

at a festivity arranged by su duan and xie fu, i give the singer xie hua this drinking song
to sing

authors often produce wonderful art and noble friendship
in their youth the gentlemen guests duan and fu acquired renown for such
on this first day of the first moon the festivities begin
bringing with them the deep desire for the green smells of spring

the wish is for a nimble messenger to bring plum blossoms from the distant south
and luxurious blossoms to be everywhere under a clear sky
not the snow and ice from the old year lying around for over a thousand miles
and we seek to free our hearts with a hundred pitchers of wine

since i am an old man i hate to hear the sad noise of war drums
so through lively drinking we shall ease our heart's burdens
as much as possible the young men should show their cheerful support
seeing me now with my graying outward signs of senility

among the guests is xie hua who understands drinking songs
he composes the words himself as well as outstanding melodies
in the past few years he has taken to writing the long seven legged verse
he belongs with li dai-bo from shandong as one of the best at this

he is the equal of he, liu, shen and xie in this newer style
there sits a talent like bao zhao whose sadness has always had its charm
all young guests can indulge themselves today in something quite new
i on the other hand realize how short is this time of festivities

and as our enthusiasm crests, the sun sinks and a cold west wind begins to blow
my wish is for the water borne on the wind to change to wine and fill our golden goblets
for the wine to always be here in quantity and our joy to be forever
and then our miseries and grief would vanish and never return

but suddenly i remember how the rains of autumn will collapse the walls of old wells
then why not just drink some more since sobriety will only bring back sad memories

murphy giving the first toast at his high school reunion
7-18-06 9:50 am

von zach III, 1
[spring 757]

high in the mountains in the scholar's refuge of cui, 19th of his clan

i come as a guest out of the southlying district of feng-xian
i have wandered far without finding an hospitable place
all the while i ate the bread of strangers the days seemed overlong
especially so in the hot days of the summer sun

i sit now in a scholar's refuge high up under the trees
for two days now i have not felt the need to move on
on this beautiful morning i climbed the mountain with cui
at the top we looked down over the steep cliffs

high ridges lie here and there in the distance
the broad plains perfect in our hearts as a scale map
i now know why this view was chosen by my honored host
to help him chase away this far traveler's gloom

the scholar's refuge is rooted on the steep terrace
high up here are thick layers of ice with water melting down
over us the clouds wander without thought of destination
under us we notice the rocks that threaten to fall

soon one distinguishes the rush of a spring, then it's gone
hearing the water depends on the winds that are changing
one hears the calls of birds, but they remain hidden
as if fearful of the darts of crossbow hunters

the same as he hides under the guise of a minor official
so he can indulge his love of freedom in this place
i meet him here in "white waters", he, the brother of my mother
and he lives here like the eldest among the immortals

supported by his cane he walks among tall spruce
having achieved seclusion in his work as an official
he cooks for me a special meal of wild rice
as we enjoy the freedom of our cheerful conversation

we sit at our meal for a long while, then the wind picks up
as the the mountains turn blue green in the pale evening
a twisting dragon of water falls full sixty feet
dividing, swirling and twisting into a tumultuous pool

there is the thunder of a cloudless sky as it crashes down
seeking an opening to dive into, its hole in the ground
suddenly a dense mist rises high as the mountain
demon goblins writhe within in intimidation

then the mountain chains of kun-lun and kong-tong appear
seem as if they are all close by, within the neighborhood
the front window is bathed in the radiance of the sinking sun
the giant crags of mount hua glow in the red of evening

the sounds of an army on the move fills the forest and the mountains
the glint of sun off the water mixed now with the tips of spears and arrows
i know these are the troupes of state minister ge shu-an
his heavy cavalry is now in the mists and the fogs

my jade cup of wine now grows tasteless and stale
yet with ge here an lu-shan should not be feared as a conqueror
as a house groans in a high wind i sing this long sad song
my tears flow to wet my sleeves and fall heavily to the floor

the life of a man is split between misfortune and pleasure
to each the world gives equal measure triumph and disaster
i bewail the fact the soldiers of the freedom loving emperor
are having to prepare to stand against the northern barbarians

bold generals now sit together in the sacred temple of ancestors
where all make proper plans to pull together in the field
yet when will luo-yang, the capital of the east, be rid of the enemy
since all the armored troops cannot be rushed in only one direction

i reluctantly ask cui to end this fine feast
it is too hard to deal with the pain of fateful change
three times i have sighed during the food and the wine
how can we ever get back to what we once were

murphy preparing a ten course banquet of chinese delicacies

7-22-06 10:15 am

von zach III, 2

i observe the floods at san-chuan

since i came past hua-yuan i have seen no more flat country
back to the north there were only mounds to hike through
now clouds and lightening are my constant companions
feeding the mountain streams which burst forth from caves

brown fog lies thickly over rushing water spilling into the deep ravines
early morning, looking at the high waves, suddenly the levee collapses
horned and hornless dragons emerge from their mud dens
stags and roes leap to the crags of the mountain for safety

uprooted trees catch in the breakwater sand, stones wedged there by the waters
clamor of demons and ghosts in the wind, the passing flood of generations of men
ten thousand channels bring the waters to the sea, the enormity of the flood brings awe
seeing the swollen mountain streams i fear the flood will drown the levees

muddy waters wash over the banks, expose the roots of the pines and the cedars
overflow the heights, burst the gateway to san-men mountain, skew the very axis of the
earth
this flood pours into the luo-shui, then the huanghe, through tong-guan pass to the sea
the sound roars a clamor of the ten thousands of homes being washed away

the muddy waters thoroughly mix, do not settle, wind whipped froth stores even further
fury
when will boats finally be able to travel again, when will this darkness be lifted
this inconstant life has many vagaries, my way ahead now obstructed, blocked
there is no shelter here that i can find, the way through the mountains is almost
impassable

clouds and thunder gather close around, the path before us becomes ever more narrow
there are no bridges left anywhere so i must trust to fording the swollen streams
pity the scholar hermit in this wilderness, trust he will not end up in the belly of a fish
i lift my head, question the heavens, where is the fabled snowgoose so i can soar above

murphy in boot camp close order drill putting one foot in front of the other
8-3-06 10:30 am

von zach III, 3

an appropriate verse for gao shi-yan

where was the place we so long ago parted ways
gone, but today we meet again, both become old men
you, my friend, still searching for success
forced, as was i, to scramble for security

since i have lost my old friends in literature
i no longer frequent the taverns to drink wine
the enthusiasms of my youth dimmed and gone
but they are kindled afresh, here, where we meet again

murphy propping his cane next to his barstool
8-4-06 11:40 pm

von zach III, 4

beng-ya

i remember when the rebels began coming directly at us
we fled to the north and had many obstacles to overcome
we started deep into the night on the road to peng-ya
the moon shining brightly on bai-shui-xian mountain

my entire family traveled that far distance afoot
we were ashamed when we saw others on the road
the birds sang here and there in the wooded ravines
and there were no refugees going in the opposite direction

my foolish daughter was so hungry she bit me
i was afraid her whining would alert the wild tigers and wolves
so i pressed her to my breast to quiet her crying
but she would wriggle free to wail even louder

my small son showed better understanding of the situation
even trying to gather wild plums from the trees to eat
half the nights on the ten day journey were stormy with heavy rain
so we held hands to help each other slog through the deep mud

there was no shelter from the rain so we plodded on and on
the way slippery, we shivering in our clammy clothes
when the going was hardest we struggled mightily
sometimes all day we managed to go only a mile or two

wild fruit replaced the meager rations we brought along
lowhanging branches became the roof of our night shelters
early in the day we waded through water in the stony ravines
in the evenings we slept in the mists of the mountains

we rested a while in the marshes at tong-jia-wa
before we attempted to pass over lu-zi pass
with my old friend sun zai district director of beng-ya
whose noble hospitality rose higher than the clouds

