

introduction: once in jiang ling i saw si ma cheng cheng, the hermit of tian tai shan, who thought that because of my natural affinity to the spirit of daoism i could wander at will with the spirits of the universe. he asked me about a poetic description of “the encounter of the gryphon with strange bird of kun lun” which had already found its way into the world. i had written it long before and people who read it found it wanting due to the inexperience of my youthful self. i had discarded the work in my maturity. but when i read in the history of the jin dynasty “the price of the gryphon” by yuan xiu i was dissatisfied with the work and disappointed. so i rewrote from memory my old poem, but it is much different from the old version. this new version i have included in the manuscript copy of my collected works. but i would hardly dare to show it to other writers. i only have shown it to my students. it is as follows:

the majestic roc

i

chuang zi the old immortal of nun hua mountain
developed his ideas in the city of qu yuan
he wrote lofty dissertations
used remarkable words of hyperbole
and took the fantastical qi xie as a source

this tells us: “in the northern ocean there was a great fish
no one knows how long he was
his name was kun
he turned into the great gryphon”

his substance of self was altogether new
he threw his back fins onto an island in the sea
and spread his wings in front of the gates of heaven
flailing away his wings shed the spring waters of the gulf of zhi li
he dried himself in the rays of the rising sun in fu sang
he spread terror throughout the world
he settled himself on kun lun
with every stroke of his wings, with every dancing movement
he raised storms of sand and stones to darken the land
his actions shook the five great mountains
the hundred rivers were driven from their beds

ii

he takes thunderous strides on the earth
he rises high into the ether
he wanders the nine regions of the heavens
he plunges deep into the sea
he flies away 3,000 miles but soon reappears
he soars 90,000 miles rapidly, up, up
his back a mighty arc like the massif of tai shan
his wings stretch high into the clouds

when he turns right or left
suddenly it is dark, suddenly the light floods back
the strength of his wings is that of the wraith of han man
as he enters the towering gates of the sky
he toys with the demons of chaos
he kindles thunder and lightning
he suddenly turns and the sky trembles
the mountains shake, the sea ebbs away
his anger finds no object, it troubles the air
his courage can find no worthy opponent
one can only imagine the extent of his powers
only his great size can be described

iii

his legs are wrapped in rainbows
his eyes shine like the sun and the moon
without respite he never stops moving
he flies about with unsurpassed quickness
when he exhales clouds cover the earth
if he cleans his feathers snow falls over a thousand miles
he hurries into the distance of the northern deserts
he criss-crosses the enormity of the south
by lifting a wing he cruises from side to side

surrounded by storms he yet continues his way
the torch dragon lights his way to see all of nature
he uses lightning as a whip to forge his path
he considers the three spirit mountains of the eastern sea daubs of mud
for him the five lakes are nothing but tiny cups
when he wishes he sweeps the spirits along with him
when he stirs the dao moves in harmony
ren gong zi sees him and ceases to fish
hou yi dares not draw his bow
these men throw away fishing rod and arrows
looking on, they permit themselves only a drawn out sigh

iv

as for his martial appearance and great size
he stretches as wide as the milky way
soaring he reaches to the blue heavens
floating he covers the vast regions of earth
pan gu opens the heavens to look down on him
xie he leans out from the sun to view him from the side

he stretches powerfully in the eight directions
he covers fully half the four seas
when he blocks the sun with his breast
it is as if turmoil suddenly ceased
when he suddenly turns and flies back
then comes the red morning clouds and the fog

v

once every six months he lands
he arrives at the shore of the sea
suddenly blocking the sun and the moon
he soars high in the sky and swoops down
resting in the endless desert sands
diving into the sea unfathomable

the wild energy he brings
the blasting catapult of self
stirs the sea into motion
divides mountains of rock
frightens the spirit of the valley chao yang
disturbs hai ro the spirit of the seas
and the giant turtle which bears on its head
the glorious islands of the immortals, peng lai

whale rises from the ocean, swims away
turtle pulls its head back into its shell
whale collapses distinctive back fin
no one dares spy on the roc
i cannot believe its marvelous appearance
it is one of the mysteries of creation

vi

one cannot compare him to the yellow swan of the island of the immortals peng lai
the one that boasts of a golden robe and chrysanthemum yellow under-plumage
he also puts to shame the black phoenix of cang wu
in his luster of a many-colored brocade background
he serves as a mount for magical geniuses
as he has long been tamed by the wily immortals

the bird jing wei is very diligent in collecting wood to fill the eastern sea
the bird yuan ju is very disturbed by his invitation to the banquet
the heavenly partridge welcomes morning on the great peach tree
the sun crow sits as ever in the radiance of the sun
all these birds are not free in their movements and tendencies
they are constrained and bound by their habits

he is altogether different in flight from the great roc
he cannot be likened to these other birds
they boast not of his size and ferocity
they do not choose when to appear and to disappear
as for his age he is as old as the root of the dao
he has partaken of the primeval ether and this fills his being
he has frolicked in the valley of the sun and returned therefrom
he has flown to visit the magic island of yan zhou in the eastern sea

vii

once the gryphon came upon the strange bird of the kun lun and said to him:
“glorious are you, o great roc, it is a pleasure to see you
with my right wing i covered over the far west
with my left i darkened the far east
i skin mountains and rivers on the earth
i circle the poles high in the sky
i take the land “indiscernible” to be my nest
and the place called “nowhere” is my playground
i call upon you to make a journey
come along and fly with me”

to this the roc readily agreed
and followed him up into the sky
soon these two birds soared into the highest regions of heaven
and laughingly looked down on the other small birds and their restrictions

