

going to the palace with jia zhi at dawn

the water clock sounds the fifth watch, dawn arrives.
the blush of peach blossoms are the cheeks of inebriation
dragons and snakes on the flapping flags sparkle in the sun
swallows dip and dive in the light breeze high above the palace walls.

the incense of the audience hall still clings to your sleeves
your brush is now filled with pregnant, lustrous pearls
no wonder we name the secretarial division the phoenix pond
we now have two literary phoenixes, the father and his son

murphy diligent and typing as false dawn arrives
1-2-05 6:45 am

von zach IV,1

leaving eastern residence after audience

gold characters over the portals to the throne hall glitter in the sun
balmy spring weather brightens the red banners of the audience hall
fragrant plants of the forbidden city hang down like the guests' striped girdle pendants
smoke of incense rises in a fine vapor which hangs in the air like gossamer

the clouds over peng lai palace show all five lucky colors
the snow atop the royal mansion is already mostly melted
we attending ministers walk slowly behind carrying our blue banners of office
the first leave slowly through the left wing to return home to eat and to rest

murphy sitting in his hot tub easing his arthritic knees
1-4-05 9:15 pm

von zach IV, 2

improvised verse, on leaving an audience at the zi-chen hall

outside the inner doors two court ladies stand, violet sleeves hanging down
the two lead the audience seekers in the procession toward the throne
incense billows through the entire throne room borne on soft spring winds
embroidered flowers on official robes are caught here and there by the sun

the water clock in the far tower is barely heard striking the hour
i am a near official so i see the joyous face of his majesty
after the audience, as usual, i go to the eastern chancellery with my friends
then to the secretarial division in the west to await the ministers of state

murphy contemplating his scruffy chin of morning
1-4-05 10:15 am

von zach IV,3

in the evening leaving the eastern pavilion

as hours of the day toll softly in the background
spring banners of the court procession are readied
after the audience has ended officials disperse among flowers in the park
i walk slowly back to my offices deep in somber thought

snow on the towers melts, wetting stones of the city walls
the clouds over the palace walls seem far away
alone again, i, the censor, burn the rough draft of a memorial
it is not until hens have begin to roost that i mount my horse for home

murphy belatedly catching up on his chores
1-17-05 11:00 am

von zach IV, 4

verse written inside the bamboo screens of my offices

within the bamboo screens of my offices stands a tall wu tong tree
it and the canopy over the gates affords the compound an inner coolness
i look at wind strewn flower petals and while away the long day
cooing doves and swallows with their young show the beginning of spring

this career in civil service at my advanced age teaches me nothing
i often return from meals reluctantly with feelings of guilt
i have not formed one character fulfilling my imperial duties as censor
i no longer have silly dreams of becoming like ji or xie, and feel worth but a pittance

murphy counting the few coins in his pockets
1-11-05 11:15 am

von zach IV, 5

spring night vigil
palace chancellor

i can't see the flowers by the low wall
evening has hidden their color
a low whish whush of birds
returning to their nightly roost

i sit, notice the stars' slow shift
up there, above these ten thousand doorways
the moon is beside god's highest heaven
its brilliance blanches the walls i touch

i will not lie down and be found sleeping on duty
i must be awake for the emperor's song
i must be aware of the sounds beginning
the sound for the marriage of heavens

tomorrow at the first ray of sun
i have this sealed document to present
several times already i have whispered to the night
how goes the clock, how goes the clock

murphy schlepping for everyone else
2-24-02 1:15 pm

von zach IV,6

taking leave of jia zhi leaving for henan

we stand under the wu tong tree, in the west wing of the palace
the entire empty enclosure is under its shade
you go to a new post with bad feelings, although it is to your old home in henan
i remain, deeply troubled, in this glorious part of spring

you will go out the east gate of the palace walls when we part
find yourself eventually beneath the clouds of zi lu mountain
remember that men throughout life covet an imperial chariot
but don't let yourself turn gray serving in this new position

murphy feeling the growl in his stomach a bit before his noon meal
1-11-05 11:45 am

von zach IV, 7

escorting zhang, member of the stoneworkers guild, as he begins his way to canton to carve inscriptions

your service now takes you as far south as you can go, canton
there you will chisel an inscription written by the first minister
you take an imperial message which you will deliver
there you will bring culture to thousands of barbarian peoples

on your way over land you shall see lavish blooms near the rest houses
on your way over waters fine mists shall moisten your sails
yet no one can know when, or if, the blue waters of the sea
will carry you back again to your home here

murphy rinsing his hands before preparing the food
1-12-05 4:45 pm

von zach IV, 8

at crooked river drinking with old friend zhang nan-shi, eighth of his clan

sparrows peck near yellow flowers, willows bend on the meandering river
storks and wild purple ducks soak up the sun on the banks
we know though, because of our white hair, spring doesn't mean so much now
despite this we empty our wine jar, take the birds and flowers to heart

being censor close to the emperor ties me down to official duties
how can i,, being in such poor health, keep living without my family
you, old friend, still strong and talented, still fresh with the vigor of youth
might you yet mimic shao-bing, and plant chang-an melons by the east gate

murphy getting up to go cook his dinner
1-12-05 5:15 pm

von zach IV, 9

the meandering river (two poems)

