

li bai ix-01

for the poet meng hao ran

i love master meng
he is famous as a free wind blowing below heaven
in his youth he abandoned the trappings of office
now that he has white hair he lives in the clouds among pine trees

he lies beneath the moon besotted with sagacity
he loses himself amid fields of flowers and serves no lord
how can i aspire to the height of his mountain
down here i can only bow to the whiff of his clear fragrance

murphy rereading his variorum edition of yeats

2/9/2002 10:00 AM

li bai ix-02

given to my older cousin, li hao, under-district provost of xiang yang

when i was twenty i knew nothing of life
and consorted flamboyantly with brave men
just as lu zhong lian after leading a retreat, i expected rewards
how could i have dared to expect a sinecure if i like zhu hai had killed jin bi

of smaller crimes let us not even deign to speak
i wished to retire east of chun ling as a gentleman farmer
but when i went there i came without possessions
so i led more a life of a wind-blown thistle

one morning noticing my black fur had become shabby
and my small hoard of gold had all been spent
i strapped on my sword, disgusted and aimless
i left the house and complained at the end of the road like ji yuan

you, my older brother, are an upstanding, honored scholar
all report that you have satisfied all requirements of position
therefore i feel i can put forward a small request
the request is: honor me with your friendship

for if the cherry blossoms are not forthcoming
better i should perish with the autumn grass

murphy perfectly at ease sitting quietly with his brother

4/14/2011 9:37 AM

li bai ix-03

given to fu ai in the snow at yang zhou

snow from the north falls from the sky in the land of wu
carried by the wind it has crossed the seas
the trees by the sea look like they are dressed for spring
the sand on the shore glisters in the silver of the moon

my inspiration is how wang hui zhi once on a snowy night in zhe giang
composed his snow-fall poems in the rabbit park of king xiao of liang
i send you this poem about the snow set to a tune sung in ying
the song here ends with my heart torn by the pain of separation

murphy always the romantic with his heart on his sleeve

4/14/2011 9:50 AM

li bai ix-04

given to district director xu of an yi xian

at the ford of bai tian i met an old man from chu
he sang a song about you, the judge of an yi xian
a producer of fine brocade does not choose his position
in any circumstance one can always use a knife that cuts

the pure wind sends your influence in a hundred mile circle
your reforming influence is known in every residence
those who fled your district now flock back in dense clouds
the land is in order from the city center to the mountains

the river winds its way cleansing the fields of wheat
the sun light glistens on the leaves of the mulberry trees
the yamen can now rest in a long whistle of satisfaction
guests arrive and you understand well how to entertain them

the dark foliage of orange trees touch the windows of your house
clear spring water flows into the pond in your garden
this wanderer now finds himself in this peaceful district
and by your grace finds he does not wish to leave

how well you understand why one plants peach and plum trees
so at the end of the year one can reap a fantastic reward

murphy sure he has found his Shangri la

4/14/2011 10:29 AM

li bai ix-05

given to district secretary lu qian of ren cheng

the sea bird felt the sharp wind blowing in the sky
he had sought shelter by the eastern gate of the land of lu
there the marquis had organized a banquet for him, but he thirsted not for wine
he thought of spreading his wings to fly again into the clouds

the music he heard gave him no pleasure, no joy
his thoughts on his companions later when he was in the fog and the snow
he wanted to fly back for the separation was difficult for him
yet with tears flowing he left his new friends, the mandarins and the storks

murphy ever the vagabond with his backpack as his pillow

4/14/2011 10:42 AM

li bai ix-06

early autumn, given to pei zhon kan, 17th of his clan

the blustery wind roars out over the wide sea
it carries the sadness of autumn to the far horizon
the constellation xin hangs low in the south
the hot vapors have gone with the red clouds

the heat of summer cannot be called back
the six dragons of the sun's chariot cannot reverse their course
bian he of jing wept over his loss of the wonderful gemstone
the old man of lu complained he was treated as a bitter gourd

success in this life is as uncertain as the drift of dreams
the sounds of my lute is poignant as i play deep into the night
you, oh pei, are truly a most remarkable man
you quickly show your many wonderful talents

first you visit du fu the lion of qing zhou
in turn you become friends with men like zhu jia of lu
what's more the two young women you bring with you
have beauty which puts lotus and lilies to shame

