

prepare the weapons and horses!

the generals who bring the dynasty back to bloom
have entered the lands east of tai mountain
the news of victories arrived late at night
bringing an immediate sense of bright days

the broad yellow-running huang-he
was crossed with ease by our troops
the rebellious barbarians so dangerous before
are now merely a split bamboo

yet still ye-cheng remains in their hands
though we should overrun them there shortly
the governor of suo-fang has thus been ordered
and given all the means he should require

back in the capital chang-an the reinforcements
ride confident on the famous war horses
the uighurs who now serve the emperor
are feasted with the best meats of the palace

it is appropriate that the northeast is now cleaned
shan-dong and he-bei now bow to the new emperor
though we should never forget that the old emperor
had to flee to hong-tong mountain in si-chuan

for three years the armies have heard only sad flutes
songs of war, death, and long separation
now the long days of riots and tumult are over
the rebellion swept away like dry leaves

the more prince li-shu has been rewarded
the more he has withdrawn in his modesty
general guo zu-yi has shown deep laid plans
his good example rare now or in the past

teaching minister li guang-bi reflects his worth
like a perfectly polished shining mirror.
minister wang si-li's love of country
is pure as the stretching clear autumn sky

these courageous few men emerged when needed
in the time of the miseries of the old emperor .
they knew how to mend the earth and the sky
how to save the world by restoring order

now officials can return as did zhang han
to feast on his favorite fish salad of his home
the people can now feel calm and safe
like birds returned south to their protected nests

the spirit of newly greening spring is reflected
in the brilliance of the courtiers' dress
there the inner forbidden city is festooned, bedecked
with brilliant flowers, fragrant burning incense

now su-zong has prepared his imperial chariot
to welcome his father the emperor emeritus from si-chuan
upon his return in the morning to the dragon palace
there he will see to his health and well being

though no one could hope to outshine the power and influence
of those who were with the new emperor upon his escape to ling-wu
the palace is now filled with these fresh dukes and princes
all who merit position from the new imperial grace

though all should remember that this is purely good fortune
and resist boasting of their prowess and bravery
in shensi fang guan, a second xiao he
has made his mark as an active governor

in the army headquarters zhang hao
has proved his worth as a strategist.
zhang hao throughout his earlier life
traveled widely and gained strength of experience

he seems nine feet tall with a full beard
and eyebrows that are now turning gray
he was appointed by the emperor for this duty
and arrived at the most critical time of need

once he lent his support to the tottering state
the appropriateness of his plans shone clear
all the rebels who dared give battle, all gone
all who dared to oppose him in the field

the tang dynasty is once again on the rise
as once the han with guang wu-di, the chou with xuan liang
once again tribute pours in from all the lands
united again under the beneficence of heaven

now again may appear miraculous portents and omens
propitious gifts from strange lands, even the fabled white jade ring
we even hear that new discoveries occur
those miraculous silver urns in the far hills

reclused holy men are returning to the capital
and not merely singing of the magic mushrooms
poets compete with one another writing hymns of praise
about how clear the waters of the huang-he

the farmers now have hope that the rains will come
and end this terrible drought these last long years
the cries of the cuckoos echo through the land
calling the people to the need for spring planting

the courageous soldiers who still besiege ye-cheng
should now return triumphant with expected victory
to their wives who wait in the south of chang-an
fully longing for them in their anxious dreams

how the earth cries out for a singular man
who can reach to the milky river in the heavens
bring down its water to wash all the weapons
to be put away and never used again, never

murphy sharpening his small knives to use in the kitchen

von zach V, 1

when i saw the troops of li si-ye march past

these strong warriors from the far north come to aid the emperor
wild tribesmen who will play a crucial role in the fight to come
they have long been thought to be invincible in battle
they will now go to confront the rebels on the borders

the riotous outlaws follow the infamous shi si-ming
now they will face these stalwarts with their carving lances
the generals should not now be satisfied with the siege at ye-cheng
but charge into troubled seas and kill the great whale

murphy the sunday morning quarterback with his brandied coffee

von zach V, 2

i can not possibly bring back the skeleton of my cousin to his homeland

he-jian is still fenced off by enemy soldiers
and your bones are still in that desolate town.
we all have cousins but now i have lost one of mine
until i die the injustice of this death will not leave me

when you were still a beautiful child you counted coins
as you grew i loved you for the quickness and clarity of your mind
on your face lies the dust of the three years since you died
as now the grass springs up again to feel the winds of spring

murphy visiting family in a time of grief

von zach V, 3

standing alone

a lonely hawk circles an empty sky
two white geese glide between banks of a river
death can come swiftly from high above
yet they blithely swim here and there

dew is too heavy and damages plants
a spider's web has yet to find its prey
nature's violent way extends to the human
within a thousand worries i stand alone

murphy sitting in the dark sipping his irish whiskey

von zach V, 4

after receiving zheng qian's letter

old zheng qian despite his advanced age remains in his exile
i have just received his brief letter from tai-zhou
he has been farming there on land by a bend in a mountain stream
and often lies ill, too ill for even enjoying the passing clouds

the world seems to have no regard for this gifted scholar
who must beg for money when he wishes to buy some wine
i can only gaze at the stars which lie above his region
is it not possible to bring his talent back from such a burial ground

murphy musing on the vagaries of the rich and powerful

von zach V, 5

a long time since i've seen li tai-bo

for a long time i have not seen li tai-bo
it's sad he feigned madness as a cover
the whole world would have had him murdered
it seems i alone who admired his wayward genius

