

visiting feng-xian monastery at long-men

before i walked through the grounds with a guide
now after a night of sleep in the monastery
the still of the night rings its own music
the forest glints shadowy shards of the moon

the gap of heaven scintillates with stars
sleeping this high brings cold dew to wet my clothes
dawn's prayer bell breaks my half-sleep
sharps my senses.... wakes my soul

murphy feathering his new nest
12/30/04 5:00 pm

von zach I, 1

presented to li tai-bo

i stayed two long years in the east capital
and saw enough of intrigues and dirty tricks
i need a simple man's vegetables with his rice
not the fat meats and fish the rich will eat

where can i find those coarse greens for my rice
i know the color would then spring from my cheeks
the truth is i can't afford to buy the medicines
can't retire to the hills for my health

though i hear lord li, scholar of the golden court
has left to seek the solitary way
he has gone to liang and song
may he find the precious herbs that he seeks

murphy staring at the empty bowl of his evening meal
12/30/04 6:00 pm

von zach I, 2

gazing up the tai mountain

i ask myself why should i worship tai mountain
and i note how green flourishes everywhere below
the life force itself is up there manifest
yin, yang, light, dark, all there at once

the breathing clouds take breath away
eyes squint to see the birds fly back to their nests
and i like confucius will climb to the top
to gaze back down on the smallness below

murphy still tasting the wine of his light supper
12/30/04 9:00 pm

von zach I, 3

a feast at stone gate with liu and zheng

waters of autumn, still, clear, without bottom
the hearts of the visitors grow quiet, cleansed
a perfect place for officials shedding their duties
riding their horses to reach these wild woods

my two companions are men of substance
and have brought food as sumptuous as gold
at dusk the flutes bring special harmony
enough to raise the dragons of the deeps

murphy waiting for his new dining room table
12/31/2004 12:30 pm

von zach I, 4

visiting hermit fan with li tai-bo

master li writes lines filled with beauty
they remind of those by yin keng
we are both here in the dong-meng hills
and i love my friend like a brother

we get drunk and share our autumn quilts
we walk arm in arm wandering everywhere for days
we remember one day a place of quietude
we walk to the north suburb to call on hermit fan

we are filled with admiration at the gate
faultlessly welcomed by the handsome attendant boy
as the sun sinks, we listen to pounding paddles at washing
we look at the billowing clouds above the city

we sing, as is our wont, the citron song
and wonder why officers would ever prefer vegetable soup
let us drop all trappings of rank and power
and set our minds free to roam the boundless seas

murphy making a resolution he will not keep
1-1-05 5:15 pm

von zach I, 5

i write two poems on the walls of hermit zhang (1 of 2)

this spring has brought me to your place in the hills
the chop, chop of wood emphasizes how quiet the spot
i forded the streams still surrounded by snow and ice
went west into the slanting sun of evening and am finally here

you have found your gold and silver in the mists of the night
you have learned from your deer neighbors how not to harm
we wander around and forget how to get back from the forest
to anyone looking on, we are like empty boats adrift on the currents

murphy sitting at his desk and wandering in his mind
1-4-05 4:00 pm

von zach I, 6

i write two poems on the walls of hermit zhang (2 of 2)

this man will often ask me to come out
and i sometimes will for gay evening festivities
after the rain the carp ruffle the pond
the red deer snuffle in the spring woods

he takes great care to pass the wine freely
and i can do no more than to imbibe too much
when the evening comes though the way home is steep
i honor the occasion with my careless steps

murphy happy to be home in his cups
1-4-05 3:45 pm

von zach I, 7

to li tai-bo

autumn thistledown blown in the wind
we've never found ge hong's elixir of life
so we sit, drinking and singing, wasting our days
stubborn and wild, who would wish to be us

murphy proudly showing his mismatched socks
6-13-05 9:35 am

von zach I, 8

climbing yan-zhou city-wall tower

i have come here to the east as a dutiful son
i take this first chance to look out from the south tower
floating clouds stretch from tai mountain to the eastern sea
lands of qing and xu are the vast plain receding before me

the stone tablet of qin rests on that lonely peak
i see the palace halls of lu still standing in their desolate place
i am filled with lines of ancient verse, they ring in my ears
i stay long after the others have left, alone with my thoughts

murphy bowing politely as he is introduced
6-13-05 9:45 pm

von zach I, 9

during a rain i write my somber thoughts and ask archivist xu to come visit me

out of the eastern mountains has come black clouds, this rain
incessant, thick boiling masses fill all the heavens
raucous thunder drives the swallows from their nests in the eaves
the heavy downpour drives the fish to the bottom of the river

i sit at a table with strong local wine
i listen for the sounds of my venerable guest approaching the gate
ashamed of my messy courtyard and its deep mud
i shout for my guest to ride his horse up to the steps, and to hurry

murphy wondering what he did before air conditioning
6-13-05 10:05 am

von zach I, 10

the thatch hut of buddhist ji

the thatch hut of master ji is welcome to me
it favors new singing, new sounds of verse
cushions and mats in an open glade inside dark trees
the tea and melons make me delay my leaving

the river lotus waves white feathery fans in the wind
asparagus is all around lifting silken threads of seeds
my trying to be a second xu xun fails miserably
and my zhi tun leaves out his sure touch

murphy tasting the wit in his pen for the first time
6-13-05 12:15 pm

von zach I, 11

officer fang's arabian

he is one of those proud arabs
sleek, long muscles, deep chest, strong
two ears stuck up sharp like bamboo
four light feet to skip with the wind

