

i send these twenty rhymes to general ge shu-han

of those living now, whose statue will grace the hero's hall
who among us will reach such lasting fame
our emperor is a warrior lion
his generals are cut from his mold

as his top general you guard all the imperial lands
your wise stratagems have been a lesson to us all
at the tip of your spear you pushed out a hundredfold
enveloped he-xi and long-yo, cleared them of enemies

there are no signs of forces which threaten there now
the arc of the tian shan mountains holds no enemy arrows
you were able to exterminate the fleeing army
you then chose wisely to step back from the enemy

you always felt abandoning he-huang earlier was wrong
you have only recently taken control of this battlefield
your plans are harmonious with those of the emperor
you surpass all others in the emperor's realm

the sun and moon shine down on the emperor's trees
the entire world bows to the feet of the emperor
the tatars are admonished back to the north
their elegant horses now again fitting tribute

you were given imperial orders to take the fight into the boundary desert
and when you return you will have the imperial medal of honor
before this time an-lu-shan had been the pampered favorite of the emperor
but in you his majesty has found the wise counselor who prevails

the emperor gave you lands with people, and official office
he swore that you and yours would always have this land
your strategies fortuitously swept all before you
your closeness to the emperor makes everything possible

your rewards are piled high to reach the blue in the sky
your steadfast courage has brought you many staunch friends
i am unfortunately unable to be among your honor guards
for i am already deep into my white haired years

when i was young i lusted after the glory of inscriptions on pillars
i wished only for the highest office with the worst problematic thorns
then, for too many years i merely watched the spring grasses wilt again
and while doing all this nothing, i became old and useless

you surround yourself with the most able military assistants
and they bring with them others of the same ferocity
with such a long powerful sword to use in the nation's defense
i would like to see your camps in the kong tong mountains

murphy taking stock of his misspent youth
3-25-06 11:20 am

von zach II, 1

farewell to secretary gao shi, 35th of his clan

the rice near the kong –tong mountains is ready to reap
and the hope is that there will be no war
i ask you to please question your governor general
why should anyone advance further into the foreign lands

the hungry falcon who has yet to lose his wildness
will limit his flight to follow close behind his master
our mister gao sits proudly on his horse
the image of the intrepid frontiersman

you no longer have the duties of a minor police official
who is always forced to use the whipping canes
i ask you the question, what duty is given to you
in this frontier district with its sultry heat

you answer that you are only a secretary to the general
yet I know you are held in the highest esteem by him
i say you must always be careful with your advice
when you are asked by prominent men

after serving in this capacity for ten years
you might yourself head such a large area
i am happy for you in your service as secretary
it fits well with your ultimate expectations

a man can now serve into his later years
and reap further honors upon honors
i regret our meetings are rare and short lived
but we have gone traveling opposite ways

now again we will be the morning and evening star
doomed to the sadness felt by each alone
when a tearing wind takes a high flying bird
it is difficult to for another to follow him

as brownish dust torments the desolate desert
will my feelings be awaiting our next meeting
if on the border you have the time and energy left
i would love to read your poems of war

murphy nose, lips and chin to the grindstone
3-27-06 10:45 am

von zach II, 2

farewell to honorable cui guo-fo and to the honorable you xiu-lie

in these last few years i have grown white haired in waiting
in my despair i knocked on the heavenly gates with my poetry
i aimed for the far side of the stars with these poems
and was very fortunate to stir the interest of his majesty

the honorable prime minister provided the theme
the honorable minister of cultural affairs reviewed my work
i was like a bird trying to outfly all the others
or the fish trying to leap over the dragon gates to spawn

in the end i was mixed with the other young dragons
and heard only jealous noise from the small birds around
i still would seek the heights of the sky blue heavens
however my wings can't carry me so high

classical scholarship only goes so far these days
but i was able to add to the good name of my family
in the mountains of my homeland are herbs of immortality
the landscape as beautiful as the renowned valley of peach blossoms

i am now preparing to return to my home in the hills
and shall always remember the academy within the palace walls
the efforts of you two gentlemen concerning my three poems
are beyond my expressive powers to convey gratitude

murphy at a loss to know what the graders had in mind
3-28-06 10:00 am

von zach II, 3

walking in the park at general he's with my friend zheng qiann (1 of 10 poems)

1

i never knew the path to the lower south pond
yet now i know, it, and the fifth bridge
this famous garden centers on its deep clear waters
with its wild bamboo stretching high to touch the blue

you have long walked this path with your friend general he
we all speak together here now as did the sages of old
i have wished all my life for such an isolated retreat
to let my horse's hooves find their farthest reach

murphy back between the bactrian's two humps
3-16-06 2:30 pm

von zach II, 4

walking in the park at general he's with my friend zheng qian (2 of 10 poems)

2

the wind shifts of a hundred tomorrows curl the waves ashore
the large lake's edge is shadowed by its thousands of tall trees
throughout the heavy foliage their ripe fruit glisten
deep hidden under the leaves and the oriole's nest

bass, fresh, slivered in silver stripes on the plate
pungent garden greens asteam in soups on the table
sitting here in the shade of an awning on a pleasure boat
one can almost imagine being at leisure in the south

murphy plugging along on the step machine, six in the morning
3-16-06 9:15 pm

von zach II, 5

walking in the park at general he's with my friend zheng qian (3 of 10 poems)

3

what a beautiful flower, it must be from far away
when did this princely plant leave its homeland
its rare blossoms no longer rooted to its native soil
but taken here to line the edges of these clear waters

only when the emperor's servant returned from the west to china
did it appear, no learned records exist for it before
but now it is beaten down by the rain, strewn about
perhaps this way it gradually expands its blooming ground

murphy setting up a new kitchen
3-17-06 12:00 pm

von zach II, 6

walking in the park at general he's with my friend zheng qian (4 of 10 poems)

4

the outlying scholar's hut is hard by the high bamboo
its scrawny hedge bedraggle with belated bloom
the elbow of its eddy pool deep enough to swallow a horse
the thick wisteria vines writhing together like snakes

there is a sadness i feel for my profitless dabbling in poetry
yet it is lifted out here in the wild where true wisdom beguiles
i should gather all my books into bundles to sell
and ask the master of the park to use just this hut

murphy on the cusp of spring still shivering cold
3-20-06 10:30 pm

von zach II, 7

walking in the park at general he's with my friend zheng qian (5 of 10 poems)

5

this man made lake can't hold back the sea of rain, it has lost its wall
the surrounding hills protrude, irregular, shaped by nature's whim
the wind whipped bamboo droops its slender green shoots
midst the trees water swollen plums have burst their red skins

i use silver picks for plucking the strings of my zheng
i have traded gold girdle of office for only this wine
and since we chose to be without servants to bring cushions
we shall sit where we are, on the lichens and moss

murphy re-imagining how harvard might have been
3-20-06 11:15 am

von zach II, 8

walking in the park at general he's with my friend zheng qian (6 of 10 poems)