he greeted us as guests even though it had grown dark
he called for lamps, threw open the outer and inner gates
he bade hot water be brought to bathe our feet
he cut ritual silhouettes, and burned them to call back our wandering souls

then he called in his wife and children waiting in the next room
when they looked at us and saw our condition they burst into tears
quite soon all my children had fallen into a sound sleep
he gently woke them and gave them their plates of food

then and there he made an oath to bond with me
that henceforth the two of us were brothers forever
finally he had the room cleared and prepared for the night
he left us to sleep pledging to help with all that he had

who could have opened his heart wider in such hard times
no one could have surpassed the hospitality of master sun
now my journey to beng-ya is a whole year in the past
and the traitor an lu-shan is still bringing havoc to the land

when will i grow the wings to fly back to that place
so i may stand again before the honorable sun

murphy staring at his tv watching the carnage of the never ending mideast war
8-8-06 1:40 pm

von zach III, 5

i receive word of my younger brother (1 of 2)

a letter arrives from far ping-yin telling of my younger brother
the only news it brings is that he is yet still alive
he fled a long distance in fear for his life
and finally found safety in a small village

but even there the war has caught up with him
my tears keep running down the same furrows of my cheeks
since i am now growing old i cannot be sure
that i will ever get to see him again

murphy retired, and relatively safe in his co-op apartment
8-9-06 9:15 am

von zach III, 6

i receive word of my younger brother (2 of 2)

you are brave but do not know how you will survive the winter
i am old and decrepit and see no possibility of coming to see you
the joyful song of the magpies indicating guests rings false for me now
like the wagtails in the shi ging it embarrasses me that we can not meet again

how can i go on with my life with this load i bear
i sit in misery while one year passes into another
once there were thirty people in my family in the two capitals
now, although you still live, your life hangs by a single hair

murphy wondering how his younger brother's retirement is going
8-10-06 11:30 am

von zach III, 7

mourning the prince

on top of the wall at chang-an a white-headed crow
its caw the herald of autumn above the west gate
from there it flies to peck at the roofs of proud mansions
warning the high officials below to flee the barbarians

the strongest whips have been broken in use, the finest horses dead
bones are separated from their flesh, the family scattered
the precious blue jue coral is tucked in his waist band
and the miserable young prince weeps by the roadside

he will not identify himself by telling his surname
he only tells of his distress and offers to become a slave
for a hundred days he has hidden in thorn bushes
his body is completely covered with scratches and dirt

but he has the distinctive aquiline nose of gao-zu
this boy could be nothing less than the nobility
jackals prowl the cities, dragons roam the woods
i caution him to take care of his precious being

i cannot stop to talk long at this crossroads
but because he is the prince i stay for a few moments
tell him of the stench of blood on the east wind last night
how the camels of the eastern hordes now fill the capital

and though the shuo-fang veterans are famed for their skills
their glory is of the past, that now they are shattered
i tell him the son of heaven has stepped down
how the crown prince has the support of the uighurs from the north

how they have slashed their faces swearing to avenge our wrongs
i tell him to speak not a word, that there are spies everywhere
i remind him to be careful, oh the poor piteous prince
he should always throw his trust to the aura of the five imperial mounds

murphy taking stock after the truce was declared
8-14-06 8:30 am

von zach III, 8

moonlit night

this night's moon shines the same in fu zhou
alone in her room my dear wife watches
from far off here i pity our small son and daughter
too young to know why i stay in chang-an

her fragrant hair will be damp from the dew
the clear moonlight is gleaming on her cool jade arms
when will we stand together again to hold back the curtains
and show the drying tears as we each search our face

murphy dreaming again of his first love's fate
8-14-06 11:30 am

von zach III, 9

inspired by thought

he would say, "pony boy is a good boy"
when he was first speaking the year before last
and soon learned to repeat all the guest's names
he could even recite a line or two of my own work

but these troubled times have been hard on him
in our poverty he has had to rely on his mother
gone is the hope of my retiring with my family
i now receive only an occasion letter from home

the entire world is under the flying banners of war
the only music one hears is the sad call of battle bugles
if only i could return to be with them again
i want nothing else, no matter how long it takes

murphy looking forward to seeing the children on saturday week, as agreed
8-15-06 9:00 am

von zach III, 10

meandering river, three poems (1 of 3)

the meandering river is unwelcoming today, fall nears its end
the lotus is faded and broken, driven by the wind whipped waves
wandering alone, i can only sigh over my graying hair
the white stones and gray sand are in constant movement
a wild goose is crying pitifully, seeking its kind

murphy facing the onslaught of cold winter for the umpteenth time
8-15-06 12:00 pm

von zach III, 11

meandering river, three poems (2 of 3)

what i am now singing is neither modern nor from old times
i sing a long time, and loud enough to make the trees tremble
the rich houses along the meandering river are difficult to count
but my heart is like ash and knows no longing after this luxury
if you could hear this song, brothers and nephews, your tears would pour

murphy hearing of his mother's death, and far from home
8-15-06 2:40 pm

von zach III, 12

meandering river, three poems (3 of 3)

i must deal with this life myself, not seek heaven's help
i am lucky now to have a small farm with flax and mulberry trees
though i might decide to move closer to the southern mountains
and ride a horse in my short coat like a second li kuang
to spend the rest of my days as a spectator on wild tiger hunts

murphy waking from a dream of having to go back to college in order to graduate
8-17-06 10:15 am

von zach III, 13

tragedy at chen-tao

tenth month, the blood of the best sons of ten provinces flows into the sea
over the muddy marshes of chen-tao stretches a serene sky
no further battle noises are here to be heard in the wide fields
forty thousand imperial troops panicked, all fell the same day

the hordes of an lu-shan left wiping their bloody weapons in the snow
they now drink and sing their war songs, celebrate in the capital
the people turn their faces to the north where the emperor has fled
in trust that the imperial troops will return to drive these men away

murphy turning to the tv news for the sickening reports of the raging war
8-18-06 11:45 am

von zach III, 14

tragedy at qing-fan

our army camped by the east gate of qing-fan
so during the winter our horses would have sufficient water
but the yellow turbans and the other barbarians pushed ever westward
they challenged us showing only a few riders with bows drawn

the mountains are now full of snow, rivers are ice, the land desolate and cold
a black smoke rose over the camps, the bones of the fallen picked white
how could we have gotten word to the troops and told them
wait til next year, have patience, do not rush to fight

murphy pausing to count ten before he answered
8-18-063:45 pm

von zach, III, 15

in the snow

chen-tao, countless wraiths of the dead here wail
sadly i sit, an old man alone, and add my sighs
confused clouds move to the doors of the night
snowflakes swirl in the dance of the wind

i throw the ladle away, it's of no use now with the wine all gone
the small heater glows red only in my mind
there are no reports getting here from the other provinces
i am full of worry and can only carve characters in the air

murphy regretting for once he has no cell phone handy
8-19-06 10:40 am

von zach III, 16

on the first day of the year i send this verse to my sister

i heard only recently from my sister
she is married to the honorable wei
he is the prefect of that distant area zhong-li-xian
i live in chang-an which is much changed and no longer the capital

the northern stars above indicate it is turning to spring
there in the south the trees must now be in bloom
i can no longer send congratulations through official channels
my face is raddled with tears for the nation

murphy stuck in sweetwater, texas, for the summer
8-23-06 10:40 am

von zach III, 17

spring scene

though the nation is broken apart
the mountains remain and the rivers still run
the city in spring is deep with grasses
and the trees have filled with leaves

but in feeling this momentous time
there are tears which sprinkle the flowers
this wrong feeling intrudes, is resented
the birds as they twitter shock the heart

for three months now, continually
the beacon fires have been ablaze
i would give almost anything for a letter from home
even ten thousand in gold if i had it

my old white head is scratched and snatched
the hair is wimpy and short, thinner
i go to pin it up with my hat pin
and i can barely manage to make it stick