he must has written a thousand witty poems
all with the experience of his wine glass
i am here on kuang mountain in his old study
now that his hair is turning white he should return

murphy declining to attend his college reunion

von zach V, 6

the official of xin-an-xian

as i travel on the road in the xin-an district
i hear the loud voice of an army officer
i say politely to the mustering official
surely there are no more men of age in this small district

he answers that the age has been lowered to 17
just yesterday he was ordered to find young men
i reply these men are young and still quite small
how will they ever be able to defend the emperor

i notice some few are strong, well-fed, and with their mothers
while the others are all alone, weak and frail
most will now leave and never return, as do waters of the river
and in these green mountains will remain only soft sounds of weeping

i say to the mothers if their tears run on they will become emaciated
and they should look neither to heaven nor earth for compassion
for the young men have gone to help conquer ye-cheng
and we expect the city to fall within only a short time

who would have thought the rebels to be so resourceful
our troops to retreat in small groups scattered through the provinces
general guo xi-yi has returned to he-yang to build his strength
he will train his men to defend the old capital of luo-yang

they dig shallow trenches to rest easy for a while
they will have light work now and pasture their horses
so when your sons leave do not despair
general guo xi-yi treats his men as his children

murphy reading the casualty lists in the paper

von zach V, 7

the official of shi-hao-cun

one evening as i settled in my lodging in shi-hao village
i heard an official rounding up recruits at night
i saw the old landlord climb the back wall and flee
the old landlady opened the gate to answer the noise

the official was shouting in his rage
while the old lady wept bitterly
i listened to her as she said
“my three sons were taken to besiege ye-cheng

a letter just came from one of them
the two others were killed in the battle
i will surely lose the last one soon
both the others dead and gone

now in this house there are no more men
except a grandson still on his mother’s breast
she has not fled yet, she can’t leave the house
she has no clothes fit for wearing outside

although i no longer have the vigor of youth
i, an old woman will go with you, sir, this night
let me answer the need for help in he-yang
i can probably still fix breakfast for the men”

then there were no more words, just the dead of night
though i felt i heard repressed sobbing
and when i left the inn next morning
i saw only the old landlord to say my goodbyes

murphy a bit doddery, but still cooking for the clan

von zach V, 8

the separation of the newly married

the vine that twists and grows on flax
will hardly last a length of time
better to expose a young girl when she is born
than to raise her to marry a soldier

i grew to womanhood and then we married
but our shared bed was hardly warmed
the ceremony held one evening, next morning you left
surely we were victims of some haste

the distance you will go is not so far
you are to defend the front in near he-yang
but the details of the ceremony took all our time
i feel awkward now when i approach your parents

my parents educated and raised me properly
i stayed hidden in the house both day and night
they taught me a virgin will belong only to her husband
as with all animals who have a well-behaved female

now you are fighting on a field of honor
your exposure to danger brings grief to my heart
i would follow you there if only i could
but that would only make your position worse

forget your bride and focus on the battle
do your best in your martial duties
the presence of a woman in camp
would surely keep you distracted

i grew up strong, but in a poor family
i worked long and hard to get my silk clothes
now i pack them away and wear them no longer
i wash the powder and rouge from my face

i look upwards to see countless birds
they all seem to be flying in pairs
only we humans act against our natures
we leave ourselves only longing to be together again

murphy scanning the photos of his first wife into his computer

von zach V, 9

an old man leaving his home

within the walls of the capital there is still no peace
an aging man like myself cannot find a quiet little place
sons and grandchildren have all fallen in battles
there is no purpose in my life all alone

i throw away my cane and march through the gate
the other men with me show their concern
fortunately i still have a few teeth left in my mouth
but my bones have grown brittle with age

but once a man dons his uniform and goes into the field
he must bow to the officers and obey what they say
my old woman falls to her knees in her weeping
it is late in the year and her clothes much too thin

who knows if we shall see each other again
i grieve for her in her inadequate clothes
she shouts her goodbyes, says she will wait for my return
the last i hear she is telling me to eat to keep up my strength

the walls of tu-men have been fortified and are strong
the enemy will find it difficult to cross the huang-he at xing-yuan
the situation is different from that at ye-cheng
though i will surely die it will not be immediate

in one's life there are partings and reunions
and for these neither the young nor the old are favored
when i look back to our life when we were young
i cannot repress a deep lingering sigh of regret

the entire world is consumed with the rage of war
battle fires blaze their red from hills and mountains
everywhere there is the stench of corpse
streams and rivers run red from the blood

but who expects a paradise on the earth
i can find no haven and must do what i can
i have left behind my small miserable hut
my despair wrenches my guts in my pain

murphy bravely facing the ministrations of his dentist

von zach V, 10

the departure of the man who had no family

since the start of the tian-bao regime everything has been bad
the gardens around the houses are overgrown with weeds
in my village there were over a hundred families
now most have scattered to the east or to the west

the few who remain hide their presence
those who died are now but dust and mud
i was in the army which lost the big battle
so i came home to search for the old paths

i wandered the village and found only empty lanes
in the murky dusk there was thorough sadness
i met foxes and wildcats who threatened me
with raised fur they hissed and snorted their fury

in my neighborhood i finally found people
but these were only a few widows
a bird will always seek its own branch, its own nest
i took my rest in my old home, my old village

it being spring i shouldered my old hoe and went to my field
at sundown i worked still, watering, tending my plot
the local officials learned of my return, called me in
they ordered me to practice the big alarm drum

