

li bai vi-01

troops leave the bai ma ford

the general breaks camp at the bai ma ford
he takes his banner across the huang he
flutes and drums echo in the mountains and valleys
mighty waves rise in the vast blue seas

the houses of wu an are shaken by the marching
but no songs rise in the cold by the yi river
the cavalry seem like small snowy mountains on the move
so many horses they could drink the hu to river dry

with their curved swords they hunt in the western forests
using clever rearguard actions they conquer zhao no
a commemorative stone is placed on yan ran shan mountain
the border watch fires spread throughout the mountains

at the edges of the inhospitable ten thousand mile desert
stand many who bring order to the districts of wu yuan
now once the great sand sea is cleansed of robbers
the guns will be covered and the metal spears stacked away

murphy wondering if afghanistan wil ever be peaceful

10/31/2010 9:22 AM

li bai vi-02

the mulberry tree on the embankment

the beautiful girl was over the wei river east of the bridge
it was the beginning of spring in the tending of silkworms
the governor came, flamboyant as a flying dragon
blue ribbons fluttering from his engraved gold bridles

he knew not whose child she was
joking and laughing he came to talk to her
i am lo qin fu he proudly said
my jade face is sought after in the capital chang an

the green branches have stained my white hands she said
as i now pick mulberry leaves by the city wall
oh governor please do not look at me now
i speak not in deceit like qiu hu to her unsuspecting husband

the chilly crickets love the fresh grass he said
the singing phoenix settles in the chestnut tree
my heart must turn to someone of course
but i wonder at the stupidity of the people i see

it is natural for the fresh morning to turn to evening
when your sublime body will be waiting in vain

murphy having his pick of the litter

11/1/2010 8:45 AM

li bai vi-03

after the song “the fish left high and dry crying as he leaves the stream”

the white dragon changed himself into a fish
since he was mistakenly shot by the arrow of you zhu
who has not at times wanted to become such a fish
but the dragon could not change the fate given to him
and he cried out a message to be given to the great whale

“do not trust the power of the wind and the waves
for when low tide comes you might beach in the mud
the lying on your back you would be eaten by the ants”

when he travels, an emperor should always take care to appear as an emperor

murphy happy in the anonymity he has chosen for himself

11/1/2010 9:07 AM

li bai vi-04

song in tribute to commander ding wu

xu kwei zhi, son of the emperor gao zu was killed by lu yue. commander ding wu was responsible for the funeral, and when he spoke to the widow, he said, "oh, how sad is the sound of your voice." in view of this one has to write a song!

i am from the yun yang district
merchants there crowd both sides of the river
but in the drought when buffaloes roar at the moon
how tedious it is to drag boats to the water

the water becomes cloudy and undrinkable
a jug of rice water is worth half the earth
then as soon as you sing the song of commander wu
hearts break and the tears flow like torrential rain

thousands of worker pull a giant block of marble
and they know of no advice to help them past the banks
and if you see this marble block from the mang and dang mountains
it will stop your tears for the people who have labored here for untold years

murphy propounding the need for public monuments

11/3/2010 8:46 AM

li bai vi-05

activity

in the morning he rides proud on his pinto
he goes to the emperor's audience via the yin tai gate
whose child is the beauty in the carriage there
with the beaded pearl curtain thrown open

with his gold engraved whip he points the direction
the jeweled bridle of the horse turns slowly
both parties survey each other closely
he thinks she has come down from the heavens

quickly she follows him through the qing qi gate
they must drink together, surround themselves with song
he raises his cup to his lips as the singer begins
comparing her to the curve of the moon and the clouds

they see each other and yet should not be together
it would be far better for them not to be together
their feelings sink as they contemplate their way
for without speaking one can know another's heart

why should there be guards placed on lonely women
why should they sleep alone under the brocade ceiling
the brocade ceiling and the mosquito net
it will surround us when next we meet

this spring wind brings a unique excitement
but why does the evening rain come so late
when we separate i will send three blue birds
to tell you again of my great longing

time does not wait on people
in a moment the hair turns white
if one fails to act in one's best years
he will become an old complaining man