murphy stranded in queens without the fare home

2-19-02 11:45 am

von zach III, 18

remembering my little son

it is spring and my little son and i are still yet apart
now that it is warm again the orioles sing in the trees
it startles me how quickly the seasons pass without him
he must have grown quite clever, and i can't share

mountain streams wind along the wilderness path
to the old trees surrounding the house of my family
i long to see him, find him constantly in my dreams
i move to the open window where the sun shines through

murphy back in the saddle after being bucked off anew
9-12-06 9:00 am

von zach III, 19

the moon on the hundred and fifth night

my family is not with me on this night of the cold food festival
i have only my tears running in silvery waves
if only i could cut the cassia tree that hides the moon
i could see more clearly its cold clear light

separated from me she will not wear her red flowers
i imagine she shapes her brows to show a sadness
we are like the herd boy and the maiden in the heavens
we shouldn't complain, and in the autumn finally cross the river

murphy sitting on the bright side of afternoon in the bar
9-12-06 1:30 pm

von zach III, 20

i am a farm hand from shao-ling
though i am crying, it's not very loud
i walk slowly along the meandering river
i don't draw much of the other's attention
all of us here in this young sun

these thousand gates to the palace
those all along the bank i walk
locked and bolted, shut away from the flowers
the tender willows, the rushes
all the sprouting green of spring

back before, we had rainbow banners
descending in file to the south park
the whole park aburst with their color
first lady from zhao-yang palace
sitting by his majesty, in his carriage

ladies in waiting paraded before them
bedecked in their glory, and arrows, and bows
their horses white, champing at golden bits
a central knight bent face to sky
shot true so the bolt pierced two birds in flight

those glinting eyes, those flashing teeth
where does the sun find them now
though the rebel pig is slaughtered, and gone
the wei river still runs far to the east
the road through sword cliffs still off to the west

though that man is gone, these others remain
any man of heart wets shirt with tears
but this grass, these flowers don't seem to care
they welcome the enemy horse, along with their dust
looking back on the south path i check north for pursuit

murphy waiting patient for his mail
8-2-03 2:45 pm

von zach III, 21

farewell to gong chao

who leaves because of an illness
out to the southeastern coast
please show this to li bai

gong chao fu shakes his head, and will not stay
he travels east to ride the clouds to the sea
he leaves us the tangibles of his songs, renowned among men
he will dangle his bait above the deep coral trees

he will travel deep mountain ravines and broad marshes
though this spring blows cold, and the land is dark, unresponsive
the blessed weaver will meet him with her cloud chariot
to show him the way to the immortals in the skyworld

this is natural since he was born from among the immortals
how can we people of this world comprehend that
you, who love him, wish him to stay to hear your praise
but don't forget how reputation and riches are like the morning dew

the honorable cai shows wisdom in quiet acceptance of this leaving
and on this beautiful night spreads a feast in appreciation
i sit sadly after playing the lute, the moon shines down
how many years before a wild goose brings a letter back from him

when he goes south by the sea he might see li bai
tell him du fu asked about his well being

murphy gifted with another day to be free
9-21-06 8:50 am

von zach III, 22

four poems from the cell of abbot zan in da-yun monastery (1)

i can't sleep, watch the flicker of the lamp
sweetly burning smoke thaws my senses
high ceilings awe in the darkness of the night
chimes in the eaves tell softly of winds

colors in the courtyard are lost to me now
but their fragrance hangs heavy in this quiet
the bear in the sky is sinking, only a few stars left
the iron phoenix seems driven by the wind, to fly

early morning songs and chants are coming soon
but i shall linger here in bed til last bell of morning
for today i will be out in the plowed fields
and i dread the sweating, the flying dust and sand

murphy sipping his seltzer like it was single malt

von zach III, 23

four poems from the cell of abbot zan in da-yun monastery (2)

at dawn young boys draw the first water from the well
their hands habituated, quick and sure in the pouring
they sprinkle the ground to settle the dust
and sweep so well they leave no trace of their brooms

the red clouds of morning reflect on the pavilion walls
through the high window mist slowly clears after a night rain
flowers are thick by the small path that leads below
hanging blossoms flutter in a gust of wind

my troubles stem from oppressive worldly matters, sad official duties
how lovely it would be, after this refusal, to retreat to this place
the abbot's support has given me great heart
here i am safe, wrapped in a bare, open silence

i leave, and as i go i return my walking stick
my time of departure will be short, i will be back
all this politicking, it muddies the soul
the yapping of dogs is all i hear

if i cannot twist out of the noose of the vandals
i will need this place to rest when i run
the master here stands pure, bold and clear
but now i deal with the fires of those others

murphy loosening the reins of his hobby horse
10-5-06 5:43 pm

von zach III, 24

four poems from the cell of abbot zan in da-yun monastery (3)

my heart is settled, serene, crystal
my robe still damp from its washing in the spring
i loudly insist at each of the successive gates
until i am able to keep my secret date with the abbott

an inner door of the sanctuary opens then closes
soon the bell will call all the priests together
buddha's message releases the best in man's nature
as food and drink relieve man's physical exhaustion

abbot zan strolls with me, arm in arm
i find i can bare my heart to him without shame
yellow orioles flit around the cloister's eaves
purple doves swoop down from the upper trellis

my foolish heart has thus found the peace it craves
i walk slowly by flower beds of delight
the abbot zan is a second hui xiu to have healed my sadness
broadly smiling he bids me retire to write my poems

murphy hands on the throttle once again

11-6-06 9:00 am

von zach III, 25

four poems from the cell of abbot zan in da-yun monastery (4)

soft, finely sewn slippers of green silk, a gift
the white scarf of thicker cloth gleams
the abbot cancelled all his other duties for an old friend
and all this now is brought forth and given me

i feel unworthy of such honor, this feels wrong
but i can't say no simply because our friendship is young
his talents are like those of zhi dun not easily found in the world
he exceeds the virtue of all others like hui yuan once did

the evening rain saturates the bamboos alongside the canopy
the spring wind refreshes the vegetable gardens in the yard
escaping the bad weather i look at the buddhist art on the walls
and am reminded of wet glistening dragon scales

murphy tidying up his room on a gloomy day

11-7-06 8:30 am

von zach III, 26

during the rain i visit su duan

since cockcrow this rain has been incessant
after this last dry spell we need even more
my staff sinks deep into the spring mud
with no food in the house to eat, i have to go out early

walking by each house i think of the family inside
some i have eaten with, but my steps go there no longer
only at lord su's can i appear often and am always welcome
and each time i am delighted with our conversation

he is an amiable man, one who reciprocates kindness
he calls for his children to bring pears and candy
strong wine is set before us as a matter of course
imbibing it loosens my tongue to bare my feelings

luxurious blooms of a fulfilling red climb the tops of the trees
juicy green grass hangs over the corner of the yard wall
kin and guests comport themselves in a jovial manner
the noise alone comforts this frail graying elder

all for the better is the beneficent fall of rain
which insures a a rich harvest for all our lives
though separated from my wife and children by the war
here i can forget and not speak of misfortune for a while

murphy snug and toasty in his easy chair on a rainy afternoon

11-08-06 9:30 am

von zach III, 27

i delight in beautiful weather after a rain

heavy rain from the supreme heavens throughout the night
but now is come fresh, beautiful weather
i leave the city proper to view the western precincts
the rain has brought the cheerful beauty of spring

the new wheat shines green on the rolling hillsides
peaches and plums blossom in chaste graceful abundance
were not both spring and summer satisfied by these fruit
how could i ever satisfy these hungers i have

although the entire world is filled with fighting
dragons and dinosaurs clashing adds more despair
though havoc of rain is always less than that of spear and shield
and it is still not too late to prepare the fields

while men bear the burden of arms and defense
women steadfastly maintain their homes
their strength less than that needed to till the fields
they can only plant vegetables and hemp

a thousand years ago the elder four wise men ate magic mushrooms
only later were shao-ping melons cultivated at the east gate of chang-an
though these hermits are now dead and their bones rotted away
who among us now would criticize their wisdom

