

two old friends are promoted

in qin zhou i read in the list of the official appointments of xue ju (third of his clan) and bi yo (fourth of his clan). being an old friend of the both, i honor them from a distance in my desolate position. (poem in 30 rhymes)

in today's world little notice is given to poets
though you two serve as models of what should be
among our friends you know how i was always the unlucky one
while you two displayed an energy of miraculous mental powers

during a single day you would master myriads of works
while everyone else slaved to understand a single chapter
your poetic efforts are both nimble and astute
you shall be valuable for the emperor in your new positions

how could you show your old friendship toward me
by the new poems you send so i might have such pleasure again
since we parted my hair has become almost entirely white
would that we should meet in the future as friends once more

once we shared everything when we had nothing
we complained together about the difficulties we faced
first here and then there we pooled our scanty rations
we were as water chestnuts carried by the flood

then, while the jealous clan drove competents out of state service
the miasma of rebellion suddenly darkened the world
we were ashamed of those who aided this false minister
many called for the help of the uighurs as others had done in the past

yet you both returned to the capital from lo-yang in vain
and were rewarded only by being cast into prison
meanwhile the aid of the uighurs was accepted
and the bad odor of the tatars seeped through the land

however, the strength of emperor su-zong won back the empire
and again the imperial prestige shone anew throughout the realm
impatiently the old seat of power, chang-an, awaited the return of his majesty
while sacrificial smells once again wafted through the forefather temple

although all the barbarian's roots were strongly entrenched
now finally they were expelled with uncommon efficiency
once again incense burned in shu jing palace in the capital
once again the pond with the wang yun pavilion was filled with water

then came the day the imperial state coach entered into chang-an
the different dignitaries were already gathered like heaven's stars
at that time xue ju was still the victim of a smear campaign
and bi yo, the archivist, stood isolated without colleagues

i, appointed as censor, hurried every morning to the phoenix palace
and returned from the audience sighing deeply at the experience of my colleagues
i already wanted to draw the attention of the world to both these men
who were not used to promoting self, and whose isolation i deplored

now, finally, these valuable swords are dug out from undeserved neglect
once again to be wielded so their sharpness can take effect
i only brought misery upon myself criticizing ineffectual officials
did not the sages of old caution not to swim against the current?

i have been relegated to qin-zhou alongside the banks of the clear wei river
i hum old songs here wishing to be back in chang-an alongside the murky jing
here military orders are still sent out, as earlier there, in undue haste
and here the guard fires still burn on and on incessantly

the tiredness of the warriors shows the success of the rebel's leftovers
and battles arise anew close to where i now reside
the inputs of loyal officials are fully words of the outrage
and patriots like xue and pi cry out their indignation.

generals sit idly by in the border areas and do nothing
their undeserved salaries are superfluously hoarded away
i look with longing for establishment of a limited peace.
but we have none here who would wield the sword to achieve it

here in kan-su parrots such as i achieve little praise and no esteem
to combat this i would like to claim my friends in china as brothers
the autumn winds have returned to the border where i now live
in my quietude of place i think of you two and your valuable work

murphy toiling in the boiler room of bureaucracy
8-14-07 10:00 am

von zach VI, 1

i send this poem of 30 rhymes to imperial commissioner gao shi from peng-zhou, 35th of his clan, and to the zhang-shi from guo-zhou, cen shen, 27th of his clan

you, my old friends, are forgotten in your exile
while i sit here alone in oppressive misery
despite my old age my talent is not exhausted
and with the advent of autumn new inspiration returns

nature shows her fullest flamboyance in the fall
we poets should never neglect this rich show
you two renowned scholars are separated like opposite ends of the clouds
living in your lonely isolation in far distant areas

kao shih and cen shen have progressed steadily in the art of poetry
they now are poets as capable as shen yo and pao chao
their themes deal with the pleasure of living with nature
their poetries imbued with the tao from beginning to end

the disasters of unhappy fu jia-mo and lo bin-wang are never forgotten
and in newer times one regrets the troubles of lu zhao-lin and wang bo
yet your official positions now in exile are still significant
while the destiny of those worthy men was truly pitiable

you, gao shih, appointed governor, are not absolutely rejected by the emperor
you, cen shen, are to be half a governor and will certainly rise upwards like a bird
when will i have in my hands again beautiful poems from you
my letters to you are all written awaiting a suitable messenger

we all know a man must be able to make his way in every situation
but away from friends he needs a strong constitution for the fight for existence
here, far from home, i think of the far wanderings of meng ci and confucius
for quite a while now i have been bedridden paying for my past excesses

i have suffered incessantly for the last three years from malaria
and that one demon which has attacked me will not let me go
every other day he strikes my fat and marrow and makes me shiver
it's as if he encased my entire body in ice and snow

in vain i have attempted to hide from him in inaccessible places
i am ashamed that i often disguised my face to escape his wrath
how i stagger when i try to go walking about
whether i stay here or leave my future is difficult.

because I could not afford to live in chang-an
i have moved my entire family here from the border at qin-zhou
even as the requests for service by liu biao went unanswered
i will remain here like pang de-gong til my death in my hiding place

my heart has lost its honor and wishes only to live with the birds and to fish
my body has lost weight and i fear only the ravenous wolves and jackals
the vegetation here on long mountain appears inhospitable and dusty
and even the clouds over the tao river contain only dirty smears of color

peng-zhou lies in si-chuan beyond sword tower pass
the lovely scenery in guo lies by ding lake in he-nan
the hairpin of jade from the jing mountains brings a chill of joy when worn
the paper from si-chuan used in letter writing shines bright its white

the black hemp from guo-zhou is cooked and then sun dried
the red oranges from peng-zhou ripen under the autumn leaves
what difference remains between your areas and the place of the immortals
both are rich with beautiful foods and goods, and glorious scenery

cen shen deals in his bamboo pavilion with the preparation of the elixir of life
while gao shi reads his books on the bank of the flower island
have you not recently written more of your marvelous poetry
though i fear from here in the distance you are overburdened with official duties

the old dignity of a governor, which comes from the han times, remains for gao shi
the easy customs from guo-zhou still touch from the time of emperor yao
the world needs men such as you to remedy its present needs
the destiny of scholars like me is to live in poverty

the rebel chi yu was, in the end, punished ignominiously
those tatars with the rioter an-lu-shan will not remain in high spirits
when this rebellion is finally suppressed i will pack up my food
and come visit you both to hold our literary conversations once again

murphy inside on a rainy day visiting the distant past in the pages of a book
8-16-07 10:15 am

von zach VI, 2

i send these 20 rhymes to the poet li tai-po

some few years back the bemused scholar he zhi-zhang
famously called you an immortal exiled to earth
for as soon as you picked up the brush you wrote as a tempest
and when finished even demons and ghosts were moved to tears

since then your fame has spread far and wide
rising suddenly out of your undeserved obscurity
the emperor himself took especial notice of your poems
which were well deserving of the whole world's praise

the dragon boat of the emperor once waited for you to awake from drunkenness
the brocade coat awarded in poetry contests was yours whenever you entered
many days you had admission to the most internal rooms of the emperor
a cloud of ambitious scholars tried to rise to your level by copying you

your request to retire and return to your native country was graciously granted
in your travels you met me and our hearts harmonized, as if we had always been friends
you stayed true to your inclination for the secluded life
truly you preserved your integrity both in public and in private life

i loved your independence and desire for telling stories
i shared your divine disposition for the love of wine
in he-nan we danced drunkenly in the park of the prince hsiao from liang
in shan-dong in the spring we walked singing on the shore of the si river.