this horse can travel some ground
your life itself is in no better hands
when one has a horse equipped with wings
an hundred miles and still could go some more

murphy making his annual bet on the kentucky derby
6-15-05 2:15 pm

von zach I, 12

the painted falcon

he appears on the white silk like a snowstorm
great blue falcon from the northland
woe bestride the timorous rabbit he sees
those eyes wild glance, barbarian

the tether there tempts my hands to hold him
how can i find such a legendary falcon
and charge to the hunt for small game birds
how i'd love to see the blood and all the feathers

murphy working up a thirst walking in the sun
6-15-05 5:10 pm

von zach I, 13

my brother's letter arrives from lin-yi, complaining of rains and flooding

the two prime opposites bring rain, driven wind
all the smaller upper rivers have burst their bounds
even the great yellow river has broken out
it floods all the lands toward the sea

every minor official has many problems
every outside district cries for help
my brother has a small district, lin-yi
he is charged to maintain the rivers there

i received a long letter from him just yesterday
he describes a terrible fight to keep whole the dikes
how he prays for help from the ancient river gods
help even from the magic black birds

the fields to the south in yan, drowned
ji river dikes, swallowed, tall grasses, swallowed
walls of the city, full of mussels, in a marsh
everywhere the hornless water-dragon snakes

i can only imagine the mess at xu-guan pass
how jie-shi mountain is an island on a lake
how whole villages are swept away except for a tree or two
how there can never be enough boats to carry everything out

i, on my own swollen river, a twig afloat
i might yet find those mystical peaches
then i would toss my net over the entire land
and catch the hideous water toad responsible

murphy thankful to be hearing about the tragedy not experiencing it
6-17-05 6:00 pm
von zach I, 14

on a winter day i think of li tai-bo

sitting in my favorite room alone
i haven't had you out of my mind
ji wu never forgot han xuan-zi
i can only sing aloud our brotherly songs

it's cold, and my clothes are thin and worn
you, in the mountains, searching for herbs
and i can't drop everything to go see you
our dreams of peasant bliss are still on hold

murphy waiting for the afternoon shower to floom
6-18-05 4:30 pm

von zach I, 15

long-men mountain

the dragon gate cuts through the land
the road trees outline the imperial way
it's not too far to the august emperor's throne
buddhist shrines all around, silver, and gold

time seems shorter these days, the seasons pass too fast
but the waters and the land go on forever
of those people i am seeing now
who will persist in my future

murphy listening to his tv
6-18-05 7:30 pm

von zach I, 16

maternal uncle fashions a zi mu-zhu (bonsai) for the incense burner before grandmother's
hall and plants bamboo nearby—i write this poem in homage

he carried the earth, piled it high
the idea of forming three small mountains astounds
i imagine myself in this miniature wilderness
lying back at ease watching fleecy clouds

bamboo shoots planted to the side
the incense pale in fresh new dawn
may his creation last as long as a mountain
and its natural beauty deepen with time

murphy limping home from his visit to the museum
6-19-05 1:10 pm

von zach I, 17

on a spring day thinking of li tai-bo

oh, li tai-bo, your poems will not be equaled
your thoughts sing loud into the clouds
your originality is that of yu xin
your elegance of phrase that of bao zhao

i am looking out north over the wei river
you looking at clouds east of jiang
where will we next share some wine
have a roiling discussion about song

murphy tuning up his father's guitar
6-20-05 9:00 am

von zach I, 18

at the house of honorable li, inspector of salt and iron monopolies (1 of 2)

when i enter this house i feel kin to the emperor
the hospitality is extraordinary
gold peacocks grace the wind screen
embroidered lotus blooms on the throw pillows

here i dine on the best flounder
where else can i find such rich rare fare
in this family happiness holds sway
celebrating the marriage of the daughter of the house

murphy serving his river food to guests at his campsite
6-22-05 10:25 pm

von zach I, 19

at the house of honorable li, inspector of salt and iron monopolies (2 of 2)

fresh breezes bathe this beautiful home
clearing the air of the miasma from the city walls
flowers bedeck the entire compound
swallows dart gracefully from the eaves

when li enters the room everyone is enchanted
without bias he esteems all his guest's talents
though he is a thoroughbred asked to pull a small cart
he does so with all the dignity of the han dynasty

murphy eating watermelon at the family reunion picnic
6-22-05 10:25 am

von zach I, 20

together with magistrate xu from ren-cheng in a boat on south pond

the canal runs high from recent rains
our small boat floats below the city walls to south pond
in the cool evening we watch men wash their horses
the thick woods are alive with the sounds of cicadas

water chestnuts are ripe as fall is beginning
reeds are overgrown at this time of year
in the morning the fall dew is thick on the ground
for warmth i wrap myself in my old felt blanket

murphy running trot lines on the colorado river near bastrop
6-23-05 4:20 pm

von zach I, 21

visiting song zhi-wen's old villa

the retreat of the well-known song is near shou yang mountain
in order to reach it one has to take an old back road
i wonder if i will return here once again in the future
to sing a new song in honor of the old villa

i rest for a while, talk with the old residents about the poet
the mountain, the river nearby, fill me with loneliness
i also talk with his younger brother song zhi-bi
as we reminisce the autumn winds grow stronger

murphy honoring the bygone elders through emulation
6-26-05 2:40 pm

von zach I, 22

poetry contest after dinner at the zuo family's villa

a crescent moon sinks behind the wind blown trees
sitting on clothes wet with dew the lute awaits our mood
we hear unseen water rushing past the flowered path
above the thatch roof the starry splendor of spring