1

each petal that falls hastens the end of spring
how much more it saddens when the wind takes thousands
yet i continue to admire the fallen flowers
the sorrow i feel doesn't keep me from lifting my wine cup many times

kingfishers have a nest in the small hut by meandering river
a stone unicorn lies beside the lordly tomb at edge of the park
when i gaze on nature like this, i know i must live life to the fullest
why then should i let transient glory of rank and office bother me

murphy wondering when the impending cleansing rain will start
1-13-05 10:30 am

von zach IV, 10

the meandering river (second of two)

2

everyday after court i take my spring clothes to pledge for wine
every evening i leave the banks of meandering river completely drunk
everywhere i have reached my debt limits for buying wine
well, i don't expect to live til 70, very few do

and there are masses of butterflies flitting through the flowers
while dragonflies fly slowly by, then dip to touch the water's surface
let me concentrate on natural changes for all life, myself
not forget how quickly life goes, enjoy now with friends

murphy getting home before the rain, and shutting his windows
1-13-05 12:30 pm

von zach IV, 11

drinking wine at meandering river

outside emperor's park i sit by the meandering river, lose all thought of return
reflected image, crystal palace, blurs on the surface of the water
peach, willow blossoms fall, together, one after another
yellow orioles, other white birds, occasionally fly over

i have more than enough wine and soon forget how men reject me
i attend court rarely, i have yet to prove i belong to that world
as a petty bureaucrat i understand how fruitless to wish for a happy retirement
it is now far too late to choose a better course of action

murphy plowing his field in a slow steady pace
1-14-05 10:30 am

von zach IV, 12

on meandering river during rain

rain clouds above the city descend to the walls of the imperial park
afternoon gloom of river pavilion, flowers fade away
tree blossoms, the color of rouged cheeks, fall to ground
winds flail, the water plants form a long green belt that floats away

new dragon and tiger garden troops stay inside the inner palace
a scent of burning incense is barely smelled but no one comes out
when will his majesty again have the festive ritual of distributing his gold
so i may tipsily idle away an afternoon with the ladies and their painted lutes

murphy looking forward to the football game and his six pack of beer
1-14-05 10:45 am

von zach IV, 13

on last day of first month looking for cui ji and li feng

the morning sun streams through a small window, wakens me from a deep, deep sleep
i wrap myself in my old furs, look up to the heavens, a spring wind brings everything to life
the weather cheers me up, though i have to summon energy to comb out my hair
i leave the house with no goal in mind, walking i feel free of all obligations

i stop to lean on my walking stick and ignore all thought of dealing with high dignitaries
late in life i have become friends with cui and li as we have mutual interests
and when i wish to tarry with them a while, they always welcome me and my wine
i take myself to see these two good neighbors on this glorious day

master li's garden is overgrown with his bamboo sprouting to a splendid height
he leads me to a cleared space where the wine can flow freely
honorable cui appears at the beginning of festivities, no one is allowed an empty glass
i wonder if any matters of this world bother these two old worthies

on one hand i notice green grass and on the other droning bees borne on the warm wind
i note farm tools being prepared for use, but wonder when will the weapons be put away
the good subjects of emperor ge-tian-shi knew to forebear taking up arms
and here i sit drinking like ruan ji emulating his life style

the majesty of the sun has risen high every day, while an lu shan has taken nine provinces
the axis of the earth is shaken by his rebellion, and a hundred rivers are in turmoil
while i sing this verse i must bare all these sorrows, knowing once i begin i cannot stop
yet strong wine sits with its home brewed strength, and helps me cope with this ever changing life

murphy reading of the continuing carnage in iraq
1-16-05 11:30 am

von zach IV, 14

i take leave of cheng from the bureau of imperial affairs, who returns to his home

i am an inconsiderable man who is increasingly becoming old and weak
i am sickly and becoming more and more forgetful and confused
if ten people come to my attention i forget the names of nine
in this my old age i often meet with lord cheng

he is an exceptional man and our conversations are fruitful
he opens my eyes and ears in a congenial way
and i feel his wisdom reverberate through my being
he comes to me as if after a thousand years bao shu-you has returned

and it is as if today he was a friend such as guan zhong
his sympathy is so deep as to reawaken this old cypress tree and turn it green again
under his majestic presence i wake up like a huge serpent after his winter's sleep
now i can open myself to sing and give him the package of my sorrows

to my inner shame i have nothing to offer back for his many gifts of understanding
i accept my friend's bounty and enjoy his tasty food
a long fish hangs from a white cord, accompanied by his clarified wine
when one first sits in agony one speaks of the unfairness of one's uneven, tough way

but the east wind still blows in springtime as the earth begins its time of thaw
i praise here your memory of your home town where you gained your wing feathers
and where you will now fold your wings to roost quietly
and not be the falcon shrieking in your haste to swoop down on smaller birds

murphy drinking an extra cup of coffee this cold morning
1-16-05 11:15 am

von zach IV, 15

i write a song on the theme of a cypress tree painted on a wind screen by the taoist priest li

i, an old man, comb out my white hair early in the morning
a taoist priest of the xuan-du-guan monastery arrives to see me
i hold my hair in my hand as my son announces my guest
he carries a wind screen on which is newly painted an old green cypress tree

the cypress tree on the screen seems quiet and dark
i lean on the window balustrade, and it suddenly seems no simple painting i see
along a dark stone wall other forms struggle to survive in the snow and frost
the crown of the tree hangs down and seems to writhe as a living dragon