murphy remembering the cherokee myth of the uktena

9/15/2010 11:12 AM

li bai i-02

in imitation of the yi fen fu

i

i arrive at dai shan in the early morning
then turn quickly to look over to hao li shan
bones of the dead shiver under spruce and catalpas
dried old weeds cover the cold ruined heights
our fleeting life is cause for bitter regret
our fate the same as those buried here
and though i am a man of strength
when i think back to those nobles of old
i swallow a wrenching despair for their deaths

ii

gao zi of the han burst forth as a dragon
many brave men fought for him when he gambled all
he drew his sword filled with a fighting spirit
and he brought his full resources to back his will
he hurried to the gulf of zhi li in the east
in the west he brought commotion to the kun lun
by chopping the snake he inspired his troops
he put an end to the troubles of the empire
he possessed a noble strategy and rose quickly
with a fierce visage he sacrificed to heaven on the purple altar
he took leave of us forever on a beautiful morning
and the whole earth mourned for him

iii

xiang wang who fought like a tiger
his luster rivaled that of the radiant sun
but whose force which could move mountains came to an end
and the power to rule the world left him
he heard the war song of chu all around him
he knew the troops of han surrounded him in double lines
he went into his tent after performing a sword dance
weeping, he suppressed his desire to fight
he sang, "oh, my racer zhui will run no more"
where away had his heroism fled

iv

while jing ke was entering the land of qin
as he came to view the yi river
a long rainbow pierced the sun
a cold wind came up with a roar
he wanted to finish his long trek and murder qin shi huang
which deed would avenge dan, the heir to the throne
his strange plan failed
and he died filled with rage

v

or take the example of the empress chen who had lost the favor of the emperor
he never again entered the chang men palace where she lived
and his radiance never reached her hall of gold
ice cold were her embroidered robes
the green of spring had departed
the fireflies of autumn were everywhere seen
she hated the transience of the peach and plum blossoms
and thought constantly of the ephemerality of the emperor's pleasure

vi

once when qu yuan was banished
he went into exile on the banks of the xiang river
his heart was constantly preoccupied with ancient chu
his soul flew up into the maple forest
he listened to the wind rustling through the trees on the banks of the river
he heard the melancholy cries of the apes
and buried his body for ever in the clear waters
he regretted that huai wang, his prince, died in qin and his body never returned home

vii

and there is li xu who was executed
his wonderful energy cut short
everyone around shed hot tears
as his sad soul touched the sky
when he was taking leave from his favorite son
he lamented they could never take their favorite brown dog hunting again

viii

or think of someone taking leave forever from his parents
leaving to go to war far, far from his home
or another who is banished to the end of the world
far beyond the sandy sea, always thinking of his return
if these people should slander and obscure the emperor sun
then their eyes are broken and their soul escapes
there is no one who would think deeply on these issues
whose robes would not be wet by bloody tears
or when festive carriages come together
to fill the palace gates with their splendid horse
the haze and dust of the morning gathering
the song and music of the daily routines
all this is as the fall of meteors or the dying of thunder
like vanishing shadows, fleeing, the interring of souls.

ix

all gone forever, confined to the past
the cassia bloom of the moon brightly shines
then the morning sun hastens to light the day
til the beautiful face withers and disappears
and the ants gather
the green terrace then empty
no more song and dance
the principle of heaven is that all should perish
that no one escapes becoming a pile of bones in an eternal night

murphy studying the sad history of the southern united states

9/9/2010 8:15 AM

li bai i-03

sorrow at the end of spring

i

why does the big dipper turn to the east when spring arrives
when the waters flow again with the color of green jade
when the orchids are abundant with fragrant red flowers
i peer into the distance and attempt to raise my spirits, relieve my grief
and take in with a glance the forlorn infinity of the sea of clouds
my soul flies away, i am rent asunder
tears form runnels down my cheeks
i sing to the purity of wind, the sound echoes from the blue waves below
i send my complaints via the xiao and xiang rivers to the immensity of dong ting lake
oh, why does my despondent heart choose to drift in its despair on the spring breeze

ii

it drifts away and my yearning has no boundary
i worry that the pleasant times spent with friends are now come to an end
the wide plains below are lush with grass and look like a patterned silk rug
i love the fragrant fields late in the spring, dense and new mown
but i regret the coming end of spring
my sorrow always deepens at this time

iii

on the meandering han river and in the marshes of the yang zi
i held heaven sent life in my hands, how can i bear my longing for that time
i think of the seductive nymphs to the north of xian mountain
i am saddened thinking of the divine daughters of yao on the river xiang
my regret knows no bounds, my heart despondent and glum
for the women now look away and not at me, bringing me grief
i still carry within me the sensual land of wei by the qi river
and dream of the goddess on the chu yun terrace

iv

every departure of spring while flowers are still in their glory
i think of when they will be gone, when spring is truly over
i sigh over the rapids flowing ever downstream
and the waters that so soon end in the great eastern sea
my spring is not coming back, that time has been spent
age and maturity have brought their boisterous welter of cares
i am incapacitated by my inability to toss a rope into the sky
to stop the headlong flight of the west bound sun