while we search through books the candles begin to gutter
while we talk about swords much wine is consumed
as the poems are finished we sing them in the wu dialect
we shall never forget traveling here in our small boat

murphy damp from his walk in a summer sprinkle
6-27-05 3:00 pm

von zach I, 23

the emperor's son-in-law zheng qian-yao holds a banquet in his park

the dark grotto of the castle of the emperor's daughter is filled with fine mist
the emperor's son-in-law greets his guests on jade-green summer mats
strong spring wine fills the delicate cups, clear as amber
blue-green sweet ice is presented in cooled bowls of agate

i am seated in a reed hut beside the flowing stream
it is as pleasurable as being in the high mountains next to the clouds
truly this is as sumptuous as the balconies of jin
as beautiful as the fabled valley of zheng zi-zhen

from time to time we hear the distinctive clinking
of the girdle pendants of the princess and her cortege

murphy graciously accepting the delicacy of maggoty meat offered by his inuit host

7-5-05 9:40 pm

von zach I, 24

again i write verse in the east pavilion of the emperor's son-n-law zheng qiann-yao

the honored pavilion lies beside lush green vegetation
a brilliant sun befuddles with its shards of light
huge trees tower over the rock strewn mountain side
water plants undulate in the clear waters of a brook

purple fish swim to the bank and look to leap ashore
a gray goshawk returns to protect its nest
toward evening i hurry to the great road
the scudding clouds keeping pace with my horse

murphy idling away another summer morning

7-6-05 9:30 am

von zach I, 25

a feast at li xia pavilion given by governor li yong

li yong, governor of the eastern province, halts his horses
his carriage stands next to the clear-flowing river
the pavilion here is famous from the earliest times
many scholars from jin an-fu are here today

the landscape, mountains near the sky, inspires me
jade ornamented singing girls approach bearing wine
we sing in happiness under tall bamboo in cooling breezes
and waves of the river water do not lap this high

the beautiful scenery continues to beguile me
only when the sun goes down do i leave
all of us here are burdened with official duties
even lowly i can wish to be invited once again

murphy by his bedroom window watching a storm approach

7-7-05 8:55 pm

von zach I, 26

together with governor li yong i climb to the new pavilion of his grandson li zhi-fung in
the old town of li xia

the building of the new pavilion is finished now
you can make it out through the mists over crow pond
it lies among the earlier balconies and towers of li xia
it is the perfect spot to balance the mountain, the sea

the lotus on this north pond have always been famed
the tumble down walls of li xia tear at our hearts
today someone has brought forth a bounteous banquet
the music played limns delicate the past

the long-happy-life of toasting is for all the guests
while we sit in proper northern order at ease with ourselves
i, this small man, feel newly inspirited by this group
and find a small song to sing, called liang-fu song from zu-ge liang

murphy sipping amontillado by the pint glass
7-8-05 2:15 pm

von zach I, 27

on the way to lin-yi, the pavilion at zhai-shan lake reminds me of li the master poet, my old friend

this land pavilion stands hard by the waters of crow pond
i lead my horse on further into these high woods
the sea dragon howls, sloshing the coast with his noise
fish leap out of the inward flood, sun is high off the mountains

on my journey to lin-yi, i separated from a poet, you old friend
i think on qing-guan, gaze back toward the outward pass
a greatness of mists and clouds from both ocean and mountains
it rains and rains, when are the chariots to return

murphy retrieving a package of books from the doorman

7-9-8-05 3:20 pm

von zach I, 28

as i passed emperor tai-cong's tomb on my travels

those good statesmen whom men have wished for since antiquity
grew tired of the incapable emperor sui yang-di
as all brave men sought to push the tyrant to do his duties
casting the yarrow stalks chose between the dragon and the phoenix

picking the son, tai-cong, most like his father, gao-zu
this son it was who established residence in chang-an
where statesmen awaited, some tigers, some wolves
the father, correctly, abdicated so his son could inherit

the son was correct in his instructions to the great yu
the wind, with the clouds streaming islands of fleece
as quickly li-jing and the others closed ranks with the new dynasty
and as the sun and moon there followed two emperors sublime ascension

most questions of policy from these earliest times can be modeled
fully half the court were followers of the ethics
whoever spoke the truth would not be censured nor dishonored
and the way of respect was not lost to prejudicial attacks

at the later time of emperor xuan-zong many ill omens came from heaven
the people then gasped for air, and have yet to return to better times
would that the entire country could quietly become easy again
and rid itself of the leaders of the rebellion, an lu shan and shi si-ming

patriots full of sorrow worship at the grave of emperor zhao-ling
this secluded place of honor where he rose into the heavens
the spirit of tai-cong rises every morning replete in jade armor
in the mists the statue of his horse shines with sweat as if still laboring in battle

under the cypress trees of zhao-ling i look back at the row of mausoleums
midst the dust of the rebellion i leave the darkening way of the emperor's tombs
the first greatness of the dynasty is now past us
a far reaching disappointment settles over the yards of graves

murphy indoors on a summer morning, out of the rain
7-13-05 9:35 am

von zach I, 29

the song of the eight immortals, drunk as they are

he zhi-zhang sits crosswise in his saddle
as if he were riding across seas
in his befuddlement he seeks a cool well
to sink into, into a deep sleep

li jin, the prince of ru-yang, assumes such royal airs
he consumes three whole gallons before court
but when he sees a passing wine cart
his mouth still waters, anticipating
drunk he imagines the emperor's designation
promotion to become the prince of young-spring wine