their singing penetrates the darkness of clouds
one regrets only the demise of the evening
for the ocean brings forth unending riches
with its marshes rich with dragons and snakes

you truly know how to be of service to illustrious rulers
your path to the clouds in the sky is clearly shown
and if your timing should not be favorable
you can return home to prepare the elixir of life

murphy thankful indeed for the festive feast

4/27/2011 9:47 AM

li bai ix-7

two poems offered to the district judge fan of jin xiang (1 of 2)

the superior man even with his clear view cannot see everything
he could not know i have lost my way journeying to the east
far from home, i have not moved for the last few months
and already the crickets chirp in the women's quarters

you need only reflect beauty as do all peach and plum trees
for the people desire to pick their flowers along the way
as you attract with the graceful phrases you offer them
your grace and love call them to your benevolent leadership

i am in possession of the beautiful emerald of song
but it has for too long been hidden in dirty waters
the people of this time have mostly rejected its worth
and thought it to be as worthless as the stone of yan

i have removed it and cleaned it to offer as a gift
but my offer has not yet been accepted as given
the farmer of liao dong found his white pig was not exceptional
the man from chu found his mountain pheasant was not a phoenix

i have only intended to offer the unique strengths i possess
crying out as did once bien he offering his precious stones
actually i stand before you deep in my grief, my only consolation
holding my tongue from communicating all this to my wife in the mountains

murphy broke and hungry asking for help

4/28/2011

li bai ix-8

two poems offered to the district judge fan of jin xiang (2 of 2)

district director fan has no wish to buy his fame
singing and playing he sits on his front porch
without making a fuss he wishes to reform the country itself
the people feel this daily, filling his jade cup with clear ice

for a hundred miles all is peaceful, for a thousand homes are snug
he loves to have guests and welcomes with hospitality
i, the traveler, can see and appreciate his auspicious governing
and send him my voice in this song of praise

murphy slathering butter on his toast

4/28/2011 9:21 AM

li bai ix-09

subdistrict judge wang from xia qiu xian

your phoenix essence shines forth from your being
your mind is that of the light-winged immortals
arguably the equal of the venerable mei fu
who came to nan chang fu as governor

a pure wind assists you in the playing of the lute
you appreciate the silent method of governing
when we first met you were more than i expected
your character is above that of your fellow men

you wield the brush easily deciding cases in your district of lu
your thoughts fly up into the passing clouds of the immortals
while i am left below among the butchers and fishermen
you possess the gift of distinguishing gemstones from pebbles

i have no way to match you in lofty conversations
and can do nothing more than emulate your ways in the future

murphy a toad with benign presence

4/29/2011 9:03 AM

li bai ix-10

i meet di bo tong in eastern lu

in previous years i knew not where to search for you
some people told me that you wandered in jiang dong
and it was also said you were preparing to cross the eastern sea
it was a truly fair wind which has brought you back here now

murphy serendipitously meeting an old student on the subway

4/29/2011 9:13 AM

li bai ix-11

i meet the former archivist wei from jing zhao returning from exile after the amnesty (1 of 2)

the flood water returns to the sea
you have returned from exile in the land of wu
we exchange stories of sorrows and hardships
and our tears are as big as the pearls of annam

murphy listening to the war stories of his drill sergeant

4/29/2011 9:20 AM

li bai ix-12

i meet the former archivist wei from jing zhao returning from exile after the amnesty (2 of 2)

i have been told you passed through the ford at jin hua
there in the east next to the sands of the five hundred
both surpass in beauty the famed ruo ye xi river
speak not that the trip was all troublesome

monkeys whistle harmoniously in the thousand gorges of the mountains
a fresh wind blows through the coniferous forest in the fifth month
in the future we must find time to travel together
and paddle along the xin an river in a small boat

murphy ever eager for a new adventure

4/29/2011 9:32 AM

li bai ix-13

given to the hermit zhou wei chang from the heng shan mountains

master zhou lives quietly in the heng shan mountains
the door to his house is next to a corner of the wall
the chain of mountain peaks look into his window
their beauty surpasses spirit island of fang zhang

he often makes crazy dance tunes out of whole cloth
and lets his songs echo over the dan yang lake
the lake's color more beautiful than the eastern sea
its watery splendor adorned with flowers and water reeds

in his period of inner satisfaction
his heart becomes one with nature
idle clouds float past his gaze, splitting and coming back together
he must wonder in his quietude whether his body is real or not