if you understand this profound lesson
then you will not delay long our next rendezvous

murphy smitten, smitten once again

11/4/2010 9:47 AM

li bai vi-06

pinning for a man a thousand miles away

li ling gone in the sands of the desert, su wu returned to china
far, far away from the wu yuan guan pass
where the snows of the north bloom on the border

paths lie in far different countries after separation
the thought of return is only a drawn out sigh
a stork and a wild goose fly to the far northwest
carrying letters to a man far over the horizon

murphy carless in central texas

11/4/2010 10:02 AM

li bai vi-07

the plant in the tree

the bird carries a plant from the steppes in its beak
it accidentally lets it fall onto a rotten mulberry tree
as a parasite there it begins to grow its roots
in the spring it is still not dead and sends out its shoots

since there is no affection between plant and tree
how is it that the plant remains alive
how is it possible they both have leaves
yet each a separate life will have its own death

murphy wary of passing under the mistletoe at the party

11/4/2010 10:11 AM

li bai vi-08

your horse is a roan

my friend's horse is a roan, mine is a ghost white steed
our rides vary greatly, our hearts still beat as one
we ride together often when we will make our rounds
and on the road to lo yang we trot along today

our long swords swing to flicker brightly in the sunshine
on our heads are high caps that shimmer rosy in the light
sporting coats of fine fur that are clearly of the best
with every prince and lord we are honored as their guest

but life has pits and traps for the wildest tiger free
and often the boldest warriors are sent to tight hard spots
a friend may best be seen in a dangerous dodgy time
how shallow is the friendship which only values ease

murphy a teammate to be reckoned with

11/5/2010 8:12 AM

li bai -09

an imitation of an old poem

i savor my reflection in the white jade
the black of eyebrows a deep raven sheen
the jewel mirror clear as the quietest pool
with a fallen blossom, still, afloat within

i step outside my door to seek the emperor's daughters
but choppy waves abound, prevent my going forth
oh, that i could catch a yellow crane
to carry a letter to my love

murphy all dressed up with no place to go

11/5/2010 8:33 AM

li bai vi-10

the breaking of the willow branch

the weeping willow dips its tender arms into the clear water
they swing a tormented beauty moved by the fresh east wind
the flowers carpet fresh as snow in you men guan pass
the thick pale green of the leaves shade the golden window

such beauty brings with it ideas full of longing
beside such natural beauty her heart remains conflicted
she grabs a branch attired in spring and breaks it
sends her thoughts far away to her husband in far away lung ting

murphy young, and tired of being alone

11/5/2010 8:46 AM

li bai vi-11

the princes

young men of high birth carrying their crossbows
turned left as they passed zhang tai palace
they burst asunder riding in all directions
as if they were a shower of shooting stars
their golden shafts picked birds clean out of the air
that night they gathered in triumph on the jeweled balcony

but bo yi and shu qi were against the will of the others
so they died slowly of hunger in the zhou yang mountains

murphy eschewing politics as too dangerous an occupation

11/6/2010 8:06 AM

li bai vi-12

the roan horse

the roan horse travels in an erratic pattern
the hooves green as jade carry his master
he stops by heavy brush on the banks of the river
why should he remain on the brocade saddle blanket

the mountain fortress bo xie in si chuan lies far behind
and the fort by the sea huang yun is still far ahead
the rider swings his whip for the roan to be on his way
and his thoughts drift free to the spring clothes of the women

murphy looking forward to the soiree in the evening

11/6/2010 8:17 AM

li bai vi-13

the song of the princes (1 of 2)

they listened to the clash of cymbals drinking the finest of wines
they beat time on their swords as they sang on the banks of the yi
when dan the crown prince of yan joined their group
he deepened his friendship with these sons of bing zhou

the princes prided themselves on their physical strength
energy and fire was their natural way of life
at the news of the assassination, gou jian lu spoke
oh, were we not led falsely into fighting one another

murphy grimy in the locker room after the game

11/6/2010 8:31 AM

li bai vi-14

the song of the princes (2 of 2)

