverty and living a spiritual life" had become an unlikely myth. Fog had now acquired a more appropriate partner, a more intimate companion: *mai*, as in *wumai* 雾霾, "fog haze," the technical word that often swirled on the tip of the tongue of weather forecasters. "Fog haze" was one of the most typical landscapes of this age...

On windless days, the vapor rising from the ground would enwrap dust, ashes, carbon dioxide, invisible toxic particles, lead molecules, at times also the grey smoke coming from the wheat straw burnt by farmers. Day after day, the thick blanket thus formed covered people's heads and pressed onto their hearts. This "fog haze" nourished his poetry, at the same time as it posed questions.

These questions had nothing to do with how poisonous this thing called "fog haze" might be; rather, they had to do with the indifference with which everyone accepted it. As if it were not a new thing that had only appeared in the last few years. As if it were not an insult to nature, but nature itself. As if it hadn't already symbiotically conspired with the dark night, acting in collusion with it to let the sun die a slow death and time stop; as if it were neither a warning nor an allegory.

At this moment, Duanwu was pulling his suitcase, crossing the dimly lit street and the vulgar, gaudy square of which the city was so proud. Even in the haze, healthy-bodied people were still visible everywhere...

The ashen, hairy, filthy fog [脏雾 *zangwu*] ceaselessly bred crime [罪恶 *zui'e*] and shame [羞耻 *xiuchi*] in his heart, unfolding in the dim light toward the depth of darkness. In front of his eyes, in a messy alley with only a scant trace of human presence, the thick fog [浓雾 *nongwu*] was brewing a sinister scheme. It was not only blocking the flight that in his imagination was leaving on time and the destination that he yearned to reach, but was also separating life and death.