he is suspected to hide his splendor as did bian he
while smiling as he searches for pearls in the deepest waters
he is truly an immortal as he now lives
would that he takes me with him to the throne of the most high

murphy hitching onto the tail end of the band wagon

5/3/2011 9:39 AM

li bai ix-14

poem given to zhang, chief inspector of guards in the memorial temple of you zhen (1 of 2)

i am despondent in a house of noble families
where deep darkness persists throughout the day
mists in the airspace mingle with a gray rain
in the middle of the month i have come to this inhospitable area

the cloudy weather has me completely stunned and overwhelmed
deep grief sits and persists within my breast
wherein can one find solace in the reality of autumn
only with the white wine which fills my cup

singing i think of guan zhong and yo yi
those august men now long turned into dust
but i continue to drink to encourage me a little
who in this world has talents enough for affairs of state

as once did feng huan i knock on my sword and take leave of you
that you are given no higher position is to be regretted

murphy once again steadfast in his eschewal of politics

5/3/2011 9:50 AM

li bai ix-15

poem given to zhang, chief inspector of guards in the memorial temple of you zhen (2 of 2)

when heavy rain falls one longs for a bright sun
how can one hope to shrink the roiling clouds
ministers ji and xie are in harmony with nature in their concern for the people
but yin and yang still stubbornly continue to brawl

the autumn rains are worse than a fountain from the heavens
a dense dark fog obscures the highest mountains
if a man wishes to go outside for a bit
he must slog through rivers of clinging mud

everywhere one hears the roar of rushing waters
tumbling and boiling, tearing with destructive waves
pushing sand and mud to block all the roads
a man peering out cannot distinguish between oxen and horses

hungry i accept food as once did han xin from the laundress
i sit idly leafing through a worm eaten book by you ling
the garden is filled with the vegetables of autumn
but goosefoot and beansprouts do not please my eye

spiders weave their webs in the darkness
crickets chirp softly depressed by the dankness
unlit kitchen fires offer no smoke to the world
green moss begins to grow on the side tables

i toss down my chopsticks and pull on my fur coat
i will buy wine and get drunk in the northern hall
i feel like liu mu zhi after losing his official position
drained of energy and not appreciated

when can i again offer a catered platter
replete with a bushel of betel nuts for my friends
after i finish my work here i want to go far, far away
perhaps i can go to the sea and sit for a time in silence

murphy suffering through a long, rainy spring

5/17/2011 8:44 AM

li bai ix-16

poem given to imperial secretary wei zi chun

zheng pu the hermit from gu kou
alone tilled his field beneath the high rock wall
the high virtue of his fame influenced the capital
the whole world talked about him incessantly

but this man did not push himself to the forefront
he slept still in the mountains and followed his own path
for when a man has no desire to serve his time
his benefit can be found in virtuous solitude

you by contrast exist in the world of men
and have worked quietly for your elevation
to be appointed as a powerful official
your conversation always replete with a wealth of ideas

you show your enjoyment of martial sports at every turn
xie an is not the only one who has come forth
emerging with strength to help the people
having left the ranks of the secret service

you surmounted all obstacles to achieve a brilliant success
but it would be better for you to return to your green mountains
how can you now remain dependent on the imperial palace
remember the solitude of your old house midst the rustic villagers

already now it will be overgrown with weeds
when you once again gaze on nu ji mountain in he nan
you will not be deathly ashamed when the moon peeks from behind the clouds
you, who struggled through the wind and the dust of the world

in your official duties your hair has turned grey
our mind is in harmony even if a thousand miles separate us
i hope you can visit me in the wonderful place where elixir is prepared
if you come it will be for me as when the skies open and i see only blue

then and there we will discuss how to help the world
there can be no difference between the life in the world and retirement
remember how after zhang liang had restored the peace
he renounced the world and went to live on the five lakes

murphy telling all his old friends how nice retirement can be

5/19/2011 9:10 AM

li bai ix-17

poem offered to the censor wei zhang (1 of 2)

a tall spruce grows on tai hua mountain
it proudly defies the frost and snow
nature has given it more than a hundred feet
how then would it be broken by a small wind

peach and plum trees shed the beauty of their flowers
passersby are beguiled by their effulgence
the splendor of their blooms fall to carpet the ground
but in late fall their green leaves turn to brown mulch