maybe they will station me in my own province
but here life for me has no meaning, no wife, no family
if they keep me close to my old home, i work alone
and i will surely have doubts further afield with others

my family is now all gone, everything is lost
it matters not where i go or what i do
though i will always remember my sickly mother
who died alone these five years ago

she bore me and found no support from me
she cried about that til her death, and so still do i
if one has no family to say his goodbyes to
how can he count himself a full member of humanity

murphy in a patient wait for spring

von zach V, 11

a sigh on a summer day

the summer sun rises in the north east
climbs to the zenith and hangs, never seems to fall
the baking fire penetrates the black earth
there is no escape from this merciless heat

the blue skies admit of no thickness nor thunder
surely the ministers do not desire such dryness
when a small rain does come it scarcely registers
fields which were so fertile before now raise only dust

birds fall from the trees dying of the heat
the lakes recede and fish lie dead on their new shores
thousands of people wander homeless, starving
their only vegetation the rampant weeds

fertile regions to the north of the big huang-he
are still filled with the rebel tigers and wolves
i worry about the distant provinces you-zhou and ji-zhou
the armies which will defeat the rebels suffer there

i cannot eat the food which is given to me
my heart and head are filled with confusion
my mind dwells on the memory of forming the exile government
i fully regret i am not with those competent men

murphy meeting an old student on the subway

von zach V, 12

a sigh on a summer night

the day stretches, the sun will never set
the air is hot smoke which roils my guts
where are the refreshing gusts of wind
to blow my garments in billowing swirls

but finally a brilliant moon rises in the cloudless sky
though only a few streaks reach the floor of the thick forest
it is the second month of summer and the nights are short
i throw open my window to catch a slight breeze

one can perceive the tiniest object in the bright air
the birds and insects who also enjoy the cool of night
this is only natural for both the large and the small
every creature on this earth takes some comfort in life

i think of the warriors on the border all year long
i feel compassion for their daily miseries
where is the water for them to dip their hands
they must hold their sun-hot weapons in agony

even at night they cannot rest and must beat copper pans
to send connecting signals to the farthest post
even if they should earn rank and higher salary
how does this compare to being able to return home

in the morning a sad trumpet sounds from these walls of hua-zhou
storks and cranes squawk as they fly up seeking food
the more the heat oppresses all of us here
the more i long for a time of simple peace

murphy getting creaky in his old age

von zach V, 13

written after celebrating the first day of autumn

the sun and moon never cease their movement
last night moving from summer to autumn
the dark cicadas will shortly find their voice
the fall swallows are massing to fly south

all my life i have longed to retire to the mountains
i'm fifty now and this is still only a wish
i have always been free to quit my official drudgery
so why do i continue these senseless tasks

murphy typing away on a rainy morning

von zach V, 14

i spend the night with a family on yan-zu mountain west of chi-gu valley

i felt unsafe crossing to here through dangerous places
but am more cheerful now having left hua-zhou
the sun warms my back beside a winding creek
the path writhes past ripe mountain fields

birds both small and large sit on the roof of a hut
beside the hedge are spruce and chrysanthemums
i come in the evening like the fisherman of wu-ling
asking for lodging in the garden of peach blossom spring

murphy leaving the daily grind behind

von zach V, 15

wanderings in former times

once i went to visit the immortal qiao wang-ci on hua-gai mountain
who wore a green coat and had feet white as jade from kun-lun
his jade coffin had ascended into the sky long before
at that time, it is told, even the shining sun was sad

in the evening i climbed to the north east point
there in a stone hermitage was his headscarf on a bench
four or five of his students happened along
we all stood in silence and poured our tears

at the time i went to visit this famous mountain
i had to come from a far distant valley
the shared sorrow of his pupils was not what i had wished for
i looked to the heavens in my grief at not seeing the immortal himself

the woods around the hut grew dark and all grew silent
i lay the whole night through in the stone shelter
while i lay there i saw wang-ci come down from the sky altar
a pale moonshine shone on the white crane on which he flew

in the morning i awoke to the sound of a mountain stream
and quickly came down the same way to the valley below
did i worry about the callouses on my green shod feet
no, i was saddened i did not find the elixir which i sought

later on i visited an old friend in the dung-men mountains
i still have warm memories of our agreeable conversations
at that time we reverentially served master dung jing-wei
and here now i stay on alone and miserable

for what have i traveled here to this fickle border
so i could have my desire for the elixir of life diminish
and what does it matter in the end about my family
who earlier caused me to neglect the red cinnabar, the elixir of life

and though i am saddened that my hair has now turned white
i still have the muscular strength to climb high mountains
now i rest on my floor and think of the long life of the evergreen spruce
this renews my desire to seek the elixir, perhaps on mount lu or mount huo

murphy shaking his head and bulling ahead as usual

von zach V, 16

the beautiful woman

a marvelous woman in her time surpassed all in her beauty
though she now lives alone in a desolate valley
she reminds herself she came from a good family
though misfortune led her to this barren forest

when rebellion broke out in the east at shensi
my brothers went there and were killed
their high official status did them no good
now i only wish to have their bones for a burial

the world wants to forget the unfortunate
everything in life changes in the flicker of a candle
like this husband of mine who is unfaithful
he chooses a new woman as lovely as jade

the mimosa knows the time and closes her leaves in the evening
yet even the mandarin ducks desire not to sleep alone
my husband takes pleasure only in the laughter of his new friend
why would he turn toward the sodden tears of his old wife

