

**Marne Kilates** \From *The Tokhang Rhapsodies*

# The Art of Tokhang

After Elizabeth Bishop

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The art of *tokhang* ain't too hard to master;  
Based on the list there's a single intent:  
User is pusher. Shoot! No other disaster.

Tag one every day, look for the goner;  
Find shack and door, no wasted moment:  
The art of *tokhang* ain't too hard to master.

Quick, before midnight, call the photographers!  
Corpse as nameless as where you've been sent,  
Turn on the floodlights, headline disaster!

Tick one off, chase after the next. All is easier.  
By the bad smell of fear anger is swiftly spent.  
The art of *tokhang* ain't too hard to master.

Let them wail and curse, the louder the better.  
Let all cringe and cower: that is our intent.  
Drugs are evil. Use once or twice: disaster.

Thus raged and decreed our Great Leader.  
Take no prisoners, is how this war is meant.  
The art of *tokhang* ain't too hard to master.  
Show no mercy. Go spread disaster.

10 June 2017

# Octaves on the Tokhang

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1

Infatuated with the madman, we hear  
His obscenities as mandolins, we adore  
His crude, grating antics that cure our fear.  
His rantings are violins, not on our door  
The knock or butt of gun, cruel gear  
Of predator whom we see as our savior.  
O how we grovel at handsome power,  
What melodies we hear in his bluster.

2

What rule of law the madman tramples  
We do not know or care, no rule or right  
Is sacred, his acts are his brute examples.  
His words are curses of force and might,  
We cheer his show of strength, how able  
His rule: boot and gun erase all blight.  
O how we admire his demented fervor,  
The martial strut banishes all terror.

3

Our souls are both vagabond and captive,  
In the dark anonymous alleys of midnight  
Where poverty or the law will not forgive.  
In a haze the addled mind knows no fright,  
There are no eyes for feet fugitive, furtive,  
Devoid at last of fear or urge for flight.  
Cheeks scrape asphalt, grit and grease devour  
Our souls, each of us alone in the last hour.

27 May 2017

# Terza Rima of the Tokhang

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Midway upon the journey of my life  
I came upon the edge of a dark wood,  
Straight into the crook'd path of my strife.

My strife had always been with the good,  
Because it heeded all the rules, and bowed  
Before the good of all, brooked no doubt nor mood.

By law or ethic or human right I was not cowed  
The end I saw had to be reached, must bend all rules.  
None can stop me, I snort and curse, say it out loud,

Put the fear of God into the righteous fools:  
The rap at their door must come in the night,  
Open up, we barked, or plead or use our tools—

Surrender and sign, own up is your only right,  
Or we we'll wreck your door, show you hell.  
If you flee, we shoot, we show you the Might

Of State, because you fought back and you fell.  
That is the illusion we must maintain:  
No amount of public clamor or uproar can tell

Us to stop. Hell is not to see the reign  
Of blood, the rule of fear has taken over  
All life now coursing in the human vein:

Reason and righteous anger all go under.

27 April 2018