minister li shi-zhi spends daily for his wine ten thousand, cash
and he drinks as a whalefish drinks from the sea
each time his lips are so happy they burst into song
the eternal words, keep it straight, no thinning for me

cui zong-zhi is a genial sort treated kindly by fate
in his cups he stares up into the sky
stands still, a stoned jade tree in the wind

su jin has made a vow to the Buddha embroidered on his vest
but for his drunkenness he takes care to forget all his rules

li tai-bo drinks a gallon, writes a hundred poems
then sleeps it off in the back of a wine shop in chang-an
when the emperor asked him to board the royal barge
he shouted back, i am your drunken immortal

zhang-xu needs three full beakers for his art
then his brush brings fairy clouds down to the silk
his cap tossed aside in his frenzy, bareheaded before princes

jjiao-sui needs at least five gallons to get him started
then he can get around to astounding us with his thoughts in our debates

murphy with a band of kiowa in the indian bar in north dallas

7-20-05 2:15 pm

von zach I, 30

twenty two rhymes given to li-jin the prince of ru-yang

your highness exemplifies the perfection of the nobility
this is due to personal virtue as well as heaven's gift
you personify the age-old princely image of the valiant stallion
as well as the fabled gigantic bird whose wings reach to heaven

in your princely duties you see to the smallest detail
you neglect your own comfort when performing your pieties
his majesty looks upon you constantly with favor
but away from the court you share your humanity

you shower your guests with the finest of imperial wines
you have the rarest of birds, even imperial eagles,
gifts brought to your doors daily by imperial messengers
but lately you have accompanied his majesty less often on his outings

since his filial duties have taken so much of his time
your own righteousness is no less well known
as are your ritual visits to your father's gravesite
you have the depth of learning of a refined scholar

your literary efforts are those of a past master
your calligraphy has the beauty of a preening peacock
all these together lend extraordinary elegance to your writings
your cheerful disposition hides a deep philosophy

your appreciation is shown for even the slightest merit
your generosity has neither pride nor pretension
i am serving another talented prince, a rare honor
yet your highness considers me as friend and equal

i have been the recipient of your hospitality many times
and find it difficult to bear such largesse
the first time we met the air was stripped of all fog
it was the finest of clear, fresh autumn days

we took the wine pots to sip our cups near the pond
that night we watched the ducks and geese by lantern light
an entire month of spring flowers we feasted and visited friends
in the scorching heat of summer i remember writing
while dipping my brush in cold waters from your well

i have heard jade pendants in your eaves jingling in the icy winds of winter
as a hermit with only half a gourd to drink from
i lived for a while in a hut high up among the cliffs

now i meet your generosity as a small shell at the edge of the sea
and i shall say again how your wine flows as a mighty river
can we not together ferret out the hidden secrets of life
there must be a path for us to follow to find them

so long as you will have me as a friend
you will never lack for good brotherly advice

murphy back in the saddle after surviving a broken leg
1-23-06 8:25 am

von zach I, 31

i dedicate this poem to my older cousin xiao, justice secretary

noble families produce their share of heroes
who then go on to amass their admirable deeds
you are the descendent of xiao-he of the han dynasty
a grandson in the princely house of liang

you are patient in your position as secretary
and honorably meet your duties and obligations
your literary works are esteemed by the younger generation
your entire oeuvre shows great originality

you have graciously honored my own family
from my youth you have given me good advice
you have always considered me to be your true friend
even as i have felt ashamed before my own family

i have drifted beneath the clouds time on end
for days and months with nothing to show for it
i came too late to be of real use for the emperor
and memories of the good old days are all i have left

i need to work hard in this world, like xi-kang, and simply smelt iron
or recluse myself, go live in a small hut and contemplate the wilderness
how could i ask you to share with me my fate
i must return to beginnings, let earth and the sky determine my fate

murphy peeling potatoes on kp in the marines
1-23-06 10:00 am

von zach I, 32

the new year's party

tonight is different because it ends the old year
why waste all the candles their lambent glitter
at this small inn in xian-yang there's little to do
so let's throw some dice and have some fun

i shout my incantation to magically make the best throw
i roll up my sleeves and twist my hands just so, i lose
as with all successful men sometimes fate brings bad luck
but sometimes good can come from the luck of the draw

don't forget that the famous gambler liu-yi before he hit it big
bet more than a million when he had nothing left in his pockets

murphy drawing for a seven to complete an inside straight
1-25-06 8:00 am

von zach I, 33

with reverence i send this verse to my old friend the governor of wei ji

a guest has arrived to this city from henan, bidden by the governor
i have been told of a get-together where old friends can talk
i even brought my sack of books so i can do my official work here
as ever, my frowning face wanders east, and then back west

this great house will feed many people the best of foods
and the host makes poetry to place beside the shih-king odes
i hold him in the highest regard as a singular man
he should have sympathy for this levity within my sense of depression

like tao yuan-ming i have always sought the strongest of wines
and like ge-hong i have always wished to drink the elixir of life
in these tattered clothes i have braved the great river to the sea
with the snows of old age sprouting through my disheveled hair

i feel lost within the immensity of this near part of the universe
wherein i have so ceaselessly searched for daoistic wisdom
and it shames me that you might mistake me for another ji zi-xun
yet i also fear to be singled out for derision like yang-xiong

but then your energy and strength are those of the gods
the very folksongs of henan extol your fairness and virtue
even though i come from a small mud hut in shi-xiang village
who else but you would think enough of me to ask me here