i think you should model yourself on the high spruce
become a view one does not get from peaches or plums
change your bearing even as you endure wrongs
then can one see your true worth as a gentleman

murphy staid and dignified as his position of principal demands

5/20/2011 7:33 AM

li bai ix-18

poem offered to the censor wei zhang (2 of 2)

i see you riding by on the censor's pinto
i know you are to ride the high twisting trails
the ones that threaten a fall to break your bones
i trust you will take care and protect yourself

i am jade left unappreciated in my youthful strength
and am now thrown under the hay of the autumn fields
but this only invigorates the purity of my heart's desires
and i regret nothing as i enter old age

murphy amused at the old man peering out of his mirror

5/20/2011 7:45 AM

li bai ix-19

given to the archivist xie

i have a new song wu chu which the people of su zhou sing
no one else fathoms the intricacy of its melody
on the cold gu su terrace now grow only ivy and weeds
there where the deer cry out in vain with melancholy voice

this song is not praise as when mei sheng spoke of the waves of the river wu
for my heart which though aspiring to greatness complains of its pain for no reason
i raise my hands in futility and take leave of the eastern sea
a failure i turn to go back to my old home

murphy quitting his job to go nurture his small garden

5/20/2011 8:11 AM

li bai ix-20

given to court secretary he chang hao, seventh of his clan

there are times when sadness suddenly strikes
then i sit in pain throughout the night
at dawn my confidence begins to return
and i think of myself as detached from the world

my spirit can then follow the storm
as the clouds blow apart for ten thousand miles
i am ashamed when i try to be a second fu sheng from ji nan
who at the age of ninety recited the shu jing

therefore i will take up my sword
and try to win fame, to fight in the sha mo desert
working the fields as one grows old and dies
is not the way a man shows his true worth

you, o master, personify today the talents of guan zhong yo yi
your abilities entitle you to lead three armies
and in the end you will succeed again as when you were minister
and rise to the ranks of chang ju and jie ni

murphy cheering on the a-team while riding the bench

5/20/2011 8:28 AM

li bai ix-21

while reading the biography of zhu go liang, count of zhong wu, i write my feelings and offer this poem to subdistrict judge cui shu feng of chang an xian with whom i have a close brotherly relationship

at the time when the han dynasty was coming to its end
all men in china began to war with each other
the lands of the three kingdoms were as yet undefined
and small local governments existed under warlords

the red flames in eastern han brought catastrophe
out of which a sleeping dragon zhu go liang emerged
at the time he still lived in han yang
but then he himself was forced to take the field

after three meetings he and liu bei became as inseparable as fish and water
he rose as the winds and clouds from the four seas
he, the count of wu, established his kingdom in si chuan
his energetic voracity soon enveloped chang an

what man first acknowledged him as a hero
that was certainly cui zhou ping
i also emerged from humble beginnings as did zhu go liang
and have because of this a deep desire to help mankind

only later in my travels did i meet another cui yuan
whose hair like mine has become white from the vicissitudes of life
you, my friend cui, also wish to aid a capable administration
in that we are a like minded brotherhood

yet we wish not to be like guan zhong and bao shu ya
the only ones for a thousand years whose friendship became famous

murphy schmoozing with an old crony

5/21/2011 9:31 AM

li bai ix-22

dedicated to general guo

as a youth, oh general, you came from we wei
and took over the command of yin tai pass to protect the emperor
at dawn you attended the emperor's audience with your hand on your sword
toward evening you returned home dangling your whip drunkenly

your beloved son played on his gemstone flute
the beautiful women of your household danced in the moonlight
the great heroes of the past exist now only in our dreams
we who now share the splendor of spring should drink together again

murphy always up for another pour of guinness

5/21/2011 9:43 AM

li bai ix-23

poem given to hermit yang when departing wen quan gong

as a youth i wandered through chu and han
harsh winds and dust storms scoured my face
i thought myself a second guan zhong or zhu ge liang but i wasn't
i gave forth a long sigh of relief when i finally returned home

then one morning the merciful eyes of the rulers fell upon me
i determined to do my best and dusted the sloth from my bones
suddenly the sun had appeared to shine forth its grace
i went directly, spreading my wings, up and over the dark clouds

i accompanied the imperial court leaving the palace through the hong du gate
i rode astride a flying dragon filled with a heavenly spirit
the princes and other dignitaries showered their mercy on me
ministers with copper seals and purple sashes honored me

