

A small story of one Chinese poem.

First is the word for word trot that whincup gave in his "Chinese Poetry". It is a poem i translated and left inside the book, and found later and was so smitten with the effort that i began my Chinese translations fer realz.

drinking wine

construct shack in people region  
but there-is-no carriage horse hubbub  
ask "sir how can thus"  
heart distant place therefrom out-of-the-way  
pick chrysanthemums eastern fence below  
distant -ly see southern mountains  
mountain air sun at-evening fine  
flying birds each-other with return  
this in there-is truth idea  
wish-to express already forget words

tau chyen  
six dynasties period  
about 400 AD

compare Yip's word for word

build house in man region  
and(but) no carriage/s horse/s noise/s  
ask you how can-be (part.)  
mind distant place naturally incline(secluded)  
pick chrysanthemum/s east fence beneath  
yu-jan\* catch sight of South Mountai  
mountain air day(evening) night good  
flying bird each-ther with return  
this within there-is true sense-of-things  
wish tell already forget word/s

yip wai-lim  
1976

and then there was me back on 10-12-96, yea these ten years ago.

drinking wine

build your house in the middle of people  
but don't listen to the sound of traffic  
just try to imagine how to do this  
let your heart go to somewhere out of the way

to pick chrysanthemums in a small garden  
and look up over everything else to mountains  
you can see sun's glorious leaving  
you can see birds fly home to roost

then you can know that to hear anything  
you want to hear, forget the words

murphy sitting at the kitchen table

And then the Library of Chinese Classics for tao yuanming and he is the same man as T'ao Ch'ien  
translated by Hinton and goes by a lot of names but is the seminal old fool now that he was then.

drinking wine (5)

My house is built amid the world of men,  
Yet with no sound and fury do I ken.  
To tell you how I can keep deaf and blind,  
Any place is calm for a peaceful mind.  
I pluck hedge-side chrysanthemums with pleasure  
And see the tranquil Southern Mount in leisure.  
The evening haze enshrouds it in fine weather  
While flocks of birds are flying home together.  
The view provides some veritable truth,  
But my defining words seem to me uncouth.

Tao Yuanming (English translation by Wang Rongpei)

i couldn't get over the rhyming couplets when i started in on this book.

(Once i got past the intro proclaiming china to be the world's good old buddy, back to take its place at the  
head of the table, but friendly to all.)

And the convoluted syntax to make the rhyme. Reminded me of my convoluted, rhyming, acrostic sonnets.

Then to go on another tack, let us peruse Hinton and his modern, fractured, take on things.

Drinking wine (3)

I live in town without all that racket  
horses and carts stir up, and you wonder

how could that be. Wherever the mind  
dwells apart is itself a distant place.

Picking chrysanthemums at my east fence,  
Far off, I see South Mountain: mountain

air lovely at dusk, birds in flight  
returning home. All this means something,

something absolute. Whenever I start  
explaining it, I've forgotten the words.

David Hinton  
1993

Being on sort of a role, i went back to my faded old copy of Arthur Waley to see what he weighed in with.

T'ao Ch'ien (4)

I built my hut in a zone of human habitation,  
Yet near me sounds no noise of horse or coach.  
Would you know how that is possible?  
A hear that is distant creates a wilderness round it.  
I pluck chrysanthemums under the eastern hedge,  
Then gaze long at the distant summer hills.  
The mountain air is fresh at the dusk of day;  
The flying birds two by two return.  
In these things there lies a deep meaning;  
Yet when we would express it, words suddenly fail us.

Arthur Waley 1919

The next version is the man who taught me about Chinese civilization when I was at Harvard. We called the course "rice paddies" and it concentrated on both Japan and China.

I built my hut beside a traveled road  
Yet hear no noise of passing carts and horses.  
You would like to know how it is done?  
With the mind detached, one's place becomes remote.  
Picking chrysanthemums by the eastern hedge  
I catch sight of the distant southern hills;  
The mountain air is lovely as the sun sets  
And flocks of flying birds return together.  
In these things is a fundamental truth  
I would like to tell, but lack the words.

James R. Hightower  
1970

And back to Yip for his static translation.

A house built within men's reach  
And no clamor of carts and horses.  
How, may I ask, can this be?  
Mind distanced, place becomes remote.  
Plucking chrysanthemums by the east hedge.  
I catch sight of the South Mountain.  
Mountain so gorgeous in the dusk,  
Flying birds return wing to wing.  
Here contains the truth of truth.  
To tell? Already words are forgotten.

Yip wai lim  
1976

And finally here is the man who started it all, old "wine-cup" himself.

Written after Drinking Wine

I built my shack  
Amid the haunts of me,  
And yet there is no noise  
Of horse or carriage.

You ask,  
"How can this be?"--  
Any place becomes secluded  
When the mind is far away.

I pluck chrysanthemums  
By the eastern fence.  
In the distance  
I see the mountains to the south.

The light on the mountains  
Is lovely at sunset,  
Flocks of birds  
Fly back together for the night.

In this  
There is an intimation of Truth.  
I want to express it,  
But have forgotten all the words.

Greg Whincup  
1987

And that's my little story for today.

murphy