murphy the old ruminant chewing his cud

9/10/2010 9:23 AM

li bai i-04

mourning over the spring days

the east wind returns
i look over the emerald grass and know it is spring
yet watching the weeping willows unsettled movement
i am saddened by the branches swinging their impotence
the glory of heaven is pure and full of beautiful harmony
the mist rising from the green sea brings freshness
the wide fields surround me with a juicy green
the clouds twist high in the sky their changing forms
the water rushes by in an unending flow
and i look to its welling source between the dark moss
wisps of the fog are wandering threads in the air
their writhing forms thin swirling smoke
yet my soul is torn as the wind tears these threads
and despite these glories i am filled with remorse
my thoughts echo the sad sounds of lung shui
reflect the melancholy cry of the apes on the banks of the yang zi
i am as sad as zhao zhun as she moved through the yu men guan pass to the huns
as sad as qu yuan, the man of chu in the maple forest
i try to raise my spirits and gaze into the distance
but my soul aches and my heart dwindles
in this spring my heart undulates like a wave
in this spring sadness swirls around me confused like driven snow
when one considers all feelings of passion and balance
in this fragrant season for me they are sunk to their lowest

ii

i think of the emperor on the opposite bank of the xiang river
we are divided by clouds and i know there is no chance of meeting him
i let my tears fall into the water and disappear into a small wave
i trust the expression of my feelings to the east flowing waters
if i could withhold all the splendors of spring so he does not perish
i would send him all the world's blessings from the far horizons

murphy considering the agonies of childhood

9/11/2010 9:44 AM

li bai i-05

grievance on an autumn day

i

i scale one of the nine peaks and look out on the clear waters
i see the three channels of the river xiang flowing far below
the moving waters shiver as they hasten to the sea
clouds above the autumn landscape cover the sky
i want to fly straight as the birds the far distance to my home
but i fear the unknown, the incredible distance from jing to wu

ii

it is the time when only half the sun is seen sinking in the west
the radiance which now permeates with its glow soon disappears
the clear sea brightens to the color of white silk
for the moon has risen above the distant waters
i think of the joy of returning to see my dear friends
but my memories of northern yan fade as i look south to yue

iii

lotus flowers have withered away amid the waters of autumn
the wind tears through the trees and the night is endless
it is as if i am on the shore of the great sea filled with yearning thoughts
i want to catch a giant turtle off the islands of the eastern sea
but i don't have such a long fishing rod to snare one
thus i can only cast my eyes on the high waves and feel deeply my sorrow
i want to complete my journey to the land of the immortals
i can no longer stay among people, i wish to pick herbs on blessed peng lai

murphy in his cups indulging himself in his favorite pipe dream

9/12/2010 9:33 AM

li bai i-06

sword tower mountains

looking south from chang an for several thousand miles
one with magic eyes could see the cloud peaks of si chuan
in the foreground towers like massive swords, tall and steep
they reach into the blue sky, and between them a valley
up there an inhospitable wind tears through the evergreens
up where the monkeys of si chuan make their melancholy cries
in addition, high waterfalls plunge through the gorges
pour over the rocks and throw their spray across the road
in the depths they crash and roil with a terrible thunder

ii

i said goodbye before to a friend who left me here
when will he return to sit with me again
though i wish him the happiest journey
i sigh deeply lost in my thoughts
i see the dark waves flow to the east
and lament that the sun is so far in the west
the wild geese bid farewell with their autumnal cries
sad clouds cover the land of qin and wrap it in darkness
unseen the moon will soon rise above the sword towers
though we are widely separated in different lands
we both can sit with cups in hand to think of each other

murphy stuck in the boondocks and thinking of bright lights, big city

9/13/2010 9:26 AM

li bai i-07

ming tang temple

once under the emperor gao zong
sacrifice of the highest order was made on tai shan
and following the successful completion of the ritual
the regime name of lin de was changed
plans were made for the the ming tang temple
it was designed in the following regime of zong zhang
but before the materials for its completion were gathered
the supreme ruler unfortunately went on his last long journey
but his empress tian hou continued to build
and zhong zong was able to complete it
then all the people came as children of the emperor
and helped in setting up the great work which will outlast 10,000 years
for emperor gao zong the heavens were pleasant in anticipation
for emperor zhong zong the heavens were filled with reverence
and as successive emperors added their efforts
a magnificent work was accomplished
i, li tai bo, praise here the beauty of the temple
and i respectfully offer the following prose poem

i

in the time of the tang dynasty instructions were drawn up according to divine rule
dedicated to the exalted ancestors of the emperor gao zu and the laws of nature
divinely awesome he came forth as thunder and led the way
he moved through all eight possible directions
brought the outermost ends of the earth into motion
swept away all dissidents
and brought all unrest to a peaceful end
the star of virtue shined in the heavens
and the constellation of the most worthy three was in balance
the rainbows disappeared and then appeared the sun and the moon
as emperor tai zong reflected the heavens and the earth

his wonderful virtue shined in war and in peace
he extended his dominions to the ends of the world
he continued the implementation of the heavenly rules
a pure wind blew without interruption
and infinite grace extended far and wide
his military strength was acknowledged by all the vassal states
the praise of the people came from the furthest lands

ii

the empire continued to blossom under emperor gao zong
as his government was showered with good fortune
from all sides people flocked to his success
fortuitous omen were seen in all places
miracles abounded, the earth brought forth its treasure in abundance
he was in harmony with heaven, he embodied the wishes of the people
he ascended tai shan and liang fu to perform the ceremonies feng and shan
he wanted to establish the ming tang temple and chose the area of lo yang
but he had not accumulated enough merits to succeed
he went away riding on a white cloud into the heavenly regions

the empress tian hou then exerted all the powers of the government
and emperor zhong zong wisely assured happiness to his descendants
in honor of their predecessor the pair continued the work of the temple
and made brilliant the glory in praise of their ancestors
the design drawn up by the emperor huang di was followed
fortuitous dates were determined by the astrologers
all considerations were diligently accomplished
and gradually the form emerged, not too splendid and not too simple
then people came from all parts of the empire to freely offer their hands
not because they were forced to offer labor instead of taxes