i, this old man, have always loved this sort of rarity
and under the spell of this painting i feel the rush of elation
that i should be so honored by the old taoist li to be given such a treasure
then i feel a sadness that such energies were demanded from the artist to paint such a scene

under the old cypress i see four old men dressed alike in their hats and sandals
they sit as two pairs and have to be the reclusive hermits of shang mountain
fully aware i stare and seem to hear them sing the purple mushroom song
these are dark times, full of danger, how sadly the wind soughs through the trees

murphy wearing two pairs of socks on this cold january day
1-17-05 4:30 pm

von zach IV, 16

i respectfully accompany the emperor's son-in-law zheng qian-yo near wei village
(2 poems)

1

the flowers overwhelm in their extravagant profusion
in imperial wei village they gleam in a riotous beauty
i must carry my cup of wine in my hands and drink all day
and with my white hair brave the full rigors of early spring

the wandering party is finally stopped by steep crags that tear at our clothes
down hanging vines swing to crash into our faces
when can i ever hope to sit and tarry a while in a bamboo grove
wearing a simple black hat like liu yan in an earlier simpler time

murphy noticing that even the squirrels have frosty breaths this morning
1-18-05 9:50 am

von zach IV, 17

i respectfully accompany the emperor's son-in-law zheng qian-yo near wei village
(2 poems)

2

the monastery sits in the middle of large willow trees,
meadow flowers spread on the shores of a full running creek
beautiful flowers are seen under the bamboo stalks
the lovely birds choose to stay here rather than go up into the mountains

and why should a man choose to live inside city walls
how can he achieve a youthful outlook living in all that tumult
how can he blindly follow the august personage
who returns to the inner city each and every evening

murphy dusting off his snowboots upon returning home
1-19-05 3:00 pm

von zach IV, 18

answering cen shen

we leave from deep within the palace chambers
the audience is over and we go our separate ways
you go west to the offices of the state ministers
i go east to the offices of the censors

on the way are seen graceful fingers of the green willows
and the marvelous deep reds of the cup shaped flowers
at this time my friend you have written some fine lines
to share with this white haired old man your cautioning wisdom

murphy drying his hair after a vigorous shampoo
1-20-05 10:20 am

von zach IV, 19

presented to secretary wang wei

your renown as a poet has long been celebrated
and your unceasing diligence has brought your skills to new heights
we are all aware the emperor has arrested the scholar returned from the rebels
we rejoice that it has not been made a case of literary treason

in the hands of the enemy your long sickness was due to longing for his majesty
for a long three years your loyalty never wavered
you must have written many songs of fealty during your agony
please read for us the wisdom of your stressful times

murphy sipping saki from a heavy tumbler
1-20-05 10:40 am

von zach IV, 20

i give to censor xu, eighth in his clan, this poem as he leaves for nanking to visit his mother

by the grace of his majesty you are permitted to leave the forbidden city
to return to your old home to see your good mother once again
the will of the emperor has kindly given you new honors
because of which your farewell party insures a triumphal trip

the emperor's gifts of considerable worth will accompany you on your journey
you have left the palace confines in extraordinary circumstance
clear nights will bring you to the post station at qu zhou
then in zhen giang a boat will carry you across the river

you are leaving us in springtime now on the announced morning
in the fall you will hopefully be in your homeland before the bitter cold arrives
you will proudly take with you the emperor's gifts of ancient books
and bring the gods' gift, the wine of long life, to your old home

i have always had a hunger and thirst to see the buddhist temple there
the depth of my desire to follow you to see it again is unmeasurable
the opportunity you have to see the kanakamuni buddha is priceless
it is so beautiful one can never forget it

murphy waiting for the snowstorm to arrive
1-21-05 11:15 am

von zach IV, 21

i ask xu, eighth of his clan, to give this respectful verse to abbot min in jiang-ning

i have not seen my friend min for thirty long years
and i find tears streaming from my eyes as i seal this letter
are you still up to your old tricks we used to enjoy in our youth
who do you show your new poems to in your old age

are you still playing go in the bamboos by hidden mountain brook
or wearing the gold priest robes i remember your wearing in the boat on the lake
i have heard that you tell your friends how i am now a palace official
while i am but only an old white head who often tipsily falls asleep

murphy watching a winter storm play itself out
1-22-05 3:30 pm

von zach IV, 22

i am reminded of my younger brothers
(2 poems)

1

in these chaotic times i have just heard of my younger brothers
they are hungry and cold living with strangers in ji zhou
since there are few travelers available i cannot send a message
because of the general warfare we cannot see each other again

i remember how confused we all were in our haste to escape
i will never forget you in your time of travail and sickness
because of my multitude of problems i cannot be with you
and can only imagine traveling downstream on the river to get there

murphy hunkering in his warm cave putting more wood on his smoky fire
1-23-05 2:30 pm

von zach IV, 23

i am reminded of my younger brothers
(2 poems)

