

an answer to a poem of the governor gao shi concerning buddhist learning

only a few of the priests remain in the aged cloister
i have taken temporary lodging there in an empty room
an old friend supports me with rice from his family farm
neighbors give me vegetables from their gardens

in the courtyard two old trees remind of those buddha himself taught under
but my three carts i brought along are for books not sutras
how could they assume i could approach the great mystery
maybe instead they might expect poetry like that of si-ma xiang-ru

murphy going off by himself to ponder the inevitable
12/17/2007 4:11 PM

von zach VII, 1

a respectful response to the poem "early spring" from my maternal uncle governor li

recovering from an illness i sit outdoors in the morning chill
there i am presented with your poem about early spring
it deepens the melancholy of this constant traveller
ever more i feel the vicissitudes of old age

the delicate red of peach blossoms are now on the trees
the nascent green of new growth spills into the pastures
nightly dreams of returning home are still with me
but the tumultuous war extends throughout the land

murphy beholding the purblind mist of dawn
1/14/2008 9:42 AM

von zach VII, 2

choosing a home site

along the flower washing stream's western shore
governor pei mian has provided a homesite near a remote wooden dam
as i leave the bustle of town behind, the world's troubles begin to leave me
the flow of the river will continue to ease the careworn traveler

countless dragonflies skim the surface then flit high in the air
a pair of wild ducks disport themselves on the clear waters
from here i could leave on a journey thousands of miles to the east
if i had the inclination and a boat to make my way

murphy folding his tent in the full of morning
1/14/2008 4:16 PM

von zach VII, 3

my cousin, underprefect wang (15th of his clan), visits me from town and brings money
for constructing my thatched hut

how many moves have i made since i left my old home
now here on the shore of a stream i have found quietude
you were so kind to visit this old man in his new place
you have chased away the grief of my morning

you worried about how occupied i am with the construction of my hut
and brought money here over the bridge of the wilderness
here far away from home you are the only family i have
please come again and do not begrudge the distance

murphy sleeping on the couch of a friend while he seeks an apartment of his own
1/15/2008 10:07 AM

von zach VII, 4

completion of the straw hut

my hut standing with its back to town is now finished, roofed with white thatch
the road from the city lies along the stream, then over the green countryside
sallow trees grow high around to shade the sun, the wind plays in their leaves
the giant bamboo encased in morning mist drip with dew

the ravens pause in their flight while their young play on the grounds
the twittering swallows cannot decide on a spot for their nest
my neighbors speak of a comparison to the house of yang xiong
he wrote his famous treatise there, but i have no such desires

murphy sipping green tree in his newly appointed kitchen
1/15/2008 10:28 AM

von zach VII,5

a visit to the xiu jue cloister

the river and sky stretch wide before the country cloister
the mountain gate cunningly hidden behind a profusion of flowering bamboo
the awakening of the spirit leads to singing this song
fortunate i am to arrive here in the fullness of spring

the rocks along the path wrap around in a solid belt
the clouds over the stream hover then move slowly away
many birds roost in the monastery's trees
but a mere visitor, i return at sunset to my life of sorrows

murphy fully realizing the indelibility of death
1/15/2008 10:58 AM

von zach VII,6

a later visit to the country cloister

on this later visit i recognize the small details
i am privileged to cross the bridge a second time
the mountain and stream welcome an old friend
the more so the flowers in the field envelop me

the vista gleams a brilliant green under wisps of light fog
the sandy shore holds its morning chill in the mild spring sun
all this eases the ongoing grief of the outsider
if not to this beautiful setting where would i go

murphy looking for fields of bluebonnet mid-april in texas
1/16/2008 8:26 AM

von zach VII,7

a guest comes

i live in the outskirts where only a few people bother to come
for a old sick man who walks with a cane it is difficult to bow in greeting
and what do i offer the world that it should seek me out
it takes a special effort to make one's way here to the river's shore

yet i detained my noble guest to sit with me the entire day
and coul offer but the coarse food that is the lot of a useless scholar
if you are not too bothered by the poor fare in this backwater
please come again when you have need of my medicinal herb garden

murphy eschewing the better mousetrap
1/16/2008 8:55 AM

von zach VII,8

the fool

to the west of the wan li bridge stands my straw hut
the water of bai hua stream passes my longed for hermitage
a soft wind playing through the bamboo teases my thought
the perfume of red lotus blossoms permeates the air

i receive no more letters from my imperial salaried friends
and my children have become pale from hunger
a fool should have joy even while lying in the gutter
he should laugh the louder as he dodders, older and more clownish

murphy counting the pennies in his piggy bank
1/16/2008 11:00 AM

von zach VII,9

a visitor comes

my illness has persisted for some time now
but here in my chosen abode on the shore of the great river
i am far removed from the dusty, noisy town
the fresh air and calm is especially beneficial

here comes a guest to visit my straw hut
i call my son to help straighten my head scarf
then i pick some fresh vegetables from my garden
a small offer to my guest in warm greeting

murphy drinking his herbal tea as a tonic
1/16/2008 11:40 AM

von zach VII,10

the minister from si-chuan, zhu-ge liang

where is the commemorative temple of prime minister zhu-ge liang
beyond the walls of cheng-du-fu where the many cypress grow
the dark green grass between the stone steps showing only the color of spring
the orioles hidden among the trees wasting their sprightly songs