in the mountains water will continue to run clear
when it reaches the valley it becomes tainted and cloudy
my servant girl has returned from the village having sold my pearls
she now gathers plants to patch the holes in my roof

i will gather these beautiful flowers but not for my hair
and cut an armful of the bitter though ever faithful cypress
the weather is cooling and the cloth of my sleeves is too thin
but i will stand for a while here in the bamboo at sunset

murphy pausing for a bit of reverie

von zach V, 17

i remember my friend zheng qian, 18th of his clan, finance controller of tai-zhou

three rivers separate tian tai mountain from this place
mornings and evenings the winds whip their waves
even if the exiled zheng qian tried to return
his age and illness would stop him along the way

before he left us he was free, a gull on the water
now he is the hare caught in the hunter's net
he must find his way among alien peoples
i hear he looks as a maniac in his grief

there in tai zhou are mountain goblins with only one leg
giant pythons slither as thick around as trees
in that desolate town he must howl his fears
no one would volunteer to go there to share his misery

men have always been exiled to their fate among barbarians
outstanding abilities calumnified to their misfortune
master zheng suffers the fate of xi kang and ruan ji
who were so hated by the smaller minds of their time

now he is a minor official stranded in the wastelands
his eyes are murky, his hair turned completely white
the yellow cap of the age of 70 he wears with distinction
but it clashes with the green uniform of his lowly position

we met in the fullness of our poetic youth
brought together by the shared lure of the wine cup
i long for his companionship, but this cannot be
the world stretching between us is far too wide

murphy being fitted for a yellow hat of his own

von zach V, 18

five poems, in which i revisit my inspirations (1 of 5)

a dragon can hibernate for three long years
an old crane can fly ten thousand miles
worthy men in former times when serving lesser leaders
fared no better than those who are ill-fated today

xi kang met an unnatural death before his time
kong ming was fortunate to serve one who valued his worth
on long di mountain one can find the mighty spruce
whose immense trunks are used by careful craftsmen

the snow and ice is nothing to these mighty plants
but if left unused for too many years even they become rotten

murphy wondering if his dotage has arrived

von zach V, 19

five poems, in which i revisit my inspirations (2 of 5)

pang de-gong was once a man of rare substance
he never left his mountain retreat to serve in the imperial capital
the elders of xiang yang venerated his being
they were especially attracted to his steady purpose

he must have had plans to help in his time's great crises
but he feared the close mesh of the law's entangling nets
if a forest is luxuriant birds will nest in abundance
if the river water pools deep large fish will gather

for all his time he hid with his family in the lu men mountains
even governor liu biao could not lure him from his hiding place

murphy tending his beloved indoor plants

von zach V, 20

five poems, in which i revisit my inspirations (3 of 5)

tao yuan-ming withdrew from the world
though one cannot be sure he understood the dao
as i read over all his collected poetry
i found he constantly complains of his miseries

should not a real daoist be content with his fate
perhaps tao neglected studying philosophy as a youth
among his sons were both the competent and the silly
should they not have better reflected a father's heart

murphy regretting wasted time spent reading adventure novels

von zach V, 21

five poems, in which i revisit my inspirations (4 of 5)

he zhi-zhang usually spoke in his zhe-qiang dialect;
as an official he was renowned for his eccentricities
he petitioned the emperor to be excused from state duties
and retired to his old home wearing the yellow hat of a 70 year old

his idealism was always irreproachable
but now, unfortunately, he is dead and gone from us
in shan yin xian between the big river and the sea
it is cool and mild, the sun beams on his reed covered hut

murphy content and happy in his fifth floor cave

von zach V, 22

five poems, in which i revisit my inspirations (5 of 5)

i deeply regret meng hao-ran never became a court official
and now he has gone into the lightless grave
but he did leave us with his many poems
wherein he often outshone bao zhao and xie ling-yun

no longer does he speak of finding old fish in clear streams
nor of the spring rains on fields of sugar cane
now i look to the clouds, southeast toward qin-zhou
and give thoughtful voice to describe my pain

murphy going to the bar early to drown his sorrows

von zach V, 23

two poems wherein i express my thoughts (1 of 2)

if one wished to rise to the heavens as does the carriage of the sun
one should use dragons which are sometimes captured in fu-sang
if then the driver could stop the carriage, his mind stronger than the dragons
only the waves of the sea would continue their stormy tumult

for if truth be known one's life is easy to lose
and the rebels fight in vain against the emperor
i suppress my tears and speak of them no more
yet the will of heaven remains still unknown

murphy tossing the knucklebones in the roman forum

von zach V, 24

two poems wherein i express my thoughts (2 of 2)

if one wakes to war on earth there is nothing better than a horse
and if there were no good horses why would one think this
now there are horses who would like to run for a thousand miles
fast as the wind they would meet all your expectations

that is the kind which comes from the wo wa river in gan-su
whose appearance is far from that of a worn out nag
they do not compare to the common sort of horse
riding one leads to anticipating success in war

murphy carefully eying the bronc he's been assigned

von zach V, 25

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (1 of 20)

everywhere i look, i see the difficulties of life
i left hua zhou to travel to distant regions to live
i crossed lung mountain filled with fear
my heart grief stricken at lung-xi-guan pass

at night i listened to the cascading yu-lung river
now it's autumn, niao-shu mountain is deserted
as we traveled west i heard more about renewed violence
overcome by my fears i have settled in qin-zhou