the foundations were laid with the use of plumb bob and the spirit level
thereupon the cloud reaching beams were erected
all existing jade from the lung mountain was taken
the beautiful trees of the forests of ho nan were depleted
the artistry exceeded that of spirits and demons
as the lofty heights reached up to touch the sky

there one could listen to the pure joy of heavenly entertainment
for here was the sublime portal of the divine residence
though built by temporary effort it was done for all eternity
so here gathered the highest advisors of the dynasty
who looked upon the solidity of the mighty ming tang temple
it rose up before them like the sun
sometimes in a bright light and sometimes in shadow
it was as if the forces of the distant past come down from the ether
high it rises and powerfully it stands there
like a giant rock, like a mountain
and it was as if the gates of heaven and earth opened and closed

iii

it was as if a great massif split, a giant rock was made into two
with elegant lines impressive towers to heaven
it surpassed all buildings before, were there but the past was eclipsed
he showed the whole of nature in all its beauty
its mystical powers penetrated and opened the void
its breath divided the chasms and livened the difference
it brings to mind the sky pillar of kun lun
that rises into the new spheres of heaven and sits above the clouds

iv

for it was built along the path of the sun
towering toward the palace of the most high
the outer wall covered the place of the gou chen star
the gates opened as the gates of heaven
everything huge and immensely high
its brilliance shining throughout space and time
awe inspiring and magnificent it is there
increasing the sublime influence of heaven on earth

v

behind the temple is the deep huang he
within its borders runs the swift clear river lo
to the north rises tai hang mountain
to the south extends the tong gu dal
in the distance lies bear ear mountain
which opens to lung man pass and to the yi river passage
the temple brings color and beauty to the land
it illuminates the pure darkness of the many mountains
it rises into the fog and the clouds as they gather
it emerges in the sun, then disappears again
it is as high as tai shi mountain and rises from the yi shui
it is sustained by the sun and approaches the moon
it is the shock of the first peal of thunder
it rubs up against the stars
it holds the coils of the golden dragon on its pillars
and regulates the movements of the celestial pearl which hangs from the ceiling

vi

it powerful presence exceeds that of the five great mountains
its massive character extends to the further ends of the four regions
it presses with its extensive foundations along the axis of the earth
it touches the borders of heaven, and thus serves as a record of such
its floors and terraces soar to extreme heights surpassing all others
the walls and gates, seen as peaks of differing heights, cover half the sun and the moon
magnificent trees and beautiful plants bedeck the courtyards
with flowering buds and luxuriant foliage
it is believed that the mighty splendor of the yu jing star looks down
its beautiful light like that of the star yu sheng
it reaches with its towers toward the canopy star
and looks up to the unequal heights of the sky palace tai wei

vii

it shelters the forbidden city
it is located next to the arsenals
it points to the constellations fang and xin allowing them to be consulted
it looks to the east and reveals itself to the people
it was built to the regulations set forth in the yin dynasty
it conforms to the fashions of the xia dynasty
it unites the names dai shi and zhong wu
it conforms to the ratios between the stars
it reflects the interaction of the elements wood and fire
it stands with power but not ostentation
it is wonderful to look upon and is not overly simple
it rises from its base to the height of the red morning clouds
the massive construction looms upward as if spreading clouds
it intercepts the sun's orbit
it suts off the path of the winds
the sun crow turns in its shadow and flies upside down
the great roc enters its shadow of the sun
and seems to fly only as high as the temple itself

viii

as one approaches through a dense forest
one sees a thousand palaces rise side by side
they are brighter than the emerald halls
magnificent as the gemstone rooms
they glitter like brocade, like the reflection of the red clouds of morning
like the myriad of stars, like the never ending waves of the sea
alone in its unapproachable height in the winds
ensconced in its deep seclusion, the forest like teeth of a comb
the temple is filled with forces for the bringing of blessings
as the auspicious smoke of sacrifice rises to the heavens

ix

the nine halls of the temple are deeply secluded
its five gates lie in a single row
its tall columns are of unequal heights
its cantilevered beams are nestled within
its cross beams are decorated with clouds formed of silk fabrics
the carved rafters and flying buttresses reach to the heavens
the white walls are as bright as daylight
the red ridge beam is a dazzling splendor
the crimson balustrades are of a dizzying height
towering high, high up to the milky way
green columns are all around
following one another in an unbroken series
to reach the outer limits of the sky
two thirds of the regions of the sky projecting into the residence

if you look at the temple from a distance
one is dazzled by the abundance of splendor
suddenly one feels the sky turn and darken with clouds
if one looks upon the temple from near by
one is hit by an immensity of light
the mountains suddenly move and the sun disappears
is luster puts the mirage of peng lai island to shame
it embodies the light seen from the top of tai shan at sunrise

the wild tiger is seen staying himself on his busy way
the burrowing dragon climbs up the columns
to penetrate the dome on the way to the sky
one looks to the milky way lying under it now
a gemstone mermaid clings in openwork carving of stars on the doors
a golden fairy hands over the moon at the end of the rafters adorned with precious stones

square wooden panels of the ceiling are carved with ten aquatic plants to ward off fire
the skylight with its red wings holds a rainbow
you feel as if you were climbing through a gorge without feet
one heel is sprained and the feet cannot be used
if you wish to leave suddenly everything is dark, and you fear death
going away and looking back you are lost in the midst of such splendor