he met his new sovereign three times to plan how to reunite china
he aspired to serve two rulers, father and son, loyally and well
he led the troops in the field against wei but died before the final victory
this memory shall bring tears to all good men throughout time

murphy mindful of the state of his stars
1/18/2008 10:49 AM

von zach VII,11

the story of the stone obelisks

my friend, have you not been by the west gate of cheng-du-fu
and seen there along the way the twin stone obelisks
tradition has it they block a cave leading to an eye of the sea
their magic is to stop this standing water from flooding in

moss and water have destroyed all the old carvings
yet when strong rains come corals and pearls are sometimes exposed
the stories are not consistent and are hard to explain
my guess is that it was a grave of a high dignitary

his obelisks put up as landmarks have survived until today
but as with all things left long exposed they are darkened and disfigured
just as a bad minister eventually corrupts his lieutenants
and the management of the state degenerates into decay

yet he still watches over and imbues all around with his reflected glory
though his stone obelisks have come to own a wrongful fame
where is the courageous man to write an explanation for the world
so all superstitious people would know about their origin and true being

murphy seeking petroglyphs along the gila river in arizona
1/30/2008 2:17 PM

von zach VII,12

surrendering to feelings, nine poems (1 of 9)

i can't seem to manage the grief of exile
even the play of early spring outside my pavilion obtrudes
on the one hand it brings a too clamoring effusion of blooms
and on the other it makes the orioles sing too loudly

murphy not even hungry for chocolate
1/30/2008 5:06 PM

von zach VII, 13

surrendering to feelings, nine poems (2 of 9)

i planted the peaches and plums with my own hands
this old farmer's walls are low, but they are still his
so it hurts when the brisk spring winds violate me
last night they brought down many flowering branches

murphy arranging fruit in a decorative turquoise bowl
1/30/2008 9:44 PM

von zach VII, 14

surrendering to feelings, nine poems (3 of 9)

aware that my thatched hut is humble and low
the swallows swoop in repeatedly from the great river
the mud in their beaks falls on my lute and my books
and when chasing the gnats they barely miss me

murphy sitting away from the lantern and the bugs it attracts
2/11/2008 8:18 AM

von zach VII,15

surrendering to feelings, nine poems (4 of 9)

april is gone and may can now begin
i'm old this spring and wonder how many more
then i put aside the worries of the flesh
and content myself with a few mugs of wine

murphy gently heating his sake' on a cold february morning
2/11/2008 8:35 AM

von zach VII,16

surrendering to feelings, nine poems (5 of 9)

my heart is torn as spring is leaving the river bank
i lean on my cane and slowly wend my way
the catkins making merry dance in the swirling winds
peach blossoms abandoning themselves to swim on the waves

murphy strolling the rambles of central park
2/11/2008 8:58 AM

von zach VII,17

surrendering to feelings, nine poems (6 of 9)

despite my laziness i can't stay cooped up
i tell my son not to worry and to close the gate behind me
i sit on blue green moss, drink strong wine, enjoy the woods
until the afternoon wind picks up and darkness begins

murphy content in his glassed in cave
2/11/2008 9:13 AM

von zach VII,18

surrendering to feelings, nine poems (7 of 9)

the clustered blossoms along the way form a white carpet
the lotus leaves green copper plates on the water
a fledgling pheasant camouflaged by the bamboo sprouts
young ducklings on the river bank, beside their mother, asleep

murphy replete in the sunshine of may
2/11/2008 9:27 AM

von zach VII,19

surrendering to feelings, nine poems (8 of 9)

west of my hut the mulberry leaves are ready for picking
the young wheat fine and delicate along the shore
how many more springs are in my future
i turn once more to my sweet tasting wine

murphy opting for whisky to liven his spirits
2/11/2008 9:44 AM

von zach VII,20

surrendering to feelings, nine poems (9 of 9)

the willow by the gate has graceful swaying branches
they move in the wind with the elegance of 15 year old girls
but this morning one cannot help but be disturbed
to see many slender limbs broken by the strong night winds

murphy trimming his bonsai to a graceful bend
2/11/2008 10:05 AM

von zach VII,21

on the wall tower by the north bridge of xin jin xian. as a rhyme i am given jiao.

from the town wall we look out on spring far into the distance
we celebrate here in the high tower close to the bird's nests
beyond the canopy one sees budding white blossoms
before the balustrade begin the corners of green fields

the pure water of the lake reflects the rectitude of local official management
the smoke from the kitchens is not oily with the cooking of animals
to the eyes of a stranger the scenery of western si-chuan is beautiful
as is the view within the town of xin jin along the great river

murphy gazing over the hudson to the jersey shore
2/11/2008 11:08 AM

von zach VII, 22

the mountains overcast by clouds

beyond the mountains overcast by clouds lie chang-an and luo-yang
for a long time all news has been missing from these seats of power
i share the feelings of ban gu and zhang heng who wrote of them during han times
tiredly i climb to the balcony where one may look out toward the home country

old and ill i now rest on the shore of the great river
family and friends have returned home and left me alone
yet the white gulls always spend the night on the shores of the great river
why should i, restless as a gull, be especially saddened by my fate