in spite of your high talent you never wished for political success
holding yourself aloof you retired to live alone with no official trappings
your moral behavior was as exemplary as that of ni heng
you became one with the poor scholars like yuan xian

being hungry you had to beg for your food, and yet were slandered for avarice
as ma yuan carried pearly seeds of barley and was accused of having precious stones
then you were exiled to the wu ling mountains, the land of scorching vapors
these san wei mountains were always a place for deported state officials

how many years can you survive there eluding the unlucky birds of death
i weep for you as confucius wept for the ill-fated unicorn
though kept against your will by a prince who rails against the throne
you are falsely said to have helped the rebellion against the throne

you refused all false gifts and attempted your escape
this is especially clear in what you wrote from your prison cell
it was held against you that you were already once an exile
why was there no one to stand up and tell the truth

standing on the river shore i am now just risen from my sick bed
a weak old man feebly singing under the autumn moon
would that i could mount a raft on the great river in heaven
i would come and explain to all how unjust to keep you in such misery

murphy writing a brief for the appellate court concerning poetic license
8-17-07 3:15 pm

von zach VI, 3

i send this poem of 50 rhymes to my old friends, jia zhi 6th of his clan, police chief from yo-zhou (in hu-nan), and yan wu 8th of his clan, governor of ba-zhou (in si-chuan)

in the midst of howling monkeys on the giant heng mountain in yu-zhou
near the flyway of the birds over the mountains in ba-zhou
live my two old friends, far, far away from here
both exiled there as officials in unhappy circumstances

both capitals are again in our hands, the world returns to order
yet mercy and disfavor of the emperor reaches officials in different ways
so was the talented jia yi exiled to chang-sha
and yan wu, forced to end his days fishing alone in the mountain streams

i remember how we three hurried once into the imperial headquarters in feng-xiang
to announce ourselves there, anxious to be of service to the throne
we mourned the defeat of ge shu-han fighting the tatars
and wondered who should be sent as envoy to the uighurs

this was when no soldiers guarded the emperor su-zong in feng-xiang
when the warships were left idle on kun-ming lake in chang-an
when our towns throughout the northeast had fallen
when our brave troops were scattered and ineffectual

when the painted horns of the rebels sounded incessantly
when the star of the barbarians reigned triumphant in luo-yang
still, even the poorly educated felt an-lu-shan would fail
and the knowledgeable predicted the same for shi si-ming

the rebels remind one of foolish birds who try to fill the eastern sea with pebbles
or the stupidity of those seeking to draw blood from the sky with arrows
every district immediately rallied around the emperor and his need
with the first drum signal the patriotic all moved forward invincibly

the clouds to the north of feng-xiang opened up
the sun shone at the summit of t'ai bo mountain
the dead bodies of the rebels were piled high in wei-zhou
the imperial armed forces advanced with ease toward yan in zhi-li

the imperial chariot returned to the high palace towers in chang-an
and the troops descended in the valleys of eight streams from shen-si
at this time i was mercifully allowed to accompany the emperor to chang-an
the formation of the clouds along our way there were favorable omens

then the imperial officers again donned the breast plates of leopards and tigers
the civil officials wore their unicorn raiment carrying the whip with jade handles
all began to assume their accustomed place at court functions

even the horses danced in formation with new crowd pleasing steps

red blossoms of spring contrasted with icy red roofs of the imperial city
the evergreen trees faded into the obliterating fullness of mist
all imperial officials had been saddened by the ongoing rebellion
the tears of the elderly citizens streamed down their cheeks

when the emperor wept over the burning of the forefather temple, a harsh wind blew
yet by the time of big audiences of the first month delightful weather appeared
the tribute rice from liang and han was distributed to us every month
and people received money to rebuild their houses from the emperor's private funds

blossoms lining the imperial halls gleamed as the best embroidery
the velvety grass in the gardens yielded soft as the best silk floss
as officials together again we thanked the emperor for his received mercy
on entering and leaving the hall we marched as one shoulder to shoulder

as it became evening we sat besotted in the hall of flowers
in the cold at night we slept together under the same embroidered quilts
we rode horses abreast, sometimes deep into the night
we wrote letters to each other filled with touches of friendship

when i would hear of elevated official positions becoming open, i thought of you
since you were already high in the ranks, that one of you would be appointed
but suddenly one after the other you were dropped from the sky
your wings were clipped and you were sent away into exile

my friends at court disappeared and others took their place
i was left lonely with my small official duties preserved
then i took a risky stand i was ready to die for
but respect for my white hair led only to exile

the students in hua-zhou knew i was desperately poor
yet they thought me too old to be their teacher
if a man is a failure as an educator
how can anyone venerate his advanced years

now when i think of your exile my old friends
my heart is torn apart with grief
yet while thinking of my own banishment
my deep longing to be in touch with you fulfills me

the bamboos along the dangerous plank road in ba-zhou have faded
while the red lotus blossoms in the lakes of yo-zhou remain bright
jia zhi will use his brush to describe desolation and discontent
yan wu will also have written newly elegant poems

i know the trouble you have gone to in producing these works
but i caution you not to make these new poems public
the slanderers continue and weavers of lies look for new threads
to be picked up and used on the gossiper's looms

the seagulls on the shore must protect their heads
or the vultures of autumn will strike and smash them down
whether in an area of gloomy hot miasmas
or in the mountains among rocks and springs

you might consider spending your days playing go
and forget the dreary year drinking a precious wine
though being a police chief in yo-zhou is too small a post
and being governor of ba-zhou is a waste of rare talent

yet a proper official will always discharge his duties
and small chores can be thought of as suitably modest retirement
do not forswear continuing to use your magnificent talents
simply because the ways of heaven are for the moment unclear

as for me i am reminded of the old saying, it is with me past
i believe in my heart my usefulness is finished
i have traveled despite my weakness beyond the long mountains
while shi si-ming has begun new battles in chi-li

i must accept the difficulties of wife and children with humor
and be willing to be idle and let time pass me by
now my friends in office become rarer bit by bit
and the war continues to spread and not be checked

in this foreign area i dream a lot of my native country
but without friends around such as you it is a difficult life
my continuing illness forces me to remain here
and has made even the writing of this long poem an arduous task

you, my two friends, are still in health and possess talent and energy
keep your spirits up, rise again, and rise high

murphy wondering why summer seems so short in his dotage
8-27-07 9:10 am

i send this poem in 30 rhymes to the mountain hermit zhang biao

you rest alone now on the south slope of song mountain in he-nan
three years ago you left the beauty of your home on the banks of the ying river
with great difficulty you traveled with your aged mother
as you left you looked with pity on the state of your fellow man

as once did xie ling-yun you put on mountain boots to scale the mountains
as once did tao yuan-ming you strained your wine with your head scarf
in all the terrible confusion following the rebel's invasion
these were the only two things you were able to take with you

once we separated in jin-an-fu as once jiang gong did from his brothers
later in hua-zhou i found in you a good neighbor as meng zi's mother did once, long before
we were intimate friends for the time we shared in jin-an-fu
later in hua-zhou you introduced me into the mysteries of the tao

the heart deepens in contemplation and knows wonderful subtleties
such as are shown in your extraordinary poetic works
your calligraphy rivals the depth of character of the ancient ones
the overpowering beauty of your verse seems to be your gift from the spirits

one can safely say your poetry approaches the level of cao zhi
and your calligraphy surpasses that of the master zhang zhi
if one sings only a few of your poems one can endure sickness and old age
if one buys a single character you have formed, one can accept poverty thereby

in the fear that your mother would come to grievous harm
you hid her away from the robbers deep within the mountains
every night you return to keep burglars from her gate
every morning you prepare her breakfast with the greatest care

unfortunately i have been misled by ambition and accepted an office
in performing the strenuous work involved i have lost my true character
being here, even with my friends, i am lonely in this lonesome place
even when i meet them i am saddened even more at not seeing you

i have been walled away up here in these border regions
and every time i receive my guests i am reminded only of you
in these times seeing old friends has become rarer and rarer
since the beginning of the rebellion there has been separation after separation

emperor su-zong has restored the forefather temple
and in so doing he rewarded the loyal suite remaining to him
the shang mountain is no longer in the hands of the rebels
the wei river again flows within the borders of the imperial domain

through meditation you must by now have acquired taoistic secrets
to know the black dragon and to ride the tame white deer as an immortal
as zhong zi-zhen you have established your field in the mountains
or perhaps as shang-gong you have built your straw roof on the shore

your herbal preparations should now rival those of ge hong
your medicinal remedies were effective and always fresh
my feelings far from home are filled with sorrow and suffering
any wish for a happy meeting with you is merely a dream, impossible

from old the people here have complained and grieved their lot
yet in this life there is room for triumph as well as misfortune
now this land is filled with weapons wielded in war
where else but with you could one find good people and peace

drums of war and bugles drown out the music of nature
the fortresses in the high mountains seem even to touch the moon
many of our encampments dot the vast gobi desert
but the guard fires of the turfan still lie nearby in lin-tao

the area is inhospitable where the troops are based
and the generals fight against themselves endlessly
our army is large and controls large tracts of land
but the rebels still persist in effective numbers