murphy getting on a train in sweetwater on his way to boston

von zach V, 26

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (2 of 20)

the old palace of wei-xiao is now a temple
sitting north of the town wall of qin-zhou
the moss-covered outside gate in ruins
moldering paintings bedeck an empty hall

within the drops of dew on the leaves, the moon shimmers
the clouds driven by the wind above the stream
the clear wei river flows relentlessly east
heartless, with no sympathy for the sadness i feel

murphy trimming the wick on his midnight candle

von zach V, 27

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (3 of 20)

cheng-xian is also in the qin-zhou district
from here the post road passes through the desert to turkestan
the barbarians have raised more than a thousand tents there
while the number of han amounts to only ten thousand families

the horses here are proud and their sweat drops in red pearls
the barbarians lower white powdered foreheads in their spirited dancing
the young han people i've met from lin-tao to the west
also show the same highly animated spirits

murphy writing home detailing the marvel of his travels in alaska

von zach V, 28

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (4 of 20)

this frontier land pulses with the sound of drums and trumpets
especially at nightfall along the banks of the river
it is autumn and their clamor rises as if from the bowels of the earth
carried by the wind their sadness penetrates the clouds

the shivering cicada clinging to the turning leaves is quiet
a lone bird flies in the darkening sky to his nest in the mountains
now everywhere in the land are these sounds of war
where, oh where, is the final destination of my journey

murphy tossing his indian head pennies for a yi-jing divination

von zach V, 29

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (5 of 20)

the imperial commissioner from chang-an needs high-class horses
earlier more than ten thousand head from here were delivered to him
moving clouds of these marvelous horses were killed in successive fights
the autumn grass all around is left uncropped, become high

it could be said that they were truly a dragon-like race
yet all i can see now is one old gray horse left in a field
it is neighing pitifully for the next battlefield
looking to the heavens for one last call from the emperor

murphy pitying the old carriage horse waiting patiently outside central park

von zach V, 30

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (6 of 20)

trumpets sound from the town walls, they are echoed from the distant mountains
the imperial troops have been recalled to the capital chang-an
new troops are hurried from the sea provinces to defend the passes at huang-he
they have received orders for mongolia to fight against the turfan

they endured much strain on the march through desolated lands
the forests long before stripped of birds and game
how can they endure such continuous garrison change
they are angry the imperial troops were ordered to lift their siege

murphy shaking his head at news of the extension of the tour of duty of the troops in iraq

von zach V, 31

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (7 of 20)

scattered all around are chaotic, countless mountains
qin-zhou sits isolated below alone in the valley
there is no wind here but the clouds above scud incessantly
it is not yet night but the moon is already above the pass

what could have delayed the imperial envoy to the turfan
he must have stayed to kill the lou-lan, their chief
i look long toward the west into the smoke and the dust
my face distorted by anxiety and grief

murphy scanning the newspaper for the worst of the news

von zach V, 32

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (8 of 20)

zhang qian who once searched for the source of the huang-he
has returned after successfully negotiating with the eastern hordes
the zodiac turns its slow way through the cattle shepherd
and the marvelous horses of ferghana still pour in

if i think of the rebel's continuing hold of yu and yan
i ask only when the connections might be restored
the brave youth who went east with ye cheng are destroyed
in this qin-zhou evening i listen to sad flutes of our barbarian allies

murphy writing slow sad songs for the basso profundo of his mind

von zach V, 33

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (9 of 20)

today my eyes have regained their pleasure in sight
beside a small lake i chance upon a nice roadside inn
a bamboo grove has branches leaning to the ground
high pastures above make half the sky green

the bits of scenery here complement each other
sudden noise as turfan imperial commissioners arrive
but my mind returns to the thought of an apartment here
how much that reminds me of my happy hut in chang-an

murphy carefully sweeping in the corners of his room

von zach V, 34

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (10 of 20)

the clouds rise over the mountains of the kun lun
it rains incessantly here on the border
scouts for the barbarians seek passage over the wei river
the imperial envoy recalls the turfan for the defense

fire and smoke rise above the tents of our troops
cattle and sheep roam the pastures of the mountain villages
my small hut is swallowed by the thick autumn grasses
i keep my small gate closed and the rains continue

murphy reading the papers content to sip his tepid tea

von zach V, 35

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (11 of 20)

here in this old frontier town it is inhospitably cold
all around autumn clouds stoop to reach to the ground
the yellow snow goose hangs her wings in the dreary rain
even blue falcons are forced to forage for food in the mud

who do we have to venture north to snatch the rebel ji men
our generals prosper most in the west fighting the turfan
i can accomplish nothing here, being merely a scholar
an old man who listens to the pounding of war drums

murphy absorbing the news of yet another car bombing in the mideast

von zach V, 36

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (12 of 20)

the mountain cloister affords a gentle scene
a watercourse flows to the north past qin-zhou
by the deserted monk's hut are ancient trees
the pure water of the stream is famed throughout the land

under precipitous rock formations autumn flowers bloom
beyond the ruins of the tower and its bell the sun sets
as i look around the misery of my destiny overwhelms me
my mind's ears can only hear sadness in the wind above the river

murphy anticipating every hint of hurt

von zach V, 37

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (13 of 20)

i am told that here, deep within the dong-ke valley
some dozens of families live, covert, hidden
the thick rattan grows up to their doors and covers their roofs
bamboos reflect on the water as their roots pierce the sand below