6

a bit of snow comes over the weather beaten ridge of rock
the cataract plunges down from the gates of heaven
here we awaken from our drunkenness on the cool mats
wrapping ourselves in blankets from the damp and the cold

an old man stops by to see to the isolated guests
he will not take money for the fresh fish he has brought
i can imagine no more pure and unspoiled place
its an entirely separate world where we are

murphy getting ready for his noon tipple of beer
3-20-06 11:40 am

von zach II, 9

walking in the park at general he's with my friend zheng qian (7 of 10 poems)

7

undergrowth and trees thoroughly enveloped in a cold fog
the early fresh green smell of fern permeating the air
it reminds how beautiful the new colors of spring
and how they fade in the cloud banks of shadows

the wild cranes come here in the cool of the morning
the spirits of the woodlands hide from the light
the park with its rocks surrounds this great lake
a hundred miles with nothing but lush vegetation and water

murphy stretching to limber up the old limbs
3-20-06 4:00 pm

von zach II, 10

walking in the park at general he's with my friend zheng qian (8 of 10 poems)

8

looking back at the lake reminds of the island of meadows
when we had to navigate over the new man-made lake
when there we drank far, far too much wine
made fools of ourselves waving our white headscarves

we rowed our boat as if we were born again oarsmen from ying
and when we jumped in the waters we outswam the locals
in the evenings we sat watching night fall on jin mountain
while reflecting on our wanderings over the rivers and lakes

murphy preparing to go out for the morning shopping
3-22-06 9:25 am

von zach II, 11

walking in the park at general he's with my friend zheng qian (9 of 10 poems)

9

the books on the shelves reach to the ceiling
the trees by the steps almost touch the low clouds
the general is no friend of warfare despite his calling
his sons, though still young, are accomplished in literature

the light breeze awakens us from our drunken slumbers
we declaim our night's compositions to the still night
shadows of wisteria fleck our rough robes
their pale blooms white in the cold moonlight

murphy standing stoic on the crowded subway
3-22-06 9:45 am

von zach II, 12

walking in the park at general he's with my friend zheng qian (10 of 10 poems)

10

our thoughts turn sadly to the task of returning
the time has come, it can be delayed no longer
we leave the park, and follow the water way which brought us here
memories stuck like white fleecy clouds in our minds

who wouldn't laugh at himself dancing before the mighty
and who really cares for the songs of this drunken poet
the only correct response is to honor my friends
to come to this special place despite all storm and rain

murphy a toady to equal all others when irish whiskey is involved
3-22-06 10:00 am

von zach II, 13

song that i sang while i was drunk

other officials obtain ever higher positions one by one
but zheng qiann himself wears only one meaningless star
in the mansions of the palace they feast on choice meats
here the professor hasn't quite enough rice to eat

he understands the higher ethics as did the scholars of antiquity
his literary abilities rise above the standards of the old masters
and though his abilities are honored by all, his life is still misery
to earn the highest rewards in the far future is worthless to him now

i, the old man from du-ling, am mocked even more
i wear only a short, thin shirt, and my temples are turning white
daily i buy a mere five cups of rice from the imperial granary
then i often go to see old zheng for companionship

when we have money we always find the other
it matters not who buys the wine, we both drink
our friendship is so intimate we forget all formalities
as to the wildness of the drinking, he probably wins

we drink the new spring wine deep into the night
sit and listen to the rain outside while the candles drip
we only know that forceful songs bring demons and spirits
and we can forget that we are near starving in the gutter

si-ma xiang-ju for all his aptitude washed dishes for a while
while the poet yang xiong sadly chose suicide at the end
zheng xian, you should retire to your family house now
even to stony fields in a broken back hut covered with moss

how does our classical learning ever benefit us
confucius and despicable bandit zhe, both now mere dust
whoever is picked next to sing cannot be sad
while we live and breathe we can still drink bottoms up

murphy finding an exercise in balance that he can do
3-28-06 12:00 pm

von zach II, 14

with the greatest respect i send this poem of 20 rhymes to the left minister wei jian-su

official records show the current regime is as long as that of huang-di
for the emperor xuan-zong has reigned for forty years
all the world is imbued with his peace and longevity
his harmonious spirit permeates the entire universe

through this time there is one first faithful minister
one whose portrait now hangs in the unicorn gallery
he is like the horse bo lao shows on silk, the fiery winner
who caught the unicorn back in that fabled time

wei jian-su, he who has streamlined and diked the great rivers
he is the minister who shines brightly for his deeds
indeed he reminds of the great wei xian of the old tang
he is justly honored as was wei fan-zhu serving the qin

his exemplary deeds go far beyond our recent history
he has no better throughout our classical records
high camphor trees have roots deep into the earth
the sea is a great water without any chance of ford

as the north star guides, so you counseled us
as did duke bi you led the governors of the east to council
your service in the internal ministry was exemplary
and you were warmly presented to the emperor

your incomparable talent reflects the masters of antiquity
imbuing the world with your overflowing virtue
your foresight exceeds that of guan lu
your calligraphy surpasses chen zun

why should the mighty dragon stay in one pond
you were the jewel the emperor could always call upon
you gave proper advice in the ancestor temple of the dynasty
and led the nobles back to the traditional simplicity of ritual

everyone of great ability now serves in the ministry
only the lesser lights stumble beneath in the darkness
i have long suffered heavy illnesses like si-ma xiang-ru
and like zi xia i battle loneliness time and again

when i look back i know i have always been near the great rivers
but that i was always swept along like the common person
the greatest of diviners, ji xian, cannot see my fate
nowhere can i find the quietude of confucius and mencius

my heart is heavy, time is late and i have no position
the spirits have inspired this long peroration
it is in your honor that i sing this poem
as the tears flow down over my robes

murphy turning the mule around to plow another furrow
3-30-06 8:40 am

von zach II, 15

the song of the beautiful women

the third day of this third month comes fresh and new
many lovely women stroll along the meandering river in chang-an
their manners are pure and true, their beauty unsurpassed
young, with delicate complexions and finely molded features

their embroidered silk dresses shine in the early spring sun
one sees a host of golden peacocks and silver unicorns
their hair is adorned with headpieces of kingfisher feathers
flowers and jewels flow down over their temples

a pearl net overdress shimmers a graceful sway
over there among the cloud feather clan
is the mistress of the pepper flowered halls
now called the princess of guo and qin

succulent roast camel is served in malachite bowls
pale pink flesh of fish decorates white crystal plates
but the rhinoceros horn chopsticks do not descend
the sharp slicing knives now useless in the server's hands

there are no eunuch messengers, no flashing of hooves
though the kitchen sends out a steady stream of delicate food
the flutes and drums add a mournful sound of the spirits
guests and patrons all truly gathered at the gates of power

and who could this be, this lackadaisical late comer
the one dismounting directly onto the patterned carpet
blossoms float like soft snow, down from the trees
a blue bird flies off with a stolen red kerchief

hands could toast themselves warm at the force of this power
better to wait, to approach at a more propitious time

murphy seated far, far from the dais
4-3-06 9:30 pm

von zach II, 16

another visit to general he (5 poems)