murphy surprised at how many apartments he has lived in on the upper west side
2/11/2008 11:47 AM

von zach VII, 23

the tale of the cuckoo

have you not seen the fabled early emperor from si-chuan
he was transformed into a cuckoo and looks ugly like an old crow
he lays his brood in foreign nests and feeds them not himself
the other birds have provided for his young til this day

though birds still treat him as of old in the ceremonies of prince and subject
he is condemned to be lonely with no children to ease his fate
he keeps to the deep wood and carefully hides himself
in the fourth and fifth month especially he strongly calls

the sound is so bitter it must issue from a mouth full of blood
why are the sounds always complaining: i'm here, koo-koo
is it the memory of an old slander that so rankles
or are you ashamed of the ugly feathers you wear

who can come to grips with the great transformations we undergo
when everything goes wrong anything is possible
when everything goes wrong nothing is impossible
how can you not remember all the officials scurrying to your palace

murphy missing the corner office with his three secretaries
2/11/2008 3:58 PM

von zach VII,24

working the fields

i live beyond the dusty, noisy town of cheng-du-fu
there are eight or nine huts in my village on the shore of the great river
the small, round leaves of the lotus float on the water
the light pollen of the barley is scattered by the winds

i have chosen my home to be here as i grow older and older
the affairs of the state slowly recede from the minds of a farmer
my main regret is that i cannot emulate the sage ko hung
who never gave up his search for the elixir of life

murphy remembering his college experiments with lsd
2/11/2008 4:21 PM

von zach VII,25

the rain of the yellow plums at the beginning of the summer

in the xi pu district around cheng-du-fu
the yellow plums ripen in this the fourth month
mighty water masses roll by in the great river
a light rain falls as daylight begins to fade

the thatch roof of my hut is thin and the rain trickles through
clouds and fog are thick and the weather will not soon clear
all day dragons have frolicked in the high waters
while surging eddies have eaten away at the river banks

murphy replete with a steadiness of place
2/12/2008 8:19 AM

von zach VII,26

my country house

my country house, straw hall, sits on a bend of the clear stream
the simple wooden door opens out onto a neglected old road
high grass blocks the view into the market town
one can even forego getting dressed during the day

the surrounding willows frail arms swing in the wind
loquat blossoms cluster perfuming the air
cormorants bask in the warm evening sun
sitting on weirs stretching wing feathers to dry

murphy seeking a spot in the sun to spread his towel
2/12/2008 8:42 AM

von zach VII,27

the village on the shore of the great river

the clear water flows around the village in a big bend
the long summer here is quiet and the village rests at peace
a swallow flits from her nest, then quickly returns
the gulls ceaselessly play on the waters

my wife draws lines on paper for a go game
my small son hammers a fishhook from a needle
though i am ill i have ample medicines
what more should a simple man need

murphy counting his blessings on his 70th birthday
2/12/2008 8:54 AM

von zach VII,28

high water on the river

beyond the hedge gate the river rushes in torrent
the children come to say it seems in even more of a hurry
while i get ready for the day it rises another foot
i see the island in the middle of the stream disappear

the swallows flit by in an elegant swiftness
gulls hover suspended in the wind over the waves
a fisherman readies the oars in his small boat
smoothly launches into the roiling stream

murphy watching the turbulent spring floods in 1965, londonderry, vermont
2/12/2008 10:32 AM

von zach VII,29

a song of the horses painted on my wall by wei yên.

master wei comes to say goodbye before he leaves
he knows i value his incomparable paintings
so jokingly he picks up one of my old bald brushes
and suddenly there are marvelous horses on my eastern wall

one is foraging on grass and the other neighs loudly
both are able to pound the ground for a thousand miles
oh, that they indeed were real, for in these troubled times
they would serve me well in life or in death

murphy cinching the saddle tightly before his morning gallop
2/12/2008 10:54 AM

von zach VII,30

humorous song on a landscape of the painter wang zai

in ten days wang paints a river, in five days a rock
a man who paints as he does cannot be rushed
only slowly can his desire achieve true form
this picture captures kun lun mountain and the island fang-hu

it hangs on the white wall of his august entrance hall
the waters of dong-ting lake below ba-ling flow east to japan
the waters of the yang-zi flow as to reflect the milky way
in the middle of picture are clouds and flying dragons

boatmen and fishermen find themselves in a small bay
mountain trees all bend to the wind raising large waves
none of the ancients equal his special skill with distant prospects
a small part of the painting equals hundreds of miles

i must obtain a pair of sharp bing-zhou scissors
if i wish to snip off half the entire wu-song river

murphy lost in the mists of sumi-e
2/12/2008 2:57 PM

humorous song on a painting of two spruces by the painter wei yan

how few people in this world can paint venerable old spruces
the painter bi hong is already too old, but wei yan is still young
when his brush finally rests the needles seem in motion from the wind
all visitors to the hall are astonished at their miraculous beauty

two trunks stand before us with cracked bark and covered with moss
the sinuous branches intertwine above as bent rods of iron
white fractures on their surface remind of dragon or tiger bones
the darker areas seem charged rain clouds ready to burst