murphy coming in from a brisk winter walk

1-24-06 3:40 pm

von zach I, 34

poem dedicated to my old friend the undersecretary wei ji

always before the title undersecretary has meant an empty suit
but now the title has been truly elevated by your mature wisdom
your family has seen many ministers leave to the capital for service
it rivals the notable wei family's contributions to the han
you now stand in the first ranks of able statesmen

unfortunately your two brothers died young and could not serve with you
grasses on their tombs have grown thick over the years
while you have fulfilled your family's honor in this office

this wanderer has labored long in the echelon he was given
how can he ever again compete with the vigor of youth
his family worries that he is growing too old for all this
all he knows is he is always stuck in the mud below the stars

who would have thought such as he would call on you
from his lowly place to reach up to your height
yet your unflagging friendship keeps him in your noble sympathy

because of his advanced age he is reluctant to ask favors
but an old racing horse needs to run, a thousand miles and back
a hungry falcon waits patient for the arm of the hunter to appear

if this poem touches a welcome spot in your thoughts
it will bring him comfort in his obscurity

murphy sweating through his job interview
1-26-06 5:30 pm

von zach I, 35

respectfully i offer this poem of 22 rhymes to my old friend , the undersecretary wei ji

young-son dressed in silk underclothes does not starve
yet many of those who wear scholar's caps become destitute
if my revered elder friend will patiently hear me out
i, this humble man, will seek to make all things clear

when i, du fu, was younger, i travelled all over the empire
and offered myself up for the imperial examinations

i wore out thousands of scrolls with my incessant study
my brush flashed with inspiration as it danced on silk
my prose was said to rival that of yang-xiong
and my poetry was imbued with the spirit of cao-zhi
li-yong asked for a face to face meeting with me
even the great wang han wanted me for neighbor

i, of course, thought i soared above all others
and should be rewarded with a sufficiently high position
to help his majesty become the best of all possible leaders
and to restore purity and grace to the customs of the land

and--- the dreams and expectations came to naught

i wandered the land, singing to live, yet never losing loneliness
for thirteen years i've been riding a donkey to get to here
to the mountain flowers near the capital in early spring

in the mornings i knock on the doors of the rich
in the afternoons i eat dust behind fine carriages
cold meat and left over wine are my rewards
all these i swallow along with my pride and my tears

his majesty recently commanded my services
i leapt at the chance to escape my miseries
but i was a bird asked to fly with broken wings
i was a carp flopping about on the grass out of water

i bear shame for having to accept your vast generosity
and i am deeply moved by your true friendship
i know that you have often spoken of me to your colleagues
quoting some of the best new verses of mine

i vacillate between sincere joy i feel over your new promotion
and the never ending despair incumbent on my own sorry affairs
how can my heart continue to carry all this misery
how can i keep up this scurrying hither and yon

i have decided to go off to the east, toward the great sea
and this means leaving the lands of qin behind
though i do still love the mountains south of chang-an
and will sore miss seeing the clear waters of the wei

i also know how much i will miss the fact of a simple meal
gratefully shared with such an honored statesman

but when a great white bird flies off toward the ocean
who can reach out to tame him from where they are

murphy peering through early monday morning eyes
1-30-06 8:50 am

von zach I, 36

the tale of the horse of general gao xian-zhi

a blue kokonor horse belongs to the governor general of an-xi
he has often been extolled for his exploits in the east
his stories are always of his battle behavior
and how he fulfilled his destiny, along with his master

strong victories have earned him generous care for life
and he is here, back from the far flung sand fields of the west
and though he has been stalled, he still carries the muscle of warfare
he cavorts with the spring and glad spirit of battle

strong slim ankles end in high hard hoofs of wrought iron
they must have splintered the packed ice of the turfan rivers
his mane flows in a fine full tassel of blended color
only after riding him on a quest will you ever appreciate his blood

none of the famous cavaliers of chang-an tried to ride him
and everyone could recognize his gallop on the field at speed
and if he is to grow old with these ribbons on his head
who else will we then have to charge out of the western gate

murphy at the bar with loud music
1-30-06 1:30 pm

von zach I, 37

a visit in winter to the temple of lao zi, north of luo-yang

in the north of the state, under the polar star, lies the temple
those who believe in lao zi are allowed in, high on the mountain, behind thick bamboo
the guardian priest is strict and stiff in his ceremonial duties
the guards appear ready for anything, to have taken all precautions

the green tiles on the roof are now exposed to the first cold of winter
the bronze pillar in the yard connects heaven and earth
the view to either side of the painted door shows mountains and streams
the sun, then the moon send their light in, onto the carved beams

the ancient plum tree of lao zi stands strong with its gnarled roots
fragrant orchids make real all the illustrious ancestors who brought their profusion
in some histories lao zi did not rate a shrine, a reverent place
but our reigning emperor has restored the veneration of his canon

there are many earlier master painters hung on these walls
but wu dao-xuan puts them all in the shade
his landscapes bring inside the movement of the earth
their shimmering beauty shakes the palace walls

five bright dragon-embroider robes, sages, stately enter
a horde of officials flock behind, like lines of geese
each tassel of elaborate headgear catches the light
every flag and banner flutters its emotion

on the grounds green cypress trees cast deep shadows
brown leaves of the pear trees set off the frost tinged fruit
from the eaves comes the wind's music on jade chimes
in the inner garden hoar frost silvers the well's balustrade

when lao zi retired from the world, the zhou dynasty began its decay
when his canon was brought back, the han began to prosper
he famously said make the hollow strong to conquer dying
he who would hold the world must plow with simplicity

