

Jade Earrings (China) 461#

SUSAN ROGERS

The Empress Dowager's Ornaments

*And on the pedestal these words appear—"My name is Ozymandias,
king of kings: Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains*

—"Ozymandias," Percy Bysshe Shelley

Cixi, were you wearing jade in your hair
when the Emperor overheard you singing
among concubines in the garden where
you beguiled him? You rose in rank bearing
a son. Did you wear ornaments of jade
at your birthday feast, *one hundred* dishes,
pearl powder and ginseng, duck's tongue, food made
from flowers for beauty, for your wishes
of longevity? All that opulence—
the release of ten thousand birds, your sleep
adorned by pillows stuffed with tea, essence
of rose, your silk clothes, your jewels couldn't keep
you alive. Could they? They were all taken.
Your tomb stripped; jade gone and you, forsaken.



NANCY ELLIS TAYLOR

They drip of morning on the sea edge
slippery seduction dancing
in and out and out of reach
beware hungry ones
this dish might just bite back

Illustration by Susan Rogers, Cixi and her ornaments