here where the city is surrounded by green mountains to the north
here where the white water flows beneath the eastern city wall
here in front of the gates is the place where our paths separate
you wander into the far unknown alone from now on

your mind floats as free as the clouds beckoning in the distance
while here in the home of the heart of your friend, the sun sinks
a last warm embrace, my friend, before we must part
your horse knows it is time and snorts you must go

murphy at graduation going his separate way

11/6/2010 8:38 AM

li bai vi-15

the palomino with the white nose

the palomino with the white nose wears a silver saddle
his dark brocade blanket protects it from soiling
a fine rain and sprightly spring wind bring down the flowers
the rider flicks his whip, heads straight to the inn with the tartar waitress

murphy in his cups, snug, warm, and dry

11/6/2010 10:30 AM

li bai vi-16

the song of you zhang

the wind from the steppes blasts the cavalry of dai zhun
as they push through lu yang guan pass from the north
the weapons of the troops of wu glitter like snow over the sea
when will they return from their incursion in the west

half of them have already crossed the shang liao ford
yellow clouds cover the sun, the land seems sad and colorless
an old mother is seen taking leave of her son
she screams to the sky in the green wilderness

even the palominos guarding the banner
surround her, neigh piteously, and rear in confusion
even the silver poplar which mourn in the fall
are stripped early this year in the mountains of giang si

the son from the beginning has been a virtuous man
and he is new to the killing of the enemies
is he afraid of dying in the coming battles
or does he wish to sweep away the enemies for the prince

his demeanor is as the stone welcoming li guang's arrow
does anyone believe he fears hardship and danger
the large houseboats hurry fast as whales here
the waves beat against the shore of po yang lake

this song can no longer continue to be sung
in this war the hair of three armies has gone gray

murphy a thirty year man in the corps

11/7/2010 7:51 AM

li bai vi-17

the bather

after you have just washed and scented your hair
do not stand around and dust your dirty hat
after you bathe your body and apply scented oils
do not stand around and beat your clothes clean

those who live in this world and what it contains
often are altogether enamored of cleanliness
the wise man knows how to balance darkness and light
to return to the zang lang river to emulate the old fishermen there

murphy walking in balance with nature

11/7/2010 8:04 AM

li bai vi-18

the korean

the wind swirls around his gold embroidered hat
his horse makes slow, small intricate turns
his overly wide sleeves dance and flutter
it is as if a bird has flown here from the eastern sea

murphy slowing down his morning tai chi

11/7/2010 8:17 AM

li bai vi-19

thoughts in the still of the night

standing by my bed i look out on the moonlight
the ground is silvered as though covered with snow
i look up to the moon shining above me
i think of home, my head sinks in despair

murphy a stripling 2000 miles away at college

11/7/2010 8:24 AM

li bai vi-20

the way to lu shui (a song)

the autumn sun looks down on the green pond
where the oarsman plucks a white flower
the lotus showing him a visual caress
sad unto death is the man in the boat

murphy watching the waves after his first wife's death

11/7/2010 8:37 AM

li bai vi-21

the way of the phoenix

the daughter of the qin prince played on her jade flute
then her singing rose up into the skies of spring
the green phoenix did not fly away
there were people still there with him

but then their shadows vanished
between the column of colorful clouds
and the fading sounds continued
they came down into the country around

murphy achieving satori without anyone noticing

11/8/2010 7:48 AM

li bai vi-22

the way of the phoenix terrace

i once heard the daughter of the qin prince
she played the song of the phoenixes on her flute
on that day on the terrace she met an immortal
she was taken from this world in her hour of separation

they both flew away on the beautiful sounds of the flute
heaven sent her a dark cloud to carry them along
the way is still there but she has never returned
only the empty name lung you has remained behind

murphy recalling a mystic experience

11/8/2010 7:59 AM

li bai vi-23

with the troops

i move with the troops on the road to yu men guan pass
we will follow the enemy until the jin wei shan mountains
the flutes sound the song of the falling plum blossoms
the raised swords split the bright disc of the moon