1

i wrote to the general asking about the bamboo at his east bridge
graciously he sent a note saying come, stay for a while, be welcome
i threw my traveling clothes into a bag, summoned my cart
i'm going back to that small hut with its high pillow, all my own

the flowers sag in the heat of the day, an oriole catches a butterfly
the small stream splashes as an otter chases a fish
i have come again to this my special place
where i can idle my time as a rustic ideal

murphy standing quietly in the parlor, waiting

6-9-03 2:30 pm

von zach II, 17

another visit to general he (5 poems)

2

up in the hills is the rain as well as our jug of wine
sand washes down the hill but we don't move
the dog sniffs my robes as the old friend he is
the crow is in her nest guarding her young

the clouds thin out over cui wei temple
the skies are now clear over huang ci slope
a bit before i wished to be alone with my thoughts
i clomped with my mud shoes past the bamboo to the east

murphy chopping the herbs for the evening meal

6-10-03

von zach II, 18

another visit to general he (5 poems)

3

fresh tea is the evening breeze of spring
the sun slants to this flat space
i use the stone balustrade to grind my ink
my poetry delicate, fresh on silk

a kingfisher sits on a wicker rack
a dragon fly clings to a thin fish string
now that i have experienced this grace
i will sit here evenings, evenings on end

murphy imagining a second chance at it all

2-19-03 12:30 pm

von zach II, 19

another visit to general he (5 poems)

4

it is strange the general stays home from the court
he is infected with my longing for the natural
his gilt hilt reflects the softness of the rain
the shaft of his spear blends with the deep green of the moss

he dirties his own hands to move the roots of his reeds
his household through his efforts grows all its own rice
all this must flow from his adoption of the quiet
i long for the peace of his white haired days

murphy slowly stretching his arthritic joints

6-09-03 12:00 pm

von zach II, 20

another visit to general he (5 poems)

5

since my arrival here i have mused many nights
my host makes it easy so a half year now has gone
but this is a stumbling life, it is past time
all i have is my desire for a place such as this

when will i be summoned to take my place in the world
so i can make enough to buy a small farm in my old village
even my latest overtures may not work
i forget the wine cup in my hand while i stare at the night

murphy imagining a better world

6-9-03 12:10 pm

von zach II, 21

the tale of lake mei bei

cen shen and his brother love beautiful nature
and they invited me along for a sail on mei bei lake
as we embark the sky darkens and takes on a strange pallor
suddenly changing the outlook for our outing

sharp waves spring up like a field of broken glass
we launch our flat boat into this chaos of shards
the unworldly scene strikes fear in our hearts
leads our thoughts to tragic tales of water monsters

but why should a man sigh over high winds and whitecaps
then it begins to clear and the boatmen are all delighted
we all watch the men unfurl the bright brocade of sail
and with the weather brightening we make our way

flocks of ducks fly off in confusion as the oarsmen begin to sing
pipes and strings are loudly played when the blue sky is fully seen
poles and weighted ropes cannot find the bottom of the clear waters
the leaves and flowers of the water plants shine fresh and clean

at the center of the lake it seems we are on a transparent sea
the surface of the deeps reflects the black form of southern mountain
inverted it reaches to the farther half of the lake
our skiff floats on this darkness until we reach edge-of-clouds temple

the moon rises beyond indigo-fields-pass, shimmers on the surface
and seems to be a pearl spat from the depths by a water dragon
the god of waters strikes his drum and the dragons disappear
the water sprites and fairies begin their evening dance

golden poles and green flags, kingfisher banners, all set the scene
yet i worry of the rain god's return, his intent still not understood
how short the time of our youth, how old age captures us all
how closely can great joy and sorrow follow one another

murphy sharpening his new vegetable cleaver
4-4-06 11:00 am

von zach II, 22

the balcony in the southwest of lake mei-bei

we look out over blue lake mei-bei from a high balcony
the weather is windy and cool though it is now early summer
the thick reeds on the shore have been blown apart
the sky and the water commingle, melt one in the other

this is the sort of view i am constantly seeking
those i feel i can reflect through my heart
in a fashion i see fairies in the corner of my eyes
when i peer through the fog to see a fishing boat

the green of the southern mountain pours over the clear surface
the image of bo-ge peak is bottom up on the water
this high vantage magnifies the grandeur of the landscape
my time on this high balcony is regrettably too short

i have labored my entire life in shame without office
perhaps i am destined to give up the public life
the current scene seems to want a more flashy runner
so i have accepted my place among the frogs

if a man knows it's time to go home, he can set the world free
if he follows his heart, no other life could be better
but if a man withdraws, what happens if he is called to a post
only after he has grown old can he truly find peace

especially if he could manage to live on water chestnuts as food
and be satisfied with a rude reed cottage on a lake
but as for now give me a good flat boat for myself
and i will drift serene in the perfection of scene

murphy staying inside on a raw spring day
4-5-06 10:10 am

von zach II, 23

boatride on mei-bei lake west of chang-an

the beautiful women flash smiles beneath blue black eyes
the flutes play on while shengs bring their alien complaints
the ivory masted sail flaps free in the spring breeze
all ropes are belayed, we have our leisure of the afternoon

the women dance with fans, their shadows kissing wavelets
blossoms from the trees where swallows play fall on their grace
what if we rowed off by ourselves in this nice little barge
do they have a hundred flagons below, can wine gush from a spring

murphy recalling the gaiety of making his first music
4-5-06 4:30 pm

von zach II, 24

i give this poem to army secretary zhang (20th of his clan), as he departs for shu-zhou
and ask him to show these verses to censor yang

my old friend zhang, may your journey be pleasant
the sorrow of your parting brings deep pain
your route takes you through the giant trees of qin
near the sharp ridges of the mountains of shu

censor yang, like huan dian of old, is censor for only a short time
while you zhang are as long serving as red beard xi chao
i am tied to the imperial commissioner yang by old friendship
it would be nice for him to hear of my good wishes

murphy answering the telephone for a change
4-7-06 8:30 am

von zach II, 25

sent to secretary gao shi, 35th of his clan

i wonder about the honorable gao shi
whether his brush still decorates the silk
his reputation is unequalled
like the tone of his exquisite verse

general ge shu-han welcomed talent into his camp
kao memorialized the kong tong mountain victory with a praise song
i hear he has recently received the red sash of office
this should ease the hard memory of his earlier years

murphy hustling to get the shopping done before the rain
4-7-06 9:00 am

von zach II, 26

in the house of my maternal uncle cui, district judge of bai-shui-xiann,
listening to the welcome rain i am inspired with this verse

the district this year prospers above all of the past
the management of my uncle is impeccable
beyond the green mountains the weather is clear and dry
but here a lively rain has everything thoroughly drenched

because the desire for rain has been so fully realized
there is nothing i should add to this, my heartfelt praise
during the time of the emperor cheng we all suffered hard drought
now all this rain makes the people to sing and dance

murphy bellying up to the single's bar as the diplomat of desire
4-10-06 8:40 am

von zach II, 27

excursion with courtesans to zhang-ba canal when cool weather attacks as it becomes dark (2 poems)