x

the temple is surrounded on both sides by covered galleries
connected to the palace wings
these galleries lead to the western building
which is named the kun lun hall
before the emperor are the consultants, behind him is the chronicler
the workers hesitate before entering or leaving
the princes of the nine barbarian states of the east
and the wild five nations of the north
enter in haste from their appropriate direction

xi

to the right and the left of the hall
are large high rising red stairs
the purple hall is in glorious splendor
valuable three footed bronze vessels are in their positions
and compete with the surrounding luster of gold
the powerful wind-driven flow of the water from the bi yong lake
resemble waves of the sea as they surround the temple

and there opens before us
the eastern hall qing yang
the western hall zong zhang
the southern hall ming tai
and the northern hall xuan tang
but the most powerful impression is made by the great temple tai miao
which is located in the center

there are instructions and orders issued here
appropriate to the seasons
and in correspondence to the cardinal points of the heavens

xii

consider the openings
there are 36 doors
and 72 windows
it is 9 yan in size from west to east
with tigers on the short walls seem real enough to move
black dragons hold the corners and are believed to move back and forth

consider the deep mysteries
the immortal chi biao nu has supervision of fire
the immortal bai zhu zhao has supervision of metal
the immortal ling wei yang has supervision of the yang principle
the immortal xie guang ji has supervision of the yin principle
the immortal sha dou presides over the earth element
all watch over the heart of the central temple

consider the brilliant paintings
one can see power shown in ten thousand variations
the whole of nature, people, birds, quadrupeds
in all their wonderful shapes and differences
they are presented as if they flew or moved
with watchful eyes and expressive with feeling
illustrious rulers and significant princes
loyal ministers and heroic men
the rise and fall of glorious governments
all this vividly portrayed for the instruction of sages and fools

xiii

in the first spring month the emperor presides
when the radiant sun rises to the east of the mountains
the heaven's sun wears the dark stone pendants on his belt
he is borne by the dark dragon horse
while near the north side of qing yang hall
the jasper sounding strings are plucked
hearing this the imperial visage brightens
and glory descends on the great ceremony

the emperor then climbs to the wonderful observatory
to keep the rituals, to be among the clouds, to speak out
then he turns to go to the ancestral temple
where he can offer his sacrifice to heaven for his ancestors
there he stands within rising clouds of incense
the sacrificial laws are exact, and exactly he follows them
long live the music of the arrayed stones adorned with feathers

here the emperor receives the tribute of the six regions
and is handed the census records of the ten thousand districts
here he unfolds the dragon banner and the rainbow flag
here he accepts the golden spears and the jade lances
he invites in the five wise and experienced elders
and beckons the hundred heads of the provinces

they hold in their hands their emperor's gift of wine goblets
they are resplendent in gems and silk garments
they are full of dignity and deference
their facial expression serious and quickly they step

then the prepared dishes of food are offered
and the vases filled with prepared millet
then the three classes of sacrificial animals are slain
and brings the five animals of the hunt forward
for the spirits of the ancestors to enjoy
the chief priest gives proper invocations
and the gathered officials show their reverence

the music of wu wang sends out its encouraging sounds
the bells and drums of the heavenly musicians ring out
the gu zhu flutes join in
the lyre adds its harmonic melodies
thus the six changes of music are completed
and the nine elements of the service are rendered properly
all the spirits are gathered
and crowd into the ming tang temple
for a wise ruler governs with respect to the world
and they can enjoy the offerings from their mysterious distance

xiv

then the emperor proceeds to the bi yong lake
and there enjoys a banquet with all the feudal lords
the food exemplifies both yin and yang
for nature provides the flavors
earth feeds from the original ether
and is sprinkled with both principles in great harmony
for a thousand miles around the people sing and dance
the hundred officials continue their chanting

at this time
it is as if the clouds split open and rained down largesse
the grace of the emperor is infinitely wide
and extends to the infinite distances
the kingdoms are united with the han far out beyond the four seas
the residents of the eight deserts are united with the middle kingdom
the entire world praises this wonderful government
all the dignitaries are enthralled by the virtue of the ruler
they bow deeply and retire

xv

and the wise ruler is connected to the people day and night
he is concerned for their needs and their comforts
he looks upward to the heavens
his ear listens to the whispering earth
his understanding expands, his wisdom prompt to be of service
whether near or far all is considered
the secrets of demons and spirits are examined
the constant interplay of yin and yang explored
clear edicts are issued
old rules are extended
the needy are seen to
the grain stores made available
gemstones are sacrificed, pearls are spent

the palace is withdrawn, the perimeter walls made lower
so inhabitants of mountains and marshes are welcomed
and make a continuous movement to and from the capital
the emperor himself visits his gardens to pick his flowers
the empress goes to her mulberry trees to pick the leaves
trade is encouraged, agriculture rewarded
people live in harmony, the seasons are in harmony

the feathered top of the emperor's standard flutters in the wind
one hears the jingle of the jade bells on the emperor's carriage
the emperor enjoys his garden of prosperity and peace
he rests in the hall of pure springs and supreme virtue
the heavens rejoice
the omens are very favorable

the emperor travels the land of qin which falls under the quail head constellation
he visits the li shan mountains in shen si
conducts sacrifices to the heavens on tai shan
sacrifices to the earth at she shou
he interments li lu and honors emperor yao
he walks around kung tung mountain
and in the south of fa shui river
he drinks the magical essence of the morning dew
he avoids the fragrance of the tastiest dishes
and elects to govern so as to fulfill his dreams
that the land of qin become the utopia hua xu described by liezi

