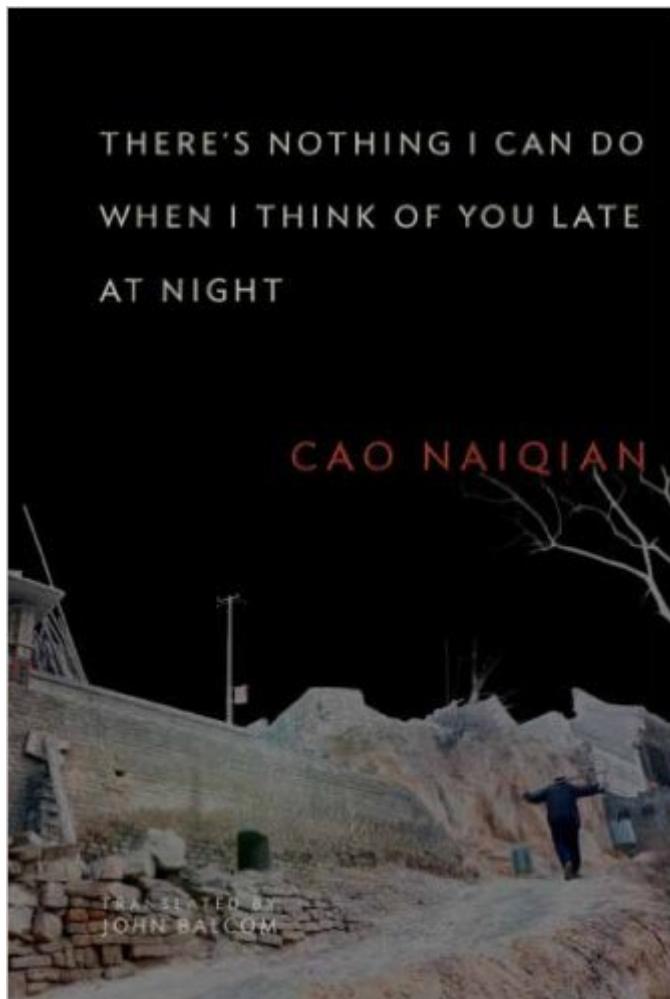


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# There's Nothing I Can Do When I Think Of You Late At Night (Weatherhead Books On Asia)



## Synopsis

Set among a remote cluster of cave dwellings in Shanxi province, *There's Nothing I Can Do When I Think of You Late at Night* is a genre-defying exposé of rural communism. In a series of vivid, interlocking vignettes, several narrators speak of adultery, bestiality, incest, and vice, revealing the consequences of desire in a world of necessity. The Wen Clan Caves are based on an isolated village where the author, Cao Naiqian, lived during the Cultural Revolution. The land is hard and unforgiving and the people suffer in poverty and ignorance. Through the individual perspectives of the Wen Clan denizens, a complete portrait of village life takes shape. Dark yet lyrical, Cao's snapshots range from pastoral stories of childhood innocence to shocking accounts of brutality and terror. His work echoes William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, yet the author's depictions of elemental passions and regional mores make the book entirely his own. Celebrated for its economy of expression, flashes of humor, and an emphasis on understatement rarely found in Chinese fiction, *There's Nothing I Can Do When I Think of You Late at Night* is an excellent introduction to the power and craft of Cao Naiqian. His vivid personalities and unflinching realism herald the haunting work of an original literary force.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a book about an extremely poor village of Chinese peasants in Northern China during the Cultural Revolution. It is told through a series of vignettes that are disjointed to say the least, and

English translation come across as third rate Faulkner. The Villagers are presented as simple minded to the point of being animals, to the extent in one story at one point it is hard to tell whether a bull being castrated or a cow herd is the POV character. This is certainly deliberate. The villagers are absolutely obsessed with the most bestial varieties of sex, and spend much of the time either copulating like animals or contemplating such acts. There are multiple incidents of bestiality, incest to various degrees, and lots of really hideous unredeemed brutality. On the whole it is a disgusting book, even if certain sections manage to rise above the basest levels. Sadly these sections are often extremely cliched by the terms of Chinese fiction, but the book is short and I found it not hard to get to the end. However do not expect uplift, after this "Blood Meridian" becomes a tale of the triumph of the human spirit. If you find profundity in the basest nature of humanity, or you can just not get enough novels about Zolaesque brutality among the peasants of Shanxi, then this book is for you. The jacket compares it to Faulkner's "Go Down Moses" and Sherwood Anderson's "Winesburg, Ohio." It really has nothing to do with either of them, except possibly structurally. At its best, a couple of the vignettes rise to the level of the weaker Dewey Dell portions of "As I Lay Dying," which shows a certain amount of talent on the writer's part. A Note: According to the introduction, the novel was originally written in an extremely thick peasant dialect of Chinese, so it is sort of hard to judge the original, which is here translated into the most basic English.

I only recently find out about this pretty obscure Chinese writer. His name shows up on a list of potential Nobel Literature Prize finalists. I am reading this book in Chinese, so the review is not on the English version. So far I have only read the first 5 short stories, and I can tell you right now if you can read Chinese, get the Chinese version. This guy is certainly one of the very good modern Chinese writers. The short stories are loosely connected, all about the lives of peasants in poor rural China. He writes in the local colloquial language and it reads true to form. I was transformed into the lives of these villagers and it's a great read. I may come back and add to this review. But like I said, he is very good. Read the Chinese version if you can.

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