1

sailing toward sunset on this boat is pleasant
the waves lap slowly, the soft wind blows
the thick bamboo shields the meeting place
where the watery blooms are fresh in their glory

the young men begin to mix the icy drinks
while the young women clean the lotus roots
overhead the dark clouds begin to gather
filling me with the desire to write a poem

murphy alone with his muse as she whispers
4-15-06 11:40 am

von zach II, 28

excursion with courtesans to zhang-ba canal when cool weather attacks as it becomes dark (2 poems)

2

the rain comes and wets the exposed deck
the wind rages and beats on the bow of the ship
the red skirts of the girl from yue clings wetly
the darkened eyebrows of the yzn beauty sadly streak

the mooring lines jerk at their ties on the levee
the side curtains are unrolled to protect from the spume
as we return home the weather turns to icy cold
bringing autumn to the canal of midsummer

murphy thumbing his well worn dictionary
4-15-06 12:00 pm

von zach II, 29

to p'ei qiu (2nd of his clan) on his departure to become a police official in yong-jie-xian

out where the pavilion stands on the solitary island
rising on the distant horizon in the middle of the fog
you will meet an old friend of mine who has a position there
you and he will most likely be working together

mei fu is stationed out there under the retiring official
you should remember him from your mountain wanderings
as for me a small boat has already been prepared
i will be sitting with a fishing pole in the autumn winds

murphy the vicarious hero of a just finished novel
4-16-06 10:00 am

von zach II, 30

complaining about the autumn rain 1 of 3 poems

in this uninterrupted downpour of autumn
all the plants have quickly begun to rot
though down by the side of the stone steps
a cassis shrub still freshly blooms

the branches are covered with beginning leaves
they are roughly spiked like a kingfisher's crown
and there are countless yellow blossoms
splayed open, the color of gold coins

beyond this splendor a cold wind brews
arrives to slash bitterly through
i fear it will only get far worse later
it will be hard for them to stay out here alone

i, the eternal student, will go stay in the shelter
so my completely white hair can be protected
i stand for a last moment in the flower sweetened wind
the short life of the blossoms brings me to tears

murphy brewing green tea for the ceremony
4-16-06 10:20 am

von zach II, 31

complaining about the autumn rain 2 of 3 poems

there are incessant storms and orgies of rain
what a way to celebrate an autumn
the four seas and the eight gardens of heaven
all together forming these constant clouds

neither horses nor riders come around here now
and there is no news of others near by
when will one be able to distinguish again
the dirty river jing from the clean river wei

the stored rice shows it rots with ergot
the millet is all turning black
workers in the field have given up hope
and no longer try to harvest more grain

if anyone in the city has an extra barrel of rice
he can arrange for a beneficial marriage
for once consent has been given
who speaks of the familial details

murphy contemplating his lunch feast of sashimi
4-16-06 12:50 pm

von zach II, 32

complaining about the autumn rain 3 of 3 poems

who thinks of this poor private man of chang-an
hidden behind his walls and his closed gate
this old man never ventures to go out
through the overgrown weeds before his cottage

only the children here have no worries
as they play in the wind and the rain
earlier a tumultuous storm brought in the cold
through the unchinked holes of this flimsy abode

even the wings of the wild geese are too wet
to soar away now high into the heavens
since autumn has come the sun has been hidden
when will this muddy earth finally dry out

murphy scribbling away at his small workplace
5-10-06 12:00 am

von zach II, 33

frustration with the rain, respectfully sent to lin you and wang che

it is the heart of fall, already the eighth month
the bitter winds have begun to blow
trees are stripped, their souls in dampness
and the house is enveloped by fog

the man i wish to see is out there in the rain
nine miles of separation can't be shortened by this pen
the white water rapids of the chan river are here
the way across the swollen river is gone

one could normally boat the river to your palace
but now it would be as hard as sailing on the milky way
i would prefer to ride on a high horse to you
or fly there quickly on the back of a wild goose

i would like to meet as quickly as possible
to discuss privately about my troubled heart
but we are now kept separate like the barbarians at canton
i feel tied to the house like a bird in its cage

i sit to a meal but walk to the window time and again
and always my hopes for a visitation are disappointed
my lovely vegetable garden is covered with muddy water
the fall chrysanthemums lie broken amid the thorn bushes

even the hawks and falcons cannot bring their wildness to use
the crows and kites have no where to find their food
i can only look over toward my northern neighbor wang che
in the vain hope that he will take the southern path to see old du fu

then we could both carefully get into my boat
go out a short way on the swollen river to catch fish
how pure our joy would then be
and this mood could be swept away by the roiling stream

murphy at two in the morning running the trot lines with his father
5-1-06 10:45 pm

von zach II, 34

i dedicate these verses to the imperial counselor zhen

many learned men these days seek hidden knowledge
but you alone, sir, have universal renown
your reports concerning literary matters please his majesty
as once han wu-di pleased si-ma xiang-ru

you are the black eagle who flies faster the colder it gets
you are the heavenly racer who maintains his speed into old age
now that you have achieved a position in the heavens
you are allowed to grieve over your hairs turning grey

murphy knowing the secret and telling no one
5-1-06 3:20 pm

von zach II, 35

i dedicate these verses to the imperial journal keeper and trusted adviser tian cheng

the office for petitions lies close to the beneficent emperor
this very important position is entrusted only to the wisest
when you, the chamberlain, leave court to dine at your house
you take the sealed envelopes from the sacred box home with you

at daybreak, you hurry to the blue-ribbon bedecked palace gate
palace ladies open the petitions and bring them into the private imperial chambers
at the window next to the serene heavens you can be seen
examining the literary quality of the unemployed petitioners

as once yang xiong wrote a poetic description of he-dong
du fu has composed verse from the giant mountain in the west
it now awaits only your recommendation
to be taken to the emperor for his perusal

murphy sitting zazen before his begging bowl
5-8-06 11:15 am

von zach 36

i hear that my old friend shen dong-mei, 8th of his clan, son of the poet shen chuan-qi, is appointed to be secretary in the imperial kitchens; though so hindered by the rain i cannot hurry to him and wish good fortune for the appointment; i respectfully send him this poem

on this day many lower officials of the prefecture chang-an will be appointed at a ceremony in the ministry of these only the noble shen is a friend of my family when he sees the emperor for the first time he will be as old as was feng tang

your poems will astonish all officials who read them as once the historians praised your father in this cool autumn you will take your high office and shine brighter than the other chamber gentlemen

i had no opportunity before this to express my joy to you and can now in my excitement offer only these few words how important i feel the position in the imperial kitchens to be as once my grandfather held the exact same position

as a poor man, i can send you no gifts and the continuous rain prevents my visit to see you know that i regard you as my praiseworthy uncle and trust you will not forget my poor private self

you are like a beautiful race horse who has risen to the heavens to become a supporting pillar of the balcony in the clouds my heart feels the same joy that gong you had when wang yang was made an official for now there is hope for your recommendation for this old graying head