murphy the clown at the bull riding event
2-2-06 1:00 pm

von zach I, 38

i dedicate this verse to hermit wei, 8th of his clan

in life friends are always being separated
rarely to meet, like the morning and evening stars
but tonight is one of those splendid events
when we are together in the light of these candles

how quickly our youth was spent
both our heads now streaked with gray
half of our dear friends are already spirits
which drives us both into sickness and depression

who could have imagined it would take all of twenty years
for me to sit once more in your great hall
before, when we met, you were still single
now your children meet me in a long line

they politely ask where i have traveled from
happy to be meeting one of their father's friends
before i have finished answering their questions
food and wine have been brought in

in the night rain spring leeks have been cut in the garden
served on fresh steamed rice, flecked with yellow millet
we are seldom together announces the host
so we must celebrate with ten goblets of wine

and even after emptying all ten i am still sober enough
to salt away these memories of this special meeting
tomorrow we will again be separated by high mountains
and as always, both our futures are unknown until already lived

murphy, feet up on the desk, describing his 40th birthday party

2-7-06 9:00 am

von zach I, 39

i dedicate this verse to to hanlin chancellor zhang ji

as hanlin chancellor you stand under the canopy over the throne
with the strength of the whale you have made your way strongly
you walk with the emperor like a later zhang fang
you even sleep within the palace walls as once did yan guangg

you compose poetry in residence in the shi-cui palace
you drink your wine at the wang-yun pavilion
with the trust the emperor has given you to write decrees
your brush is carefully perfect like in the six classics

you have been presented with the golden sash of learning
and you gather imperial favors like fresh li-ji
it is impossible for me to fly with such a phoenix
i can only bemoan my own unsuccessful studies

i vegetate like spring grass, don't worry about me
i'm old, floating flat like a water plant
when i think back to my younger artfulness
i must sing sadly, and sound like the tragic flute of xiang xiu

murphy restringing his old pre-war gibson
2-7-06 3:15 pm

von zach I, 40

i visit tai zong's tomb a second time

amid the confusion at the end of the sui dynasty
one of the many brave men who emerged was tai zong
he ended the period of unrest with his mighty sword
and provided the foundation for the new dynasty

he then helped the people to establish arts and culture
and by his foresight this was done without recourse to arms
his wise measures reached all under heaven
his sacrifices to the honored ancestors brought heaven's glow

his tomb lies on a shoulder of mount jiu zong
warriors guard the surrounding grassy slope
for a second time i behold the grave at the end of the row of cypress
and stare at the billowing clouds swirling above

murphy swigging his third cup of morning java
2-8-06 8:40 am

von zach I, 41

three elegies at the funeral of guard general wu wei

1

as his men were on guard on a cold night
he fell as a meteor flashed above his tent
his valiant soldiers embodied bold determination
an imperial decree sorrowfully extolled his spirit

now that the emperor has defeated the enemy
his name has been inscribed in stone
his wish was to gain honor as a brave warrior
as such he has earned his place in history

murphy reading the dispatches from the iraqi conflict
2-8-06 10:15 am

von zach I, 42

three elegies at the funeral of guard general wu wei

2

he excelled above all others in his sword play
as a hunter he had great success against all animals
he slashed his sword always with a strong heart
his arrows never failed to bring down his quarry

by his hunting he fed thousands of his brave tang soldiers
even in the tenth month when the yellow river had frozen over
his exploits were known even beyond the gobi desert
his terrible swiftness is legend there even now

murphy polishing his marine boots to get ready for inspection
2-8-06 10:40 am

von zach I, 43

three elegies at the funeral of guard general wu wei

3

a clamor went up at the sight of his funeral caisson
his new gravesite far away near the jiang river
the men along the way streaming tears of sorrow
heaven itself rising in a furious storm of activity

the men are ready, and thirst for new action
the morale of the hun enemy is not so high
leaders such as this are exceedingly rare, impossible to find
sitting under a great tree like field marshal feng yi

murphy brushing his dress blues for the parade
2-8-06 11:00 am

von zach I, 44

the story of the war wagons

the wagons creak and the horses snort
men are quivered and on the march
all their families push to tell them goodbye
you can't see the western bridge for the dust
they hold on so hard the men often stumble
sometimes the pile stops the parade
heaven cannot but hear their clamor

an armed man answers a shouted question
he says they are always drafting the young men
when we were fifteen we guarded the north river
at forty we were sent to the northwest army forts
as young men we still struggled to tie our white headband
we came back with white hair, and then were sent back again
back to where the blood flowed like a sea
but the emperor still wants to expand his borders
haven't you heard that in over two hundred districts
in thousands of villages thorny brush now grows
even though the wives seek to plough like their men
the fields are unkempt, overgrown, filled with weeds
so much that it is hard for a man to tell east from west
and since we soldiers from shensi are noted for fighting
they herd us around the front like dogs or chickens

since you have kindly asked about our troubles
how can recruits give voice to their grievances
they know not how, this winter, the troops in the west passes
did not return, and are now probably lost for good

and the officials are ruthlessly asking for taxes
where are these taxes going to come from
it's so bad we wish to have no sons born
it is more fortunate to have daughters
a girl can be married within the neighborhood
sons are lost in unmarked battlefields in the wild grasses

haven't you heard how in the region near kokonor
since ancient times our bones are left strewn to bleach in the sun
the spirits of the newly fallen bemoan their fate
while those of the earlier killed merely weep
their keening is always heard at night or in the rain