the able lord facing troubled times withdraws a great distance
and settles himself like a dragon in the mud
i am ashamed i have nowhere to withdraw to
i am only walking home and facing the sunset

pang de-gong went back to lu-men mountain in xiang-yang
i for a raft on the blue east sea to take me to the islands of the immortals
but why do i imagine myself only in these most extreme of choices
i who can do no more than pointlessly sigh

murphy facing up to the mirror of souls
11-9-06 4:25 pm

von zach III, 28

a happy meeting with professor zhang
at imperial son-in-law's palace, we drink together

can we now say we live despite the war
how extraordinary we still drink together
since the wretched rebel has now met his quietus
we loyal servants should return to court

your hair has turned white dealing with rebels
your fire for the court reduced to mere ashes
since last we met we both barely missed death
and now we're here, suddenly, on this tower

now once again we listen to the court musicians
now once again we are here in your cousin's home
we are being kept to dance here in this spring night
though we cannot keep from crying, it's safer for now

murphy waiting a while longer for wisdom

8-13-02 12:20 pm

von zach III, 29

three poems wherein i express my joy to have arrived happily at the traveling palace of the emperor in feng-xiang (1)

before, i awaited word from the emperor's court in feng-xiang
but there were no travelers from there to the capital chang-an
i looked with full longing toward the region where the sun set
gradually my heart despaired, turned to cold ash

trees in the fog dogged my journey to the emperor
before me always i saw new mountains appear
my friends in feng-xiang saw my haggard look
that i had suffered torture and had aged in my captivity

murphy successfully retired from the wind and the storms of existence
11-10-06 9:15 am

von zach III, 30

three poems wherein i express my joy to have arrived happily at the traveling palace of the emperor in feng-xiang (2)

i remember with grief the evening trumpet song of the tatars
evenings, despite spring weather, depressed, pacing the imperial gardens
that i am alive here came at a moment's chance, a cart passing by
escaping was a nightmare of being found out and murdered

the first old-yard ceremonial i saw here in feng-xiang dazzled me
new emperor su-zong has brought vitality back to the dynasty
i was shaking in my heart's exultation
joyful tears a flash flood on my sleeves

murphy splashing on flat rocks like a waterfall
11-10-06 12:15 pm

von zach III, 31

three poems wherein i express my joy to have arrived happily at the traveling palace of
the emperor in feng-xiang (3)

had i died in chang-an, who would have brought the message here
now that i am here i begin to look at myself without pity
i can raise my eyes to the snow on the tai-bo mountains
i can see the clear blue heavens above mount wu-gong

i feel alive again among the thousand officials
my heart revived when i saw the seven commanders
from this day on men will see that here it began
today we celebrate the resurgence of the han people

murphy playing the numbers on an auspicious day
11-10-06 1:15 pm

von zach III, 32

let me tell you what is troubling me

i have been alone, no family, since last year
the last ding-guan defense collapsed and all was lost
the bushes became full grown in the heat of summer
i took my chance, hid, and escaped to the west

in hempen sandals i kowtowed to his majesty
my elbows poked through the rags of my sleeves
the court was astonished that i had survived
friends and kin were shocked by my appearance

i shed tears when i was appointed as a reminder
my sovereign's grace munificent for such a refugee
though i wished to return to my humble abode for a visit
i could not further delay assuming proper duty

i did write to san-zhong to ask news
i asked if my family might still be there
then i heard that town had also been ruined
not even a chicken or a dog was spared

in my leaky thatched hut hidden in the hills
among the stunted green pines the ground is cold
perhaps the bones are not yet rotted
i wonder if anyone sits at a window and waits

how few i imagine could live through these times
would i dare to hope for everyone to have lived
my mind is between the tiger and the steep cliffs
my heart sags when i think of what might be

i haven't written again for ten long months
in truth i rather dread hearing the truth
i wonder whether my tired heart can stand it
but fortunes of the sovereign are rising again

perhaps i might end my days in wine
but what joy is there in merely that
where does happiness occur with only drink
i would simply be a miserable old man

murphy trying to count backward by fours
8-14-03 1:35 pm

von zach III, 33

a letter from home

i took the chance when i could
and gave the letter to a passing stranger
it's only now that the answer's come
today i finally hear true news

back there in that estranged place
they are still living in our old hut
baby bear has now been safely born
and pony boy is proudest of all

now that i'm old i yearn more for home
but in this bad time i can't get there
my greying head shuttles here and there at court
i'm the lowest who waits on the imperial chariot

to the east the rebels still rule chang-an
but to the west autumn begins at feng-xiang
cooling winds there will show the vees of geese
and with all their autumn rains now come

fish can be bred most anywhere
when i think of farming in those lonely hills
i only want to say one thing
let me end my remaining days there, a farmer

murphy baby-sitting a simmering soup
8-22-03 12:30 pm

von zach III, 34

i give this poem to censor zhang-sun (ninth of his clan) as he leaves to take his post as military auditor for wu-wei

the post of censor is your new appointment
your horse is graced with a silver bedecked saddle
you in your silver and gold embroidered uniform
now, a chamber gentleman, you will ride to jiao-he

i ask you as you begin this ten thousand mile journey
why are you making such show of your leaving
you must know the desire of the emperor
to make your travel time as short as possible

last autumn an uprising of the tatars was expected
it is indispensable that the rebellion be suppressed forthwith
you will, through your good offices, gather the people
to re-establish good order and customs

my uncle du hong-jian is now the governor of he-xi
a rich province which is justly well known
he has a good friend who was smuggled in disguise
so he could examine the situation at fort wu-wei

because of his report my appetite has been taken away
and my heart has been made sore in its grief
the talent and energy of you, my friend, are overpowering
you are a tsunami that inundates even high islands

now i lose one who has always been a carousing fellow poet
while the distant borderlands will gain a gleaming gem
as i sadly ride escort, as you are leaving
the sky is filled with clouds bringing copious rain

in the eastern provinces the signal fires are still yet burning
high officials and common people, all depressed and starving
the boundary protection in the far west has collapsed
my fervent desire is for you to bring the heavens out there back to order

murphy sitting over a go problem, marveling at its intricacies
11-15-06 9:00 am

von zach III, 35

i escort censor fan, 23rd of his clan, as he leaves to be the military auditor of han-zhong

as yet the push to pacify the empire has failed
there has been no quiet year since the rebellion began
blood continues to flow in the river beds and valleys
we are enmeshed constantly in a fight with leopards and wolves

emperor su-zong suddenly appears out of the north
he shakes the people out of their despair and apathy
he has encamped his troops at the foot of mount ji
and secured the help of the uighurs at his side

although both capitals are not yet freed from the enemy
the emperor begins to make sure of the distant outside countries
untravelling now the han river flows through the region of han-zhong
tribute for the emperor came from the outlying huai river and the lakes to the north

also all the tributes from the south no longer arrive
the imperial domination is weakened in the provinces
prince li yu of han-zhong fulfilled his duties in an outstanding fashion
you now leave on your mission after a short conference with the emperor

you who can explain deftly the astronomical constellations
and sketch the strategic position of the entire army by hand
your insight has the penetrating clarity of pure ice
your judgment quick and sure as the lightning flash

that a censor is assigned from headquarters is extraordinary
the occurrence unforeseen in the imperial compound
the son of heaven has now placed his august trust in you
you will take the imperial grace for you to bestow

as a censor you are still yet called to meetings in the palace
but you must leave early in the morning to attain your new post
these are difficult times and our planning has been careful
we all must insure the endurance of the dynasty

a turbulent wind gust surrounds, disturbs a lonely tree
the sun glows on the departing sleeve i now tightly hold
deeply moved, i stay behind under the smoky wraiths of clouds
while the mountains close behind you on your far journey

i, the one who stays behind, am overwhelmed with loneliness
while you, the wanderer, push on farther into the distance
pacing back and forth in my gloom at this separation
i am acutely aware that i am already but an old man