thus the people are filled with joy
and need not know of his mighty efforts
it is as if a flock of clouds follow the dragon
to more quickly bring the waters to fill the seas
thus one can truthfully say the exalted ruler
from the height of the ming tang temple
brings forth through his governance a benevolent stream

xvi

should one compare this temple to the palaces of qin, zhao, wu, and chu
does it compare in height and wastefulness
those who built o bang gung and cong tai
they created the gu su terrace and the zhang hua balcony
not to sacrifice to unite the ancestors and the heavens
but only to reach toward the moon and the morning clouds
if one compares on only this point
the palaces are not worthy of praise
why should we still speak of them
and of the powerful beauty of the jasper terrace of the tyrant zhou xin
why should we still speak of it

i have ventured to praise the prime gem of the kingdom
now i write the following epilogue

the ming tang temple is massively high
it reflects the heavens in the magnificence of its presence
its height and width are appropriately grand
and the finest material went into its construction
proudly and boldly
it rises to its majestic dominance
all around it the waters of the bi yong lake
and at its highest point the ling tai observatory
to view the splendor of the solar wind and its thunderbolts

dense clouds of incense rise from the ancestral sacrifices
the imperial virtue spreads in all four directions
dominates the eight regions
penetrates the nine spheres of heaven
the four gates of the temple are opened
here ten thousand people of the empire come together
the emperor has seen the favorable omens
and lets the worthy enter

oh awesome ming tang, you are the bulwark of the most high
may the sacrifices continue for generations without end

murphy in his dress blues for the general's parade
9/26/2010 8:49 AM

li bai i-08

the great hunt

prelude:

i, li tai bo, consider that rhymed prose stems from the ancient art of poetry. strength and beauty is required of its words, the burden it bears is to be versatile and comprehensive. if it were not so, how could one describe the grandeur and glory of the heavens and the intentions of the gods?

now si ma xiang ru and yang xiong have been in a zealous race to write prose poems. they emulate literary heroes and therefore noone dares to criticize. i will discuss the imprecisions in rhyme prose and make them more accurate.

in zhi xu fu, si ma states, "the kingdom of chu is no more than a thousand miles in circumference and the king's hunting ground, the marshes yun and mang, make up more than half of the lands." if the kingdom of qi was only eight or nine times as large in area itself, then the three types of agriculture would have been impossible and the game would never have found peace. this is not the way of feudal princes to waste their resources, and this must be kept in mind.

in the prose poem of si ma describing the imperial hunting park, he said, "to the east is cang wu, to the west is the farthest reaches of the land". yet if we examine the true extent of the park, then its circumference was only a few hundred miles. in the prose poem of yang xiong about the chang yang palace the emperor boasts before his guests about his game park. that he can always let fall the encircling nets to loose the deer for his guests to have joy in their hunting. in the yu lie fu of yang xiong the hunting park of ling tai was an enclosure with a fence a hundred miles long with the dian man gate for entry (unlike previously where the hunting grounds were open).

at that time the park was kept in extraordinary beauty. if we look at it from the perspective of today it seems petty and unworthy of a ruler to enclose it in this fashion. for only the prince can consider the four seas within the country as his home and the ten thousand families as his children.

therefore the game of the wild mountains and the forests of the entire kingdom belong to the prince in the same manner as do the tame beasts of ordinary men. but what i think is that if i were incapable of advising the prince to oversee the park with the dao of love and understanding for the animals, and if i had only ordinary words concerning the extent of the hunting park, then as a minor official i would not take on the task of describing the imperial hunt as si ma and yang xiong have done before.

the gardens and ponds of the hunting grounds of our present exalted dynasty extend to the outer expanses of the sky and cover all six areas of the land. a great hunt in the land of qin in the tenth month will demonstrate the sheen of imperial prestige and exemplify the might of the military force at his disposal. the sky and the open land will be swept clean. is this wasteful or does it contain the proper idea of the three proper ways in which game should be used. i, li tai bo, have therefore written a prose poem highlighting the beauty of the great hunting as undertaken. this prose poem follows:

i

if we examine the created rank order of heaven and earth
and compare it with the mysterious primal mother of the universe
we can discover the celestial glory of the five generations of the tang
but only in the reign of of kai yuan was the dominion over land and sea extended
and even the outermost star of the big dipper was set in motion
the present emperor combines the splendor of his predecessors
and by his birth in the eighth month obtained the pure essence of metal power
he bathes in the brilliance of early autumn
and the beauty of his character surpasses the seven heavenly bodies
his laws are in accordance with heaven and earth
he combines within himself all that is good and beautiful
his insight illuminates even the deepest mysteries
he can bestow his grace in the remotest of areas
he seeks to emulate the ancient idea of the three proper actions
he allows the game to live or die in natural harmony with the four seasons

ii

when the hardships of winter begin to prevail
and the cold air chills the whole of nature
the single minded wind from the northwest roars down
the trees lose their leaves
the grass shrivels and dies
the valleys are filled with dark vapors
indeed, even the fire fountains of si chuan are closed by ice
that is the temporary state of things in the winter months

the son of heaven then occupies xuan tang hall of the the tang ming temple
the waters are cold and there is rest from the hundred pursuits
the emperor studies the rituals and follows the customs of the states
he appreciates the pause in the work of the farmers
and he orders the great hunting and military exercises for the capital

iii

the splendid troops of the emperor march through the nine gates
the imperial bodyguard protects in the four directions of the open country
the officials of the gardens and fisheries are called
the inspectors of the mountains and marshes are called
the quantity of game available is determined