at their feet a tatar monk sits in contemplation
thick eyebrows and white hair frame eyes free of all desire
his robe leaves his right arm free, his feet are bare
pine cones have fallen all around him

o master wei, master wei, i am glad we have here met
i have a piece of fine white silk from eastern si-chuan
it's beauty already rivals that of embroider or brocade
i have carefully brushed and smoothed it to a lustrous shine

so i ask you humbly to touch it with your brush
to set before me a slender young spruce with fine straight branches

murphy at the brooklyn museum for the von gogh exhibit
2/12/2008 4:48 PM

von zach VII,32

i leave cheng-du-fu to proceed to qing-cheng-xian; i send these verses to both
underprefects from cheng-du-fu tao and wang

although quite old i am still required to continue my travels
because of my poverty these trips are quite fatiguing
with all the trepidations of a stranger i go to a foreign district
at this time i recall the poems we recently sealed together

the broad eastern vista shows two streams uniting into a great river
to the west the mountains of tibet are covered with eternal snow
these days only the writing poetry comes easy to me
a last look back at cheng-du-fu inspires me to this verse

murphy burnishing his reputation as a writer of occasional poetry
2/12/2008 5:07 PM

von zach VII,33

looking over the land i decide to visit the underprefect chang

together with a friend i ride over an old country bridge
how refreshing it is to explore the land in the fall
bamboos cover the whole district of qing-zheng
the winding valley stream comes from guan-kou

we decide to go up a lumberman's trail to visit chang
he shows us his garden so we can eat of his fruit
and even after the sun has completely disappeared
our esteemed, reclusive host begs us to stay a while longer

murphy driving to the wilds of brooklyn to visit a colleague
2/13/2008 8:31 AM

von zach VII,34

the zhang-ren mountain

since i am a guest in qing-cheng-xian i dare not to spit on the ground
for i love the zhang-ren peak with its lovely red wildflowers
the mountain temple there reflects my love of seclusion
i love to climb up within clouds to stand befogged, alone

here one may find the herb which makes the white hair of age black again
and makes the face to lose its wrinkles and be as smooth as ice

murphy strolling through the cosmetics section of macy's on a saturday morning
2/13/2008 9:12 AM

von zach VII,35

i leave the outskirts of the town qing-cheng-xian

a heavy hoarfrost forms in the bitter cold of evening
the heavens seem lower looking off into the distance
the smoke from the salt-works smudges the horizon
the oblique rays of the setting sun gild the snowy peaks

in my native land the battles still rage on
even here one hears the resounding drums of war
this night i return to my home in cheng-du-fu
i add my voice of grief to the crow's despair

murphy slogging through the february slush to get the morning papers
2/13/2008 9:29 AM

von zach VII,36

i take the ferry over the huan-hua river

the rays of the setting sun make the high tower gleam
i board my boat to set out on the wide meandering huan-hua
who says that cheng-du-fu is a backwater town
even this far west the stately pines of villages abound

and beyond them in the wilderness devoid of people
the colors of autumn spread their special sadness
on the tips of the mountains the snow shines
beyond the clouds one can see the stretch of a rainbow

boys play along both shores of the river
they have brought their nets and their fishing bows
some disturb the lotus flowers and harvest water chestnuts
and show the other boys how this is done

when they catch a fish they clean them quickly
but when they pull the lotus roots they seldom wash them
this is as it has always been done with us
fresh beauty is welcomed, gross squalor rejected

the village is already wrapped in darkness
in all the people's huts the chickens now roost
in this continuing time of trouble why would one wish to travel
provincial official or hermit is the way to survive

my clothes reflect the feeble rays of the new moon
as i pass through fields i recently harvested
and return to the murky wine just become drinkable
yet even it doesn't make me forget the war drums east of the city

murphy continuing his struggle day by day
2/13/2008 10:05 AM

von zach VII,37

i dedicate this poem to my older friend, the venerable priest lü-qiu from si-chuan

you, venerated master, embody the spirit of tong-liang mountain
you, famous yourself, are also a scion from a famous family
your late grandfather was an imminent professor of tai-chang-si
he embodied the wonderful natural forces of his time

i think back to that historical period of time
when the empress wu-hou guided china from her palace
there were many scholars who all followed the teachings of confucius
and veritable clouds of famous authors assembled at court

at that time such men were honored before the steps of the throne
and not only high dignitaries and ministers were so rewarded
the whole world knew of the literary worth of lü-qiu-jun
his writings loomed as large in imagination as the kun-lun mountains

when his divine spirit was extinguished darkness covered the sky
the dragons disappeared and everywhere the waters were murky
his famous inscriptions on the shining stones in si-chuan
east of the tibetan snowy mountains are still esteemed today

his writings are scattered about the capital and other cities of the empire
their value exceeds even that of costly precious stones
only as i have grown quite old have i fully understood his deeper ideas
and i find it difficult to find others to share these final insights with

my grandfather du-shen-yan was famous for his poetry in that time
he received the imperial honors at the same time as lü-qiu-jun
du-shen-yan was like a towering tree which spreads between the sun and moon
he has left deep roots for us in later times to use freely as we see fit

yet i will admit my thoughts have remained always superficial
i feel i have only reached to the entry gates of high literature
as i here in deep distress wipe away my tears of grief
i meet you to share as a brother our memories of our grandfathers

