

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