yet not many were prepared to become my close friend
only you after we had shared a few words in the inner chambers
wait until i have fulfilled my duties and received the ruler's grace
then we can join hands and relax in the mountains of white clouds

murphy when first hired already looking toward retirement

5/22/2011 8:13 AM

li bai ix-24

i meet an old friend returning from guard service at wen quan gong

when the han emperor was in the chang yang park
returning to his palace at the hunt with his mongolian guests
yang xiong had the signal honor of being welcomed into the suite
where he presented a formal encomium of unusual polish

to partake of an imperial reward he put in motion his celestial brush
and was graciously recognized with a beautiful brocade jacket
i have met you, old friend, and heard your report of our sovereign
in the future we will fly together as two exalted phoenixes

murphy keeping up his contacts with the rich and the famous

5/22/2011 8:27 AM

li bai ix-25

given to pei fourteenth of his clan

this morning i saw you, another pei kai
glowing with magnificence as a shimmering mountain gem
it was like swift huang he flying in beauty over the eastern sea
all his 10,000 mile journey emblazoned on your chest

one would almost think you were riding on the white turtle spirit he bo
but it would take gold piled to the height of nan shan hill to buy your gaze
for you linger among the people of the six cardinal points without making friends
and now you will float like a wandering cloud as you move off to the west

murphy admiring the successful but only from afar

5/22/2011 8:38 AM

li bai ix-26

given to censor cui

the three foot carp of the huang he
held originally in the meng ford
wrinkled his brow but could not become a dragon
and so was allowed to return to the other fish

you, my old friend, are a man of dong hai
as soon as i saw you i asked for your patronage
when the winds and waves are favorable to me
i would like to return with your favor back to kun lun mountain

murphy seeking material support wherever he goes

5/22/2011 8:45 AM

li bai ix-27

given to general ge shu hua, describing his drive and explaining my feelings

heaven has created you as a hero of the state
your heart bristles with lances and spears
your abundant deep strategies flow and scintillate
your restless energy reverberates as the thunder

a man who knows you puts it this way
he brashly bashes three armies into flight
general wei qing is mistakenly held to be a great general
and bo qi compared to you is only a child

murphy buttering up his betters

5/25/2011 8:29 AM

li bai ix-28

offered to friends the poem “clearing up a defamation”

oh i have fallen deeply in error
long in trouble, i have been in the hands of robbers
until i turned fifty i knew not my wrongs

yet the people of antiquity have always known this
a man uses wise words to correct his mistakes
thus insuring his name will not perish
but whosoever forgives himself and cloaks his failures
nurtures and makes an ugly evil even worse

poems such as the shi jing ode “the moon appears” bring ridicule
and this old white-head is made ashamed
but this insight comes much too late
since the past is long gone, that day vanished

what encumbrance holds the white gem
so the black flies repeatedly visit with their filth
too many light articles eventually break the axle
so even slight errors can harry one unto death
yet the many feathers of a bird allows its bones to fly
so he can rise up into the heights of heaven
and through a buildup of imperceptible threads
a brilliant brocade robe is formed in a sumptuous design

as background, muddy sands or a field of dirt
do not enhance pearls or precious stones
the high flame of the sun lights the tops of mountains
and bring them out of the mists and clouds
powerful waves seem to reach for the sun
though they emerge from even the smaller streams

da ji destroyed the tyrant zho xin
bao xu led zhou yu wang to ruin
the mandates of heaven overturned
mainly for these reasons
empress lu hou had evil shen yi ji at her side
the mother of emperor qin shi huang
had criminal dealings with lao ai

when the rainbow is indistinct
the sun itself is obscured
if the emperor is surrounded by corrupt men
why should i be worried for myself
my words are ended, my thoughts exhausted
my heart is true, my opinions honest

if i have spoken untruths
may the high heavens punish me
zi ye speaks good words
li lou is extremely keen
even a spirit cannot stop true words
even a demon cannot escape its form

you, my friends, do not reject me
so i can later show you my loyalty

murphy owning up to being merely human

5/26/2011 8:53 AM

li bai ix-29

given to can liao zi a hermit whose real name is unknown

the white crane which brings the emperor's words
sought in southern jing zhou a man of high learning
the five colored cloud is above the xian hill
there one will certainly find can liao zi

