

**Expatriate**

The girl pinches dough around the meat,  
placing the dumplings next to the frying pan.  
Flour rises in clouds.  
The kitchen sizzles and hisses.

The newlyweds are back from abroad.  
They stroll around the patio, talking to everyone but each other,  
she in a long cream dress, he in office slacks.  
Despite the toasts poured to their health  
(ritual, unstoppable), their glasses of *baijiu* quickly run dry.

Sparklers go off in the neighbors' driveway—  
then there's a shout. It's Independence Day, but not theirs.  
Probably it wasn't anything serious.  
People mill around the dinner table,  
a smoky amorphous sea with no lifeboat in sight.

The parakeet never emerges from its wooden house.  
There are no other pets, just children playing video games.  
It's quiet enough for the girl to hear her mother laugh,  
"Oh no, my daughter can't understand a word we're saying!"  
Shortly after, they eat.