2

i rejoiced for only a while when i heard henan had been freed
and it doesn't still bother me that ye zheng is yet held by the enemy
we, the family, have survived a hundred battles
for three long years i have waited for your return

the flowers in our home gardens bloom without our care in these chaotic times
and the birds in the new year return there yet again as before
it has been a long time since smoke rose from our hearth fire
with you in the west and i in the east, it is rare to get any message through

murphy recharging the old battery in his car yet again
1-24-05 3:00 pm

von zach IV, 24

i hear word of my younger brother

no one can return home now since this war has yet to end
it is far better for you to stay with strangers than to return
my heart is bitter with sadness at this time
i have long desired to be with you, to live and die together

your books are still on the shelves on the walls
but your young woman has long since left the house
our old dog knows i suffer because of your absence
he is always by my bed with his head lowered, sad

murphy waiting patiently for the thaw to begin
1-25-05 11:00 am

von zach IV, 25

i give li zhou, secretary of the private archives, this letter

on tai montain to the north lives a large falcon
its young are beautiful with soft red down
the owa river there is filled with strangeness
it runs past the boneyard of dragons

li zhou is the son of a famous father
he has risen to tower above his contemporaries
at 15 he had mastered literature and history
at 18 he was at the center of the social scene
at 19 he was made secretary of the private archives
and by 20 his reputation was in the highest ranks

i have met him often and consider him a friend
and carry in my innermost self a great admiration for him
i note how much more difficult the upbringing of my two sons
seemingly an endless task in comparison and ultimately unfulfilling

earlier this year in the first year of the reign of ch'ien-yuan
the people began to feel better within themselves
you, li chou, like lao lai-zi will make your mother happy with a visit
and, partly because of me, have decided to take yourself away to your old home
on the way south you should sing the song of white blooming reeds
and the beautiful green mountain of chu should already be in your dreams

the capital chang-an is, to be blunt, hardly visited now
while with every day that passes more ministers assemble here
when will it be possible for your honorable mother to greet you

in the great hall of your house in chang-an
your father serves as secretary in ming guang palace
and the emperor holds him in high esteem
your return will not be allowed if you wait much longer
and i am struck by the fact your departure is now imminent

it has always bothered me, since i come from a poor family,
and have only recently become a minister under extraordinary circumstance
that i have always had a menial disposition since my earliest youth

and in my old age this fault has become only worse
i am often saddened, feel remorse, and am led to think
that the space between heaven and earth is too narrow for me to fit in
i admire you who, still yet young, can be so diligent and hard-working

now in this moment of parting my thoughts are rueful
and i cannot even bring myself to drink the wine in front of me
i extend my gaze to look out over the green land before me
and to my mind it is nothing but a dreary marsh

i am like an old wild goose calling out his hunger early in the year
waiting until the thaw brings rotten wheat to eat
you on the other hand are like the high flying swallow in beautiful weather
your young with beautiful wing feathers exemplify speed

but for long weeks there is wet weather in your mother's homeland
the rivers are flood level and this makes many dangerous rocky clefts
i will stay a while with your carriage in han chung
i, this sick old man, thinking with sadness on your glorious past

murphy enduring yet another four inches of snow this long cold january
1-30-05 12:15 pm

von zach IV, 26

i don't know exactly what to do

i am at loose ends, but why should this be?

we live at the ends of the same road, you to the north, i south
doesn't it bother you at all that we seldom speak to each other?
we haven't even seen each other for ten whole days

since i turned in my official horse i have been home bound
the road to your house is hard to walk as though thick with brambles
i could walk all the way to you in the past but no longer
it's not that the weather is too bad that i cannot

nor is it that my legs have grown too weak
my superiors at court would be angry if i walked on foot
that is the trouble i have, you must understand
this morning the rains came and the wind blew fiercely

sound asleep i heard neither bell, nor drum, that signals to come to court
my neighbor to the east would lend me his lame donkey
but the mud is too slippery for the beast's poor legs to make it there
i have sent a message to place me on the leaves of absence

my life, as any man's, is indeed filled with troubles
how can i make it through this fruitless day with this heavy heart
perhaps listening to your poems which i so admire would help
already the first blooms of the magnolia tree have fallen

you and i are no longer so young as to waste what time we have left
even though we often complain of the high cost of wine at the street corner
it's not often we drinkers can afford an inebriated sleep
come quickly to drink a jereboam with me, i have exactly 300 coppers and that should suffice

murphy pulling on his boots to visit the liquor store before it closes permanently
2-26-05 7:30 pm

von zach IV, 27

for my old friend the historian zhang qian 18th of his clan

the exile land of tai-zhou is very wide and next to the immeasurable sea
clouds and rain always pass over and deeply green islands jut up through the mists
my old friend weeps at the prospect of his having to abandon me and live there
now in the fullness of spring he goes into exile like a water chestnut tossed aside

if i get drunk in the future and will not dance, who will invite me to do so
if i have written a poem and would like to sing it, will i have any friend there to listen
why go under the five bridges to make a picnic when i will surely be disappointed while alone
on the north bank of huang-duo pond stands a pavilion where i now sit deeply troubled

the slandered jia-yi regretted his unfortunate appointment as bailiff of chang sha
the loyal su wu was put out to pasture after he fell into the hands of the hunns
and one must not forget that zhang qian chose the loyal path by his actions
that's why he received a new post in exile, an easy neat solution to his dilemma

but i'm afraid you will find in tai-zhou the fate of ni heng while governor of jiang-xia
and then men will not think of you as one rightly placed within the stars of heaven
in the lane before your house we shall share sadness alone as no banner man heralds you now
and glowworms by whose light you earlier read books lie dead and dry on your writing table