suddenly the thunder of a thousand horse
lightning strikes as the emperor appears in his carriage
he rushes to fu sang in the east and touches the fire clouds to the south
he reaches to the moon caves in the west
and the place of the rising moon at the north pole

his noble appearance inspires awe for all time to come
he impresses as the most powerful in all the heavens and earth
this is only the beginnings of an adequate description of him
within himself he embodies china as the center of the world
he reaches to the northern desert as the end of his empire
he opens the important passes for universal transport
he encompasses the outermost regions and retains all as his own

as did da zhang in the time of yu, he strides across the earth in all directions
as did gua fu, who wished to catch the sun, he swings his stick and hurries on
his steps penetrate as far as the sun and the moon
and reaches even beyond the principles of yin and yang

iv

the great gong of the emperor is struck
and the bells on his carriage are heard
he leaves the phoenix gate of the jian zhang palace
the gates of the imperial city are opened
the emperor is carried in the flying dragon of his precious carriage
he drives past the high mountains of the beautiful country of shen si
he visits the wu cuo palace and views the three rugged mountains
he visits the xi liu balcony and then reaches the shang lin park
his highness positions himself beneath standards decorated with ivory
the tents of the honored guests stretch far into the distance
the emperor draws his long sky-reaching sword
it is as if the kun lun shrieks and collapses in fear
it is as if the universe moans because of this display of militancy
he is able to reverse the flow of the milky way
the rivers and mountains wait for him to send out the winds
the flags flutter into life for the nine purple heavens
the hunt fires burn, the thousand mountains are red from the rising sun

v

the emperor assembles the imperial guard
orders them to wield their long lances
to surround the vast marshes with nets
then he warns xuan ming the spirit of rain
he frightens away fei lian the spirit of wind
imperial prestige more vibrant than lightning or thunder

the display of military splendor excites the assembled barbarians
the royal hunting grounds of liang zou are declared too limited
the usual hunting methods of the imperial park are rejected as unworkable
instead to weng shan and hua shan at the southern border
to tai shan and chang shan extending to the north
extending to the shore of the eastern sea as the great moat

the rarest animals of the nine provinces are contained within
the thousands of them are turned, all to enter the hunting area
all together the rarest curiosities of the life in the eight deserts
the ten thousand species rounded up and assembled within

vi

nets are erected to reach the heavens
the sky obscuring nets strung closely together
an unbroken series of traps for large and small animals
high strung nets bar their paths
even swarms of mosquitoes cannot get through
the smallest of insects are captured within
in the highest levels of heaven and the deepest jungles
only a few floating birds and burrowing rabbits are left behind

vii

the emperor's troops work together to show their art
they spread to cover the mountains and the hills
their metal spears move en masse
and reflect on the frigid ice of the sunlit wilderness
rainbow banners flash their colors on high
fluttering together in the vast sky

the wu horses like streaming strips of silk
blood-sweating horses from ferghana wild in their mad rush
both race around the unbroken chain of mountains
and their shadows interrupt the glint off remote waters
it is as if the five giants of si chuan set out to move the mountain tops
each man as strong as the man with nine heads who uprooted trees
the canyons are filled, the heights are infiltrated
the dangerous crevasses flushed through
tree stumps and other impediments removed
the forest undergrowth thinned
a great noise is raised
as they all rush toward the emperor together

viii

the hunters are such as tian kai jiang and gu ye zi
as wu huo and the men from the kingdom of zhong huang
they scale steep cliffs
and hunt in the wild steppes
they raise a loud, roaring cry
they are swift as the whirlwind or flash of lightning
they peel off the striped fur of the panther
they take the great paws off the black bears
they seize fast hares and snatch wily monkeys
they carry three animals under their arms and two in their hands
they strike without weapons to demonstrate their strength
soon they resort to displays of spear throwing
they roar as loud as the white tiger, their eyes keen as a fish eagle's
their energy that of a raging fire smothering with smoke
they fight down the mighty boar
and fell with an elbow the great fox

the mythical xiao yang animal falls dead from the shouting
all 4,000 feet of the ye yu animal faints and falls into the abyss
brains are shattered, spines are broken
marrow flies out like so much spittle
the remotest deserts are scoured by the hunters
the forests and marshes thoroughly searched
they seize the wolves from within their caves
they kill the sky dog
they snatch the horns from the rhinoceros
they break the tusks out of the elephant's mouths
they pursue the great fox for a thousand miles
they strangle the nine headed hydra
they prance with dead snakes, swallowing them whole looking to the sky
they pass by the galloping rhinoceros leaving him far behind

and there is the emperor wearing his high hat
he sits under the star studded banners
then he hastens to the thunder carriage
he wields the lightning whip

ix

he goes to inspect the spoils of his brave hunters
he inspects the three armies and joyfully declares
how can men such as these show fear
the wilderness is filled with spirits ferociously slain

he orders the animal skin drums beaten again
and sends his officers back to the hunt
although much game has been killed

the blood lust is up and will not stop as yet

again they nock the red feathered arrows which shine like the sun
the bows of wu hao are bent and curve like the full moon
the chariots rumble to their appointed places
the mounted archers spread their splendor in a circling charge
the pace of attack is that of the hawk and the hound
the birds and quadrupeds flee in confusion

the moaning deer are killed with a flying kick
the small game animals are scooped up to hang on racks
the spears are covered with grease, the swords black with dried blood
the arroyos are sealed off, the caves are blocked

but consider the strength and agility of some of the animals
there are many who come out and then run away
they are the white mei and the flying jun
the qiong qi and the shu man
their teeth are like swords
their manes like a bamboo forest
their mouths can swallow spears
their far seeing eyes compete with lance and shield
they smash the stones with ornate arches
they trample the jade crossbow