loyal as he leaves his home
proudly he enters the palace
the son of heaven rewards him with gems and silks
the hundred dignitaries listen to his valuable advice

constantly he uses his brush and ink
as he explores complex things and writes wonderful essays
he thoroughly explicates heavenly ways and human affairs
his splendid work resides in the unicorn gallery

he bows deeply but assumes no office
he shakes the dust from his clothes and returns to the forests
i have also left the wei yang palace
we both now cling to the vines on the mountains

anywhere we are we think of each other
among the cassia trees at the edge of the dark clouds

murphy recognizing a mystic when he sees one

5/27/2011 7:40 AM

li bai ix-30

given to sui zhang tax secretary of rao yang

in the morning the phoenix drinks the spring waters of cang wu
in the evening he lingers in the mists of the emerald green sea
who can possibly understand his intention
why he strays so far away from the yi and tong trees

emulating minister lin xiang ru, did i not do as did the ancients
i chose the poet xi wang yi from the models of the past
i am ashamed i do not yet have the age of huang shi gong
yet i have the ability of zhang liang earlier than expected

my creative abilities unfortunately fade as the setting sun
my youth is gone, tossed away on the flowing river
yet i can say much now with only a few words
i hope by applying the whip to reach the three mountains

but i am still unsuccessful in this world among men
and drag through the world the pumpkin gourd of hu gong
my intention is to understand the creation of all things
to examine the hidden and find the seed of development

oh that we could go together, hand in hand
beyond the doors of this dark prison of mortality

murphy drunk and making promises

5/27/2011 8:02 AM

li bai ix-31

given to my nephew li yu, district judge of qing zhang xian

i am one of the myriad branches of the plum tree of lao zi
twigs and branches of this old stock have spread throughout china
heaven has given this family many distinguished scholars
all deeply concerned for the people's welfare
at this time your great force is used to kill chickens in a small pen
your mighty blade must wait before it carves up an ox to roast
yet your fame has already spread like thunder over all four quarters
your humanity pouring over the country like the waters of the qing zhang river
you are glorified in song as was the emperor yao in his time
you have achieved a relaxed manner as you hide out among the officials
when the heart is satisfied it projects a uniquely good character
and the morality of your district reflects the best of antiquity
cattle and sheep run freely in the fields
while doors are not locked throughout the night
if one asks why this has become so
the answer comes a noble man manages our country
throughout the district you have planted peach and plum trees
which not only bring shade but sweeten the air
a dam controls the clear river water to prevent flooding
mulberry trees and silkworm oaks reach toward pregnant clouds
the girls from zhao do not rouge their faces to attract
but carry their baskets for silkworms en masse every day
they sing as they unwind the cocoons for the looms
their sweet voices are heard far, far away in the distance
outside the court hall birds build nests while officials labor inside
one can enjoy the peace while browsing taoist scriptures
the cane whip hangs on a tree branch under the eaves
shaming the people who might fear its use on them
in the moonlight of evening you pluck your zheng
then while people sleep only the wind blows through the chambers
satisfied you whistle for a long while without saying anything
clearly you are enjoying your leisure as once did emperor fu xi
you are pure as ice water in a pitcher of white jade
your clarity of vision reaching to the deepest places
bright rays of your being distinguished as the finest hair
your purity reflected by the love of your people
those to the north of zhao praise your safe government
to the south your name is well known and respected in yan
passing strangers read the hymns of praise raised in your name
i, too, so glorify your well earned reputation for virtue

murphy ladling it on with a heavy spoon

5/28/2011 8:44 AM

li bai ix-32

given to my younger brother li hao, district judge of lin ming xian, who has just left his office

the district judge tao yuan ming left his district of peng ce
his valiant heart is truly a revered paragon from antiquity
a great voice heard even without the trappings of office
just pluck your fretless zither as he famously did

the road is not far to the banks of the river where the fish are
plans of the emperor to find more giant tortoises are on hold
one should emulate the great man of the lung bo kingdom
you will find that the emperor will be reaching out again soon

murphy preaching the patience he so rarely has

5/28/2011 9:02 AM

li bai ix-33

given to guo ji ying

guo tai from he dong possessed the dao
he roamed about as a wandering cloud
his sublime virtue unreachable by such as us
his pure light reflected only by someone like you

you would shame yourself by eating with chickens
for you should fly forever with the phoenixes
with one wing beat you will soar nine thousand fathoms
one trusts you will rise to the purple mists of the palace