the soil, though poor, yields its harvest of rice
melons grow abundantly on the southern slopes
the boatmen informed me before of what to expect
and i wanted to lose myself in a peach blossom spring

murphy playing the numbers on an auspicious day

von zach V, 38

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (14 of 20)

the cave of lake chou-chi is known to connect underground
all the way to the xiao you-tian caves of the wang-wu mountains
the famous fish formerly found there are no more
yet we can still call this place miraculous

this paradise lies quite near qin-zhou to the southwest
and i have long wished to visit its famous 99 springs
how i would love to spend the balance of my days there
near the mountains of white clouds in a small reed hut

murphy sighing as he clammers from his easy chair

von zach V, 39

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (15 of 20)

i still see no possibility to once more visit the blue sea
everywhere on the roads one meets only weapons and horses
now in this frontier town autumn strips bare the trees
looking out of my humble quarters i see heavy rain throughout the mountains

ruan ji took his pleasure wandering throughout the land
pang de-gong withdrew into the mountains and was never seen again
i would like to enjoy dung-ke valley in full idleness and freedom
and no longer pluck my white hairs to look young enough to become an official

murphy rooted to his favorite chair sipping his chilled sake'

von zach V, 40

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (16 of 20)

tung-ke valley has many beautiful rock formations
it cannot be compared with any other valley landscape
as the sun sets many beautiful birds fly high up to their nests
fleecy summer clouds drift slowly through the blue sky

the local people boast of their inaccessible place
i would also like to claim part of the bamboo grove on the river as mine
collecting medicinal herbs i would spend a pleasurable old age
but i have yet to tell my children of such yearning

murphy choosing a comfortable, worn, old cotton shirt before going out for brunch

von zach V, 41

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (17 of 20)

on the border here autumn clouds weigh heavy this evening
soon it will be dark and the morning promises gloom
the rains drips from the gutter wetting the window curtains
mountain fogs creep over the courtyard walls

a cormorant peers expectantly down into a fishless well
earthworms crawl from the ground onto the floors of the back hall
seldom it is to see a rider or a cart pass this way
the gate is almost overgrown with grasses and weeds

murphy reading a novel as he waits out the inclement weather

von zach V, 42

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (18 of 20)

another autumn ends in this remote secluded place
i, high in the mountains, still cannot return to chang-an
the clouds above the great wall part, then close over again
when briefly seen the sun shines only dimly in the sky

beacon fires, which warn the people of the turfan enemy, are always lit
urgent dispatches, war news, carried hurriedly back and forth
the western barbarian princes are allied with our tang dynasty
how is it possible that they sit in council with heaven's son

murphy sure that the world news will talk only of killings tonight

von zach V, 43

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (19 of 20)

the battles with the turfan in the feng-lin mountains still rage
travel through the he-zhou district is still met with difficulties
up where the lighthouses of the border guards tower to the clouds
the wells of our exposed troops have begun to go dry

the turmoil rages into the furthest regions to the west
cold moonlight shines down on the dwellings of the turfan in the north
this old man looks forward to a flying general like a second li guang
to be appointed by the emperor to come smite these hateful barbarians

murphy a hero of the people in his walter mitty daydream

von zach V, 44

twenty various poems about qin-zhou (20 of 20)

emperor yao, the founder of the tang dynasty, was a formidable man
now this old man waits in the wastelands watching the restoration
i need my wife to help dry my medicinal herbs in the sun
i need my children to meet my guests at the gate

i have heard there are remarkable books hidden in the you caves
and reading within them one finds mention of more in the caves at chou-chi
yet all i can do now is remind my old phoenix friends in the emperor's court
that this old undistinguished dressmaker's bird sits out here on his bare branch

murphy riding the clouds through the window's eye

von zach V, 45

looking out over the plains

the clarity of autumn air seems endless to the eyes
though dark clouds peek over the distant mountains
the surface of the far river reflects the blue of the sky
the smoke of hearth fires smudge a distant village

the few leaves left on trees flutter in the wind
the sun sinks slowly behind the remote mountains
why does a solitary crane return late to its nest
tired crows filled the woods at the beginning of dusk

murphy gathering his picnic supplies and turning toward home

von zach V, 46

the milky way

throughout most of the year the milky way is a bit of a blur
however when autumn comes it becomes especially clear and bright
though sometimes obscured by scattered clouds
it never fails to shine throughout the night

this river of stars runs over the imperial city
and carries the moon with it past the border towns
the cattle shepherd and the weaver cross the river each fall
and the winds and waves never perturb their stream

murphy reading the manual of his new backyard telescope

von zach V, 47

the east tower

the road to the west stretches out thousands of miles
as soldiers march through the gate to seek the enemy
in new fights their skeletons will add to the number of the dead
and the spirits of those killed will never return to their homes

the roof of the tower rises high into the stormy air
as all along the dark foot of the wall a river writhes
below in the noise of the street flies the imperial messenger
carrying fresh orders to the headquarters on the battlefield

murphy turning on the tv to hear the evening news

von zach V, 48

the mountain cloister

in this cloister in the wilderness live a few priests
a narrow path winds high up into a walled garden
a musk deer sleeps in a bed of carnations
a parrot gnaws at a fresh ripened peach

the grounds contain numerous small creeks to cross
on top of an outcropping of rock is a substantial dwelling
standing in the evening in the tower of the cloister
the clarity of the air shows the smallest feature a hundred miles away