when the desire rises in me to return to my native country
i remind myself i am only a single bird caught in my cage
how can i force myself to write under these circumstances
it's as futile as when once confucius tried to seize the unicorn

now it is the tipping point of autumn and the foliage begins to fall
i look now to the spruce and bamboo which do not change

murphy at the sporting goods store testing out the arctic tents
8-28-07 12:30 pm

von zach VI, 5

nine poems on the departure of the troops to the border in the voice of a common soldier
(1 of 9)

i am filled with sorrow as i leave my village home
i march to remote jiao-he, to the country of the turfan
our commanders give us very strict orders
deserters will be hunted down and punished severely

the empire is large enough already as huge as it is
why must the borders be pushed out still further
i am separated from my loving parents who depend on me
with choking sobs i shoulder my lance to pursue my way

murphy, serial number 1666182 u s marine corps, sir!
8-18-07 3:00 pm

von zach VI, 6

nine poems on the departure of the troops to the border in the voice of a common soldier
(2 of 9)

since i left my old home much time has passed, i've learned my craft
no longer am i the raw recruit, the butt of the veteran's jokes
though i yearn to return to my family they live only in my heart at night
i must pay my attention to the field of battle, death comes at any time

during a charge toward the enemy lines i let my horse have his head
i hold the silk reins loose in my hands trusting his agility and strength
quickly he barrels down the steep hill of loose rock
bending low from the saddle i reach to grab the pole of the enemy's flag

murphy huddled in his forward position cleaning his rifle
8-28-07

von zach VI, 7

nine poems on the departure of the troops to the border in the voice of a common soldier
(3 of 9)

i hone my sword on a stone on the shore of the weeping waters
staining it red as the blade injures my hand
i should have been able to ignore this sound of sad rushing
but my heart has reached a sore muddled state

a brave man agrees to sacrifice himself for the state
why then do i give in to weary sighs and cry
heroes are immortalized in the imperial unicorn gallery
but bones rot quickly when left on the field of battle

murphy awake before dawn dreading reveille
8-29-07

von zach VI, 8

nine poems on the departure of the troops to the border in the voice of a common soldier
(4 of 9)

because the older members of my family are held responsible for my actions
i keep myself focused on my obligations here, far away on the border.
accepting either life or death i dutifully march forward toward the enemy
my captain no longer shouts at me angrily

on the way to the front i meet a friend from my village
and entrust with him a letter for my family
how sad it is to be separated from them so far away
how bitter not to be there for them when bad times occur

murphy hitching up his pants to go back to work
8-29-07 12:45 pm

von zach VI, 9

nine poems on the departure of the troops to the border in the voice of a common soldier
(5 of 9)

as an army we march continuously far, far away
to join with the even larger force on the frontier
here is where a soldier survives by luck or by pluck
how can the generals plan so any one man is safe

on the far side of the river we finally see the enemy
suddenly they appear, turfan, in countless multitude
i am merely a small man holding his place down in the ranks
how can i ever hope to be singled out for bravery

murphy keeping in step during close order drill
8-29-07 4:30 pm

von zach VI, 10

nine poems on the departure of the troops to the border in the voice of a common soldier
(6 of 9)

choose your bow, choose the strongest
choose your arrow, choose the longest
shoot first the horses, and then the men
taking prisoners, take first the king

during the killing, set fast your limits
borders are best when strictly drawn
since it is enough to stop the invasion
do not indulge in a wholesale slaughter

murphy, at attention, accepting the distinguished service cross with two clusters
8-29-07 4:55 pm

von zach VI, 11

nine poems on the departure of the troops to the border in the voice of a common soldier
(7 of 9)

i drive my horse on and on through the snow
the army on the march pushes into the wild mountains
the way is steep and the trail twisting and narrow
icy fingers hold to cold rock to keep from a fall

we are far indeed from the moon over china
when will we ever return from building these forts
at sundown the clouds drift south through the thin air
my dream is to catch one in both hands and ride it home

murphy pulling guard duty in the long cold hours before dawn
8-29-07 5:15 pm

von zach VI, 12

nine poems on the departure of the troops to the border in the voice of a common soldier
(8 of 9)

the turfan attack our positions on a broad front
the wind whipped dust of the fight covers a hundred miles
we rally around our general swinging our swords
the enemy bends, then breaks, stampedes in flight

i bring back their famous king in tow
he enters our fort with a rope around his neck
then i return to my troops and prepare again for battle
a single victory is not the end of the fight

murphy celebrating his promotion with beer down at the slop chute
8-30-07 7:40 am

von zach VI, 13

nine poems on the departure of the troops to the border in the voice of a common soldier
(9 of 9)

it has been twelve years now i am a soldier
without being singled out once for any honors
the others always claim more than they should
but i do not wish to become part of that baying pack

unceasing war continues throughout all our lands
we can expect no less from the barbarians north and west
a man's ambition should be harnessed for the duration
i must be content with my lot in this long bitter struggle

murphy limbering up before the day's forced march
8-30-07 8:00 am

von zach VI, 14

five more poems on the departure of the troops to the border in the voice of a common soldier (1 of 5)

a man who has been born into the light of this world
must strive in his youthful strength to become an army officer
success is to be found only in the heat of the battle
how then can one remain in the hills of his old home

soldiers are conscripted to go to the front
they are already on the move, i cannot stay behind
a thousand taels buy me a horse and a gold trimmed saddle
a hundred more a sword with carving on the hilt

the entire village turns out to escort me on my way
my family and kin crowd around wishing me well
the old patriarchs take place of honor at the farewell meal
inebriating wine in abundance, sweet dumplings enough to fill

the young people also offer their parting gifts
and laugh with joy as i brandish my sword

murphy polishing his boots for the morning inspection
9-10-07 9:00 am

five more poems on the departure of the troops to the border in the voice of a common soldier (2 of 5)

at dawn the next morning i enter the camp at the east gate
in the evening i move over the bridge at he-yang
the setting sun glows on the general's battle flag
the horses neigh in the brisk evening breeze

a sea of tents dot the level sands of the desert
the entire troop is called forth to parade, to kneel in obeisance
a shining moon hangs heavy in the cool night sky
the discipline is steady, the troop remains quiet

occasional sad notes are sounded from a lone trumpet
even the most boastful of us are homesick, subdued
who is to be our leader a comrade quietly asks
the most powerful of men, an lu shan, comes the soft answer

murphy counting only on himself in the ongoing struggle
9-10-07 9:30 am

five more poems on the departure of the troops to the border in the voice of a common soldier (3 of 5)

in olden times guarding the frontier was of supreme importance
now the focus is on gaining high rank and great riches
our noble ruler has entered on a war of conquest along the borders
there are countless soldiers stretching like a cloud to cover the land

as the emperor wishes the people have become a single family
only the isolated barbarian peoples on the border confront us
the glorious troops, the leopards and the tigers, rise to fight
fearlessly responding to the wishes of his majesty

the air is thick with the dust of battle, weapons in constant wield
great herds of tatar horses are cut off, seized for the greater good
the men swear to conquer the entire northern frontier lands
gaining them all in fealty to our great lord

murphy rereading the history of the final defeat at waterloo
9-11-07 9:30 am

von zach VI, 17

five more poems on the departure of the troops to the border in the voice of a common soldier (4 of 5)

every day brings word of another victory
the border has been quelled, presents no more worries
the place now for heroes is yu yang in zhi-li
there are the war drums and the martial flutes

ship after ship comes laden sailing on the yellow sea
bringing the best rice from the far southeast lands
the finest silks arrive from zhe-giang and he-nan
and are worn by the rank and file serving an lu-shan

he has assumed ever higher rank with his victories
he surrounds himself with luxury equal to the emperor
on the border here no one dares raise his voice
lest he be hanged forthwith on the public road

murphy keeping silent counsel in the contentious meeting
9-11-07 1:10 pm

von zach VI, 18

five more poems on the departure of the troops to the border in the voice of a common soldier (5 of 5)

my ancestry is illustrious and i follow their way
having served honorably in several armies
but this general's ambition has come to distress me
i have become disinterested in promotion under him

after twenty long years of service in the cavalry
i shall not betray my lord the emperor
i can see how an lu shan's cavalry
will soon turn to attack within the empire's borders

i desert in the dead of night by a country road
return to my home and find an empty village
i feel fortunate to have escaped with my good name intact
but now i am old without son or grandson