murphy contemplating the burning bush
2-13-06 9:45 am

von zach I, 45

with several friends i climb to the pagoda of mercy near chang-an

i enter the sky when i climb up here
here where the wind cuts with a ferocity that never quits
despite how much i try i cannot escape worries
and climbing up here only brings another hundred worries

religious feelings come from our knowledge of nature
so one climbs the mountains, penetrates the forests
when i view the rock crevices of dragons and serpents
i am amazed at the intricacies within the rock

up here at night the seven stars of the dipper seem just to the north
i seem to be able to hear the heavenly river of light flowing west
the sun disappears, being pulled ever further downward
the clear autumn moon has begun its new climb

suddenly great clouds blur, destroy the mountain top
the clear wei and muddy jing below are lost to sight
looking down shows nothing but the impenetrable mist
how can we know for sure our august empire still lies there

i turn to the south to cry out for the great shun himself
and the billowing sadness above his grave echoes my grief
today the feast at the mystical jade lake goes on
the fairy queen mother serves drinks as the sun sets

yellow cranes keep flying, they never rest
with all their plaintive noise, where ever they go
you can see them, dark against the setting sun
searching for the rice fields for their food tonight

murphy standing in the sun after yesterday's blizzard
2-13-06 1:30 pm

von zach I, 46

i send this poem to the officials of both districts xian-yang and hwa-yuan

i know the high level of talent within your official ranks
i see their white furs and elegant horses face the ice and snow
who among these would complain of the cold in chang-an

but i am the rustic from du-ling whose old bones do crack
beansprouts at the foot hills of the southern mountains have withered
the melonfields by the blue gate are lain waste by frost

this country boy is unhappy and has a few words for you
the friendship of old colleagues has stopped at the gate
naturally i understand how i don't fit in these days
and so much the worse i am clumsy in official affairs

but in the meantime i have lain here for over a week, hungry
my fur has worse than the hundred patches of a beggar
have you not, good sirs, forgotten this old man this evening
he who weeps bitter tears of blood within his bare walls

murphy adding up the inequities of his station in life
2-15-06 10:00 am

von zach I, 47

in the house of du-wei, my young cousin, i celebrate new year's eve

i come to celebrate the new year at my young cousin's house
i hope the stories are true about his pepper blossom wine
i hear the fancy horses of the guests rustling in the stables
i see the crows fly from the trees, escaping the torches

by dawn i shall be in my fortieth year
the last part of my life has more than begun
there should be no restraints in what i dare
as a drunken fool i shall enter the rest of my days

murphy in the dim lit honky tonk of an afternoon
2-14-06 3:10 pm

von zach I, 48

the song of xuan-du altar and the sacred hermit yuan

my great good friend lived earlier on tung meng mountain
there he found enlightenment under the god of the blue sky
my great good friend lives now in the zi-wu valley
there on a northern cliff face he built his thatch hut

before this hut stands the time worn xuan-du altar
lichened rocks mid a steady cold of wind
in the night the cuckoo cries and the bamboo thrashes
by dawn the goddess herself descends on rosy banners of cloud

i know you have decided to leave the world for good
to eat the magic jade and drink eternal dew each day
you climb to a destiny we mortals cannot grasp
you seek your paradise and you seek it alone

murphy scratching himself, beside his left ear
2-15-06 3:30 pm

von zach I, 49

the song of luo-yu park outside chang-an

fabled luo-yu park is high, cool and fresh
its green grasses stretch acre after lush acre
the party of our young host is at the highest point
the qin river below glints flat as an outstretched palm

we drink from great wooden ladles brought in jest by our genial host
afterwards we tipsily gallop our horses in the rapture of the countryside
spring flowers reflect on the lotus pond in the lower park
thunder in the heavens, the sounds of imperial troops in cadence

the gates to the sky are open wide in the brilliant sun
reflections of silver crests pass beside the meandering river
the floating length of dancer's sleeves flow like water
the purity of a singing voice finds its way to heaven

i think back to earlier years, i would have been drunk already
but this year, before i even lift my cup, sadness overwhelms
of what particular use is a white haired old man
so trick me with a hundred toasts, i'll drink them all

the high officials don't value a mere useless scholar
though i belong here today sharing nature at the emperor's reception
when this celebration is over i leave, maybe to never come back
alone in this vast wide world, i sing a song for myself alone

murphy passing the port at the festivities
2-16-06 3:30 pm

von zach I, 50

respectfully i dedicate this ten rhyme poem to censor zheng

as censor you have achieved far reaching success
and your poetry has made your name famous
you have naturally hit the center of your targets
who would be he to march against your leadership

your thoughts push beyond the here and now
far beyond this shared world of appearances
your marvelous verse is precisely appropriate
it astonishes even the spirits and demons

careful reading shows not the smallest awkwardness
in the rhythmic waves of rising, falling tones
would that i, man from the wilds, could achieve the same
but, in the clear eyes of heaven, luck has escaped me

because of a series of illnesses i have lost my scholar's clothes
and wear but a poor recluse's rags these days, ever wandering
i build small huts up in the mountains to seek the deep secrets of nature
i eat the bread of strangers while i pile up my wander-years

it's true the emperor sent messengers out for me
but i was unrecognized as anything but a hermit
i should hope that the promise still holds
and that your response will gladden this heart

if before then you should see me sitting, weeping
take pity on this latter day ruan ji, seeker of the wilderness

murphy looking forward to his return home from his travels
2-17-06 11:30 am

von zach I, 51

i keep the army secretary company on his journey to an-xi

you sir have suddenly risen to the stars, sit in the clouds
while i have been keeping my steady place down in the mud
i, this old white head, am losing my steadfast support
you as a red-sashed official have shown me great sympathy

