田野里的声音

那年秋收，我躺在田埂上闭着眼睛玩，发现田野里热闹得很，眼睛看不完的声音，耳朵一样不少地听见了。

最近的是镰刀声。唰，唰唰，一刀接一刀，快的时候像撕布，慢的时候像梳头。割到田那头，声音就钝了，隔了一层稻子。父亲割稻的唰声最有特点，又匀又稳，我闭着眼也能认出哪一刀是他割的。

稻捆落地是另一种声音。咚，闷闷的，像拳头捶在棉被上。一捆一捆码上田埂，咚、咚，间隔得整整齐齐。挑担起步时扁担吱呀一声，越走越远，吱呀声变成一条细线，最后断在村道口。

打谷机在晒场上轰隆隆地响，突突突，像一列不停站的火车。稻穗喂进去，谷粒喷出来，哗啦啦砸在围布上，那声音又密又脆，像下雹子。机器声传回田里，惊得镰刀声都显得安静了。偶尔机器卡住，突突声变成呜呜声，人喊一嗓子，全场都听见。

麻雀是田野里话最多的。叽、叽叽，落在刚割完的田里，蹦着找落谷。它们抢食时吵成一片，像教室下课。人一走近，哗一下全飞起来，叫声齐齐拔高，绕一圈又落下，声音又慢慢低回去。

风过稻浪的声音要轻得多。沙——沙——，从田那头滚过来，像有人隔着很远的地方抖一床大床单。浪头到跟前，稻穗互相磕碰，沙沙里带着细碎的咔哒，那是谷壳碰谷壳。

傍晚收工，声音一样样撤走。镰刀进了筐，打谷机熄了火，人声散进村子。田野一下子空了，静得能听见自己的呼吸。

夜里我又听见了另一种田野。蟋蟀在墙根叫，一声长一声短；田里的青蛙咕呱咕呱，隔着水田应和；远处村子传来两声狗吠，闷闷的，被夜压得很低。稻茬在露水底下轻轻响，那是田在睡觉时翻身的声音。

第二天父亲问我，昨天躺田埂上干什么去了。我说听声音。父亲想了想说，听出来什么了。我说，听出来秋天不是金色的，秋天是吵的，吵完了再安安静静睡一冬，等明年再吵醒。

The Sounds in the Field

That autumn harvest, I lay on the field ridge with my eyes shut playing, and found the field was busy indeed: sounds the eyes could not take in, the ears missed not one.

Closest were the sickles. Swish, swish-swish, blade after blade; fast, like tearing cloth, slow, like combing hair. Cutting at the far end of the field, the sound dulled, muffled by a layer of rice. Father’s swish was the most distinctive, even and steady, and with my eyes shut I could tell which strokes were his.

Bundles hitting the ground made another sound. Thud, muffled, like a fist punching a quilt. Bundle after bundle stacked onto the ridge, thud, thud, evenly

spaced. When a load was shouldered, the pole creaked, and as the bearer walked off the creak thinned to a thread and finally snapped at the village crossroads.

On the threshing floor the thresher roared, chug-chug-chug, like a train that never stopped. Ears fed in, grain sprayed out, pattering dense and crisp against the canvas screens, like hail. The engine's voice carried back to the fields and made even the sickles seem quiet. Once in a while the machine jammed, its chugging turned to a whine, someone shouted, and the whole field heard.

Sparrows were the chattiest creatures in the field. Cheep, cheep-cheep, they dropped into the freshly cut stubble, hopping for fallen grain. Fighting over food they bickered like a class let out. When a person came near, they all sprang up at once, their cries yanked sharp and high, circling once, settling, and slowly quieting again.

Wind crossing the rice waves was far softer. Sha — sha — it rolled from the far end of the field, like someone shaking out a huge bedsheet at a distance. When the crest reached me, ears knocked together, and the rustle carried a fine click-click, husk against husk.

At dusk the work ended and the sounds withdrew one by one. Sickles went into baskets, the thresher cut its engine, voices scattered into the village. The field emptied all at once, quiet enough to hear my own breathing.

At night I heard a different field. Crickets sang by the wall, one call long, one short; frogs across the paddy answered each other, gurgle-gurgle; from the far village came two dog barks, muffled, pressed low by the night. The stubble whispered under the dew — that was the field turning over in its sleep.

Next day father asked what I had been doing lying on the ridge. I said listening to sounds. He thought a moment and asked what I had heard. I said: I heard that autumn is not golden. Autumn is noisy; then it sleeps quietly through winter, to be woken up and noisy again next year.