i have lived within the confines of the city of cheng-du-fu
while you have chosen to remain outside in a buddhist cloister
because we are close to each other you can comfort my homesickness
we should have continual visits as if we were only a hedge or a hill apart

now the rainy season in si-chuan has finally come to an end
though the beaten down plants in the paddies have yet to thrust up with vigor
and i have grown tired of wandering in search of a small official post
i have returned to rest and turn to you the buddhist priest

in the evening i walked about the long porch of the cloister
and was free of the incessant sounds of horses and carts
deep into the night i received the gentle teachings of buddha
and saw the setting of the moon shimmering as a silver bowl

the larger world beyond here is wrapped in deep darkness
yet the striving of the people to better themselves is insatiable
for them only the pearl of the teachings of buddha
can make the murky waters of the dirty world come clear

murphy wondering why he still bothers to try to keep up with current affairs
2/13/2008

von zach VII,38

the old rustic

the bending shore of the stream lies before this old rustic's hedge
the gate not squared with the directions because it opens toward the stream
the nets of the fishermen are lowered into the clear waters
the boats of tradesmen hurry back and forth as evening falls

i think back to my time on the dangerous plank roads through the mountains
then idly puzzle why a single cloud remains high in the sky without moving
the imperial troops have yet to report the retaking of the eastern district
it is autumn again and war bugles still echo from the gate towers of cheng-du-fu

murphy questioning the wisdom of sitting zazen for a zen clown
2/13/2008 1:23 PM

von zach VII,39

here stands a single house

here stands a single house in a foreign land far away from my native country
the evening rays stream through the surrounding deserted woods
i sit here filled with grief hearing the plaintive flutes of these borderlands
i spend much of my time now watching the boats pass by on the stream

since i have come to si-chuan i have often been ill
how many more years do i have to go on to hu-be or hu-nan
and after i am gone will this straw hut become famous
as did the home of wang-can in xiang-yang beside xian mountain

murphy suffering the sin of hubris yet again
2/13/2008 1:36 PM

von zach VII,40

the northern neighbor (wang qian)

you didn't give up your status as a district judge because you were growing too old
it was the desire for solitude that led you into your retirement from man's affairs
you spent a great deal of good money surrounding yourself with wild bamboo
and you can be easily spotted on the riverbank with your distinctive white hat

i know you prefer to drink only the best of wines as did the ancient shan-jian
i also feel you are an excellent poet comparable to the venerable he-xun
and sometimes you venture over to visit with your sickly old neighbor
wearing your clogs to pass through the high grass to reach his humble hut

murphy thirsty for the taste of a good single malt
2/14/2008 7:52 AM

von zach VII,41

the southern neighbor (zhu-xi-zhen)

the master of our neighborhood wears a black angular cap
he grows yams and chestnuts in his garden and has enough for his needs
he is always a welcome guest and the children greet him with joy
the birds even continue their feeding on the steps as he arrives

the river is four or five feet deep this autumn
and happily my skiff accommodates us both
evening sinks around the village, the white sand, the green bamboo
we part in the moonlight at my brushwood gate

murphy taking the circle tour around manhattan on a lazy summer day
2/14/2008 8:09 AM

von zach VII,42

night in the village

this evening the weather turned cold, inhospitable
there are no more boats plying their way out on the river
despite pounding rain the sound of the watermill is still heard
and the fires of the neighbors shine out into the darkness

what terrible grief has been wrought on us by the rebellion
i must now spend my life among fishermen and woodcutters
in the middle empire are my brothers and friends
from a thousand miles away my longing for them deepens

murphy looking at pictures of his extended family back in texas
2/14/2008 8:21 AM

von zach VII,43

a letter transmitted deferentially to the authorized imperial representative gao shi, 35th of
his clan

if one speaks of talented men of the present generation
in the end how few of them can be compared to you
the noble stallion rides at the head of the troops
the falcon rises above the earthly clouds of dust

this old traveler is in the late autumn of his life
and your friendship is more dear as we grow older
it is a rare joy to meet here at the end of the world
an unexpected pleasure in freely sharing our innermost thoughts

murphy meeting by chance his old college roommate
2/14/2008 8:35 AM

von zach VII,44

i send this poem to yang tan, prefect from gui-zhou, 5th of his clan

in the area of the five mountain ranges summers glow with heat
then only in gui-lin can life be said to be endurable
in the spring plum blossoms are plentiful for countless miles
but the whole winter through the land is deep with snow

when i heard this my heart stilled thinking of you
at the same time i hear you prosper there as an administrator
here on the shore of the great river i take leave of secretary duan
and from a distance send with him this song of loyalty up til our end

murphy as always a man of his word
2/14/2008 9:38 AM

von zach VII,45

the western precincts

i have just returned from the town of bi-ji in the western precincts
it is good to get back to my thatch covered hut
the pastures planted near the market bridge are still tender
and the wild plum trees along the way spread their perfume

i stand beside my book stands and neaten my books
i read the titles of my bags of medicine and check how much of each are left
today nobody seemed to notice my going or coming
my sense of detachment grows ever more strong

murphy cutting all ties with his former colleagues
2/14/2008 9:57 AM

von zach VII,46

i answer a poem of bei di, occasioned when he took leave of a guest on the east pavilion
and noticed the early plum blossoms, and use the same rhymes