as army secretary you now leave to win victory after victory
i remain where i've been for two years, waiting for an appointment
i need to get in a boat to follow the great river to the sea
to lose the sadness of facing the future without your presence

murphy typing his manuscript in a military cadence
2-17-08 11:50 am

von zach I, 52

respectfully i dedicate this 20 rhyme poem to zhang-ji, director of tai chang-si

the ghost islands lie on the other side of korea
the kun-lun mountains lie west of the ten-thousand realms
both of these places are fabled throughout the world
both are as difficult to reach as the emperor's palace

yet you penetrated to these distant areas of the immortals
as well as into the good graces of the emperor
your family is thick with honored statesmen
its renown is richly earned by its collective wisdom

though there are many able officials in the court
you are the one picked for the emperor's bejeweled scepter
as a duty of your office you recite the poems of occasion
as master of music you inform the court orchestra

the calligraphy in your flowing brush rivals ni heng
the astuteness of your essays cuts sharp like pi-ti's sword
your brothers share your ability and serve at your side
and all of them are filled with the gallantry of service

the door keeper of the palace has your name on his list
your hand is seen in many of the imperial decrees
the clock strikes a late hour deep within the palace
when you finally emerge for the quick gallop to your home

the call of your abilities reaches even to the barbarians
your masterful plan for the empire's future is known well by all
you have only recently begun to implement these measures
we all wonder to what great heights you will lead us

i am the fabled man who is always in a fiasco
i am he, wandering, sick, without office, in constant disappointment
i am the artist who wishing to paint a tiger draws the body of a hound
my future, my fate, is turning sour like vinegar

i float helpless as a water plant even as i persist in life
seeking but to find the way to a bit of peach tree shade
i would like to be made known to the emperor
then perhaps would follow a small obscure post

truly it is hard to wrestle with the great sea
nor can one rise up to touch the sky
i am ashamed of my lack of complete preparation
with only my meager skills i throw myself on your mercy

i cry miserably like an orangutan locked within a cage
i am a mere magpie seeking his warm nest for the night
sometime, perhaps, when you hunt with the emperor
you might mention this patient fisherman, waiting

murphy with his ego cut off at its knees
3-1-06 8:30 am

von zach I, 53

respectfully i dedicate these twenty rhymes to prefect xian-yu zhong-tong

there are many scholars who serve the empire
but how many among these are men of worth
yet an extraordinary talent should rise occasionally
as your bold spirit distinguishes itself from all the others

now i have discovered the perfect prefect
you should be the one to stand next to the emperor
the greatest of war steeds forge the path for others
the greatest of eagles soar above the sparrows in the dust

great lords and overlords are here in abundance
yet you rise above all with your poetic brush
you soar above the others with your song
its calling place now central to us all

as an older man you had gone back home went fishing like pan-xi
yet now you have again stepped forward, and hold the axe of office
you have risen to stand next to the sky, in the heavens
no one could be nearer the state council of ministers

i have heard that all of your sons display excellence
i have heard that you welcome worthy new guests
i have heard of your great heart with growing expectation
but because of past defeats i hesitated to approach you

the road before me is broad, and i know not which direction to take
your level of service is so high it is hard for me to speak so directly
but i was a noted poet and scholar in my own province
who was sent as a candidate for examination by my prefecture

but i was not fated at that time to be successful
and was left behind to admire those fortunate others who were
since then i have often doubted whether my training mattered
but have been solaced by remembering some who bloomed later in life

three poems i publically submitted caught the emperor's attention
but i was never invited to bow in the audience hall
though i was made to meet with other famed, learn'ed men
and they were appreciative of my modest literary efforts

it was difficult under the previous administration
under the control of a devious plotter only out for himself
wherein even this humble person was attacked
and even now i find it difficult to countenance why

but now you are the face of a new government
which promises rain for the scorched earth
here is a scholar who dreads starvation
could you not mention me to the prime minister

murphy on bended knee with his wee proposal
3-6-06 9:00 am

von zach I, 54

the friendship of shared misery

there are friends who pass as clouds, or sometimes rain
such fickle men are everywhere if you go count them
their's not the friendship of guan-zhong and bao shu-ya throughout shared misery
that loyalty today has been trampled to dust and debris

murphy mad at holding the bag once again
3-6-06 11:20 am

von zach I, 55

the tale of the white silk threads

when silk thread winds off the cocoon it should be long but not necessarily white
in gauze of zhe-giang, in brocade of s-zhuan; it will be measured with gold tools
blood red silk over the ivory frame, delicate white hands sewing back and forth
upon this vibrant background hundreds of bright colored flowers, thousands of tiny green
grasses

i have told to you how this silk will be dyed for fashion and not be white
as you can see by looking at the brilliant flashes of color from under the busy looms
beautiful young seamstresses then carefully iron the brilliant cloth flat
then they cut it, sew it, hide the needle tracks, and press it flat again

young women will dance these spring gowns before you in their joy of being
the butterflies will sparkle in the sun, orioles will sing from the tops of trees
the faded wild flowers will contrast, blend in, lend their beauty
while the thin life threads of the nascent willow waft in the wind

but should any dust, or sweat, or dirt besmirch the garment
it is straight away discarded in favor of fresh new clothes
can you not see how hard it is for a talented man to ask to be of service
and risk being discarded in a dark, strange place, like an old piece of silk

murphy completing a knotty petrarchan sonnet
3-6-06 2:10 pm

von zach I, 56