here in feng-xiang it could be the time of emperor yao
the politics remind of the han dynasty under emperor guang-wu-di
unfortunately i possess not capacities with which to help the state
i will therefore, henceforth, live the simple life of the hermit

murphy pulling the covers over his head to shut out the morning light
11-20-06 9:00 am

von zach III, 36

i escort my cousin du ya as he leaves to become military auditor at he-xi

the south wind of summer blows with a vigor of autumn
a hint of cold death suffuses this torrid time of the year
now, midsummer, falcons and hawks swoop down on prey
in these dangerous times we need such men

my cousin had a quiet private life in the country
when suddenly the emperor invited him to a political conference
the emperor commanded him to the palace
where his eloquent tongue stirred the son of heaven

you who have studied the fifty authors of tactics and strategy
and therein have trained yourself to become an expert
you answered the emperor's concerns with alacrity
explaining with clarity and without referring to text

your proposals are original and will work
the throne shall once again be firm
yet now the ancestor hall still lies as ash
the minister and his first minister still weep

the turfan threaten to shake the earth-axis mountain
the heavens above the constant battles collapse
the far west experiences ongoing agony
the mountains hide in the smoke of signal fires

the emperor has said you support the public
you can do that best by helping the generals
the emperor's deepest need is to sweep the desert
you have undertaken this duty and now leave us

when you return the emperor will receive you again
you go far but not as a young official to be tested
rather you are entrusted with holding wu-wei
and devising a workable plan for its future safety

we part now at this postal station on solitary mountain
you mount your fast steed with its golden bridle
when you arrive at he-xi you can feast on fat chamois meat
and get drunk on lu wine sipped through reed tubes

the usual man would certainly be pleased with all this
but a true patriot will not be so easily satisfied
you are not only concerned with pacifying the boundaries
your main task is to lead a rebirth of our glorious dynasty

one does not use a noble steed to pull a drum vehicle
he is better used for a far nobler purpose
like a dragon steed you turn your head back to the capital
and call out that you will return to attend the emperor again

murphy caulking his door frames for the winter
11-27-06 9:00 am

von zach III, 37

i escort the official da-li-si wei, he leaves to take his post as military auditor in tong-gu

once when we were both in the clutches of the rebels
we had to be clandestine when we showed our friendship
now we are both returned to the imperial quarters in feng-xiang
the emperor decrees that you proceed to your new post while i remain here

though beset on many sides by war as it rages
the emperor wishes to plan carefully and quickly
and although your build is small, it is wiry
you have already served in nine provinces

and you have gathered yourself within this maelstrom
to rise up now with the red glare of fury for the rebels
your loyal character has led to the imperial appointment
you are the military auditor for the commander at tong-gu

the emperor's carriage is now here in feng-xiang
and tong-gu is a dangerous gate to the rebels
tong-gu looks west over the ruo river
faces the edge of fu-han to the south

in the time of peace the place was overrun by bandits
so many that all the officials bowed their heads in shame
now, all the more, since that tatar is still yet alive
we have to hold there, and for that you are the best man

your uncle wei, is the first lord of tong-gu
he has ruled with forbearance and good will
you, his nephew, are an outstanding talent
tong-gu is in the hands of two excellent men

i have been reading your poetry since we left feng-xiang
and now you are on horse to tong gu, to qiuu pond
in the old district there are the torn, cold desert-sands
where massive black clouds throw down a heavy snow

the old tatars there wear boots of pigskin
the young ones sport fresh yak-skin coats
they face west when they sound their trumpets
our banners flutter sadly there on the blue mountains

startled birds rise from the limbs of dead trees
startled dragons show their angry selves in the ponds
since the oldest of times this has been a deserted area
now it has become our perpetual battlefield

how regrettable it is that a distinguished scholar like you
must spend his time riding patrols in that high desolate area
and we mustn't forget the immense fights raging in our country's center
how can we be sure we will ever meet like this again

as you know our life's destiny is fixed and unknowable
we can never be sure whether our destiny is to rise or to fall
so i am left with nothing else to offer but a good friend's care
his hand and his company a few steps along the way

the distant tong-gu valley will come to peace through your plans
then perhaps your inclination to poetry can again come to the fore
should a new thickness of verse come to you in your far post
you might send me a few every now and then with your letters

murphy bobbing and weaving to get a sense of his new opponent's tendencies
12-5-06 9:45 am

von zach III, 38

respectfully, i escort the censor and manager of the imperial stables, guo ying-yi, as he proceeds on to his governor's post at long-yu.

an imperial decree has transferred you from the slopes of tai shan
this autumn you will assume command of the troops in long-yu
your father's death there has left them desolate, without a leader
you will be met warmly since your family is famed for prowess in war

at this propitious time of year you spread your wings like an eagle
like a dominant stallion your distinctive voice will command respect
the difficult situation there demands the highest caliber actions
you must decide on them without fear and proceed to your new post

the setting sun reflects off your wagon ready for departure
a crisp wind sets the banners of your escort aflutter
in long-yu such a wind sighs sadly through spruce trees
there the desert sands mix with the snows of the mountains

to pacify the turfans there you will no doubt use kindness as before
no one would dare risk the protection of the borders by irritating them
since olden times a truly successful general treats foreigners
with quiet action, relying more on the threat of military might

the wild boar, an lu-shan has burst from the regions yan and ji
luo-yang, chang-an, both destroyed by him like a whale destroying a net
that was the muddled state of the center of the han nation
after the death of the whale other rebels have made everywhere unsafe

their arrows pierced zhao yang palace in chang-an
their trumpets blared forth from the hai-lui bivouac nearby
the ladies-in-waiting cried behind their red sleeves
the princes dressed in plain clothes to accomplish their flight

the evil bringing star of the barbarians sparkled about the imperial throne
even the graves of the emperors were not spared by the ravaging mobs
only the golden pieces were taken from the royal sepulchers
the light silk coverings in the tombs were then and there destroyed

the temple of the forefathers of the dynasty was razed
the heavens shed tears as the palace continued to burn
the surrounding houses were thoroughly looted during the days
while their rafters ablaze collapsed throughout the nights

in the third month this year our troops gathered themselves anew
the power of the tatars was nearly totally destroyed
in spite of the dreadful strain you made it through all these fights
showing courage you distinguished yourself with your success

the reward for you should be a high one, a premier ministership
and from there with the emperor's good will a directorship
so now you will return to your mandated governor's post
there together with the other generals to sweep the rebels away

then you will emulate the success of han xin of old
who stormed 70 towns with 3,000 men, and their long ladders
i am ashamed that i cannot fight against retreat in qing-xu
only assist the emperor in his ceremonies, as once did the scholars of lu

being without entitlement i have taken a small post at court
while you wear the robes of an exalted position among the officials
as i hurried to see you after this morning's audience
i covered my thin wisp hair with my office cap

i would now like to follow you again like wang can followed liu biao
but i fear you would become weary of me as did liu biao with ni heng
how can this dilapidated old man endure our separation
holding back my tears, i must carry my grief inside

the barking of foxes is all you hear in the towns destroyed
tigers and panthers prowl the obliterated villages
the people suffer ever more this dreadful misery
how can one not be loyal to the han at such a time

marshal li shu, prince from guang-ping has brought his discipline
li si-ye's scouts already approach the old capital chang-an
so after you have pacified the border, you must help the emperor again
when we retake chang-an there will be riches and fame for all

murphy cooped up in his office cubicle with his fluorescent suns
12-6-06 11:30 am

von zach III, 39

to military auditor yang, sixth of his clan, as he leaves for tibet

the autumn winds whip the trees as i escort you on your way
you go to the far, far west to the cold smoke rising from kukunor
the imperial residence is still filled with the stench of tyrants
and the people's continuing separation is troublesome

though far from the turmoil in china the borderlands are outraged
they wish to show their fealty to the emperor their relative by marriage
you carry a hand-written letter from the emperor full of sympathy
one hopes the tibetans will agree to send reinforcements to chang-an