the plum blossoms of the east pavilion have occasioned your poem
it is as once occurred to the poet he-xun when he was in yang-zhou
and now looking over the snow i am reminded to think of you
saying goodbye to your guests as the first signs of spring led your thoughts

how fortunate you did not send the blooms to sadden me at this time of year
longing for my native country how could i have endured their sight
here on the shore stands a plum tree which has pendulous blossoms
it is a sign that the new spring will find my hair even more white

murphy brushing the ever thinner hair on his balding pate
2/14/2008 10:33 AM

von zach VII,47

i request peach cuttings from the garden of district judge xiao-shi, 8th of his clan

i am presumptuous in asking you for a hundred peach cuttings
please send them to the village of huan-hua before the start of spring
while the peach trees in your district are countless
my garden here on the bend of the river is not yet filled

murphy calling in an old debt
2/14/2008 10:45 AM

von zach VII,48

i request a hundred cuttings of willows from under-magistrate he-yong, 11th of his clan

the channel to the west of my thatched hut has no trees
who can i turn to in my solitary need except to you
i have often heard that willow trees grow tall in three years
please help me bring plenteous shade to my shore along the huan-hua

murphy wrapping himself in the cloak of supplication
2/14/2008 11:02 AM

von zach VII,49

i request a few spruce tree saplings from the district magistrate wei ban

the spruce towers high above other trees such as the willow
and it rivals even the myrtle in remaining always green
i would like to put up some spruce crowns which will last a thousand years
please send me a few saplings with long sprigs of snow-white roots

murphy planning for the landscaping around his house to last for a century
2/14/2008 11:23 AM

von zach VII,50

another request of wei for porcelain bowls from da-yi

the fired pottery of da-yi is light and durable
when tapped it rings true as the finest jade chime stones
the white bowls in your household gleam as new snow
please send a few out to me where they will be appreciated

murphy writing on cardboard his plea for loose change
2/15/2008 7:41 AM

von zach VII,51

rising early

since the spring has come i always get up early
then chores of my secluded life are easily done
i pile up stones to prevent the erosion of the river bank
i hack clear the path through the woods to the mountain

its heights are reached through gulches and thickets
i forge my way slowly and with great effort
eagerly awaiting my young servant's return
he has gone to market to fetch a large flagon of wine

murphy waiting for noon to begin his toping
2/15/2008 8:00 AM

von zach VII,52

lute terrace

si-ma xiang-ru though long suffering as a sickly man
wooed and won the beautiful zhuo-wen-jun
they ran a small wineshop here beside lute terrace
now only dusky clouds float by the crumbling ruins

the wildflowers growing about remind of her headdress
the deep green of the grass her silken robes
but the magical sounds of the phoenix searching for its mate
no longer resound from this fabled place

murphy musing on the therapeutic powers of music
2/15/2008 8:31 AM

von zach VII,53

a full feeling of nature, two poems (1 of 2)

here in the country the spring sunlight is still tenuous
the clear stream flows by with hardly a sound
the reeds crowd alongside the sandy bank
the village paths meander from house to house

i have assumed the habits of an indolent man
and now as tao-yuan-ming strain my wine with a headscarf
i keep my eyes from the bustling outer world
and even with my ailments my body feels light

murphy fully adjusted to the sedentary way of life
2/15/2008 8:55 AM

von zach VII, 54

a full feeling of nature, two poems (2 of 2)

on the riverbank it is already the middle of spring
i spend the early morning beneath blossoms again
i look up at the birds and envy their song
i turn my head and answer their call

when i read now i skip the hard parts
when i drink i keep my cup full
my new friend, the old man of o-mei
already knows my laziness is real

murphy always with his feet on his desk
2/15/2008 9:15 AM

von zach VII, 55

arrival of a guest

south of the hut, north of the hut, all spring waters
flocks of feeding gulls have been our only callers
the path is not swept of flowers to welcome guests
the hedge gate for the first time is opened for you

the market is far so i can offer only rice, no tasty treats
and the only wine around is my unsettled home brew
but if you like we can make a party with my old neighbor
i'll shout over the fence and we can all drink together

murphy searching the larder for that bottle of scotch he remembers hiding
2/15/2008 10:50 AM

von zach VII,56

walking alone along the riverbank admiring the flowers (1 of 7)

the intensity of the flowers along the stream shatter my calm
wishing to discuss my frenzy of feelings i go to seek company
i hurry over to my southern neighbor, my drinking companion
but when i arrive i hear he has been off on a drunk for ten days

murphy lamenting the death of an old drinking buddy
2/15/2008 11:12 AM

von zach VII,57

walking alone along the riverbank admiring the flowers (2 of 7)

a tangled riot of flowers blankets the river shore
in awe of spring's power i stagger drunkenly along
poetry and carousing are things i can still manage
don't pity this white-haired old man just yet

murphy ordering another case of sake' from the wine store
2/15/2008 11:26 AM

von zach VII,58

walking alone along the riverbank admiring the flowers (3 of 7)

beside the stillness of the bamboo grove stand a few houses
but even there coquettish visions of red and of white intrude
the only response to these vociferous glories of spring
is to go find some wine and drink the sun down