murphy entering the elevator of the empire state building on a cloudless day

von zach V, 49

on an autumn day the hermit juan fang sends me 30 bundles of shallots

within the hedge door of the hermit's hut he grows his fine vegetables
in the autumn his harvest is bountiful enough to give some away
i receive a full basket of shallots still wet with the dew
he sends them to me without my having to ask

the bundles have the light green color of fresh hay
onion tips glow like the white ends of fine chopsticks of jade
as one's hair grows white the limbs get stiff and cold
but these vegetables are healthy and will warm an old man's blood

murphy rinsing the scallions for the chicken soup simmering in the pot

von zach V, 50

my servant searches for a small monkey and will send him to me

men say that in the southern provinces of guang-dung and guang-si
small monkeys hang down from the limbs of every tree
my whole family already imagines they hear the monkey playing
so i instruct my servant to go find such a fist sized monkey and send him to me

now we imagine how his wizened face will resemble a barbarian
and we will train him with a riding switch to do his tricks
the servant promises to find the cleverest of monkeys
i'm sure my children will find great joy with such a pet

murphy watching lemurs leap on the discovery channel

von zach V, 51

the turfan sword

the sword was brought here from the remote foreign country
it is plain with no inlaid pearls, nor jade, obviously not han
but all in all it seems a most remarkable blade
it seems to glow at night with a mystical, subdued sparkle

the white tiger spirit of he lu's sword appears some nights over his grave
two swords buried under the prison by feng-cheng turn into their dragon spirits
now, unfortunately, riotous battles still rage in the empire
so i will hand this sword over to the army for their use

murphy honing his chinese cleaver before chopping his fresh vegetables

von zach V, 52

the copper scooping bucket

there is still no end to the fighting around qin-zhou
earlier in peaceful times quietude ruled in the jasper palace
then, before the copper bucket had fallen into the well
one always heard the squeaking rope hauled upwards from the depths

i imagine the thoughts of the young woman who turned the crank
she must have been saddened when the bucket was lost
for although the embossed dragons were half worn away
this relic of the imperial palace could be exchanged for gold

murphy marveling at old saws in the museum of technology

von zach V, 53

what here my gaze falls upon

throughout the entire district now the grapes have ripened
and clover runs rampant high up on the mountains
the clouds above the passes seem to always bring rain
but the rivers near here are never quite full

the signal fires do not frighten the barbarian women
their men are adept at steering the camels through the town
it bothers me though, that all i see these days, over and over
are scenes which sadden, confuse, and trouble

murphy cursing the afternoon rush hour traffic

von zach V, 54

written on the occasion of the return of the chinese princess from the uighuren court

i hear that even the uighur troops have met defeat
so even our alliance arranged through marriage has failed
it is fortunate the princess of our court
has escaped from huang-he and returned to us

in her grief she no longer dresses in her finery
grown thin her clothes hang loosely about her
now the rebel hordes threaten even more battles
so many of our troops have been lost in vain

murphy wincing at the day's body count from iraq

von zach V, 55

the swallows return to the south

is it because they escape the ice and the snow
or perhaps they become lonely when everyone else leaves
yet there is no altering the seasonal change
instinctively they must return to the south

they would never return wearing the colors of spring
and why do the young fledglings not fear this new place
if their old nest is not destroyed they will use it again
and flit here and there about their old master

murphy cleaning up the summer cabin on memorial day weekend

von zach V, 56

the house cricket

a cricket in the house is a but tiny thing
yet he touches the human heart with his song of sorrow
he seldom sings out in the grasses and woods
but he is inside now singing for people

a lonely traveler will be brought to tears
a wife left alone will not sleep the whole night
sad string music or a happy flute stir one also
but nothing moves us more than pure nature's song

murphy searching the top of the tree for the chirring cardinal

von zach V, 57

reeds

a reed is thin and will often snap
especially in the harsh autumn winds
for only a short time does it show snow white blossoms
whose petals decorate the rippling waves

in spite of its frailty it sprouts early in spring
and with plenteous morning dews grows slender and tall
in the southern rivers and lakes it wilts later
but everywhere it becomes frail in the growing cold

murphy lamenting the creeping decrepitude of age

von zach V, 59

bitter bamboo

in the lush green of a bamboo grove some is found
in spite of its scrawny nature it pushes upward
but because of its bitterness the insects shun it
the birds of spring will not build their nests

it is never found near the houses of the rich
there is little good one can say about it
yet if such a plant has the luck of a hermit's seclusion
it can develop undisturbed, roots enduring the frost

murphy wincing after biting into a sour apple

von zach V, 60

sunset

the wind picks up only after the sun has set
then the crows fly up to the town wall
the yellow clouds above still do not move
but the shining water of the river ripples with waves

the barbarian women chatter and laugh
their men stroll around, break into song
a mounted guard begins his night's patrol
wielding the carved lance of the emperor

murphy sipping his evening aperitif

von zach V, 61

the evening lighting of the lighthouse

the lighthouse in the evening spreads its flame afar
its role is to announce the status of the emperor's borders
here, in qin-zhou, it looks but a paltry glow
but its light is still visible in these remote areas

it illuminates shen-si and warns of impending danger
it makes it difficult for the enemy to cross over lung mountain
it has been told to me that 1000 riders watch its flare
ready to gallop immediately to the defense of the border

murphy wiggling his toes to stay awake on sentry duty

von zach V, 62

flute playing in autumn

i feel i should play this sad song to its end
but i fear your clothes will become sodden with tears
my pain has become overwhelming these last few days
the soldiers who have left will return only as bleached bones