to discharge your imperial orders you will proceed quickly to your new post
your superior nan zhu-chuan will provide all you need on your way
like once your namesake yang-xiong you have been patient and unambitious
but as of today your proactive position as vice envoy begins

with tears in your eyes you have resolutely thrown your brush aside
and as once did ma-yuan yo have bravely mounted your horse
the mountain birds of tibet will gawk at the garments of a chinese scholar
while the young people will gape at your envoy's scepter

beyond the border you will be plied with gold cups of green wine
foreign singers will perform while you dine off jade plates
the tibetan horses of your troops will be well fed on the grasses there
even during the heavy snows your felt tents will be dry and warm

you need to be careful with your negotiations with our friends
you must soar effortlessly with strong confident wings
if then on your return home you receive the emperor's approval
you will have flown 90,000 miles carried by zhuang-zi's fabled bird

murphy redreaming the first painful desires of youth

12-7-06 9:25 am

von zach III, 40

lament at the death of censor zhang-sun

your ethic of studying the shih-king and shu-king was justly esteemed
as a result your poems and prize songs were roundly praised
early on you demonstrated your mastery of ministerial rites
and soon were riding on a dappled steed as an imperial censor

now your life is over, and like the waters of the river, will never return
your official work is done like the cloud which passes and is gone
now as by the side of your offices in the censor's court yard
only the tall cypresses stand sadly beside your grave

murphy buttoned up for the blasts of winter
12-8-06 9:00 am

von zach III, 41

to assistant chancellor yan wu

in all those with the sovereign in feng-xiang
you alone are still yet young
the dragon of state commands the rain and the storm
the eagle of gold flies clear autumn skies

where can the fox or the rabbit yet hide
your home is given to me without ceremony
we are close, our offices just down the hall
i hear music in your poetry, we must share

murphy leaping to complete a close double play
8-18-03 4:00 pm

von zach III, 42

at the farewell party i leave this poem for jia zhi and yan wu and their cohorts

i must return to my farm and my garden to remain for a while
though i am reluctant to leave my colleagues in this time of war
as i leave for my far travels i say goodbye with this poem
as we meet to lighten our sorrows with the pleasures of wine

this fall we have been inundated with rain after rain
and today is the first cloudless day we have seen for a while
on my mountainous way home i will hear trumpets of war
how can i stand that, hearing them all along the way

murphy dreading the new cold front that is on its way
12-1-06 10:30 am

von zach III, 43

verse i improvise one afternoon on a journey

i can no longer reach fu-zhou by this evening
afternoon shadows lie on the mountains toward my home
this odd, blown-down goose swims on frigid water
while starving ravens look down from the battlements

the market and the court these days, everything is changed
when will all this madness and chaos become as before
i am ashamed when i think of returning home with my thin white hair
i am no jiang zong of the liang, retired with a full black mane

murphy honing his chinese cleaver with a new whetstone
12-1-06 4:25 pm

von zach III, 44

a poem composed when drunk

the cinder of my lamp's wick forms favorable blossoms
and there is still a mug of green wine sitting nearby
being drunk i am satisfied to not go wandering
this verse is coming as a gift from the spirits

the war, riots, soldiers, always before my eyes
where does a confucian learning fit into this mess
i feel the restrictions of my small office
i lower my head to these rough men of the fields

murphy counting the hoarded pennies with his granddaughter
12-2-06 9:50 am

von zach III, 45

the story of going home to fu-zhou on foot
(presented to his excellency general li meeting him on the way)

sir, while you stand at the best age for a man
you have become embroiled in this political unrest
the state in its troubles needs your help
it depends on the emergence of you excellent men

the temperament of these times is one of crisis
the state is now thoroughly without order
the fact is that no one other than you can help
no one else can beat down the rebel hordes

now located in feng-xiang with the emperor
the thousand officials have barely enough food
there are no more garments of light silk
the horses are no longer sleek and well fed

i am among the poorest of these
i, only one of the green-coated officials
this white haired reminder who stands before you
who is traveling home to fu-zhou afoot

in life one may make many good friends
without taking into consideration youth or age
as one does not distinguish occupations
i an old scholar, you a young warrior

my woman and children cry to the heavens
in their longing for my imminent return
i have need for one of your swift chargers
who can carry me on my way like the wind

murphy wondering how his brother in texas is getting along
12-8-06 9:45 am

von zach III, 46

jade flower palace

i've returned to the sighing ravine
the pines still sing their special sougning
but i see grey rats in the heaps of broken tile
there is no sign of which is the prince's palace
outside a stream slips sadly downhill

the only joy here is the music of the leaves
just now dreary in the colors of late autumn
even beautiful women are drab dirt these days
their beauty that was powder and rouge gone
all those beautiful people in the entourage
now i can see only a carved stone horse

when i can no longer keep from crying, i sit
i sing, i cry, i wipe clumsily across my eyes
on this restless road of all our people
who cares how long we have yet to live

murphy beginning to strategize his retreat
8-26-03 8:30 pm

von zach III, 47

the jiu-cheng palace

the blue mountains stretch in an 800 mile circle
the sloping edges form a huge, thick sided bowl
the high palace meets the intrushing winds
it rises as a mountain in the entrance to the valley

its beams and posts appear as ghostly supports
its windows jutting far out from the overhang
looking south one sees medicinal mushrooms in abundance
to the north at night the mountains loom into the zodiac

mighty spruces seem to have fallen everywhere
strange cliff formations seem ready to tumble down
the melancholy cries of the apes reach the ears
one thinks of the tears of travelers within the wilderness

one thinks of the folly of the emperor of sui
building this mighty edifice that is now in such ruins
but if the sun of that dynasty had not set
how else could the tang empire have risen

though the tang has not restored the palace
officials have met here and claimed it as royal
if the emperor should travel this way it is near jasper lake
though its state would bring a hint of caution to any ruler

i have come here at the time of dangerous riots
looking up at the palace i sigh long and deeply
the current emperor stays in feng-xiang at the foot of tai mountain
i turn my horse and continue my journey there, to his new capital

murphy returning to base after an ill fated sortie
12-19-06 9:15 am

von zach III, 48

chiang village (1 of 3)

1
to the west purple mountains of clouds
the sun stretches eye to see the flat of ground
above the simple wooden gate the magpie cries
how welcome this far traveler feels

my family stare to see me yet alive
when they've settled down they brush away my tears
we are lucky in these times to be a family
that we're all still alive a simple chance

neighbors come now, climbing over walls
they too can't hold back, begin to weep
the light of day fades, a candle lit
we stare to make sure its not a dream

murphy looking for a job in the depression
8-28-03 9:30 pm

von zach III, 49

chiang village (2 of 3)

2

i live, i steal life in the evening of my age
and even though i'm home, i still have no joy
the baby stands, holding tightly to my knees
he knows i still might leave once more

i remember how we shared the breeze last year
he and i walked around the trees, around the pond
like now the northern winds tipped the toe of winter
then, like now, my thoughts tended to our thousand needs

at least his highness has brought a good harvest
and i can see in my mind the vats of festering wine
at least there will be plenty to drink this winter
we can blunt these memories of our frustration

murphy back from his latest bat mitzvah
8-31-03 6:00 pm

von zach III, 50

chiang village (3 of 3)