murphy remembering the tiny fridge he used in college exclusively for beer
2/15/2008 11:34 AM

von zach VII,59

walking alone along the riverbank admiring the flowers (4 of 7)

to the east i see a small town covered in a fog of flowers
how much more lovely to look down from its tower on such beauty
but who can afford to empty golden cups of expensive wine
or summon dancing girls to twirl before the embroidered mats

murphy imagining the omekase dinner at nobu
2/15/2008 11:49 AM

von zach VII,60

walking alone along the riverbank admiring the flowers (5 of 7)

before the stupa of the llama to the east of the great river
exhausted by spring i lean on my cane in the light breeze
i am surrounded by peach blossoms whose beauty no one owns
i can't pick a favorite from the deep reds or the pinks

murphy breathing freely of the crisp northern winds
2/15/2008 11:56 AM

von zach VII,61

walking alone along the riverbank admiring the flowers (6 of 7)

before the house of the woman huang-si blossoms cover the whole path
thousands upon thousands press down the branches
here and there a butterfly flits by in an erratic dance
while the orioles spill happiness in endless song

murphy bewildered by the sweet tugs of spring on his decrepit old body
2/15/2008 12:03 PM

von zach VII,62

walking alone along the riverbank admiring the flowers (7 of 7)

i don't love the blossoms so much that i will die
but i do fear my growing old too quickly after they are gone
they fade and scatter so quickly, then leave such a void behind
why can't they bud more slowly and linger with their heady perfumes

murphy enjoying the nose of his courvoisier
2/15/2008 12:12 PM

von zach VII,63

rising spring waters (1 of 2)

on the sixth night of the spring moon the waters begin to rise
the sandy bank before my hedge is almost completely awash
you cormorants and wild ducks, don't be so quick to celebrate
we will all be looking at a raging flood before it's over

murphy retelling the saga of the muddy rise of the colorado in 1946
2/16/2008 8:08 AM

von zach VII,64

rising spring waters (2 of 2)

the stream has risen more than two feet overnight
a few more days of this and we will be lost
at the ford in the southern market boats are for sale
but i cannot afford to buy one to save myself

murphy in a heavy downpour having to go to work without an umbrella
2/16/2008 8:18 AM

von zach VII,65

delightful spring night rain

the good rain comes in its good time
especially in spring when all is born
borne on the wind it soaks through the night
in a steady wet that comes without sound

the country lanes wander under dark water clouds
the boats on the river cover their bright fires
in fresh morning light the puddles are red
and flowers flourish in old cheng-du

murphy knowing that summer comes next
3-18-02 1:45 pm

von zach VII,66

surrendering to my thoughts (1 of 2)

an oriole sings to his mate on a nearby branch
a gull swims nimbly out by the river island
fallen blossoms dot the path to my gate
in this lonesome village i look at the swollen spring waves

my body continues to fail me so i turn more and more to wine
though this fine rain has helped my resetting a young orange tree
i am truly glad that most people are drifting away
i renounce all attempts at fame in favor of this seclusion

murphy replete with his poetry and his books
2/16/2008 8:42 AM

von zach VII,67

surrendering to my thoughts (2 of 2)

the shadows of the eaves slowly disappear
the waters of the stream float soundlessly past
the boats on the river flicker with lights
sleeping ducks rise to track up the sand

floating clouds cover the burgeoning moon
a fragrance betrays the nearness of blossoming shrubs
my neighbor has a stock of excellent wine
my son can go fetch some, even on credit

murphy raiding his piggy bank to buy a six pack of beer
2/16/2008 8:59 AM

von zach VII,68

spring floods

when the peach trees bloom in march high water comes
the floods of the stream resume their old ways
in the morning i note the disappearance of the sand bank
as greenish waves lap against my cottage gate

i dangle the fishline and let the tasty bait hang in the water
i connect the hollowed bamboo to irrigate the small garden
seemingly from nowhere has come a flock of birds
who frolic noisily in their high water bath

murphy teaching his son how to bait his hook with worms
2/16/2008 9:11 AM

von zach VII,69

the pavilion in the stream

i lie on the pavilion by the stream and sun my body
stretching, i lazily eye the woods while singing a song
my quiescent heart ignores the turbulent stream
my mood is more slow reflecting the clouds

then in silence spring hurries toward its end
the whole of nature cheerful and at ease
i know i cannot return to my native land
so i turn back my head to write another poem

murphy content with his somnolent days of old age
2/16/2008 9:22 AM

von zach VII,70

an idle stroll

i put on my shoes and begin a leisurely stroll through the fields
the sun sinks slowly behind the pavilion of the forest
swallows flit by carrying mud from the garden in their beaks
bees swarm around with swatches of pollen stuck to their bodies

i dribble wine on my clothes as i hobble along
supported with my cane singing my verse
how could anyone envy me because of my talents
now i am merely a silly old drunken fool

murphy with clients having his usual three martini lunch
2/16/2008 2:45 PM

von zach VII,71

the festival when no fire is lit

on this day streams of blossoms fall from the trees
flying in the wind they cover the pathways in the village
over the river island a light fog descends
the rays of the sun shine pure through the bamboo grove