murphy wiping the sweat from a feverish brow, his own
3-23-05 1:25 pm

von zach IV, 28

i hear news of my younger brother

the wind ruffles the crimson flowers of the flame tree
their gleam beginning to disappear with the coming end of spring
the blooms abandon their ancient limbs and fall to the earth
though the breeze blows them here and there, they can never make it back to the tree

nothing is worth more than letters full of familial love between brothers
especially as it is now too difficult for separated parties to visit
and again my tears run down my face in full stream
i stare through blurred eyes toward the east where he now stays

murphy denned up by the winter's snows which reach halfway up the windows of his hut
3-24-05 10:30 am

von zach IV, 29

i dedicate this poem to bi yao, 4th of his clan

your poetic talents are so great that you stand at the pinnacle of poets
and yet your family is poor and you labor among the lower officials
you go hungry and are cold while even your servants treat you with contempt
your facial expressions are now those of a withered old man

complaining gets us nowhere without a congenial friend who understands
we must laugh about wasted literary talents which we alone appreciate
we must constantly think of qiang yan and bao zhao neglected in their times
and we both have sons who will carry forward our art when we are gone

murphy adding to his secret diary on sunday afternoon after church
3-24-05 11:00 am

IV, 30

the tale of the chivalrous vulture

on a northern rock face lived a pair of blue falcons
high on the mountain top they raised their young in a dark cypress tree
a huge white snake slithered up into their nest
for a breakfast feast on the brooding eggs of spring

the male falcon had flown far away in search of food
his mate could do nothing more than raise a pitiful cry
against the giant strength of the snake she was helpless
til all that was left was half her yellow beak

when the male returned from the west to this devastation
he turned to fly away again to seek solace in the wide world
soon enough he came upon a mighty vulture
who heard him out and was moved by his expression of tragic pain

suddenly the body of the vulture stiffened and turned
with a loud croaking he flew off alone back to the high regions
the scaled monster fell from the high branches
his large head smashed by mighty blows

from high in the sky the serpent was finally dropped
and was heard to fall in the short grasses
the broken tail is all that can absorb new blows
his full stomach completely torn apart

he had killed the falcon's young and now he was killed
and this serves as a warning to all bad men under heaven
all creatures in nature know the feeling of revenge
a malicious joy overwhelmed the falcon in an eye blink

although the vulture is by far the most reviled of large birds
in a moment of terrible need he shines in one's heart
when he was called after the deed, he was already gone
how worthy has his appearance now become

shortly before this time i went along the chueh river in chang-an
there i heard this story from an old lumberjack
i have become completely white-headed like the tall mountains
and i lift up my official hat in due recognition

in this life we have many official duties
and it is easy to be self sacrificing for one's own good
so i tell here the story of a chivalrous vulture
so as to arouse everyone's courage when needed

murphy reminded of his debt to the cherokee rabbit stories
4-7-05 11:30 pm

von zach IV, 31

the tale of the dancing horse of my friend li, the district official of hu-xian

the magnificent horse of my friend is named brown dancer
it carried him as he fled from an lu-shan to the mountains of si-chuan
then they turned around and came all the way back to serve the new emperor
his horse was so fast that he drank in the han river in the morning and at ling-wu that night

mister li told me that no better horse can be found than his brown dancer
and that when he rode this horse thousands admired and idolized him
after all this i believed he had the ability to overcome any difficulty he faced
and it bothered me then that he always gave me a broken down old nag to ride

set in the head of this noble brown dancer were a pair of sharp eyes
his ears the bamboo plant in autumn, high hooves carved out of jade
at first i likened him to a wonderful dragon flown down from the skies
but you could not compare this sleek beautiful horse with any other

the great road to luo-yang is once more clear of bandits
many days i am free to ride with li toward the east
it is easy to recognize in him the breast of the phoenix and the mane of the dragon
with his head forward and his eyes ablaze he gallops as a mighty storm

murphy removing his spurs before entering the ranch house for supper
3-25-05 7:00 am

von zach IV, 32

the emperors gift at midsummer festival

i find my name on the midsummer festival gift list
such fine clothes are sewn at the imperial palace
such sheer muslin seems to waft in the light breeze
such perfumed silk floats like soft falling snow

the label bears his majesty's calligraphy, hardly dry
i know the summer heat will seem to vanish when i put these on
how did they manage to make it fit so well?
i will never forget my lord's largesse

murphy lacing up his new sneakers for their maiden walk
2-28-05 10:am

von zach IV, 33

to meng yun-qing

it's not so often two white hairs like us find such joy
let's stay up all night and take advantage of these bright candles
since we both now know such meetings will become rare
let's hang out together here while we can

my only fear is that the milky way will fade from sight too soon
we should neither refrain from draining our cups
when the sun returns we can think again about worldly affairs
then we can dry our tears and part: one east, one west

murphy asking the barkeep to draw another round of guinness
3-2-05 10:15 am

von zach IV, 34

i am saddened by memories

this time last year i returned to the emperor along this road
that was when the tatars were thick in the western districts
i have even now scarcely recovered from those dangers
perhaps i left a bit of my soul to wander about here still afraid