3

the hens peck the roosters in confusion
the whoofing of feathers greets our guests
first i pole the birds up to their trees
then the knocking on the gates comes clear

several of the elders peer to look within
they ask again about my health, the journey
each brings the present of their best wine
we pour them all into a common strength

please forgive us, they say, for how poor the wine
we would have raised grain for a better brew
but all the young men have gone to the front
far to the east is the strength of our men

i ask to sing for my elderly friends
i seek not sympathy, their lives harder than mine
i lift my eyes to see past my feelings, i sigh, i sing
and everyone cries, bright tears in their eyes

murphy bearing ritual gift of self
8-31-03 9:00 pm

von zach III, 51

the way north

i

in the fall of year two in his majesty's reign
on this lucky first day of our new eighth month
i, tu fu, am about to leave for the north
and i am torn by my feelings of family
this now is the core of the struggle
no one, in court or away, can escape their duty

i am conflicted by the will of his majesty
he said yes to my return to my home far away
i have accepted his writ of departure at the palace gate
i tarry long in thought, caught in sad confusion
i feel i have fallen short of my role as reminder
i was, at best, but the least of good reminders
yet i fear that his majesty should still be reminded
his being reflects the rebirth of our dynasty
he plans and rules fully and well

but the rebellion from the east goes on
this is why this humble servant, du fu, worries so

sadly and with close memory of the exile court
i take this road, still unable to think clearly
the universe is sundered, when is the end of the chaos

ii

my feet drag slowly as i plod the land
i see few fires for cooking, the land is smashed
most i see now have all suffered wounds
they move slowly, they groan and bleed

i turn back toward the castle that one last time
the fading light shows me tips of the far banners
i climb shadowy folds into the cold hills
i see only old cisterns for cavalry horses

the high plain seeks its birth in these mountains
where the river pours forth as a torrent
ahead a tiger roars so loud as to crack the cliffs
the wild chrysanthemums have now begun to fade
this rocky road is worn with ruts of ancient wagons
i find myself among the clouds, my spirit rises high with me
up here is quiet, repose, contemplation for itself alone

the wild berries this high are small
they bush under the chestnuts mid the acorned oaks
some globes are red as the shards of cinnabar

others have a deep black shine like fine lacquer
heaven has rained and sprinkled its dew
sour and sweet they fruit equally
my thoughts here in this effulgence of nature
filled with sighs for what a mess i've made of life

iii

on top of a ridge i gaze far to fresh mountains
my home in one of the deep valleys running between
i make haste to the river below in full feeling
my servant left to catch up, back in the woods
strange owls hoot in these yellowed mulberry trees
marmot holes dot this high country

at midnight we pass an old battlefield
cold moon shines bright on the white bones
a hundred thousand men had to go through this pass
their mass thrown to the winds like chaff of wheat
full half the people on this side of the yellow river
were uprooted and died as a result of this loss

iv

even i was to fall under the yoke of the tatars
and now i return home with hair all gone white
nearly a year it took me to get back here
i find my wife in patched up clothes
her wails at seeing me alive, shrill
like high winds in cold piny woods
then softer weeping like a welling spring

my eldest boy, my life, is pasty gray
he turns in shame and howling, bawls
his feet are dirty, no shoes, no socks

v

my two small daughters cower by the bed
their frayed garments barely covering their knees
embroidered waves on cloth from an old dress
toss and turn in an uneven patching
the fabled sea monster and the purple phoenix
upside down on their short skirts

i collapse, an exhausted old man
take two days to bed with diarrhea, vomiting

but i was able to bring some thick cloth with me
it should keep the family warm through the winter
i also brought some small cosmetics for my wife
quilts and bed curtains unpacked one by one
soon enough her thin face is glowing
the two silly girls try to fashion their hair
they will do anything when playing like their mother
their hands all smeared with morning make-up
their cheeks too soon all rouged and powdered
their eyebrows drawn rough, uneven, thick

i return home and am now with my family
the hunger and thirst of the trek fade in my mind
the children ask me all their questions, pull my beard
i haven't the heart to make them show respect
i compare my terrible days among the rebels
i am happy to accept this noise, this pestering,
being home now will bring me some rest
but i must soon begin to bring order to our lives

vi

yet even his majesty is covered with the dust of exile
who knows when he will be able to rest his troops
i search the skies for signs of change
i feel the foreboding winds will shift
and a cold wind blow down from the northwest
behind the uighur troops who have rallied to our call
their just king sending troops which rush and smash
five thousand men with ten thousand horses

they say of the uighur, 'the fewer the better'
that level of bravery is appreciated by all
they will be high flying falcons to swoop and kill
with the force and quickness of an arrow
his majesty puts much trust in their strength
no one gives voice to any other course

vii

now we should be able to take back luo-yang
then easily recapture the capitol chang-an
the imperial army should march deeply into the east
wait until they are in position and then unleash their full might
this first attack will open up the xu valley
and we can then sweep up the entire northeast
heaven brings now her winter cold of death

justice demands that we kill and punish
this year the worst of the traitors was killed
soon all those who followed him will die
the rebels will surely meet their just ends
this dynasty will never be cut short

i hark back to when this disaster began
we neglected the lessons of our fathers
the head of state was actually executed
all his cohorts scattered or killed
i know that other dynasties have fallen short
but even then the evil women were not killed
no, our fate is with those who stumbled
and then rose majestically again
then his majesty will be as the other two
who revived the zhou and the han courts

general chen xuan-li you cut with mighty axe
but for you we would have all been shamed
because of you, his majesty still reigns

viii

the capitol stands desolate in this cold
lonely the silence of the heavenly gate
the courtiers of greeting no longer meet
but are yet still more anxious for the court's return
to add more brilliance to its burnished gold
indeed the ancestors lie solemn in their graves
we will always honor them in the proper manner
our great majesty will have his proper empire
the foundation is both full broad and solid

murphy with a shiny new kitchen to get dirty

12-9-05 6:00 pm

von zach III, 52

the moon

the starry sky turns its face toward autumn
a harvest moon sheds its bright light on men
i see this glow mirrored in the river
why doesn't the shadow of the old man drown

there seems the shadow of the rabbit
as he pounds at bitter herbs
as if preparing to live forever
such thoughts tear into my heart

they bring with them even more white hairs
oh, moon, you know that war still rages
don't send your warmth on to the west
our men still have much sorrow to bear

murphy taking iraq in his stride
8-18-03 5:00 pm

von zach III, 53

i hear to my joy that the imperial troops have approached the rebel positions.

the barbarians have held the royal residence for a long time
but now, finally, our army surrounds their position
they are fish next to the cooking kettle, with but a short time
how can they escape, caught like ants in their hole

the temporary housing in feng-xiang is full of officials with black caps
the gateway to the camp gleams with the white capes of the officers
the mountain of qin is already walked by the imperial train
the army banners of our army fly in the royal hunting park

the serpentine way about tai mountain is no longer dangerous
the high feather fans of the royal retinue rise high to the clouds
the rebels have lost their grip on the five plains of chang-an
the rioting on the shores of shensi's eight rivers has been stopped

now one looks to the intentions of heaven toward the rebels
they are as walking ghosts who can expect no reprieve
even if they offered their submission, who would believe
they should do not tire us with such false protestations

imperial prince li shu reigns as commander in chief
employment minister quo zi-yi stands as his chief of staff
the vanguard is lead by li-si-ye, loyal as a second su wu
commander of the left wing is bu gu courageous like a second lu qian

the military presence of these generals turn back birds in their flight
the thick din of their majestic march puts the giant tortoise to shame
the gleam of their lances rivals that of fresh snow
even the finest blade of grass could not escape their many arrows

the difficulties of the empire are now behind us
the luck of harmonious times is begun anew
who would say toxic thorns will still remain
even the stink of the rebels will soon be washed away

the deep strategies of the emperor has brought the troops here
the emperor's spirit is pointed by the strength of the royal guards
the uighurs have crossed the extensive gobi
the turfan have come forward around lin-tao

these people come to honor the emperor with their deeds
the emaciated rebels should all be arrested without further trouble
the garments of these troops are dyed with the rebel's blood
they attack suddenly from horseback swinging their sharp swords

i am now certain the capital will be returned to chang-an
yet i still weep for the cries of children in the coming last fights
then everywhere the people will sell all their jewelry
they will buy fragrant wine to offer the triumphant troops

murphy marching in his dress blues after advanced infantry training
12-19-06 11:15 am

von zach III, 54

the recovery of the capital (1 of 3 poems)

emperor xuan-zong has left the capital with his retinue
the nefarious symbol of the barbarians glimmers over the throne
because of these invidious ruffians he has had to leave
and can no longer enjoy the pleasures of his palace