murphy down two touchdowns and playing out the string
9/17/2007 8:23 AM

von zach VI, 19

i send these verses to my nephew du zuo

as autumn strips bare the trees i suffer greatly from my illness
it is a great joy that you have come to comfort me
as you speak of the charms of your reed hut
i long only to sleep peacefully in your bamboo grove

i visualize mountain clouds rising high above the valley where you live
a mountain stream pouring forth its falls just past the hedge of your home
if indeed i have become a second yuan zhi in my life
you are surely a more worthy one than i, another yuan xian

murphy wondering what decrepitude will manifest itself next
9/18/2007 9:21:58 AM

von zach VI, 20

after a visit from du zuo, i send him these three poems (1 of 3)

the late afternoon clouds in the mountains merge with fog
i fear for you on our way back home
just when you reach the cold mountain stream
the birds must be settling in their roost

you then hurry by the low line of planted trees
to reach the small hut where your family waits
you must tell them it was old footloose uncle du fu
who kept you out so late looking after him

murphy setting up the microphones for the recording session
9/19/2007 8:23 AM

von zach VI, 21

after a visit from du zuo, i send him these three poems (2 of 3)

it is time for the first harvest of yellow millet
earlier you promised to send me some
you must be grinding this grain quite finely
why else would it be taking you so long

you shouldn't wait for the time of golden chrysanthemums
the flavor of millet goes just as well with green mallow soup
you know this has long been this old man's favorite food
his taste buds water at the mere thought of it

murphy fiddling with the sound board to get the levels right
9/19/2007 8:33 AM

von zach VI, 22

after a visit from du zuo, i send him these three poems (3 of 3)

you have many springs which water your garden
they run all over the green carpeted slopes
the leaves must be thinning by now
and the flying clouds of autumn have appeared

water chestnuts are thick in the swollen pond
flax vines drape thickly through the forest
the white shallots now become ripe at first frost
i would appreciate a few more of them

murphy tuning up the martin for the session
9/19/2007 8:42 AM

von zach VI, 23

i spend the night in the hermitage of the buddhist abbot zan

why did you decide to come here to qin zhou
now when the autumn winds deepen their bite
rains have rotted the chrysanthemums in the gardens
frost has taken half the lotus flowers in the pond

of course exile does nothing to change your ways
meditating on the nothingness of all things
and now we can meet and pass the night together
the moon above seems brighter as we do

murphy idling away the last few days of summer
9/20/2007 9:50 AM

von zach VI, 24

i give my feelings free rein

i give in to sorrow looking out on frost and snow
though the city wall still sprouts self confident asters
the passing storm has torn branches from the willows
my tears begin when the war trumpets take up their wails

in the quiet water of a pool the bank tower reflects undisturbed
the somber mountains skew the last rays of the sun
in the encroaching dark the birds find their nests
only a lone crow now caws, late, in the darkness

murphy being close to the fire and keeping warm
9/20/2007 10:01 AM

von zach VI, 25

the ruined vegetable garden

it is late in the fall and the vegetables are ruined by frost
how should i become able to save them from their fate
now at the end of the year one can count the leaves on the tree
the storms have risen and done their damage

the green of life has become covered with mud
even the smells have now been scoured til little remains
yet when i think of spring's resurgence of life i cry
i will not see the ritual jade plate of vegetables given to the emperor

murphy testing his lines for smooth scansion
9/20/2007 10:22 AM

von zach VI, 26

i remove the ruined wooden frame from the melon patch

the crude frame has collapsed now that it is fall
the melon leaves have become ragged with the cold
but the fruit has already set from the white blossoms
and the tendrils no longer need their support

the autumn crickets will still chirp their song
but where will the sparrow of evening now perch
now in the cold the melon patch seems uninviting
as is our life when youth has passed us by

murphy dreading the aches of the coming cold of winter
9/21/2007 9:36 AM

von zach VI, 27

i spend the night in the mud hut of the abbot zan
(1 of 2)

i leave the small town of qin zhou, in the distance a mountain fortress
finally i find the small path and push through the thorn bushes
i go along the shore of a brook with its incessant bends
and finally find the place where i can wade across

abbot zan reminds one of the esteemed master hui xiu
he loves the contemplative life and his wishes are pure
recently he sent me a delightful poem, exquisitely wrought
extolling the charms of a life lived in the rocky heights

today i am pleased to walk with him hand in hand
we wander into the distance as our hearts decide the way
finally for the last climb up we cling to the thick ivy
on the rocky point we stand looking back at the way we came

for me it is important to find a warm place on the southern slope
unfortunately i cannot abide the cold of the northern side
as i gaze on the ancient gnarled trunks of the surrounding trees
i am overwhelmed by the holy sense of sinuous dragons

it grieves me that building my hut here cannot be started now
evening descends so we return home supported by our walking sticks
the sun peaking its last colors on the high mountains
and the dew already glistening on the surrounding plants

murphy dreaming again of a gentleman's farm in vermont
9/21/2007 10:16 AM

von zach VI, 28

i spend the night in the mud hut of the abbot zan
(2 of 2)

this cold weather has the birds huddling in the woods
when the moon comes out a stillness covers the mountains
in the mud hut moonlight shines in through the door
looking past the gate are the soft shadows of the spruce

during the days we explore the steep surrounding mountains
during the nights we share our deep inner thoughts
we often freshen the fire with more of our gathered wood
and venture out to the rock spring for water to brew more tea

the exalted master was earlier the abbot of a powerful cloister
his virtuous life demonstrated his grasp of the secrets of the heavens
i wandered about there with him as once zhi dun did with xu xun
we held our best conversations in that distant seclusion of the stream and the lakes

through misfortune persons like myself were exiled here to the border
even here he knows how to exemplify and preserve his ascetic customs
who would have thought that even in this time of war and rebellion
he could still live in contemplative seclusion from the world

i wonder if it is only for him to find such a solitary way
i see in the distance many mountains on which to build a mud hut
tomorrow morning at false dawn we start out
we want to visit again that glorious southwest mountain point

murphy imagining living in the smoky mountains in 1750
9/24/2007 10:46 AM

von zach VI, 29

i send this verse to abbot zan

i spent all day yesterday with abbot zan walking in the woods
we looked at my chosen place to build a hut on the south mountain
with increasing age my physical strength has declined
the cold of the north side of the mountain would be bad for me

the place we have chosen is north of the abbot's hut
and it faces the sun the entire day through
there i wish to build a reed and mud hut for myself
this is what my heart longs for most deeply

not long before now i heard of a valley west of xi zhi village
the area is thick with evergreens and varnish trees
it is said to be warm there throughout the day
and the ground, though stony, should yield enough for my needs

however, i would have to wait until after the rainy season to visit
that and my chronic tooth ache mitigate against that place
meanwhile i visit with abbot zan in his mud hut, the tiger's cave
we walk the area along the shore of the long hong river

i look forward to brewing tea in my new hut
a narrow path will join it with the abbot's dwelling
it is here we have chosen to grow old together
to share cheerful and stimulating companionship

murphy imagining once again his gentleman farm in the ozarks
9/25/2007 8:36 AM

von zach VI, 30

the spring by tai ping cloister

the cloister clings to the side of a high ridge
its dispersed buildings reach down to a grassy plain
there in the marshy pasture a spring comes out
its seepage through the ground comes from afar

the water becomes visible between the rocks
but the source seems to be much higher on the mountain
it is only a small spring but has a constant flow
those all around find good use for it

two small dragon snakes live there, one light, one dark
one sometimes glimpses their pristine beauty
the thin breath of the spring rises as mist
to spread in all directions to become clouds and rain

from the ridge of the mountain to its foot
a shallow shaft soon reaches the flowing water
this water will quench the thirst of even the most jaded of men
its taste even better than the richness of cow's milk

the north wind ruffles the surface of its pool
where the tender water plants spread their green threads
the transparent water clearly reflects the garments of a visitor
while the ripples breathe life into the mirrored trees

when i build my hut on the lower course of this stream
it will surely moisten my medicinal herbs to fruitful strength
then next spring perhaps the herb for lengthening life will appear
and the wings of the immortals will be offered to me

murphy lost in his elysian idylls on an indian summer day
9/26/2007 8:38 AM

von zach VI, 31

the empty pouch

when hungry, green cedar may be chewed though it's bitter
indeed looking up to the morning clouds can be food for me
the world has indeed treated me roughly
my way has become exceedingly hard