the drums ring out over the sand sea, the gobi
the fighting spirit rises high into the clouds
i want to cut off the head of the hun prince myself
and then take the long gallop back to the iron gate pass

murphy boots shined, rifle cleaned, ready for battle

11/8/2010 8:06 AM

li bai vi-24

autumn thoughts

yesterday had a bit of the taste of spring
yellow orioles sang in the thick green of trees
the orchids wore their last lavish finery
then came the cold tearing wind

autumn is here, though the leaves still cling
the cricket complains in the cold moonlight
idly i sit and complain of the loss of the plants
the white dew is crushing their lush beauty

murphy facing the aches of winter yet again

11/9/2010 8:20 AM

li bai vi-25

spring thoughts

the grass in yan has turned again to the soft green of silk
the mulberry trees in qin have now their green branches
my heart is already broken, why welcome the return of spring
the spring wind does not know me, does not penetrate my bed curtains

murphy always finding something wrong with his lot

11/9/2010

li bai vi-26

thoughts of autumn

it is the time of yellow leaves in the mountains of yan zhi
i think of climbing to the top of the tower hidden high above
a sea of purple clouds stretch far over the sand sea
everywhere is autumn and sadness reigns

the tartar hordes mass on the borders of the gobi
the minister returns home from the yu men guan pass
but the warriors have no date to come home
instinctively i bemoan this time for the plucking of orchids

murphy hating cut flowers which wilt in the vase

11/9/2010 8:43 AM

li bai vi-27

four wu songs in the style of zi ye (1 of 4)

lo fu from qin picked mulberry leaves by the green water
her white hand reaching into the dark branches
her cheeks colored gold by the bright sun
“the larvas are hungry and i must go, my lord, and so should you”

murphy begging off a lunch date with a good excuse

11/10/2010 8:08 AM

li bai vi-28

four wu songs in the style of zi ye (2 of 4)

jing lake is large and covered with copious lotus flowers
but when xi shi comes to pick them one thinks how small it really is
soon she turns her boat and does not wait for the moon to appear
for she must hurry back to the house of the king of yue

murphy visiting the house he grew up in and noticing how small it was

11/10/2010 8:19 AM

li bai vi-29

four wu songs in the style of zi ye (3 of 4)

chang an stands silvered in the moon's bath of light
from every household sounds the beating of the wash
the autumn wind blows steadily; everything reminds me of yu guan
when will the barbarians be beaten and he can return to me

murphy tired of the continued fighting in afghanistan

11/10/2010 8:26 AM

li bai vi-30

four wu songs in the style of zi ye (4 of 4)

early tomorrow the baggage will leave for the front
all night i have sewn wool padding into his uniform
my hands are cold holding the needle, i fumble with the scissors
i sew tight seams and send them into the distance, eventually to lin tao

murphy gathering scrap metal for the war effort

11/10/2010 8:34 AM

li bai vi-31

in front of the wine

song zi was transformed on mount gin hoa
an gi was successful in reaching peng lai
both achieved immortality in the ancient world
but where, indeed, are they now

life is as brief as a bolt of lightning
barely long enough for the light to be seen
if heaven and earth are immutable
why is the change so fast for all of us

you who sit in front of wine and hesitate
the pleasure awaits, what else should you wish

murphy always standing close to the keg

11/12/2010 9:00 AM

li bai vi-32

the itinerant merchant

the itinerant merchant uses the heavenly winds on the sea
and he travels to his distant ventures with sails drawing full
he is like the bird flying through the clouds
having once passed he is never seen again

murphy remembering when he didn't buy that book he now can't find

11/12/2010 9:23 AM

li bai vi-33

the poem of the washing stones

for more than ten years the beautiful woman has lived alone in the women's quarters
she sits with her shadow and furrowed brow, unhappy without her husband
but then she sees the first swallow of spring come flying by
in its bill it holds a letter on white silk coming down from the clouds
her white hand opens the missive, she heaves a long sigh as she reads

my brave man is still a soldier in the field north of zhiao he cheng
ten thousand miles away the waters of the zhio he river flow north
i want us to be together there like a pair of birds on a river island
at the border where horsemen with blue ribbons crowd around
on the red limestone house where i live grows a thick moss