after a short stay in si-chuan the emperor could return to his capital
as once did yao in fen yang, and lu zhong-lian when he fled to the yan empire
as in the older times new strategical plans be formulated
and a fresh spirit of han then rise again over all the world

murphy waiting quietly while his daughter sleeps
12-20-06 10:00 am

von zach III, 55

the recovery of the capital (2 of 3 poems)

i have come to accept the reality of decline in old age
i stay lonely in my quietude along the border
and hear both sadness and promise from the court
as the estimable su-zong demonstrates his piety

as once did the four old men for prince liu ying, the hermit li bi has done well
i remember how the virtuous retired xuan-zong protected the throne
my fortune to have experienced the day when he expressed his humility
i turn my eyes to the blue firmament to shed my tears

murphy waiting in silence for the bonfires of the solstice
12-20-06 10:25 am

von zach III, 56

the recovery of the capital (3 of 3 poems)

after heavy fighting our courageous cavalry has recaptured the emperor's palace
now in the spring the rebels have been destroyed in the capital chang-an
one should sing di-du from the shih-king as a proper celebration for the troops
the return of the emperor will be just before the sacrifice of the cherry blossoms

but the uighur and turfan strangers are in the midst of their battle lust
their generals compete with each other imagining new large palaces
and although the whole world now offers good wishes for the emperor
might he not now, perhaps, see a future filled with problems

murphy suffering from post-holidays depression
12-20-06 11:00 am

von zach III, 57

the official at tong-guan pass

we good soldiers are tired indeed
building the walls at tong-guan pass
these walls are stronger than iron
linking the forts high, high in the mountains

i ask my questions of the officer in charge
he answers we will bar the barbarians next time
he asks me to dismount and to follow him
he points out the angle within the hills

there up among the clouds we have built
not even birds can fly up over there
if the tatars come we will defend that place
there should no longer be fear in the capital city

he walked me on to the important points
they are so narrow only one cart passes at a time
in such places he said one man alone can defend
the enemy cannot use their long lethal lances

he lamented about the past battle of tao lin
a hundred thousand of our troops trapped and killed like fish
there i begged him to tell the general in charge
to take care not to become another ge-shu

murphy putting out his flag on memorial day
12-22-06 9:45 am

von zach III, 58

about using the uighurs

the proud sons from the north dine on meat
it follows that they are all strong and courageous
in the late autumn they rode their greasy fat horses
and shot their arrows at the chinese moon

since the oldest times they have meant trouble for china
the shi-ging mentions perpetual fights with them
the highest virtues of the emperors influenced them to peace
each success but a continuance to their need for reform and training

why are they now accepted in numbers to darken the emperor's golden gates
why are they still allowed to go in and go out with impunity
true enough when the rebels overran the center of china
these other ruffians were of help in their removal

our princess who married the uighur leader now sings the song of the yellow crane
our emperor has sworn by the sun to treat them well for their needed assistance
like countless clouds the uighurs now camp in tong-zhou
for a hundred miles one sees the snow of their white uniforms and flags

their long lances so thick they bother the birds who fly by
the mornings are saddened by their mournful trumpet tones
the farmers are extremely worried at their excesses
wheat is trodden down, the limbs of the mulberries broken

the stud farm at tong-zhou is near the clear wei
thick heavy grasses perfume the river's shore
they cross the river without boats, churning the bed
thousands at a time swimming in the high waves

it is true the enemy shi si-ming has fled over tai-heng mountain
but this has meant other wild men, the uighurs, are now in chang-an
if really the uighurs must stay to protect the realm
china will eventually find in them a greater misery

murphy offering counsel only when asked repeatedly
12-22-06 11:15 am

von zach III, 59

about the defense of lu-zi pass

how remote are the five frontier towns
they lie far beyond the huang-he river
now all their forces have moved east to fight the rebels
leaving behind only bare bushes of thorns

shi si-ming has left huai-zhou and wei-zhou
to advance determinedly to the west
he marauds toward the western deserts after the south
since both the yao and han-gu passes are unguarded

yan zhou is the northern gate from shen-si
and there the lu-zi pass must be defended
how can one muster even ten thousand troops
and hurry them north to block the way

in feng-xian is governor xie jing-xian
the mountain robbers know his force from old
i recently heard the turfan for fear of him
have decided to retreat full 300 miles back

the lu-zi pass thus controls both the turfan and shi si-ming
my deep concerns lie with the defense of this stronghold
who will be brave enough now to say this to the emperor
especially since the tatars are so quick on the march and might escape

murphy sweating away the afternoon in close order drill with his platoon
12-23-06 8:45 am

von zach III, 60

i send this poem zheng qian, 18th of his clan, who was exiled to my regret as a tax official after t'ai-chou, because he. in old age, fell into the hands of the rebels and accepted employment from them. because i was prevented by absence from personally saying goodbye to him, i have sealed these verses in which my feelings are expressed.

master zheng is old and becoming decrepit
the hair at his temples white silken threads
often these days when in his cups
he refers to himself as only the old painter

my heart is broken by the sad news
he has been exiled into the far distant provinces
at the very moment the dynasty returns to bloom
and he so near the end of his long life

in his haste he has already taken his leave
and departed on the long trek to his new place
i had no opportunity to see him personally before he left
for i came to his resignation party too late to be greeted

it seems at this time that the sudden parting
will be a final separation for the two of us
perhaps we shall meet again in the other world
there we can renew, deepen our friendship

murphy reading the obituaries in his college magazine
12-23-06 10:00 am

von zach III, 61

the thin nag

the thin nag in the outlying eastern field saddens me
his bones stick out like a buttress from a ledge
when you reach to bridle him he weakly sinks to the ground
though he still looks as if he wants to gallop away

if you look closely you can see the six branded stamps of the military
he is obviously abandoned on the roadside by the troops
his skins is scabbed and scarred, covered with excrement
his fur is dull, he stands desolate midst the snow and ice

last year he still stormed the enemy positions
as a noble steed he was then unbridled, unstoppable
the officers usually rode horses from the imperial stud
sadly he is now merely a sickly bucephalus

he probably had a misstep when he was prancing
he could not prevent the fact that he was then rejected
when he sees people he looks at them to speak his misery
because he has lost his master his eyes have lost their shine

despite the cold weather he was left with only wild geese for companions
he has no stable to retreat to at sundown, ravens peck at his scabs
if anyone were to care for him now, he would serve faithfully
but one must wait til new spring grasses to try with him again

murphy staring at the scraggly hackney horse for hire
12-24-06 9:30 am

von zach III, 62

the painted vulture

in the high hall one sees a living vulture
cheerfully he seems to move his old bones
one understands slowly he has nothing to perch on
so how can he emerge in such sharp outline

then one is forced to admit the skill of the artist
who has absorbed the secrets of nature in her creation
and this wonderfully striking figure signifies
seems to fill completely your gazing eye

birds populate the branches outside the high hall
but avoid the inner bird who might suddenly emerge
with foresight they look to the blue firmament
their plumage making it impossible to fully hide

the long tail feathers in the painting look like swords
with their help he can soar above the area of people
thus in such a way the sky and earth are expanded
though his frightening visage is but a painting, not real

my thoughts lose themselves in the far horizon
there above the sand and clouds is the true vulture
strangely this irritates my current condition
i walk submerged in my thoughts, not free as he

murphy making his metaphors pop on the page
12-24-06 11:55 am

von zach III, 63

the la festival

in most years the la festival occurs before any warm weather
but this year the thaw has come before this festive day
the day lilies peek whiter than the snows now gone
the nascent green of the willow tree steals a march on spring

i will be sure to have enough wine for the party this evening
the brilliance of the court was early this morning, now i go home
carrying the tokens of imperial grace, facial lotions and cream
from the heavenly palace beautiful jars of silver and jade

murphy finally getting into the spirit of the holidays
12-24-06 12:30 am

von zach III, 64