without firewood to heat water for tea the well remains icebound
without bedding my bed is cold throughout the night
but i cannot abide the shame of having empty pockets
so i keep at least one copper in my money pouch

murphy putting on his last clean white shirt for sunday dinner
9/26/2007 8:59 AM

von zach VI, 32

the sick horse

old horse you have been my mount for a long time
i have ridden you deep through the winter border lands
on our long journeys you have given me your all
i am sore saddened now that you are sick and weak

your are not stronger or more beautiful than the others
but you have always been faithful and obedient
though you are but an animal you show affection for me
deeply touched by this, i sing for you this song

murphy remembering his first dog butch who protected him fiercely
9/27/2007 8:03 AM

von zach VI, 33

i escort a friend who moves with the troops to the west

you leave for the west where the wide river ruo lies
you must get through yang pass which is next to the heavens
then you must traverse the ocean of sand, the gobi
you will be many months without seeing human settlements

i know as a warrior you are not fearful of death
and do not flinch from years of war seeking glory
but in the cold you must see that your horse does not lose the way
for the snows will often reach to your saddle cover

murphy cleaning his m1 rifle after gunnery practice
9/27/2007 8:17 AM

von zach VI, 34

i escort the military auditor li from ling-zhou

you go to where the barbarians pollute the air of the empire
wherever one looks their odor permeates the firmament
bloody battles redden both the sky and the earth
the rebels' dust blots out the sun and the moon

your general is one who employs excellent strategems
his headquarters filled with able men such as you
one thanks the emperor who leads the dynasty upwards
and to his armies who will bring an lu shan to his knees

murphy marveling at an exhibition of propaganda posters from world war 1
9/27/2007 8:34 AM

von zach VI, 35

i send these verses to a friend far away

warriors in full armor fill the whole world
why have you left for distant climes in these warlike times
you have left family and friends behind in their misery
you and your saddled horse gone from this frontier town

now in the fall the plants have begun wilting
ice and snow have begun to seal the passes
we parted only yesterday and sadness still fills me
from ancient times the tragedy of friendship has been separation

murphy taking down his high school yearbook to look up an old flame
9/27/2007 10:31 AM

von zach VI, 36

with the abandonment of qin-zhou i take leave of abbot zan

the hundred rivers of the empire flow ceaselessly east
this old wanderer also can find no place of rest
since i was born i have suffered this movement
where shall i find an abode of rest and peace

reverend zan is an elderly buddhist priest
he has come here in exile from chang-an
he is deeply disturbed by the uproar of rebellion
his appearance is afflicted, he is wasting away

in the spring of this year he gave morning sermons in his abbacy
by summer he was here with beans already ripe from the rains
my body also is like the driven cloud
it must drift away to the north, or south

it is good i met my old friend in this foreign district
it has been a primal joy to share with him my heart
yet under the wide sky here i am afflicted by the cold
with my age i suffer only more from hunger and the frost

the wind blowing from the wilderness ruffles my clothes
i have to say goodbye before the dark of evening approaches
as the horses neigh in longing for the stable
before the birds all return to the woods to rest their wings

all the places we have been in the past are thorn bushes
overgrown brambles inviting fresh scars
plainly speaking we are both growing infirm
and must seek to endure now a last separation

murphy reading the obituary pages in the new york times
9/27/2007 11:06 AM

von zach VI, 37

the house of censor wu (tenth of his clan) in liang-dang-xian on the shore of the jia-ling stream

the city is cold with thin wisps from the chimneys
scarlet leaves of autumn shiver in the mountains
the cold north wind comes from a thousand miles away
to rattle the eaves of your riverside home

yellow cranes cackle on their small island
the sun slants to the edge of the wide fields
you were once a strict and just censor
how long will you remain in exile in chang sha

even a monkey is sad to lose his nest in the trees
but surely a bird will fly to escape the second arrow of the hunter
you must, of course, wish to return to your native country
but it is still painful to recall how you were punished

it was in the days of the temporary capital at feng xian
you and i were both members of the golden court
the emperor still breathed the dust of seeking refuge
and the eastern areas were sore darkened by war

it was the time of vigilance against enemy spies
who were frequently found within the city walls
the censor's court was responsible for processing these men
and you took the greatest care in your investigations

you could not endure unjust punishments
so you carefully ascertained guilt or innocence
for a time the minister backed your decisions
but suddenly you were sent away into exile

remember that even confucius found himself scorned
that low position is sometimes preferred to wealth and respect
the entire court knew that you had been wronged
but no one let out even the softest sigh

at that time i was in the position of the emperor's reminder
and was foremost in position beside the red steps
i too saw the injustice done to you and did not help
i will carry the stigma of my inaction to my grave

since that time i have become severely depressed
and now leave your home feeling completely lost
i failed my clear duty in your time of need
in my remorse my hair turns even still whiter

murphy recalling his sins on yom kippur
9/28/2007 10:30 AM

departure from qin-zhou

as old age catches up with me i grow weaker and more foolish
i am even becoming unable to provide for myself
because i have little food i dream of a land of plenty
because my clothes are old and threadbare i long for the warm south

it is early november in the han yuan xian district
there it is more brisk autumn than bitter winter
the leaves have not yet fully turned nor dropped from the trees
and the scenery is said to be intriguing and beautiful

chestnut station is an especially charming name
and there are many available large fertile fields
one could eat yams to the heart's content
and sweeten them all with wild forest honey

there are thick bamboo groves to yield winter sprouts
and a clear pond to boat upon with friends
although saddened at the thought of being far from my home country
i would satisfy the urge to travel i've had since my youth

i have lived here in qin zhou on a busy main street
and i really fear it has become too noisy for me
i have no desire to make friends with these foreign people
and my excursions here have not assuaged my sorrows

in the surrounding country there are no interesting cliff formations
and the fields here on the border yield little or nothing
how can an old man find comfort in this situation
i am fed up with my life here and can stay no longer

the sun sinks low beyond the lonely fort
raucous crows crowd atop the town walls
i leave in the middle of the night on a fast wagon
i pause only long enough to water my horses in the cold pond

the vault of heaven is lit with a slim moon and bright stars
as wisps of clouds and smoke from the city float by
there is no end to the vastness of earth and sky
my way lies ahead and i cannot view its end

murphy with arthritic hands that dread the onset of winter's cold
10/3/2007 9:17 AM

von zach VI, 39

the red valley

the weather is cold and snow and ice cover everything
but i persist in moving toward my set purpose
yet i wonder if my sadness is merely that of old age
or whether it is the thought of never returning home again

at dawn we left from the roadside inn in red valley
we have only begun the difficult part of the journey
the wagon furrows twist between weird cliff masses
i have oiled the wheels well so they may be followed

a violent wind sweeps down from the high mountains
at sundown my children are exhausted and sore hungry
because there are few villages through this area
it is impossible to find a hearth and warm food

in my senile decay i have found utter misery
i have dropped my dreams of returning to my native village
and discovered a final fear of dying on the road
to be scoffed at by the immortals in their hermitage

murphy wakening from his recurrent dream of being late for the final exam in calculus
10/3/2007 9:43 AM

von zach VI, 40

the iron hall gorge

the cold mountain wind beats into my face
my blurred vision seeks out the rocks i climb over
the gulch i'm in resembles a huge hall carved into the rock
the black walls seem to be made of iron

the narrow path winds toward the sky
slivers of rock split jagged edges on all sides
slender bamboo sprouts from the crevices
deep hollow pits are filled with never melting snow

the way curves along a rushing mountain stream
my entire party exhausted and depressed
the rushing water cold with chunks of ice
my horse at his last strength and soon to fail

we live today within the bowels of a civil war
the rebels still maintaining their positions
i have now been blown like thistle down for three years
when i think of chang-an i am overcome, i weep

murphy, a marine near the end of a forced march putting one foot in front of the other
10/4/2007 8:10 AM

von zach VI, 41

the salt wells

in the salt districts everything has a coating of white
only the smoke from the state boiling plants is black
because of the enforced quota of production
this smoke floats through the valley the whole day through

year in and year out men wrest salt from these wells
a never ending line of carts carry their loads away
a basket of dried salt sells for 300 coppers
the traders charge twice this throughout the land

a wise man contents himself with what is necessary for life
a common man tries to gain as much as possible
it is sad that this should bother me so
it is only human nature to be discontent and greedy

