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Heading for a heart attack

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Health-giving sounds of wind and waves with a lovely view of Lake Ontario and the nuclear plant in Oswego. In the distance it looks like a steamboat that leaves behind its smoke signals that imperceptibly merge into the herd of clouds. I lie motionless, highly productive. Excellent working conditions in deep shade; beneath the spreading branches of a maple, I take remnants of verses, fragments of pain and fossils of dreams, and reconstruct the world of an eighth-century Chinese poet. This is all that's left of him. Nothing more is known to us, just that he shunned people. Not where he was from nor his real name. There are those who claim that it's all falsified. But the legend still lives, saying: "Sometimes he crazily ran along monastery paths, shouting and attacking all those around, sometimes he looked into emptiness and laughed at himself." I feel I'm very close to him. And that from his time till now nothing has changed. The world is just a bit older and more irritable, stagnating too long, haughtily turning on its axis as if it were the Center of the Universe. But the truth is, from some other corner of the cosmos even an all-out nuclear war would just seem like some tiny, far-away star blowing up. Like striking a match. Grief could make one's heart split like an atom, releasing energy in an unstoppable chain reaction fusing words into lines, lines into a poem, till the heart detonates from the force, and the world disappears with the cry of a wild goose.

Nothing has changed. Only that, unlike earlier generations, we can't expect we'll ever be read by our descendants. At the end of the path from self-realization to self-destruction, it's time to devote ourselves to the archeology of the future. Behind

this steamboat of ours nothing is left but smoke,
short-lasting, just till it scatters in the breeze.
On the far side of Lake Ontario, over beyond
good and evil, just as if nothing were happening,
the sun sets. A beautiful view, just right
for a sugary panoramic photograph.

(Syracuse, 12. September 2024)

Translated by E. Wayles Browne

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