

JENNIFER S. CHENG

From *Letters to Mao*

Dear Mao,

For one day I shall have the ability to convey the feeling of sleep, which is a feeling of dreams, stories, nightmares, and sometimes absolutely nothing. If sleep were a language, it would not sound like nothing but would instead materialize both longing and distance, history and myth. What I learned from my parents was the feeling of water, where all knowledge comes not in stories but in the tone of one's childhood, or the mood of a Saturday afternoon, or the sound of something boiling over when one is not looking. On the porch of our Texas house, I noticed that the summer evenings were quiet with the sound of large insects and crickets, which also sang longingly under my bed whenever I opportuned to wake in the middle of the night. The language of our home was similar to yours, though smoother like glass, and easier to tuck away. It is important to note that before language, children experience memories as image and sound, which is to say they experience them as poetry. I hope you understand that what I am doing is trying to give you a history of water, which, like memory and sleep, is fluid and wafting in refracted light. *History as water*, so that I am giving you something that spreads.