murphy cutting a pie to share, and taking the last piece
10/4/2007 8:30 AM

von zach VI, 42

the cold gorge

my travels become more difficult with each passing day
the mountains and valleys become ever more rugged
the road wriggles along beneath precipitous cliff walls
and the short winter days only make my troubles worse

the cold of the mountain valleys bites hard
my worn garments are much too thin for warmth
it is now well into the second month of winter
the whole day now is filled with waves of blowing snow

sometimes i hear voices of local people through the eternal fogs
our meals are hastily eaten on the shore of the stream
i am fortunate in my life to have escaped military duty
but i cannot imagine it to be worse than this journey

murphy imagining an astronomical distance
10/4/2007 10:14 AM

von zach VI, 43

the fa-jing cloister

in my miseries i make it to the next province
i force myself to continue to my destination
sorely distressed from the long wanderings in the mountains
my grief is suddenly lifted by the sight of the old mountain cloister

the path there shines gracefully with fresh-green moss
a shivering mass of bamboo rustles in the wind
a brook runs sinuously around at the foot of the mountain
a continuous drip of dew falls from the mighty spruce

scudding clouds darken the beginning morning
a rising sun is soon covered, but then breaks through again
the red roof beams of the cloister glisten
i count the many windows gleaming in the sun

inside i sit on the polished floor and look out on the forest
when i finally emerge it is already midday
the cuckoo calls from his hidden bower
i hasten to see him but the path narrows to nothing

murphy radiant from his hot bath after a hard day of work
10/4/2007 11:28 AM

von zach VI, 44

the qing-yang gorge

here beyond the border i am sick of looking at mountains
my trip to the south becomes worse and worse
knolls and hilltops seem to have no end
clouds and ground-mist twist into each other

suddenly a clearing in the woods leads to a deep gulch
the sky narrows, cliff walls become precipitous
to the west of the mountain stream the wu li rocks rise
they seem angry, ready to fall down on me

i look up and think the sun must detour around the mountain top
i look down and fear the earth cannot bear such a heavy stone load
the cold wind brings the whistling of mountain goblins
everywhere i hear the crash of falling blocks of ice

i remember how i earlier came over long mountain
in beautiful fall weather i saw the immense wu yo mountain
i looked to the east to the tip of the giant mount hwa
and to the north i recognized the smallish mount hong tong

looking back then the wu yo towered over all others
it seemed to take up the entire firmament
now it seems to still be in pursuit of me
but its size has dwindled, begun to disappear

murphy somewhere in tennessee on his way from boston to dallas
10/5/2007 8:39 AM

von zach VI, 45

the fortress on long-men mountain

along a small stream light ice impregnates the narrow plank road
everything around is slick from the heavy humidity
i cannot avoid the difficulties of the trip
so i hurry forward to make the most of the short winter day

clouds and snow conspire to make the pass seem more narrow
the old fort situated here is surrounded by mountain peaks
flags flap sadly in the falling evening wind
weapons of the warriors dulled by the incessant wet weather

the cavalry of an lu shan are camped far away in cheng-gao
what can this local garrison do to meet those dangers
pity the poor soldiers guarding this distant border
doomed to many more nights here in these cold, cold mountains

murphy zipping up his new anorak, snug in its fur
10/5/2007 9:00 AM

von zach VI, 46

the stone niche

from the east comes the growling of bears
from the west the roaring of leopards and tigers
behind me the drawn out whistling of mountain demons
ahead of me the cries of countless monkeys

the weather is cold and the sun is hidden
in this world of mountains the road is indistinct
as my cart passes under the stone niche
suddenly the bad omen of a rainbow appears

who are the people here who fell the bamboo
they sing sad songs as they climb up the mountain
this area is where they collect the best arrows
for five years they have been sent to the standing troops

they tell me in sorrow the straight bamboo is used up
they can find no more which can be made into arrows
how can the border people now defend themselves
are they to live in fear of an lu shan forever

murphy as a young boy selecting smooth stones from the clear stream for his slingshot
10/5/2007 10:22 AM

von zach VI, 47

ji cao mountain

under the many mountain tops the road fades into darkness
the sun peaks through the clouds then disappears
all around the wind whips the limbs of the trees
always the wild cliff scenery startles with its changes

beyond the ji cao mountain the road divides
the long way to ming shui xian separates
my arduous wandering has taken a sore toll
the winter and my advanced age have weakened me

the place i would like to remain is still a hundred miles away
there i will halt my cart and stay with a wise scholar
a judge who lives there has extended his hospitality
it is as if he had always been my colleague

his return letter to me is especially friendly
being a stranger from afar this surprises me
there i shall eat only ferns and wish for nothing else
in my mind's eye i already see the mud hut i will build

murphy daydreaming on an indian summer's day
10/5/2007 10:43 AM

von zach VI, 48

ni gong mountain

at sunrise we started slogging through black mud
in the evening there is still nothing but black mud
this muck and mire is very difficult to get through
many men had to labor to fashion this sorry road

by now i do not so much fear the length of the journey
but that i might drown in this endless slime
my horse has become black with caked mud
my small boy walks like a staggering old man

i pity a monkey who has fallen from the trees
he dies like the deer i see exhausted by her struggles
i have words of advice for any travelers from the north
plan for ample time to plow through this mess

murphy in college in the cambridge winter with holes in his shoes
10/5/2007 2:09 PM

von zach VI, 49

the phoenix balcony

the phoenix tower rises high
overlooking xi kang zhou to the north
duke wen of zhou is long dead
he no longer hears the song of the phoenix

the mountain is steep and trackless
wisps of clouds float in the rocky crags
i wish to build a ladder to reach those clouds
to scale the heights for my lord

perhaps a fledgling phoenix without a mother
cries ceaselessly from cold and hunger
i would give to him my heart and my blood
as food and drink to comfort him in his lonely grief

my heart would become his favorite bamboo fruit
so he could prosper and find more such food
my blood would be like the water from the li spring
and might be more to his taste than that pure stream

this integrity of effort would portend well for my lord
and be worth far more than the sacrifice of my paltry life
i would sit quietly watching the bird's bright plumage grow
until it would be ready to fly over the entire world

then from heaven he would bring the book of great wonders
as once the phoenix sat down by the twelve towers of emperor huang di
then the book would be handed to the emperor
and once more his exalted government would prosper

a new glow of plenty would shine throughout the lands
all the miseries and cares would be swept away
from my deepest heart i wish this to be so
how then could there continue to be rebels

murphy imagining hitting a home run for the mets in the world series
10/5/2007 3:10 PM

von zach VI, 50

seven songs written in the government period qian yuan during my stay in tong gu xian
(1 of 7)

there is here a man far, far away from home
his family has the name of zi-mei
he lives here on acorns and chestnuts
he has adopted the ways of the monkeys

the weather here is cold, the sun low in the sky
though he still walks over mountain and valley
he receives no letters from his home
and has no hope of returning to china

his hands and his feet are rough, bitten by the frost
his skin chapped, his limbs frozen and clumsy
this is the first song i sing for him, filled with woe
i bring the bitter wind down from heaven

murphy watching a yupik elder make string figures
10/8/2007 9:06 PM

von zach VI, 51

seven songs written in the government period qian yuan during my stay in tong gu xian
(2 of 7)

a tall digging hoe with a white ash handle
that is all i have to provide for my family
but the wild mountain yam cannot show its shoots
the snow on the mountain covers them up

i tug on my short clothes to stretch them down
but they can't even reach my shin bones
now i must shoulder the mattock once more
once more to return home with nothing to show

there i meet my children sobbing from hunger
nothing else breaks the silence of the mountains
this is the second song i sing, at last breaking free
the faces of the village turn to looks of pity

murphy visiting a one room school on the lakota reservation
10/9/2007 8:41 AM

von zach VI, 52

seven songs written in the government period qian yuan during my stay in tong gu xian
(3 of 7)

i have younger brothers who live far away from here
all three were sickly in their youth, needing the strength of others
which of the three may have now become strong
we separated long before this time, each to his own way

since that time we have not met one another again
the dust of the rebellion still fills the sky
travel is difficult and even a small distance looms large
though the wild geese still fly to the east

followed closely by the storks and the cranes
but how can these birds take me to my brothers
this is the third song and i sing it three times
if i die here will my brothers seek my bones to bury