murphy praising one he would like to be like

5/28/2011 9:10 AM

li bai ix-34

given to wang da quan as he contemplates withdrawing to the shi men mountains in the province of
ye

throughout my life i have been on the move
a blowing thistledown with no fixed destination
often a thousand miles between two temporary stays
i pirouette through life like a falling leaf

in the middle of my travels i meet you, my good friend
you ask me politely where i am going
i temper my response with a bit of advice
who can know the true temper of the times

the emperor's power rules over the six directions of space
all the lands and sea now know peace and arms are put to rest
the brave men now fold into the seclusion of their village
deep sorrow filling their hearts for their talents lie fallow

i too am dissatisfied with my peripatetic journeys
yesterday i set out from the city of nan yang
my steed, the purple martin, went whinnying to her stall
my sword jing ping clattering into my footlocker

i threw myself again into the turmoil of the world
the fives no longer before me, nor brave marching men
i am ashamed that i will not stay in the country til i am recalled
and i cannot like them be a coiled dragon hoeing weeds

prestige and wealth is what i will take as my goals
while i am still young i wish to acquire merit
and i want to take your two hands in mine
so you can understand my feelings completely

a friend who knows me is like a second self
we are more than one brother to another
you go now into the mountains like a wonder-filled child
where you will raise your clear voice up into the white clouds

as we part my thoughts become tangled and confused
everyone hopes to keep a good name in the hearts of others

murphy trying to explain why he is always dissatisfied

5/30/2011 8:09 AM

li bai ix-35

given to labor inspector wang hua zhou

in the time of wang dao the huai river flowed steadily with high waves
the sublime virtue of the wang family brings ever more brilliant scholars
i know that you are a worthy descendant of your ancestors
now you are become a high dignitary and given a valuable sword to bear

murphy writing his thank you notes after Christmas

5/30/2011 8:24 AM

li bai ix-36

offered to two scholars appointed to the court, lu hong and his brother

our illustrious monarch has called for honorable men to report to him
now emptiness reigns in the mountains among the clouds
only the two lu brothers will not come out from seclusion
though the emperor pays high tribute to their character

he shang gong is pleased that these two remain
they regard the world as small as the inside of a gourd
wherever they live, there is the paradise
they are at one with the surrounding forces of nature

when the trees lose their leaves in autumn sea waters are clear
one can view the island of the blessed from the back of a giant turtle
together with you both i want to admire the reflections of the water
and holding your hands ascend on the rainbow up into the stars

murphy always ready to imagine a magical reality

5/31/2011 8:11 AM

li bai ix-37

given to the gentleman from xin ping zhun

when han xin still lingered in huai yin
while all the young people mocked and insulted him
he crawled around with a curved body as if he had no spine
but always his brave heart had high expectations

only when he met han gao zu did he attain self assurance
he rewarded the laundress who helped him with a thousand pieces of gold
since then all people have praised him for that
compared to him what have i done in my day

i am sitting here now complaining about the cold
a brisk wind penetrates my thin short sleeves
both my hands feel like chunks of ice
and my old friends show me no mercy

i am constrained like a caged tiger
i am the hawk bound to the leather sleeves of a hunter
when will i soar up into the clouds
like an eagle pouncing to show what i can do

murphy feeling sorry for himself one more time

5/31/2011 8:53 AM

li bai ix-38

given to censor cui

a long sword and a goblet of wine
that is in the small of the heart of every man
in lo yang i followed you as another zhi meng
one night i spilled my innermost thoughts

i saw in your high rank the beauty of mountains
yet did not see you were deep as the deepest sea
then we met once more in chang an
seeing your worth there as a thousand bars of gold

you were an assistant imperial envoy
and i dishonored the position of your secretary
but a high wind blew and uprooted you, this magnificent tree
an unshot crossbow was aimed at a frightened bird, me

i do not seek the excitement of the returning ship as did wang hui zhi
i will tighten my grip on the carriage you ride
when the whirlwind comes i shelter with you
like the peach and plum trees you have planted i give you shade

when i am in a positive mood i can speak like zhang yi
when i have pain i sing of my distant homeland and zhuang xi
who will not pity me on this moonlit evening
as i listen to the autumn laundry beaten on the stones

murphy knowing who his good friends really are

5/31/2011 10:52 AM

li bai ix-39

given to the emperor's son du gu (written extemporaneously)

