I don’t know much about it anyway, 
the self-professed king who handed over 
his part of the Three Kingdoms to an idiot 
son, the tyrant who slew his warhorse 
to feed his dying troops, the general whose main 
battalion burned, decades flying into the air like water. 

Yet I never saw your eyes water 
when the farm boys, charging, yelled away, 
their scrawny arms the force behind the main 
assault, their fire-lit arrows sent over 
to pierce the laughter of the gloating king, whose victory horse 
must now sit quiet in the stall, idle as an idiot. 

I do not want to be the idiot, father. 
I do not want to be the one to watch you water 
plants in little clay pots, you who rode your horse 
giddy towards mountains. You say 
this illness is nothing, just some pain to get over. 
You watch melodramas from the couch, hunched in your domain. 

All onscreen believe that whoever could get a certain man 
on their side would unite the Kingdoms. Idiots. 
Though what tragic joy lay in that wise man’s eyes, when all was over, 
to say he could have done nothing more, nothing to water down 
the terror of a child-king who shrank from war, if his father’s away 
and dead. Wisdom and goodness ruined by a boy who played horse. 

Even if I screamed my voice hoarse, 
father, I could not say it—these mangled manes, 
these stories broken down into madness. Away from you, 
I know nothing, least of all a charging river, one that nursed idiots 
and heroes. I know nothing of waters 
old and depthless. I clap my hands when the show is over. 

When all this is done, when all this is over, 
I will buy you some land and a horse 
to lead around fields and drink from cool well water. 
I will watch you there, free from harm by the main house 
I cannot go back to. I will be that idiot 
and I know it, at that shrouded bank when you ride away, 
laughing. And perhaps it’s easier that way, to be that idiot 
not knowing when things are over, than to stand on that main 
bank without so much as a horse to ride into the water. 

Ting Gou