murphy chanting in a sweat lodge on the cheyenne reservation
10/9/2007 8:58 AM

von zach VI, 53

seven songs written in the government period qian yuan during my stay in tong gu xian
(4 of 7)

i have a younger sister who lives in zhong li
she is a widow with children in their infancy
where she lives the long huai river throws up high waves
the dragons living there are constantly angry

i have not seen my sister for ten long years
how can she now come to visit me here
nor should i take a boat and sail to see her
that brings to mind a rain of the arrows of an lu shan

there in the southern regions of our land
the rebel troops raise high their banners
this is the fourth song i sing, and sung four times
until even the monkeys in the forest hear and are saddened

murphy at a memorial powwow for viet nam veterans in tulsa, oklahoma
10/9/2007 9:21 AM

von zach VI, 54

seven songs written in the government period qian yuan during my stay in tong gu xian
(5 of 7)

the winds attack, sweeping down from the mountains
waters pour off, roaring by in a roil of torrents
a cold rain unendingly pelts all around
the ancient rotting forest doles out its drips

an old connecting wall is covered with yellow weeds
the angry clouds boil their way through the sky
a white fox jumps, a brown fox sits upright
why do i spend life here in this desolate valley

in the middle of the night i sit up in bed
i can't sleep through my countless worries
this fifth song i sing is long enough now
yet i cannot will myself to return to my native home

murphy listening to the last crow warrior chief talk about world war ii
10/9/2007 4:13 PM

von zach VI, 55

seven songs written in the government period qian yuan during my stay in tong gu xian
(6 of 7)

in the south a dragon lives in his mountain lake
around the edge are old luxuriant trees whose limbs intertwine
the yellow leaves drift down from the trees
the dragon emperor quiet in his hibernation

then come two snakes, the noxious pretenders
they come from the east, disturb the calm waters
i live through my fears yet do not confront
i watch as they pass by, how dare they to come

my sword drawn to slash, is sheathed once again
i have not the strength for a successful attack
this sixth song i sing, i sing purpose long denied
knowing in my heart that spring soon returns

murphy betting his last twenty in the onandaga casino
10/9/2007 4:32 PM

von zach VI, 56

seven songs written in the government period qian yuan during my stay in tong gu xian
(7 of 7)

i am a man who has still acquired no distinction
although my age is advanced and i now grow old
for three years i have wandered lonely and hungry
my time wasted in desolate border mountains

in chang-an ministers and high officers are still young
wealth and respect must reach one while still in one's youth
my old friends here are retired mountain sages
our friendship built over a lifetime of toil

now we meet and talk of the glories of our youth
holding close to our hearts our current afflictions
this is the seventh song i sing, i end now in sadness
i look up to the sun as it tirelessly shines

murphy finding a quiet place to smoke his sacred pipe
10/9/2007 4:52 PM

von zach VI, 57

the ten thousand fathom abyss

the green-black abyss connects with the underworld
where a miraculous creature sometimes appears
we know dragons love a deep, dank pool where water gathers
this one holds a cave ten thousand fathoms deep

with cautious steps we skirt the rocky edge
and twisting and turning descend into the surrounding fog
finally we stand by a great stretch of mighty waves
behind us gray rocks rise back to where we were

the slender path to safety disappears into the heights
the shore line forms two cliff walls down into the fundament
each vertical to the heavens far above
each casting its blurred shadow onto the water

the darkness of the water indicates its great depth
a few broken reflections ripple on the surface
a lonely mirrored cloud swims upon the deeps
and there one sees the image of a flying bird

overhanging vines serve as decorative curtains
frost rimed trees crowd round as rows of banners
many mountain streams feed into this vast lake
where the dragon in the cave calls the secret waters of the earth

this spot seems to have never been known to man
we are the first to explore this exquisite spot
and now with much regret we must return home
of all the places i've seen in my long life, this is the best

in the cold of this season the scaly monster hibernates
his great body quiet like the boulders we must go around
how much better it would be to come in the summer
to see his spirit rise in a vast thunderstorm

murphy wading out as far as he can to gather fresh clams
10/10/2007 9:17 AM

von zach VI, 58

i set off from tong gu xian

it is said of mo zi that he never blackened his chimney
and that confucius never sat long enough to warm his mat
how can such an inept, starving man such as myself
ever find a quiet place wherein he can find rest

when i first came upon these mountains
i thought of a long rest in this remoteness
but what has transpired because of worldly cares
i have made four long trips in only one year

with a heavy heart i must now leave this superb place forever
and continue on my never ending journey
i stop my horse and look back at clouds over the dragon's abyss
and then turn my gaze toward the tiger's rock

at the crossroads i take leave of my new friends
clasping their hands i weep unashamed
though i have known these men for only a short time
at my advanced age the tears flow easily

my entire life i have wished for a simple life of leisure
and here i thought to have found my hermit's paradise
truly i have found it difficult in my life either to stay or to go
full of remorse i envy the simple birds in the forest

murphy content in the foggy morning to sip cup after cup of tea
10/10/2007 9:49 AM

von zach VI, 59

mu pi mountain range

now when i come into the area west of li ting
i still think back to the beauty of phoenix village
it is now the third winter month, my children are weak
we struggle through hardship on to si-chuan

traveling south i climb the mu pi mountains
the difficulties we meet are hard to describe
sweat covers the body despite the cold
the strain of the march tells on us all

in the distance the mountains seem to bow to the mu pi
a thousand overhanging rocks seem to want to fall down
i know now there are five more giant mountains ahead
and still others which inspire wonder to the eye

the mu pi chain towers and blocks out the sun
its mighty weight carves fissures in the earth
i hear the roar of tigers and leopards again and again
i often crouch in fear under the windblown trees

high on the way i come across an abandoned plank road
it is rotted and hangs down like a broken axle
below i see broad evergreen forests
the roots often running over the rocks

the western cliffs of the range are especially beautiful
they gleam with the gold of magic mushrooms
the bare walls glint with silver and the flash of gems
they are devoid of soil and show not the trace of sand

i remember once gazing on a painting of the kun lun mountain
now i see for myself where aeries of wizards could be
why do i wish to hurry when these are my sights
i am deeply saddened i can find no rest in my old age

murphy opening an atlas to the map of honduras
10/10/2007 1:32 PM

von zach VI, 60

the ford at the white sand bank

the dangerous road follows the broad stream
at the ford i descend the precipitous bank
it is difficult to maneuver my cart onto the boat
finally we push off in a wide arc to cross the river

in this desolate river cold weather holds sway
at sundown we have reached only to midstream
my horse faces north and neighs his displeasure
i see mountain monkeys drinking at the edge of the water

clear water shows many boulders washed here in the floods
the white sand of the banks shows in half submerged shoals
my grief and sadness is swept away by the beauty i now see
my physical ailments for the moment leave my mind

we finally reach the steep cliffs of the far side
the chaos of the mighty waves now behind us
i turn my head to escape the full blast of the wind
i seize the horse's reins and sigh deeply several times

murphy climbing the steps from the subway into the february gale
10/11/2007 8:36 AM

von zach VI, 61

the ford at the confluence of three rivers

there are only certain narrow ways to travel through the mountains
it is now midnight and i haven't reached my destination for the day
the new moon has long been set and the way is dark
it is especially difficult to travel under these overhanging rocks

now i have come to a stream which must be crossed
the water surges, roils, like an arm of the sea
the boat's men row me toward the other shore
they sing and laugh as if there was no danger involved

in this cold weather the footing on the shore is slippery
the harsh wind makes clubs of hands and feet
and now that the harrowing crossing is behind me
the serpentine road up the steep mountain still remains

i look back at the sky above the pounding waves
and marvel that only the stars have remained dry
the long trip has made me altogether too thin
my sufferings eat into me with more and more force

murphy putting on a second pair of socks because of the holes in his shoes
10/11/2007 8:58 AM

von zach VI, 62

plank road through the fei xian mountain range

at tu-men the travel over the mountains becomes more difficult
a narrow path winds along a hairsbreadth of carved strip
the plank road with its cross ties rises high into the clouds
its wooden beams firmly embedded in the mountain's rock

from the many gulches trees grow in misshapen forms
in the darkness of the valley below crash torrentuous waters
the sun shines palely low in the winter sky
a continuous wind howls through the heights

finally at the foot of the mountain i dare to look back
i am in awe of the heights i have come down
although we rested on the serpentine way many times
both myself and my horse are at our limits of strength