this year i waited closely upon the throne, but am now reassigned
his majesty cannot be the one who decided for this to happen
i have no great talent and am growing still older by the day
i stop my horse and gaze back at the palace with longing

murphy settling in to his new digs
3-1-05 10:00 am

von zach IV, 35

i write this verse in the xi-xi-ding pavilion in zheng district of hua-zhou

the xi-xi complex sits in the zheng district high upon a hill
the broad vistas far to the west stir my feelings
when the clouds are ripped apart i see the lotus peak of hua-shan
in good weather i see chang-qin palace shimmer behind the willow trees

woods birds come here to find their old nests and attack the foreign swallows in droves
the chirping of the young birds among the blooms stays with me for a long while
i feel the need to mention in this verse the joy i find in the fresh green bamboo
but being lonely in the failing evening light i fear i have become too sad

murphy putting on his best face upon hearing the bad news

4-15-05 12:25 pm

von zach IV, 36

view from mount hua

the western peak of mount hua towers mightily
until it reaches heart grabbing heights
all the other mountains which surround it
arrange themselves into children and grandchildren

how can one attain the nine-membered bamboo staff of the immortals
to use to reach the sea where the nymphs wash their hair
one goes to zhu-xiang by the wagon trails
until one cannot return because of the darkness

then when you reach a vee shaped notch
you will come across a small gate
i will wait here for a breathing spell
until the west wind springs up in its coolness

then i seek the throne of the white emperor on the heights
and there ask my questions about the sources of the truth

murphy venturing out on a warm spring morning

4-18-05 11:00 am

von zach IV, 37

still august, still too much work, with insufferable humidity

it's the fourteenth of august and the day is a steamy cauldron
i can't even choke down a few bites in this weather
at night i worry about scorpions creeping into my bed
and now that autumn approaches there are even more flies

i am berobed and belted, and about to scream out in my agony
especially when they bring in more paper work to pile on my desk
i stare out my window to the green pines in the southern mountains
my feet yearn to be barefoot and walking on the packed ice up there

murphy at poolside in acapulco with his icy cold carta blanca
3-2-05 10:30 am

von zach IV, 38

clearing after a rain

there are still dark wet clouds on the horizon
a west wind blows which would clear any sky
what a fine, fine morning after the long rains
now there is nothing standing in the way of the harvest

at the border stations pastures are still green here and there
but the mountain pears have only small red fruit
the trumpets of the soldiers resound off the brick walls
i see a wild goose fly over high, high in the heavens

murphy easing into a warm spring day
4-20-05 2:10 pm

von zach IV, 39

the burgeoning crescent moon

the crescent moon has just risen with its delicate light
since it is waxing the shadow is unformed, incomplete
it is now barely above the old rampart on the horizon
and then it disappears behind the edge of passing clouds

the milky way has not changed its color
these frontier hills are still cold and lonely
the yard has a growing dew, crusty with frost
the chrysanthemums grow chill in the dark

murphy stepping into the back yard of his brother's home in texas
3-2-05 10:45 am

von zach IV, 40

i watch the troops of li si-ye, governor of an-xi in hua-zhou pass on their march to chang-an,
there to await the emperor. (2 poems)

1

within the four prefectures of the west are soldiers enough
and all of them are ready for the coming onslaught
now i will reiterate that li-si-ye with his officers and men
those paid by the emperor, are enough to stop an invasion

he understands, like the old horse, his way home at night
he will serve the emperor as a hungry falcon let loose by his hunter
he already has four camps within the danger zone
now in our deepest need we understand his wonderful strength

murphy deploying dream armies in a hopeless position

4-25-05 2:30 pm

von zach IV, 41

i watch the troops of li si-ye, governor of an-xi in hua-zhou pass on their march to chang-an,
there to await the emperor. (2 poems)

2

the success of troops does not depend on their number
li-si-ye with his trained cavalry of only 10,000 men will now help china
with morale high he does not mention the enemy who stands in he-bei
with loyal courage he wants only to serve the sublime emperor

a lonely cloud follows the blood thirsty troops
birds take wing when they approach the city walls
the troops remain an entire day here and plan ahead
yet the citizens of hua-zhou are not bothered by the noise

murphy back in the saddle and riding to glory

5-5-05 8:15 am

von zach IV, 42

double nines at cui's farmhouse in lan-tian

fall is a season of sadness for us aging old men
on an impulse we gather to visit and share
we know we shouldn't expose our wispy hairs to the wind
so we laugh when a friend tightens a hat with frail hands

the blue water of the lake comes from far flung gullies
the nearby hills seem almost tall as the far snowy peaks
how many of us white hairs will be around next year
with besotted eyes we examine the dogwood leaves

murphy looking closely at the speckles on his sclerotic hands
3-3-05 11:30 am

von zach IV, 43

the straw covered villa of the cui family on the east mountain of lan-tian xian

i love the quietude of the straw covered villa on your beautiful mountain
the fresh air of autumn makes the stay here most refreshing
from time to time one hears distant sounds of bells and gongs
and again at sundown one sees fishermen and lumberjacks pass by

we peel our chestnuts fresh from the entrance to bo-ya valley
our rice is cooked with fresh parsley from the bottomlands of qing-ni-fang
i wonder why the noble wang wei's nearby villa is closed and unused
with his simple gate now overgrown by the spruce and bamboo

