

# The Yellow Emperor & 2 More

by [Jack D. Harvey](#) (May 2025)



Qin Shihuang's imperial tour across his empire depicted in an eighteenth-century album.

## The Yellow Emperor

When the last lithe leopard  
in the emperor's crowded preserve  
leapt down from his arboreal perch

pink-mouthed and mottled,  
where was the degenerated emperor,  
taped and bandaged,  
with all his skill for naught and  
disowned by his own people,  
slowly, grandly, greedily dying?

Nowhere else but  
still as stone  
in the hospital,  
such as it was,  
his golden skin wan  
in the crepuscular hospital light.  
Was it his own disease,  
newly invented,  
or whose disease was it?

Lengthy discourse  
rattling out of the  
discountenanced doctor,  
made clear the cancer or  
so he called it,  
was the last stop on the line.

Brutish cells, voyaging  
in giant argosies of destruction  
turn yellow to sallow  
and, dappled with deceit,  
dangerous sympathetic  
friends and courtiers  
dimly seen, daily on view  
became more distinct,  
more sovereign,  
as death clumped closer  
and the flesh, forever awake,  
became a burden.

Death as a unicorn  
in nurse's uniform  
bides his time,  
patient as Griselda  
among bottles and needles.

Toward the last morning,  
fading with the stars  
the Yellow Emperor saw clear  
as alpine forests, close as lovers  
the luminous jade-green eyes  
of a dragon, watchful and quiet,  
watched it fade  
to its beautiful oblivion of myth  
and the emperor arose,  
a live wire of life and strength,  
leaving cap and clothes,  
leaping through the dawn  
he went, bright as the Paschal lamb  
he went, bright as the morning he went,  
dancing to the harmony and peace  
of nothing at all,  
to eternal heavenly equivalence;  
kingpin of the indeterminate,  
internal joyful void  
where all power and life begin.

## **What History Teaches**

Follow a variety of interests;  
take pleasure  
in what history presents.  
Actual government?  
No, but Rome in a ring  
with the other beasts.

Xerxes returning  
commends our own times,  
commends the fierce grace  
of automobiles.

Time and chance afford  
us only one opportunity.  
Although the ages  
do not alter us,  
this is not the fault  
of old men.

### **Venus Disarmed**

Astute statue,  
best in art,  
best in light,  
best mellow.  
Not hurt by haste,  
cut round and  
round, rude stone  
takes form.

Take a hand  
and feel  
the fingers.  
the arms;  
see eye to eye  
with such beauty  
as never was  
what the world knew;  
blink at perfection,  
like an owl at sunlight.

Serene is marble,  
the Goddess serene;

how hard,  
how just.

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**Jack D. Harvey** lives in a small town near Albany, New York and has been writing poetry since he was sixteen. His poetry has appeared in *Scrivener*, *The Comstock Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Typishly Literary Magazine*, *The Antioch Review*, *The Piedmont Poetry Journal* and elsewhere. Jack has been a Pushcart nominee and, over the years, has been published in several anthologies.

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