murphy bemused by the old man he sees in the mirror
5-8-07 12:00 pm

von zach II, 37

at the festive meeting in the mountain pavilion of the imperial son-in-law cui

this is the fabled home of another xiao shi
where we find feathers of the phoenix in the forest
the source of the swirling waters is hidden
somewhere behind the high craggy rocks

the guests drink from large golden goblets
while we poets compete for a brocade coat
this fall there are many such festive occasions
not a day goes by without this fragrant, heavy wine

murphy rearranging his tchotchkes
5-9-06 9:00 am

von zach II, 38

on the ninth day of the ninth month i send this poem to cen zhen

i walk to the door, go out, then in again
dreary clouds have their feet on the ground still yet
in all directions i see only sploshy mud
i can only look over in your direction with longing

lost in thought i sit by the west window
as i eat it seems dark enough to be the evening meal
i know the banks of the meandering river are near
and could hardly hold any more of this deluge

i sigh over the plight of the common people
who will be unable to harvest their crops
how one wishes to throttle the rain god
or at least dam up the sluices of heaven

the light of the sun and the moon are hidden
the empty country hears only the cries of the birds
the nobility slowly wind their way to their duties
while the poor folk all stay in their houses

i look to the south toward the high mountains
from which, i fear, all this rain comes flooding
on this festival day the chrysanthemums at the east hedge
are riotous in their blooming confusion

cen zhen's poetry is filled with images of these blooms
and how appropriate it is to drink to their beauty
if i were to go out to pluck them now
i could fill my sleeves with their yellow gold

murphy newly apprised of his arthritic wrist by the coolness of fall
5-10-06 11:30 am

von zach II, 39

on the ninth day of the ninth month district judge yang feng-xian arranges a drinking bout
for cui bo-shui

the pan yo of the present day sits himself to drink
his contemporary, the other lu yun, joins in
they have brought along some clear wine
in which chrysanthemum blossoms float

the heavens above shine in the clarity brought by the frosts
the yamen of the host yang sits clear of the nightly fog
the wine has done its work, the guest cui begins to dance
but his shoes seem to have become confused

murphy awash in his guinness once again
5-9-06 12:00 pm

von zach II, 40

i sigh over the chrysanthemums out of the gan-valley, that i have planted in the yard

i planted chrysanthemums in my yard this year
but it was too late, they are from the gan valley
their green buds are not yet ready for picking
and it is the festival of the ninth day of the ninth month

this festival day will lead to a sad tomorrow
and i will sober quickly from the drinking
with all the other flowers now in bloom
of what use are my late bouquets to be

beyond my hedgerow in the fields
many wild flowers yield up their perfume
so i go to pick these small bits of color
to bring into the central hall of the house

i am filled with melancholy by the sight
the petals of my chrysanthemums are not awakened
they put down roots in the wrong place
where the winds and the frosts used them ill

murphy still at it in his dotage
5-10-06 10:45 am

von zach II, 41

verse for my grandnephew du ji

at dawn i rode out on a donkey to search
not knowing exactly where i had to go
high officials had filled me with flattering words
but i thought it better to find my relatives by myself

these kin are poor and without work
their houses are ramshackle like a deserted village
bedraggled, wild bamboo grows by the entrance hall
behind there is a stand of wild lilies

these lilies have been killed by autumn frost
which is now attacking even the bamboo
to wash the rice use only a small bit of water
to use too much muddies the shallow well

to cut the hollyhock use a gentle hand
you will harm the roots if you hack too hard
i am old and decrepit and rarely go out
only to see my grandchildren would i venture here

but i come only to speak of family matters
and do not expect a bowl of welcoming rice
only small souls regard hospitality as only the food
and i will speak no more of this unnecessary custom

do not let such insinuations raise doubts in your mind
we belong to the same family from the oldest of times

murphy returning from college to see his extended family all dressed in their sunday best
5-16-06 9:30 am

von zach II 42

i respectfully write the following verse at the invitation of the imperial adviser guo:
“the miraculous powers of the pond east of the hot springs of li mountain”

to the east li mountain rises into the clouds
on its peak is the imperial summer palace
each year in the tenth month the emperor raises his standard
as a sign that from here the nine provinces will be ruled

the fires of the inner world heat the local spring
so the lustrous water flows over the rocky wilderness
at times the sun shines here and its reflection
bathes the jutting facade of the summer palace with its brilliance

once duke mu from zhou came to the kun lun mountains
to expand his investigations of the mysterious world
the sound of his entourage thundered to the heavens
when the emperor came to view the hundred fathom deep pond

the dragon who dwells here is especially remarkable
so the emperor commanded his officials to make sacrifices to it
i have heard that in the past this dragon has used its strength
to shatter the mountain’s rocks and splinter the wooded heights

it must have been here in the middle of last night
its presence pronounced by the violent thunderstorm
the shadows of the summer palace fall on the jasper pond
which welcomes the blue water of the mountain runoff

the water of the pond has the taste of sweet dew
the examining hand feels its smooth white sheen
i look up to see the fluttering green flags of the emperor
the clouds bearing the heavenly spirits linger above

music of flutes and drums reverberate through the four directions
a wonderful fresh fragrance imbues its redolent perfume
water nymph maidens bring the dragon thin silk
a double number of priests sacrifice a steer to the flood

a hundred marvelous omens appear before the sublime emperor
no ruler of antiquity was ever given such a display
then on the steep bank of the pond a golden frog
this certainly brings an exceptional significance

when the emperor saw it he did not smile
thus yang gui-fei desired it not be seized
then it dived into the impenetrable deeps of the pond
and changed into a long, brown, hornless dragon

you, oh guo, have a high position in the court
your literary efforts have the beauty of rare coral branches
you have composed a lovely song to the greenness of this pond
to those who hear its beauty all grief and sorrow is driven away

murphy putting on his regalia for the new moon festival
5-15-06 10:30 am

von zach II, 43

on the occasion of visiting the tomb of emperor rui zong, i send this poem of thirty
rhymes to the officials in the feng-xian district

emperor rui-zong has ascended to the heavens
countless spirits have gathered since at his burial mound
there are many statues near the mausoleum
situated in the middle of fruitful fields

what is most impressive is the power of this edifice
it exhibits the same strength as the five colossi of si-chuan
the grave mound blends into its natural surroundings
steep hills, a few set back, surround it like a high wall

the grave tower seems to move through the scudding backdrop of clouds
the wind breathes a respectful sighing through the cypress trees
the stone gate is covered with white hoar frost
the marvelous vestibule is green with moss

the yard keepers greet the sun here each morning
the official sacrifices begin in the last glitter of the stars
the watch guard report early under the wide roof beams
copper water vessels have been brought from the deep well

though the court officials make constant sacrifice
the pious heart of the emperor is not yet calmed
it is not only that the emperor provides the appropriate rites
he hopes thereby to meet the spirit of his deceased father

this piety would serve as a proper model for the government
to promote and develop the teachings of lao zi
mushrooms grow by the columns of the grave temple
lovely birds flit through the shrubbery of the surrounding rock faces