murphy taking his pleasure where he finds it
5-9-05 10:30 am

von zach IV, 44

i send this verse to the crown prince's advisor, gao shi, 35th of his clan

you, gao shi, have now risen to be counselor of the crown prince, a noble position
because of the circumstances surrounding this war we are long separated
i only recently heard of your donning the raiment of this new position
i trust your feelings for this old man have not become too cool

the wild geese still fly in the heavens
many carp still bottom feed in the rivers
we have been friends for fifty years
and yet you rarely send me even one letter

murphy snug in the solitude of his hermit hut
5-9-05 10:45 am

von zach IV,45

5 poems wherein i give voice to my feelings

1

the north wind brings the wild goose out of mongolia
it is cold, inhospitable, and stings with the sand it carries
how powerfully it rustles the vast extended forest
the autumn grasses are luxurious, a deeper green than earlier

the riches of the inhabitants of the north are piled high
in their large, beautiful houses flutes play every night
why should they note the stranger in the southern neighborhood
who now in the ninth month is maneuvering through the thin grasses there

murphy in the eye of the hurricane waiting for the storm to begin again
5-9-05 11:00 am

von zach IV, 46

5 poems wherein i give voice to my feelings 2

the sharp thinking lord of zhang-ling
waits for the early morning to go hunting
he carries a manly bow, and arrows with sharp metal tips
his gray horse steps carefully on the light snow

he doesn't yet know which animal to pursue
so he moves slowly through the forest throughout the day
on his return he nails two wolf skins to the wall
on the gate one sees the emperor's flag and the rod of command

murphy imagining the brave heart of a general
5-11-05 12:00 pm

von zach IV, 47

5 poems wherein i give voice to my feelings 3

because the varnish tree provides varnish it is felled
tallow gives a candle light, so it assumes its role in burning
the orchids have reached a peak and begun to fade,
autumn winds destroy the blooms of the fragrant olive bush

in the office of the prefect of the capitol is an older man
the path to the house of ministers is sprinkled with sand
now that the noble prefect xiao zhih-zhong is executed
he can now be properly remembered by the people

murphy successfully resisting the urge to martyr himself
5-11-05 12:20 pm

von zach IV, 48

5 poems wherein i give voice to my feelings 4

the wild tiger struts mightily in his majesty
but is only too often captured and caged
his thunder voice roars in futility
when his legs are tightly bound

shortly thereafter fur spreads over a bed
and eyes no longer glint with life
there are men whose tread resembles the tiger's
this tale should warn them what happens to large pests

murphy relaxing in the balmy spring of may
5-12-05 10:00 am
9-19-05 10:30 am

von zach IV, 49

5 poems wherein i give voice to my feelings 5

this morning i saw the funeral train of a rich man
before and after the coffin was all glitter and splendor
one could not but notice the large number of kin who followed
with their hundreds of white mourning cloths

now all who followed the train will also follow in death
despite their show of such pomp and circumstance
so think only of a poor dead person whose corpse has been prepared
and how he will find his burial place in the mountains

murphy only too aware of his mortality this morning
5-12-05 10:20 am

von zach IV, 50

3 poems wherein i express my feelings 1

the thistledown also has its roots
as it tosses here and there on the wind
in cold weather it floats far away from its hold on earth
it can never again return to its place of birth

as i walk among these plants i remember my old home
it's been three years since i was last there
as i give over to this yearning i see fire signals on the mountains
and know the war wagons fill the region east of han-gu-guan pass

how quickly this life passes me by
stranded here alone in this land of strangers

murphy remembering his childhood far away in texas
5-12-05 10:45 am

von zach IV, 51

3 poems wherein i express my feelings 2

i now worry day and night
do my brothers still wander to find shelter
i don't know if they are alive or dead
or if their journeys have been long or short

since we were separated by this accursed war
hunger and constant cold have been my bitter companions
i wonder if my house in luo yang is still there for me
but when i consider returning i think of tigers and wolves on the way

i look up to see the wild geese flying high overhead and understand
my brothers and i lack the wings to fly one to another

murphy wearing only one eagle feather in humility
5-13-05 9:00 am

von zach IV, 52

3 poems wherein i express my feelings 3

once when i still lived in lo yang
surrounded by my friends and relations
we greeted guests on their way to the cities in the east
and sometimes made excursions into the southern mountains

smoke and dust now cover all of huang he valley
and the banners of war fly over chen-gao pass
i remember where i once drank so much wine
and wonder if i will ever return there again

but a man must be young and strong to return so far
and i sadly no longer have such rosy cheeks of youth

murphy rereading thomas wolfe in his blustery fullness
5-12-05 9:15 am

von zach IV, 53

poem for hermit ruan fang

the traditions of chen-liu are not much honored
few outstanding men have come from there
but in these borderlands i met master ruan
who carries on the name of his ancestor ruan ji

one sees he is a hermit by his appearance
the impression is furthered by his outmoded hair style
his neighbors all ride in carts pulled by horses
while his yard wall remains covered with weeds

but the clarity of his verse reflects truly the ethics
and shows how deeply he has considered them
in order to visit him i walk a small overgrown path
i gather my robes in my hands as i wade through the cold wet grass

this is sufficient to indicate his affinity to xu you or chao fun
who considered splendor and excessive dignity to be cow manure

murphy wondering what part of his body will break down next
5-18-05 11:40 am

von zach IV, 54

two poems wherein on the day of the winter solstice i express my feelings, and which i respectfully send to my old superior in the north department and to my other friends there