though i now beseech you with this dirge
my playing is quiet, becoming too soft to hear its end
the listening clouds of autumn have ceased to scud
a light wind rises, touched by the sad sounds

murphy drowning his sorrow in a hot sake' bath

von zach V, 63

washing clothes

husband, i well know you will never return from the frontier
but it is autumn and time for me to use the washing stone
the cold weather approaches and you will need warm clothes
no matter how much this long separation tears into my heart

how can i think to escape the drudgery of this washing
i want you to be touched by my efforts
every fiber of my being is focused on this labor
if you listen hard you will hear the pounding

murphy cooking breakfast for his grandchildren

von zach V, 64

remembering family in the moon light

the guard drums throb through the night
no one can travel more, we're lucky we're here
on the borderlands with an autumn moon
and the only friend heard is a lonely wild goose

the dew of this night glows bright
white in its crustal iciness
so bright the moon as in my youth
when it rose above where i was born

i remember all my younger brothers
they are scattered by these pains
i have no family left to counsel
no one to ask if they live, or die

i send letters to where they might be
i know my words still can't reach them
the only thing i might add
there is no end to the fighting

murphy sipping his cool plum wine

von zach V, 65

i give voice to my feelings

the incessant fighting goes on and on
my brothers and sisters torn from my grasp
i wipe away tears and note blood on my shirt
loose grey hairs snarl my grooming comb

the ground here is flat and the horizon is far
this evening the river flows slowly away
how i can endure more of this idleness, decay
i fear i will never see my siblings again

murphy stuck out in brooklyn with the trains not running

von zach V, 66

i dream of li tai-bo (1 of 2)

the mourning of the dead will come to an end
the separation of the living is endless anguish
jiang-nan is a hot, pestilential land
li tai bo exiled there and i hear no news

but last night he appeared to me in my dreams
it is clear i am always thinking of him
yet i fear this li tai bo is not the soul of a living man
the immense distance between us is too far to cross

when his soul left the maple woods were green
now he returns through the dark passes of night
he is now caught in the net of the prosecutor
how could he have soared free on feathered wings

the sinking moon still lights roof beams above my bed
the face in my dreams is still almost seen
he lives now in a place of deep water and high waves
he must be especially careful around the water dragons

murphy thumbing through his college yearbook

von zach V, 67

i dream of li tai-bo (2 of 2)

the floating clouds of the days pass through the skies
but the far wanderer has long not been seen
for three nights now i have dreamed of him
he truly reveals his affection for me

in each dream the parting was far from easy
complaints were made of how difficult his journey
on the rivers and lakes the wind and waves were high
you always fear the boat will be upset

leaving me thrice you were scratching your grey hairs
as if to point out your wasting of youth
the capital now is filled with young new officials
while such a great man as you lives in misery

who would tell me now the law is used wisely
when such a mature, gifted man remains in exile
the fame of eternity is a cold, cold friend
when it is the only comfort in your tomb

murphy crafting a website for the edification of his grandchildren

von zach V, 68

three poems in which i express my thoughts (1 of 3)

i climb down from my horse on the old battlefield
abandoned desolation lies in all four directions
a sadness of wind pushes scattered white clouds
loosens yellowed leaves to fall at my feet

ants crawl through the rotten bones strewn all about
creeping vines coil about these fragments of men
old men such as i sigh at the sight and move on
young men of today determine to widen frontiers

first we the han win a battle, then the barbarians
the boundaries remain fluid and dangerous
where can we find a consistent winner as was lian po
then the army with its general could finally enjoy rest

murphy reading a history of sherman's march to the sea

von zach V, 69

three poems in which i express my thoughts (2 of 3)

i climb the border mountain in late autumn
to look south toward ma-yi in shan-si
our barbarian allies have been sent east to fight the rebels
no warriors of any worth are left behind in this land

abandoned tents of the men lie scattered on the ground
the clouds seem to hover above the desolate scene
old men and the helpless gather at the sides of the road
hoping against hope that the fighting will end in victory

the siege of ye-cheng held by the rebels goes on
the fallen bodies are heaped up to make small hills
all the generals have been amply rewarded for their efforts
where can we find the men to finally see this through

murphy wondering how lincoln kept the union together through that last hard year of fighting

von zach V, 70

three poems in which i express my thoughts (3 of 3)

who among us would say that the harvest this year won't come
the fruit bringing waters have now fallen, though a little late
for the maturing of the fields there was ample autumn rain
now full plump millet hangs heavy over the edges of the fields

the spring shoots have had their full nine months to grow
they have finally begun to wear the ripe colors of fall
i admonish you scholars who huddle in your rude huts
do not be lose hope as you remain unused in this misery

when the time is ripe you will be able to use your talents and energy
whether sooner or later will not matter in the fruitful ending
lu pi-weng retired from society to seek the miracle mushrooms
his example is the one i would wish to follow as i bide my time

murphy listening to the medicine priest describe the peyote road

von zach V, 71

far at the end of the world i think of my friend li tai-bo

a cold wind rises here at the end of the world
old friend, what would be your thoughts in this inhospitable season
when will the flying geese return with a letter from you
from the land of high waters where you still now remain

we writers know how fickle is worldly success
the demons in your new land want to pick your bones clean
you should rather console the pained soul of chu yuan
and drop a poem into the mi-lo river for all unjustly exiled men

murphy content to peck at his keyboard as his daily chore

von zach V, 72