the giant hua mountain looms before the grave mound
and the powerful huang he lies far to the east
the massive wall embodies the strong foundation
the many water courses of sha-yuan park glitter in the sun

the grave mound with its wall is a natural fortress
water ways and fields extend before it into the shimmering distance
this district has been named a second residence for his majesty
the balconies and pavilions rival those of the capital

the number of officials here attest to its importance
its high reputation is truly well earned
the honorables wang and liu glow like beautiful bamboo
the honorables bei and li are the aroma of spring orchids

the talent of the honorable zheng reminds of the renown of the old
the brush of the honorable dan incessantly moves over the silk
all the poems are full metrics in their description of nature
their incisive wisdom that of a freshly honed knife

the literary products have the richness of embroidered brocade
beautiful on both sides gleaming in the light like jewels
this administration rivals the abilities of the honored lu gong
they rise to the level of those in cui yuan's commentaries

as when the high court astrologers once observed the magical ducks
or when wang-zi qiao approached on the wings of the cranes
now i am as far removed from the court as the milky way
and constantly think of retiring to the wilderness

as a result of my unfortunate official course
i left du ling and wandered along the muddy jing river
in the manner of a student i wore a shabby tunic
and was pulled along like a swirling water chestnut

during the famine my children lost much weight
while in my great despair i wept bitter tears
you my hosts met me with the sympathy due an old horse
or an autumnal firefly bringing its feeble light to the tent

but a vagabond like me can not feel at home
and in my deep grief i will not rouse that emotion
when will i throw off all such concerns
and take sail with abandon out into the deepest of seas

murphy sensing his strength is almost fully spent
5-18-06 10:45 pm

von zach II, 44

after an illness i seek out wang who entertains me with wine so i give him this song

the greater world knows little of esoteric worth
that of the unicorn horn or the phoenix beak
if one could encompass these imponderables
then one could perform many and wonderful miracles

yet master wang of the present day has such wisdom
he has visited his wonders upon this poor sick man
how can i begin to show my gratitude
with what will i convey my adoration

i can do no other after he has seen to my illness
than to atone for the long time we have been apart
thus he already knows that for my entire life
i have shown a penchant for low position and poverty

since i have suffered often from hunger and bitter cold
i believe therefore there is nothing to be ashamed of
because of many long years of illness
i am in a weak and emaciated condition

when i came to visit master wang
he showed surprise at my deplorable appearance
answering his question i said i was confined to my bed
with numerous aches and bodily afflictions

i was feverish for the three long months of autumn
who is able to survive such an ordeal
for over a hundred days i oscillated
now hot, now cold, now hot again

the hairs on my head all turning white
my eyes clouding over, callouses where i sit
my complexion turning to a sallow pallor
my skin hanging in folds as i prepared to die

when master wang heard of all this he was dismayed
he deplored my lack of health and strength
he began to give his best effort to help
he decided i needed some healthy food

he sent his people out to the market
they bought sweet rice using his credit
he called his wife from her chambers
and asked her to cook it for me herself

she used preserved winter vegetables from chang-an
the vinegar imbuing them with a fresh green color
adding soft cheese from xing-ping
polished and glowing, the color of silk

she called for a fat piglet to be found
so she could make a fine hash of the meat
without telling she also sent for a barrel of wine
in order to end the feast on a happy note

who else but my old friend master wang
would have extended such hospitality
the feast loosened my bones enough
for me to attempt a small dance or two

the proverbial old horse was made lively once more
truly as written of old, the shi ging holds truth
by these events i became well, fully satisfied
all the more are my deep feelings for master wang

if i reach a ripe old age i want nothing more
than to be able always to eat to such satisfaction
wishing nothing more than to visit you often
without causing any unpleasantness of course

murphy finished chopping all the ingredients for his famous west indian soup
5-23-06 10:30 am

von zach II, 45

the story of the sha-yuan stud farm

have you not seen the white sand of feng-yi-xian, white as water
a hundred miles of wall surrounds the horse farm
once the best horses came only from the wo-wa river in mongolia
now the same breed is raised here for the emperor

there are at least 3000 breeding stallions and dams
raised on the grass which does not wilt even in the cold
this feed brings forth such strong horses
that they surpass even the best from the west

the new foals get ever better than the ones before
such is the skill of the emperor's officials in charge
he who enters the gate sees horses as thick as clouds
all are of the su-shuang breed favored by his majesty

in the spring and the fall a snow white courser is chosen
sent to chang-an for the sole use of the emperor
of the hundreds of thousands available for his use
none comes close to compare with such as he

he like all su-shuang is fast, and none faster
his intelligence brings heroic loyalty and steadfastness
as i gaze over the white sandy hills, these nimble horses frolic
they bound along leaping over small streams

when they wish to test their abilities they race with the deer
they swim in the waters and disturb turtles and water lizards
out of the deeps rises a giant fish as long as a person
its tail is cinnabar red, its scales glint their gold

one knows that such strange creatures have spirits for souls
they frighten us, but they are not horses transformed into dragons

murphy riding a brahma bull in the high school rodeo
5-24-06 9:30 am

von zach II, 46

i give this verse to general cai xi-lu as he returns to long-yo, and send it through him to ge shu-han's secretary gao shi, 35th of his clan

active bravery has become general tcai's second nature
he has long been a taut bow killing tatars in the west
courageously he prefers to die on the field of battle
an ambitious hero such as he eschews erudition

he earned his rank always fighting in the vanguard
his audacity bringing many an enemy into battle
his body is so nimble it reminds of an attacking kestrel
he wields his spear so deftly thousands scream and flee

he has been summoned to the high tents of headquarters
to meet the great ge shu-han in chang-an in the spring
the heads of his horses are bedecked with golden bridles
his camels carry the plunder of war beneath brocade cover

the far way back to the snow peaks of tibet is nothing for him
and with all due haste he will return again to kukunor
general ge shu-an meanwhile stays in chang-an with the emperor
while the brave field general goes west to your headquarters

when he passes the han and the huang-he rivers it will be autumn
there in liang-zhou he will find only withered stubble of wheat
i ask him to take this message to gao-shi
i would gladly learn how it goes with this second yuan you

murphy on his hands and knees scrubbing the kitchen floor
5-25-06 12:50 pm

von zach II, 47

i dedicate these verses to tian liang-qiu (9th of his clan) military auditor in the warehouse
of ge shu-han

the great warehouse is on kong-tong mountain
it reaches up to the blue heavens
the turfan chief of long-yo bows down
pledges loyalty to the emperor's court

the tatar horses he presents as his gift
are strong and well fed on spring clover
of all today's fighting generals only ge shu-an
could stand with the great he chu-bing of the han dynasty

and who else could be called a second yuan you
but you, tian liang qiu, called out from chang-an
all your colleagues in these headquarters
were recommended to their position by you

it is clear that in order to find such strong, capable men
you could not have searched among fishermen and wood collectors