1

last year on this festive day i stood respectfully before the throne of the emperor
at the third gong of the fifth vigil i entered the audience hall with the other dignitaries
i wish you to know that i am very sad here in hua zhou as a minor official
I find it increasingly difficult to carry myself with dignity through the official duties

i tell you this because i vividly remember standing with you directly before the clouds of incense
now, in the haste and confusion of my new office, i often enough wear vestments inside out
who among you would wish to think of anyone in this miserable state of mine
and from today on i expect ever more additional sorrows to be endured

murphy deep in his slough of despond
5-27-05 11:15 am

von zach IV, 55

two poems wherein on the day of the winter solstice i express my feelings, and which i respectfully send to my old superior in the north department and to my other friends there

2

i remember how i was filled with joy in the courtyard with the high officials
now i have only those memories of being with the dragons of the emperor
the golden unicorns of the incense pots never moving but continuing to belch their fumes
the large peacock gates opening slowly for the emperor, then their shadows receding

from time without memory the jade throne of the emperor has been our polar star
and his officials wear the appropriate red robes only in the palace at chang-an
today this festival occasion in the lonely city of hua zhou churns my guts
sadly i sit under the cold clouds which cover the mountains with their snow

murphy building the bonfire yet higher as midnight approaches
5-31-05 10:50 am

von zach IV, 56

toward the end of the winter, i go to the eastern capital on business. i meet meng yun-qing east of hu-cheng. we return to liu hao's house to spend the night in feasting and drinking

the fierce winds off the river darken the buildings with their dust
an arriving traveler can hardly see his own hands
i am somewhere east of the city of hu cheng
when i happen to open my eyes to try to see

there, right before me, i recognize my old friend yun-qing
had i not been on my way to see liu hao as my host
we could not both have gone on to the promised feast
liu is very pleased that i have brought along an extra guest

he lights lamps, calls for more wine, and for a fine spread of delectables
he says, "let's talk all night and enjoy this special occasion.
let's don't talk about how difficult things are going with the war."
the red glow of the stove reminds of the coming dawn

the moon shows pale through the paper windows like rippled silk
not long ago heaven and earth were torn asunder near chang-an
just now is winter's end and spring returns to luo-yang's palace halls
who could have predicted how we three would have found ourselves here now

we all talk of how fast the water clock seems to be running
such comradeship and joy are rare in any life
the cock crows outside in the trees to end our festivities,
we stand to go, and we all burst into tears

murphy carefully pouring his and his guest's next drink
3-4-05 4:30 pm

von zach IV, 57

as a jest, i offer a long song to mister jiang, district lower-director of wen-xiang, seventh of his clan, on the occasion of a feast of fish

in the middle of a severe winter the honorable jiang has given us a feast of fish
yesterday, just as today, an uninterrupted icy wind has blown
because the river has frozen over it is not easy to obtain fresh fish
taking an axe to the river would risk breaking into the palace of the river god

so the cook probably received his fish from the hands of a water sprite
the fish are washed, the knives sharpened, i note the eyes of the fish are red
quietly fall the small bits of white flesh as if they were snow flakes
all the bones are removed, the finely chopped flesh is subtly spiced

the belly fat served up cannot be done justice except by a vigorous young man
the soft boiled fragrant rice is placed before this very old man
the hacked remains are brought over on white paper, they look as if stained with wine
just before i am to die of overeating i notice the golden platter is empty

all this hospitality was afforded despite jiang's short acquaintance with me
already he has shown me his love with the finest of wines and delicacies
and after this it is naturally very difficult to leave quickly for lo-yang
when i rise to take my leave, my horse awaits, but i can hardly stand

you are truly a man full of love with a good warm heart
you have made me very aware how deeply caring friendship can be
i have no grounds for complaining of my woes when i am with you
i will remember this day's depth of hospitality forever

murphy picking out the fattest arctic char for the night's feast

6-1-05 11:00 am

von zach IV, 58

short song i offer in jest to district under-director zhen from wen-xiang

in the past year the emperor was temporarily at the base of tai-bo mountain
after the audience was over you met with me, alone in the lodge
our souls could not have been more in harmony were we closely related
as we talked i began to appreciate your mastery of literature

now that both capitals have been retaken the political landscape is clear
as we renew our acquaintance i find to my great joy our friendship has lasted
when you gave a feast in my honor yesterday, my happiness knew no bounds
you, the master talent, treated me with your fullest respect

murphy always surprised when someone has paid attention to his mutterings

6-2-05 10:20 am

von zach IV, 59

while traveling i meet with district lower-director yang wan, fourth of his clan, and offer him this humorous poem

i beg of you secretary minister yang, please enlighten me
before i found myself on hua-shen mountain in the cold
and i could not find any restorative ginseng
now that i have returned to hua-shen

and the weather has warmed considerably
where on this high mountain can i find this nostrum
i have rummaged through all the caves of the immortals i could find
they say the best ginseng comes from this area

for your help i will send you an ancient red cane
that you can lean on when you rouse yourself in the mornings

murphy practicing graft out of the necessities of his new official position
6-2-05 10:15 am

von zach IV, 60