yet the hunters shoot the wild boar
they pierce the running tiger
when one metal arrow has been shot
it is soon followed by four or five more
even the the zuo chi with its sharpened teeth is taken
and the old white haired tiger of the southern mountains is worth mentioning

x

the emperor now summons the eight xiao you
tells them to search the four corners of the world
they must pursue the zhuan zhu
they must be more agile than the people of the du lu kingdoms
they must climb the highest tree
scale the highest walls
they must take the chan hu animal
seize the mai and the guo
bring the you wu from the deepest depths
bring down the hu and xiao from the steepest rock faces

one thought it was yang you ji that first loosed arrows
another says he saw the the flying carriage of qi hong men
the skill of the hunters exceeds that of the archer ming ying

and their thrown spears match the accuracy of pu jie zi
they bring down the shu you bird from the highest clouds
storks and wild geese are shot from the blue skies
they take the cang and the hu fowl
they kill the fish eagle and the waterhen
they roust out the caves of the animals
the homes of the spirits, where the birds fly
they behead the fabled roc in the land of the sunrise
they eliminate feng bo the god of the wind in the turbulent sky
as did the man in the lung bo empire they seek out the magical giant toad
as did ren gong zi they catch the great whale of the eastern sea
i have now exhausted all the various creatures of nature
yet wonderful rarities might still remain

xi

from this great slaughter blood runs freely in streams
there are so many feathers one thinks of falling snow
it is as if it had rained animals from the high heavens
fallen from above to coat the vast plain
a cornucopia has opened and poured from the forests

the sun-crow changes its color in the morning sun
the rabbit in the moon faints at the full moon
the hunters wish to continue their hunt in the vast pure air space
but see to their sorrow there are no roads leading across the sky
and so, suddenly, the heavens and the earth are again calm and peaceful
the peoples of all the regions come together again in their companies

even qin shi huang and han wu di
could not compete with this emperor's success

xii

but then the emperor seems lost in thought and the mood changes
it is as if he were suddenly aware of having made an error
for when in one's most secure situation danger begins its approach
to avoid the risk one must avoid the temptation in one's joy
the degeneration of the heart caused by the hunting frenzy
belies the propriety of a profound sense of ethics

moreover the emperor is the exemplar of sublime calm and dignity
he embodies the mystical beauty of the dao as a treasure
the cruel extermination of the animals was ordered
but it contradicts the very essence of the dao

thereupon the emperor ordered the three sides of the nets to be opened
that humanity should be shown in all directions of space

that all the animals already killed were his own guilt
that the wounded would be given their natural chance at life
that the already killed animals should be brought forth
that strips of flesh should be cut and dipped in sauce and eaten
the captured phoenixes along with their young were set free
the emperor freed the zao you and the qi lin
he took from chen cang the dian bao making him the ruler of the world
and brought in his carriage from the banks of the wei
not a bear as booty but a second tai gong

xiii

then the emperor took his leisure
and rewarded all for their toil and hardship
he spread wide the wagons of roasted meat
riders carried flagons of wine to all assembled
the weapons were stored
and the nets were burned

xiv

the emperor then climbed to the sky balcony
and gave a banquet in the park with all from the eight most distant regions
he opened the latch to the munificence of the sun and the moon
and opened the gates to stimulate all the wonders of nature

when the superior man rises all the world looks on with pride
the spring hunting of the duke cheng of qi recorded in the zuo zhuan
the winter hunting of the duke xuan recorded in the shi jing
these hunts can now be considered overshadowed
we can laugh at the festival said to be given by mu wang to the queen of xi wang mu
yet we still sing “the white clouds” wherein she glorified mu wang

xv

is it not better to feed the people with ordinary food
to make the people drunk with a cup of pure water
to understand the power of thunder and lightning
in order to understand the principles of yin and yang
to enter into the world of the spirits
to become familiar with the dao and virtue
the extension of the imperial power over the whole world as a net
as the great simplicity of a fulcrum
to reach all under the great arch of the heavens

after all we should find able men to advise the ruler
for if we can hold such a hunt
is there anything which could not be made possible

xvi

the emperor thus provides satisfaction to the righteous people of the world
and makes it possible for them to realize bountiful harvests
for the six women's palaces to foreswear pearls and gems
for the people to concentrate on farming and weaving
for the sensual musics of zheng and wei to become silent
for the pleasures of beautiful shapes and colors to recede

tian lao presented the white plan to emperor huang di
feng hou stood at his side as minister
the stars of san tai now shine as smooth as a whetstone
in the general harmony as the sublime dao radiates from the emperor

how can you compare this with the passages in the poems of zi xu
wherein feather bedecked hunters hunted in the imperial park
and boasted only of the size of the parks and the gardens
only when the supreme ruler of the dao brings fullness to the whole earth
only then is the brilliance of the dynasty extended to future generations
only then will the brilliance of ancient times be carried even further

the signs of bounty to come
are now abundantly present
the emperor makes his sacrifice on tai shan
and inscribes his deeds on a stele of she shou shan
is he not one of the 72 emperors
to be in their lineage and honored equally

xvii

now the emperor raises high the rainbow banner
and enters the carriage of chiming bells
he inquires like huang di about the lessons in guang cheng zi
and asks for the solitary cell of da wei
he leaves formless wang xian in search of the dark pearls of the red river
and disappears from the known world and becomes an immortal

murphy thanking the fresh killed deer for giving him its life to further his own

10/23/2010 1:43 PM