around this house the spring wind blows weaker day by day
who can bear to look at the mirror to see the white hairs of grief
this morning i blew the bamboo flute by the falling blossoms
tonight i will wash uniforms on the washing stone by the light of the full moon
it shines high above and the night stretches long before me

a veiled curtain of pearls opens into the fragrant hall
wherein hangs a canopy embroidered with connected hearts
the incense i have lighted on the mat has half burned through
the beautiful mat, the precious canopy, the ceiling with intricate embroidery
lonely with all this around i sleep in the flickering light

your messenger brought me golden scissors, and i thanked him
i cut fragrant orchids for you yet you still do not come
i weep into my red handkerchief til it is sodden
if you are still fighting a year from now i want to come to you
like the elf of wu shan mountain came to the king of chu

murphy hallucinating and delirious in his solitude

11/18/2010 8:38 AM

li bai vi-34

the young prince

have you not seen
the young prince from huai nan
by day he hunts or plays ball, by night he throws dice
if he loses a hundred thousand on a throw, he becomes determined
he will seek payback even if he must go a thousand miles away
this young knightly prince who loves to wander

he wears only the best of silk garments
his suite reeks of orchid bedecked courtesans
he is always surrounded by instruments and singing
he proudly assumes he has no equal alive
many hangers-on stay in his house
he gifts them all with saddles and horses

he serves only the most expensive of wines
with his warm heart he welcomes his friends
he spares no expense in surrounding himself with scholars
and when one of the learned leaves him
he is always replaced by someone new

magistrates and district officers are always in his house
dukes and counts are often seen in his company
why should he bury himself in books and court poverty
he will still stand shining a hundred years from now
why should he hold to principle and risk failure
civil servants of today are half the men of war
while poor scholars are most often only hermits

let the prince stretch his roots and branches in all directions
nothing is better than to acquire new friends
let him manage his marriage to tie himself to the imperial residence
nothing is better in life than having a good position in the state
look at the rich and titled before your eyes
why should they be bothered to strive for fame after death

murphy without a care in the world having gotten more his share already

11/18/2010 11:46 AM

li bai vi-35

the long song

the peach and plum blossoms open into the spring sun
their beauty is confined to only this short season
when the east wind impassions all of nature
all vegetation speaking loudly at once

no more withered branch with its ugly leaves
the dry stream bed now become a clear bubbling spring
a mighty force moves both heaven and earth
as xi and he continue on their daily swing

but fame is not acquired in one's youth
why should our name shine then in history
the splendor of blossoms is only in the spring
who else could borrow the bright sun

reputation and immortality come later
this fruit is the culmination of frail age and wisdom
eventually metal and rock fall victim to time
while wind and ice are evanescent, ephemeral

i fear we become old only once and no more
we have only one time to enjoy wine and song
the striving of plants do not reflect that of people
how quickly fall the leaves of the purple willow

murphy looking out from ancient glittering eyes

11/19/2010 9:23 AM

li bai vi-36

longing

the sun is leaving and the colors of the flowers blur
the moon rises bright like white silk, i cannot sleep from grief
i hear the improvised sounds of zhao of the phoenix at play
the pipa from shu begins the song of the pair of mandarin ducks

this song has deep meaning of grief for one who suffers
would i could follow the spring wind as inscribed on the yan ran stele
i think of you separated from me by the long blue sky
and how once i looked on you with a roguish eye

now that eye has become a fount of tears
if you do not believe my heart is torn
come back and look at the longing in me
as i am now reflected in this clear mirror

murphy separated and forlorn

11/19/2010 9:51 AM

the song of the wild tigers

i

in the morning i compose a song about wild tigers
in the evening i compose a song about wild tigers
my heart is torn but not because it is by the waters of lung shou shan
my tears flow but not because of the lute music of yong zhou zi men
no, it's the bewildering number of troops on the banks of the huang he
the drums of war so strong as to threaten the mountains with collapse
half the inhabitants of qin are in the hands of an lu shan
and the horses of the illegal barbarians eat the grass of lo yang
along the mountain passes surge the fortunes of war
the cities of the province you ji are bitter battlegrounds
as long as the ugly turtle is not beheaded, the waters move to the sea
loyal fish and dragons have sought shelter, but there is no hope of peace