murphy celebrating the holiday alone with his memories
5-29-06 8:45 am

von zach II, 48

i drink under blossoms midst the entourage of cavalry commander li si-ye

today i see this landscape for the first time
slowly absorb it, and ease into joy
i blow on a fine bird feather and imagine flying
i idly count the stamens in a plucked blossom

the verdant grass is a wonderful place to sit
as we drink midst the bouquet of the wine and the flowers
we return toward our homes completely besotted
fearing to disturb the city guards on such a quiet night

murphy welcoming the first heat of summer to come
5-29-06 10:10 am

von zach II, 49

i sing a drunken song on the leave taking of my nephew du qin who failed the exams and returns home

lu ji composed his first successful verses at twenty years of age
my nephew determined to be a writer even earlier in his life
as a lad he writes his concept essays quickly and aptly
other young men make a lot of noise but have not his grace

a magnificent steed shows his blood for speed as a colt
a young eagle soars from the beginning to the heights of the heavens
the words of this youth pour forth as the yang-ze through the three gorges
his powerful brush could inspire an army of a thousand men

he now at the tender age of only sixteen
proceeded to the exam determined to place first
to hit the leaf at a hundred paces as once did yang yu-ji
but he, the horse with shining hooves, has stumbled

this will not prevent him from finally picking the lovely flowers
he will return with mighty wings to fly triumphant as the wind
for it is already apparent strings of pearls drip from his lips
but i, his old white haired uncle, can no longer harbor such future longings

spring brightness sparkles on the waves near the east pavilion of chang-an
reeds on the river bank glitter white as teeth, the water plants glow green
the wind blows the rich robes of the guests, the sun shines its gold
the trees filled with flowers belie the sadness of our separation

we sit on the sandy river bank and empty two jade pitchers of wine
the guests have all become drunk, only i am still partly sober
realizing for the first time how serious is this our parting
i choke back a sob, stand in confusion, tears pouring down my cheeks

murphy skipping the graduation exercise of his class at harvard
6-8-08 12:15 pm

von zach II, 50

joke poem, sent by letter to zheng qian, and simultaneously offered to the imperial academy teacher su yuan-ming

when professor zheng qian comes into the academy
he ties its horse firmly under the terrace of the hall
but being drunk he soon remounts his horse
leaving his angry superiors cursing after him

his literary renown has lasted now for thirty years
yet he still can't provide cushions for his guests
fortunately for him the good dean su you
always sees fit to support his wine habit

murphy taking a breather from his work in the kitchen
6-8-06 11:30 am

von zach II, 51

at night hearing xu 11th of his clan recite his poems; i am moved to compose the following lines

the buddha boy xu went as a guest to the priests in shansi
finishing his studies, he disappeared into the mountains
i, also, was a student of can and hui ke
but i never penetrated the mysteries of meditation

what must be the height of the terrace he has achieved
one would never erroneously think of me as his equal
after our long separation, we recently met again
to my joy, he has now patiently begun instructing me

his recitation tonight has loosened the bridles of our inspiration
his ease at table has helped us all shed our fears of inadequacy
the skillful presentation of his song echoes the highest of poetic art
his verses composed with a pure heart buzz with the urgency of arrows

his keen insight permeates all with the sense of infinity
his animation even puts lightening to shame
tao yuan-ming and the three xies don't rise to his mark
only the shi ging and li sao reach to his level

his poetry stands before the others as a lone rose
who would venture to set something alongside his
his intentions are beyond the ken of us others in the world
he stands alone in the middle of men, shining solitary in the darkness

murphy trying to unimagine the rains of seattle
6-7-06 10:15 pm

von zach II, 52

li yan visits me on a summer day

in the trees where the heat is only slight
a noble gentleman comes to search for me
here where i live poorly like one does in a village
though it is not far from the southern city wall tower

the neighbors here are friendly and kind
i can easily provide for my needs from them
from the roof i call to my western neighbor
and ask it whether he has some wine i might have

he passes a pot of strong home brew over the wall
we take a mat to the bank of a lovely little stream
a fresh breeze comes from one direction then another
it reminds my guest that fall soon comes

small birds twitter their songs over the nests
while cicadas chirp from among the thick leaves
the noise bothers us with its raucous nature
who would still style my hut as surrounded by quiet

but the lotus flowers glint gold in the afternoon sun
and we stay a little longer to absorb their beauty
there is only a little wine left when we return
so i hasten to ask again of my good neighbor

murphy choosing sake' for the festivities with care
6-7-06 3:45 pm

von zach II, 53

i take in the festival feast at mei-bei pond with yuan, under-district officer of he-xian,
(oldest of his clan)

because of the beauty of the western mei bei pond
the meal provided by mister yuan is worth ten thousand coins
we consume many bowls of gleaming, pearly white rice
followed by melons cool as the mountain snows

and because i am confined to the boat for the nonce
i have given due notice to the plenitude of wine
the kind hospitality of our host is boundless
i compare it to the finest jade in this small poem of thanks

murphy knowing the proper song to sing for his supper
6-9-06 8:45 am

von zach II, 54

on the ninth day of the ninth month on meandering river

to trim seating cushions we need river rushes
searching along the river we find all the lotus are wilted
half a hundred years of my life have now gone past
on this festive ninth day my heart is doubly tired

though i believe the inevitable stream will become transparent
i am now outside giang-ling on this beautiful meandering river
in recent years my joy in life has begun to leave me
i become uncertain that i will enjoy the ninth day next year

murphy arising in his aching creaky way
6-16-06 9:00 am

von zach II, 55

a song of five hundred words traveling from chang-an to feng-xian

i

in du-ling there lives a poor man in obscurity
his old age bringing with it impractical ideas
foolish thoughts of his youthful desires
to serve his country as did ministers chi and hsieh
how disappointing has been the lived reality
his hair now turned white and only hardship before him
yet he persists in the face of frustration
only with the coffin closed will his spirit rest

he has always felt the burdens of the common people
enough to breed sighs from his roiling guts
while his old schoolmates make him the focus of ridicule
he sings his sad songs with ever more passion
he still dreams of roving on the rivers and seas
without care or sense of passing months and years
but he lives in the time of an extraordinary prince
and cannot abide missing his chance to be of service

though there is a plenitude of willing officials
and the throne room is filled with servants
this sunflower will always turn his face to the sun
truly nothing can change the instinct of his nature
he takes notice of the small crickets and ants
they both seek small holes as their homes
why should they ever emulate the great whale
and seek abode far from land in the ocean's deeps
he inferred from this how he should live his life
being ashamed when asking help from others

through these stubborn habits he has come to this end
suffering his fate, bending low, eating the dust
even so he is still not up to the likes of hermits chao and xu
who could not be tempted from their places of refuge
what else is there for him to do but drink too much
and sing his songs to break through the sadness

it is the fall of the year the grass has withered
 high winds now tear at the rocks on the ridges
 the road from the capital is at its darkest
 at midnight when the traveler sets forth on his journey
 a harsh frost lies on the land, he tightens his girdle
 but his fingers are stiff and he can't tie a new knot
 yet by dawn he is passing through the li mountains
 he thinks of the emperor snug here in hua-jing palace