this life is determined and one cannot escape fate
whether wretched or glorious it is accepted
sighing i ask myself why have i brought my family here
why have i asked them to share in such misery

murphy ruing his vow of poverty and its effect on his children
10/11/2007 10:12 AM

von zach VI, 63

the wu pan mountain range

although the road through the wu pan chain is full of peril
the mountainous terrain is quite beautiful to see
if i look to the heights i see the fine outline of the plank road
looking down i see distinctive trees on the shore of the rushing river

the area is desolate and no one casts out their nets
though one can see glints of many fish roiling the surface
many birds fly back and forth through the rarefied air
those native to the area nest high in the trees

it pleases me to gaze on this natural primitive scene
my heart and mind are made easy, they are set free
this though the fighting still rages east of chang-an
oh, when will their leaders finally be slain

in my old native haunts are my brothers and sister
they wander the ruins, their farms are destroyed
even if here in cheng du everything is peaceful enough
heart and soul reach out to my old hut, my old home

murphy talking to his brother about the house at 721 genoa street in dallas
10/11/2007 10:30 AM

von zach VI,64

the plank road over long men mountain

the clear stream flows past the foot of long men mountain
the steep wall of rock shows not the slightest speck of dirt
a constant wind howls over the choppy waves
it has been the same here since the oldest of times

the perilous plank road writhes along the middle of the cliff wall
looking up from below, the way is but a thread hanging down
who was it that bored the anchor holes in the smooth rocks
up there where the floating road sways in the wind

my eyes lose focus and i see only flowers of color
my head aches and i reel as if pelted by a hard rain
a long life ahead seems but a fanciful thought
my life hangs by a thread and one slip ends it all

i have heard stories of the difficulty of qu tang gulch
and the dangerous passage of the da-yu mountains
but nothing prepared me for what is happening here
this has to be the most dangerous time in my life

murphy crawling under machine gun fire in boot camp
11/9/2007 9:47 AM

von zach VI, 65

the plank road over shi gui mountain

in the third month of winter the days have become longer
after sunset the sky over shi-gui mountain slowly reddens to black
now along the roads in si-chuan early flowers are found
many oddly shaped rocks can be seen in the shallow streams

the plank road over shi-gui mountain rises high over the waters
it hangs swinging in the winds above along the steep cliffs
the last rays of light show the birds coming home to roost
the beginning darkness stretches to receive the far traveler

all this wandering has made me rethink becoming a hermit
now the thought of further travel brings forth a deep sigh
perhaps my timidity is due to the continuing rebellion
it is more than simple hunger and cold which bothers me

xie ling-yun enjoyed himself all his life as he roamed
and tao yuan-ming remained true to his restless inclinations
but since i am now grown infirm i do not have such freedom
i feel inadequate when i compare myself to them

murphy working out in the cold thinking of the warm kitchen and coffee
11/10/2007 4:11 AM

von zach VI, 66

the jie-bo ford

in the darkness the jie-bo ford lies along the cold stream
here a long bridge has been fashioned out of bamboo
patches of fog float past the wet canes lashed together
the winds blow through them above the flooding waters

the bridge swings gracefully to and fro awaiting my steps
my travel garments flutter as i gaze on the scene
the strong current has scattered the birds on the river
on the steep shore turtles and crocodiles stare quietly

from here i turn in my travels toward the west
the opposite direction from the stream flowing steadfastly east
it has come from high in the mountains through jing-men gorge
and will run broadly from here to unite in giang-su with the mighty sea

the sun does not show itself to this weary traveller
alone in my desolation with much farther still to go
there is nothing here which could cheer up my heart
nothing for me but further arduous steps over the high mountains

murphy with blistered feet halfway through a fifty mile hike
11/10/2007 5:12 AM

von zach VI, 67

the sword gate mountains

considering all the immense obstacles under the heavens
the sword gate mountains are probably the most difficult
unending mountain chains enclose the entire southwest
the stony crags outthrust, leaning all to the north

both walls through the pass rise steeply
both sides almost vertical like town walls
a few determined men intent on defending the pass
could easily stop even a hundred thousand enemies

all precious goods from si-chuan must pass through here
in the past the o and mei mountains were sad outposts
before the three sovereigns and five emperors
not even chickens and dogs were allowed to pass through

but these later rulers desired to subject distant areas
gradually si-chuan lost its primitive customs and gave tribute
but from time to time rebellious brave men rose up
fell on the protected position of si-chuan as usurpers

they then looked with covetous eyes on all of china
they made their own laws and kept all their treasures
they were secure behind this natural barrier
would that this immense obstacle could be removed

now i fear rebellious men will rise up once more
here in the silence and the winds i stand filled with worries

murphy visiting his daughter on fort washington avenue, the highest point in new york
11/12/2007 9:14 AM

von zach VI, 68

staghead mountain

staghead mountain rises high near cheng du fu
near my final destination hunger and strain fall away
to the southwest the mountains diminish in the distance
i can see all before me for miles and miles

when i, the old traveler, left the capital chang-an
i thought i could never cross over sword gate pass
now when all the difficulties are behind me
i treasure the view of the wide expanse below

once in the past this land was an empire within itself
strong independent minds have always been here
now the whole world is united under one dynasty
and si-chuan no longer has its own imperious palace

i think of long ago, of si-ma xiang-ru and yang xiong
they followed each other and established everlasting fame
their thoughts left to us in their writings seize our minds
we ask ourselves where here might their bones be buried

this land has always been a playground for adventurers
it stretches wide to encompass many a man's ambition
if a loyal man is not chosen to take the governor's post
how can it be possible to maintain the chinese civilization

governor peu mian, the duke from ji, is a sturdy foundation
whose governmental strengths can be relied upon
how wonderful for all the people of si-chuan
that this man has been their long time leader

murphy safe and snug in his small apartment in the big city
11/12/2007 5:05 PM

Von zach VI, 69

the town cheng du fu

the sun sets slowly behind the mulberry and elm trees
the last rays reflecting on this old travelers clothes
i have seen many different landscapes on the way
now suddenly i have arrived at the other end of the world

here there will be many new faces, an unknown fate
i wonder if i will ever see the old native country again
the great river has flowed always to the east
as i for a long time moved steadily west

within these towering city walls are many mansions
and even though it is late winter the trees are still green
this famous capital city is noisy and lively
many different instruments mix their sounds in the air

the place is really marvelous, but no one greets me
i turn my attention to the river and its bridges
big birds, small birds, here all seek their nests
unfortunately i have no wings to fly home to china

the new moon begins to rise but only low in the sky
it shares the night with the flicker of stars
many able men throughout history have lived in exile
why should i complain that this is also my destiny

murphy remembering swimming in the colorado river as a child
11/13/2007 7:54 AM

von zach VI, 70

shedding problems, two poems (1 of 2)

for the longest time while traveling i thought only of returning home
now because of the incessant fighting i harbor no such hopes
it is the wet season in si-chuan and one rarely sees the stars
instead one listens at night to the rain on the river

it is reported that thousands of our troops invade the rebel's land
truly the entire world hopes for nothing but their success
minister li guang bi taking back yan and zhao
and finally restoring the old lands to us again

murphy with aching wrist in the autumn rains

11/13/2007 8:10 AM

von zach VI, 71

shedding problems, two poems (2 of 2)

i hear reports that minister of war wang si li now holds bing-zhou
within the fortress there his troops maintain austere discipline
when will he advance north to ji-zhou, the center of the rebel's lands
i hope news of his success will soon reach chang-an

the longing for the emperor's court there breaks a patriot's heart
below my thin white hair tears wet an exile's humble clothes
it is this old man's misfortune not to be recalled
i fear i shall never find my way back to the capital again

murphy sitting quietly in his daughter's house in rome
11/13/2007 8:21 AM

von zach VI, 72

sorrow because of long separation from home

since i departed from lo-yang city 4000 miles away
the rebel warriors have spent six years in china
the plants had withered when i reached si-chuan in late winter
and the continuing war has kept me here since

i walk in moonlight on clear nights thinking of home
during the days i remember my brothers looking at clouds
i heard recently li guang bi has retaken he-yang from the enemy
now he must shatter shi si-ming to regain all our lands

murphy finishing his morning chores and settling down with a book of poetry
11/13/2007 8:36 AM

von zach VI, 73