

From *Notes from an Old Montreal Wartime*

XIII *Desert*

Hereabouts is desert, it
grows nothing, nothing to show for, sand has no whereabouts,
goes everywhere and nowhere like a sea:
yes, I said, and noticed the flash of sun on grit
and knew that all the hourglasses in the world had broken
and this was the sum of all the hours of the world.

Did you ever see a man bleed in sand? I
asked him, did you ever see a soldier, a khaki
hero with his life blood blotting entirely and quickly
into the khaki sand? Did you ever see a man drown in quicksand
or, let alone a man, a tree or a bedstead?

It
nor the bitter heat of it nor its blinding glare
but it the shiftlessness, that there
nothing but a blanket warming a blanket, or a sum
multiplying and dividing itself forever, a sum
adding and subtracting itself forever and ever.

XIV

As you read some verses of Li Tai-po