the banners of war snapping proudly in the cold winds
 the marching of his armies have worn the path smooth
 a heavy mist rises as he passes the jasper green pools
 and hears the faint clash of arms as the guardsmen drill
 here is where the emperor and his ministers revel
 music is made to echo through the ravines
 and only the highest dignitaries bathe here
 none of the common people share in the feasts

but the silk garments worn in the harem
 are all woven by cold women in coarse clothes
 their husbands beaten by imperial officers
 the tax collectors come to extract their due
 all the emperor's chests of gold are meant for his people
 to help them prosper and all the land might thrive
 so when a minister neglects to carry out his duty
 it is certainly not his majesty who has caused the ill

there are many talented men who fill the court
 but the benevolent among them may well cower in fear
 even more when they hear how the gold platters
 have all ended up in the houses of the royal relatives
 in the central hall fair goddesses dance
 perfumed air following each jade body
 the guests are clothed in warm sable cloaks
 fine music of the pipes and the zither entertain

fine broth of camel hump is offered around
 tart tangerines and oranges ripened by the frost
 within vermilion gates wine is left to sour, meat to rot
 while without lie the bones of the frozen and starved

ii

there are but inches between the bloom and the withered
it tears into my heart and renders me mute
i turn north to reach where the jing and wei rivers meet
find the government ferry and look to the other side

chunks of ice are in the torrent from the west
the more i look the higher the waters seem to be
i wonder if they have come down from kong-tong
and might have destroyed the pillars of heaven
but fortunately the bridge still barely stands
cracking sounds emanate from its supports
we make our way across holding fast one to another
cursing the width we must crawl across

i had sent my wife on ahead to a strange district
the dangerous times breaking up our household of ten
i can no longer leave them alone without my care
so i have come home to share their hunger and thirst
as i enter the gate i am surrounded by wails
my infant son is gone, starving to death
i want to show strength controlling my grief
but all the neighbors are crying so why shouldn't i
i am ashamed at my failure as a father
i didn't provide food, i caused his early death
i didn't know he would die before the harvest
could be made available to my family in their poverty

all my life i have been privileged, exempt from taxation
my name has never been made available for military service
thinking back on all these events i ache with bitterness
how much worse it must be for the common people
i think of those who have lost property, their livelihoods
i think of the soldiers sent to distant garrisons
the torrents of my worries rise high as the southern mountains
huge, tumultuous, they can not be contained

murphy snug in his den typing away at a manuscript
6-20-06 11:45 am

von zach II, 56

the song of the newly painted landscape picture on the wind screen of liu, lower district
judge of feng-xian

it is certainly difficult to grow in the shade of those sycamore trees
as dense clouds rise there from the stream in the mountains

i had heard that you first painted landscapes of your district
but now your inclination is to paint idealized vistas
it is rare to find a true artist among the many painters of today
in this painting you have made the silk satisfy the spirit and the mind
and not only do you surpass your contemporaries qi yo und zheng qian
your brush is as magnificent as yang qi-dan from the times of sui

seeing hints of rocky xuan-pu and the streams around xiao and xiang
i could be sitting at the foot of tian-mu mountain
and be listening now to the shrill cries of the apes
i am reminded of a previous night when a wild thunderstorm hit
it is as if the spirits and demons were gathered at the gates of feng-xian
the fresh paint of the mountains and waters are as if lifted from life
the painterly sky reflects the richness of reality
a pavilion in spring, wilderness, flowers receding into the distance
it is evening, a lone fisherman sits in his boat
the blue depths of the flowing stream stretch wide
steep banks and high islands are painted with the greatest subtlety
while one does not see water sprites plucking their instruments
the bamboos on the banks of the river are spotted with their tears

the honorable liu loves painting, bringing to it divine creative powers
he also has two sons who can paint in a similar manner
the older son's specialty is an old tree at the tip of a mountain cliff
the younger paints a mountain priest and his young apprentice
it reminds one of the beauty of the cloisters on the yo-ye river in zhe-giang

i must sigh that from now on i stand here in the mud of reality
searching for beauty in as a tourist in linen stockings and leather boots

murphy bemoaning an abnormally dank-wet late spring
6-26-06 9:15 am

von zach II, 57

song of the lovely saddlehorse out of the imperial stud farm t'ian-you

i have heard the emperor's horses are tireless
the one in this painting certainly appears so
how extraordinary is his conformation, his heroic strength
the flick of his tail would raise the north wind

his coat is a glossy grey green, he has yellowish ears
his eyes flash crimson fire and the pupils are square
he has a warlike nature equal to any challenge
his formidable frame ready for a magnificent gallop

zhang jing-shun, the director of imperial horses, chose him
from all the broken colts his breeding shone most clear
the head groom at tian-you was charged with his training
whose sole attention was the loving care of this courser

at that time there were over 400,00 horses on the farm
but zhang felt they were all less than ideal
so he had this painting made to set a standard
when one lays eyes on it the image remains fresh

many years having past the horse is only this image
sadly, these hooves will no longer gallop along
the wonderful horses yao-niao and hua-liu also gone
because the classic studs have died we see their like no more

murphy touting the favorite at louisville on derby day
6-27-06 9:10 am

von zach II, 58

the song of the dapple onion-colored horse

every one knows the duke of deng loves his horseflesh
but this is the first one from mongolia he has owned
i heard this long before, and now my eyes gaze upon him
he is paraded forth to everyone's astonishment

his masculine beauty and elegant bearing impresses all
eying his own shadow, he nickers his pride
eyes sparkle from dark depths like two mirrors
under his mane heavy muscles are undulating copper plate

in the morning the duke rides by the palace balcony
and all onlookers agree his worth is beyond price
beads of sweat on his white skin catch the blood red sun
under his silver saddle lies beautiful perfumed silk

these were gifts from liang, head of government ministries
surely this horse compares to the imperial dragon steeds
his morning bath is taken in the jing or the wei river
by afternoon he is being carried in the shade in district yu or bing

all know that horses are best in their maturity
this one has a year or two to reach that plateau
one can then trust four hooves to rival the wings of birds
the song of the fabled eight steeds are appropriate here

now in these hard times where can we find such good breeding
surely they do not come out of the darkness and fog
recently i have heard of none in the herds of the emperor
shouldn't the seed of this steed be spread in the emperor's stables

murphy searching the blazing eyes of the wild bronco he is to ride in the rodeo
6-28-06 10:45 am

von zach II, 59

when my appointment as police commissioner was announced i wrote this humorous
verse to tease myself

i will therefore no longer toil in he-xi
how tiresome it would be to always bend my back
as an old man i do not like such hustle and bustle
but in the commandant's office here i can take my ease

i do love my wine so i need this small stipend
and my raucous singing is yet tolerated by the court
my desire to return to my old hut must again be put off
now i can only turn to face the wind that blows

murphy sipping his cool sake' poured over blueberries
6-28-06 3:50 pm

von zach II, 60