ii

these times remind of the western han when turmoil was endless
in the morning zhang liang rushed to bo lang sha to kill qin shi huang
in the evening han xin tentatively entered the marketplace of huai yin
zhang liang was never as impoverished as was han xin
the fate of liu bang and xiang ji depended on these two generals
an old man gave zhang liang the book on the art of war when he visited xia pei
in his distress han xin was given advice by a laundress later to serve the duke of chu
the heroes of antiquity loved such things before eventful times
however, today when men strive for greatness they ignore underlings
who, even if they could hear good advice, dare not approach the dragon
they have all hidden in the south to escape the barbarian storm
their martial value, their precious swords, are kept in the high towers
their gold inlaid saddles, their noble steeds, they give away to their friends
only yesterday i was merely a guest in xuan zheng
i rang the bell and sought the governor
often i cheer my heart through playfulness
three times it took me to throw a victory roll of the dice

iii

the men of chu always speak of the peculiarities of zang xu
his heart was filled by wind and clouds and was unknowable
already the governor of three provinces seek him out
brave men and knightly princes of the four seas all looking for him
also xiao he and cao xu were originally clerks in the land of pei
clinging to the scales of dragons, sitting on the wings of the phoenix, everything has its time
we now meet in a wine shop on the north bank of the li river in the third month of spring
the willow blossoms are luxuriant and grief is killing me

barbarian youths with green eyes are playing their precious flutes
the giang su song of the white hemp floats with the dust to the rafters
seeing zhang xu here has brought me a sudden joy
we must kill an ox, beat the drum, and give our friends a feast
then i will go to the eastern sea and go fishing
and if i catch fish i will send glad tidings back to my friends

murphy caught in the hurly burly of a melee

11/20/2010 11:00 AM

li vai vi-38

the song of the outcast woman

i

there have always been women who have been cast out
but there has always been a refuge they could find
today i must leave my husband
who is it that i should turn to
my own family is completely ruined
so i have to cry now on the side of the road
i remember before my wedding
when i learned that you were very generous
you gave me fine silks and embroideries
and at least one thousand ounces of gold
we were engaged when i was fifteen
at twenty i left my parents to be with you
then not long after our wedding you left
you traveled to remote mountains and valleys
other families were joyful, i sat alone and grieved
in the dark women's quarters many thoughts were shared
one's beauty lasts for hardly more than ten years
but yearning runs in an endless circle
as cushions and mats were flooded by tears

ii

these tears have been unstoppable
as i constantly dreamed of you so far away
and then you came back at last
and when you appeared i was already old
love hates ugliness
a new darling was found in first bloom
hiding my tears i must leave the familiar house
my wounded heart suffers more than wilting grasses of autumn
since i became your wife
we were almost always separated
behind our bed curtains were only sorrowful awakenings
my white face was bathed continually in tears
for all the long time of our separation
i have allowed a thick layer of dust to cover everything
i always heated the thought of a lonely existence
and i always wished for a life of loving as mandarin ducks do
but in place of blooming years has been only frost and snow

iii

what is the future now for this poor woman
the faded hibiscus has fallen into the cold pond
the autumn winds have shriveled the meadows
i leave now with my care worn face
only my old belongings go with me into the bleakness
where should i stay for the rest of my life
who will accept the burden of my life
after i lost your favor who will give me a future
i regret i emptied the wedding cup with you
and received nothing but an embroidered heart

iv

the flax tendrils wrap around the green spruce
it learns to lean on the tree and snuggle
this water chestnut can no longer float on the water
and she wanted nothing more than for you to be the water
i do not complain that you failed me
i complain only that my future is to be pitied
i remember when we were married
your little sister stood there beside me
has she now become a young woman
what can i leave your sister but this advice
do not marry a man like your older brother

murphy listening to another tale of woe

11/21/2010 8:56 AM