
An Ancient Temple by Bei Dao

The long ago songs of a bell
weaved this spider web; in the column's crevices,
grown outward, one sees annual rings there for the counting.
No memories are here; stones
that merely scattered the echoes in this mountain valley,
have no memories.
That little path, even, by-passed it;
its dragons and strange birds are gone.
They took with them the silent bells that hung from the eaves.
They took the unrecorded legends of the place, too.
The words on the walls are all worn clean and torn.
Maybe if

it caught on fire
one could read the words on the inside.
See the annual growths of the wild grasses,
so indifferent.
They don't care if they submit to any master,
to the shoes of the old monks,
or to the winds, either.
Out front the sky is held up by a broken stone tablet.
Still, led by the gaze of some living person,
the tortoise may revive and
come out carrying his heavy secret,
crawl right out there on the temple's threshold.

translated by Gordon T. Osing and De-An Wu Swihart

<http://www3.webng.com/tuoyk/hanshi/beidao.htm>