you, the emperor's son returned from the morning audience on horseback
a fragrant wind in your face as if flowers were flitting through the air
the silver on the saddle and bridle reflecting the purple clouds and the sun
looking neither left nor right in your splendid uniform

i was inside the jin ming at this time waiting in the travel office
then i was received in audience by the emperor
i bowed deeply in thanks for becoming a scholar of the empire
my heart is warm with the gratitude to you for helping me

since then you linger in the court, i move among the people
and i cannot raise myself to your level for our friendship to thrive
if you look back at me as wei gong zi once did for another
then i, another hou ying, will no longer have to guard the gate

murphy toadying up to get to the next level

6/1/2011 8:29 AM

li bai ix-40

given to the holy taoist jiao from sung mountain in he nan

introduction: the holy taoist jiao from sung mountain, “the alchemical master,” was a woman of unknown origin. they say she lived in the time of the liang dynasty, and when she was about 50 to 60 years old, she swallowed her breath and took no food. she lived in a hut in the shao shi mountains. they say she went flying over the eastern sea for ten thousand miles and went to peng lai, the island of the blessed immortals. i have traveled to the shao shi mountains to look for taoist teachings and have climbed in search of saints all 36 mountains. i had heard of their spiritual nature and was taken by their holiness. the verses thrown here by my brush are offered from a distance.

the two shi mountains stretch up to the dark sky
the pattra trees flower there three times a year
an immortal made her home there as a guest from the isle of peng lai
one would almost guess it would be the fairy ma gu

where the tao is present no noise penetrates to spoil the world
when the spirit is raised the requests come from far away
she always ate from the leaves of the cinnamon tree
she read from a sacred book whose leaves were the color of blue green moss

she indulged in her wanderings the eight outermost regions of the earth
though she usually roamed through the nine spheres of the heavens
as once did xu you who had no cup she took a gourd to drink from the ying river
as once did jin wang zi who had no carriage she came to yi quan on dancing cranes

then she returned to her eastern mountains
sleeping in her loneliness after sweeping away the red autumn clouds
there the climbing moon hung in the air, a shining mirror of morning
the wind blowing through the pines, the zither of the night

her mysterious luster hidden in the mountains of sung yo
her purified soul under the tent of the clouds
how glorious their rainbow colors swept by the winds
the penetrating sounds of her flute echoing far, far away

i wished to see you as once did xi wang mu
wherein i would graciously say like another dong fang so
if you would provide for me the holy violet ink book of the tao
verily would i study it and remain forever grateful

murphy still dreaming of magic powers

6/1/2011 10:27 AM

li bai ix-41

given to court appointed scholar yang (extemporaneous)

district judge tao yuan ming gave up his position in beng ce
liang hong moved back into the mountains of gui ji
exploring the biographies of eminent men
i found you were like those sages of antiquity

sleeping in the clouds you stay in the high hidden valleys
yet the emperor's handwritten orders have reached you there
i do not know if you are another yang zhen
and will soon come down to the capital chang an

murphy putting his hand into what doesn't concern him

6/2/2011 8:16 AM

li bai ix-42

an li yong

one fine day the giant roc rose into the wind
the tornado then blew for 90,000 miles
when the wind subsided he had landed again
and then could not roil further the waters of the seas

the people of the world know me and my peculiarities
and when they hear my exalted language they laugh with glee
even a confucian my fear a man born lately
so as a man never underestimate those younger

murphy looking for rattlesnakes as he walks along

6/2/2011 8:23 AM

li bai ix-43

given to hermit ge of zhang gong island south of wu chang

lie zi lived for forty years in zheng bu
and was there considered a useful citizen
hermit ge retired to the southern island where earlier zhang gong lived
he always hoped the men of chu would not look for him there

he watered his autumn vegetables with a can he carried to the fields
idle in mind as thoughtless as the clouds overhead
one always saw him with the old farmers in the melon patch
plowing and sowing on the banks of the han river

i often traveled to zhang gong island
and wandered among the grazing animals without spooking them
ge's well did not have the proper pulley system
his gate did not have any name inscribed

he bowed deeply before the emperor and thanked him for his appointment
but he refused to become a district judge
the man is truly a natural hermit
we can only aspire to be as true as he to what we are

murphy wondering why he chooses to do the things he does

6/2/2011 8:46 AM