i accept invitation to all the neighbor's spreads of cold food
when they offer me presents i accept them all
in this secluded place we all know each other well
even the chickens and dogs wander around freely

murphy handing the doorman christmas envelopes for all the help
2/16/2008 2:55 PM

von zach VII,72

the stone mirror on the grave of a royal concubine

one of the kings of si-chuan erected this stone mirror
on this desolate mountain he showed his love for his concubine
in order to honor her corpse deep in the dark grave
he placed a mirror to remind all of her reflected beauty

the other concubines sighed with relief after her death
the thousand riders who brought the stone returned more easy
only the circular stone of royal pain remained behind
it now sinks into a depression round like the moon

murphy sweeping the backtrail with leafy branches to elude his pursuers
2/16/2008 3:15 PM

von zach VII,73

the tale of country squire (1 of 2)

don't laugh at the old earthenware mug of the farmers
while it held wine sons and grandchildren have grown
pouring out of silver or jade only beguiles the eyes
in the end one sleeps it off among the roots of the bamboo

murphy standing close to the keg at the beer bust
2/16/2008 3:29 PM

von zach VII,74

the tale of country squire (2 of 2)

the young nestlings of the swallows have all flown away
the thousand blossoms of spring are now gone leaving far fewer fruit
the young squire in his yellow silk shirt should visit here often
to watch time pass by this thatched hut on the east running waves

murphy putting away the toys til the grandchildren come back for another visit
2/16/2008 3:37 PM

von zach VII,75

humorous song for general hua-jing-ding

a certain hua is among the courageous generals from cheng-du-fu
even the babbling babes already lisp his full name
his attacking mode is that a falcon swooping down like a wind whipped flame
the more enemies he faces the quicker they fall

the vice governor duan-zi-zhang assumed the yellow robe of an emperor
young master hua swept him away and stopped that rebellion in a single day
returning from the battle he brought duan's head smeared with blood
and threw it at the feet of general cui-guang-yuan as his report

thus his excellency li-huan resumed his post as governor
all good people know general hua is unrivalled in all the world
and since he has no equals in all who face the emperor
who should not his majesty send him to recover luo-yang

murphy watching an old newsreel of the ticker tape parade for lindbergh
2/18/2008 8:21 AM

von zach VII,76

the tall machilus tree

the color of my machilus tree has a deep darkness
on the shore of the big river it forms a wide green roof.
among its roots i have put a patch of herbs
under its wide leafed crown i have made a bower

even the slanted afternoon sun doesn't break through
and the smallest breath of wind whispers music through the branches
usually a surfeit of wine is difficult to sleep off
but napping under this tree i am sober again in no time at all

murphy sitting on his favorite bench in central park
2/18/2008 8:33 AM

von zach VII,77

the useless trees

when i walk around above the pavilion
i always carry with me a small hand ax
although many trees here offer their shade
i try to remove all the small useless ones

i spare the wolfberry trees with pleasure
but what can one do with the honey locust
not only are they small, thorny and useless
but left alone they spread everywhere

murphy declaring war on the dandelions in his back yard
2/18/2008 8:47 AM

von zach VII,78

six short whimsical poems (1 of 6)

yu xin's poetic style bears the fruit of deep reading in the literature
he gives form to the wealth of his ideas with a strong expressive brush
but the current generation mocks the true tradition in poetics
wise men fear their descendant's accomplishments not their criticisms

murphy struggling to perfect his latest sonnet sequence
2/18/2008 4:55 PM

von zach VII,79

six short whimsical poems (2 of 6)

the poetry of the famous early tang four, yang, wang, lu and luo
is continually ridiculed by the current crop of amateurs
but they who continue to mock will die and their names will fade away
while the fame of the heroic four will flow on forever as a great river

murphy in perpetual awe of shakespeare's ballads
2/18/2008 5:13 PM

von zach VII,80

six short whimsical poems (3 of 6)

although lu-zhao-lin and wang bo in their poetic output
stand above poets of han and wei, they only equal those of the shi-qing and li-sao
for the latter can be likened to marvelous racing horses
who look down with contempt on the clods of earth they whistle by

murphy happy to be able to play in the feeder league to the nfl
2/18/2008 5:42 PM

von zach VII,81

six short whimsical poems (4 of 6)

which poets of today can be compared to the heroic four
which of today's men can bear such a heavy weight
just look at a small fisherman with his flimsy nets
is he able to trap the whales of the deep blue sea

murphy hardly ever attracted to the modern academic styles of poesy
2/18/2008 5:57 PM

von zach VII,82

six short whimsical poems (5 of 6)

i do not reprove the poets of modern times nor do i love the poets of antiquity
anyone who can produce marvelous phrases and a singing verse is my friend
though i fear they will never reach the heights of a qu yuan or song yu
and will always be below the poets of the qi or the liang dynasties

murphy content with his small rhyming abilities
2/18/2008 6:06 PM

von zach VII,83

six short whimsical poems (6 of 6)

it is not surprising that modern poets have not reached the level of the heroic four
since they have forgotten the origin of the poetic tradition the shi-jing
they should change their ways and keep as near as possible to the book of odes
then the more their illustrious predecessors will become their teachers

murphy acknowledging his debt to the korean sijo tradition
2/18/2008 6:14 PM

von zach VII,84