

i send this poem to du wei

i have just heard of the easement to your punishment
i think you have always had your old home in your inmost heart
you are now exiled countless miles from chang-an
in sorrow i tell you it will be ten years to live down your shame

in addition we see before our eyes the dusty swirls of war
and all our hair has turned white from these troubles
here, in lu yei, where i write this letter, my heart is heavy
will i ever meet you again on the meandering river for a game of go

murphy sitting carefully to ease his sciatica

10-8-05 1:45 pm

von zach VIII, 1

i give this poem to pei, fifth of his clan, who goes to si-chuan

you dear friend are a dropped leaf in flowing water
your propriety is that of heaven and earth
when again will you pass the border of yee
we have seen each other age within these gates of shu

you go to the east and so we will be apart for a time
i look to the north, bile roils my soul
i'm cold, it's cold, sad nights of autumn
with you gone i've no one to talk to

murphy finished writing last christmas' thank you notes

10-8-05 1:55 pm

von zach VIII, 2

i give han suo a poem as he departs for jiang-dung to seek his parents

there is no second lao lai worshipping with flair
to be found on the streets of this war torn town
i sigh, i stare, i see all the clans' losses
we are melting away even more now

there is no clan hall left for my brothers
nor for my sisters to come pay their respects
it is also true that we can't find father or mother
the brown ox valley below hides its noisy river

the swift clear stream runs cold
with leafless trees thick along its banks
after this parting we must both go forth
to reconnect with our families

and i feel i have much further to go
so i will return back here later than you

murphy riding the subway during a terrorist scare
10-8-05 7:00 pm

von zach VIII, 3

i meet my young friend liu, archiver for tang-xing-xian

we parted at the end of kai-yuan's reign
and it's been a few years since we exchanged posts
now we have returned to this mountain and its broad stream
while the rebellion drives all our thoughts to families and home

here outside sword-gate pass you are an official cut off from his post
it is seldom, indeed, that officials from chang-an arrive here
i must engage a light boat for giang-su and she-giang
when again will i be able to serve you

murphy sitting still til the advil kicks in

10-9-05 12:40 pm

von zach VIII, 4

i write a poem with the same rhyme as the poem of pei-di
“climbing to xin-jin cloister” which he sent to wang-jin

why was pei-di so disturbed by his stay in the mountain forests
in his poem he spoke only of the yellowing leaves
i hear cicadas now, they surround the temple
i note the shadows of birds flying over the cold pond

the scenery here disturbed his soul, saddened his heart
and he sent a letter to wang-jin about his journey
i feel only the bright sun of buddha in this cloister
and this old man takes advantage when he can

murphy retracing his steps to find where he put his glasses

10-12-05 10:40 pm

von zach VIII, 5

i respectfully send this verse to district judge wang-qian of tang-xing-xian

you are like wang-qiao when appointed district judge of he-nan
i am like si-maqian held back waiting to serve
men of the finest talent, such as you, are few in number
i feel a deep sadness about my unsettled wanderings

when a swift arab is sick, he wishes for especially good food
when a falcon is sad he feels squeezed into a cage
when i think of your boundless generosity to me i am chagrined
to be so well treated when countless others are in equal straits

murphy peeking at his whole card before his big bluff
10-12-05 2:40 pm

von zach VIII, 6

a second letter to wang-qian

here in si-chuan the weather is different than in chang-an
this winter's cold seems only mildly cold
the heavy clouds over the river are gone on this night
the rains here seem never to end

your letter asking how my travel goes was kind
could there be hope for relief from my miseries
perhaps you hear a wild goose call, harsh and hungry
the rice crop is very sparse this year, she can't find food

murphy thankful, with a full belly

10-9-05 12:40 pm

von zach VIII, 7

i send a brief poem through the courtesy of general censor cui
to gao-shin, the prefect of peng-zhou

i have now lived half a century old
this half done life approaches autumn cold
please ask the prefect peng-zhou
when can i expect some help in my distress

murphy complaining of arthritis during the first autumnal rains

10-12-05 10:40 am

von zach VIII, 8

i hear that honorable hu-si-rong, sixth of his clan, has not yet returned from his journey

my old friend has gone to jiang-ling
to make money writing grave inscriptions
he has always lived by his literary wits
but now his family sinks into sadness

their gate is overgrown by tall grasses
no smell of cooking seeps from that kitchen
by now he is older and tired, he should come home
he can afford it, just cut down on his drinking a little

murphy atoning for an imagined faux pas
10-13-05 10:45 am

von zach VIII, 9

the song of the two sons of honorable mister hu

friend, have you not met the two wonderful sons of xu
their spirits have fulfilled the wildest dreams
confucius and buddha were both involved
the two sons are like unicorns descended from heaven

the older one has nine years with skin a light clear color
his soul shines as clear herb water, his bones are jade
the smaller boy has five years and is strong enough to eat an ox
the many visitors to the house always turn their heads to him

i know mister xu and understand he needs nothing more
he brings forth good works and produces princes
but how can a man with such brilliant children
be content with an insignificant position

murphy scratching his head in bewilderment
10-18-05 8:40 am

von zach VIII, 10

for young general hua

every day in cheng-du-fu heavenly music resounds
winds carry the sound to the river and up to be lost in the clouds
such music is heard often in heaven
how seldom do we mortals get to hear, to share

murphy making up his shopping list for dinner
10-18-05 8:45 am

von zach VIII, 11

a hundred worries

i remember the child i was at fifteen
healthy as a bull calf romping the meadow
with september came ripe pears and dates
i must have climbed a thousand trees a day

but now i count my years up to fifty
afternoons i nap or sit quietly and rarely stir out
i am still polite, though, and visit my friends
but sadly my situation gives me a hundred worries

when i return home from excursions to my bare house
i know my wife sees the despair in my eyes
and the children have quit honoring their father
they meet me with cries for food and my kitchen has none

murphy wondering when he stepped off the primrose path
10-21-05 3:20 pm

von zach VIII, 12

the story of the stone water buffaloes

have you not seen the three water buffaloes struck from stone
which were erected in si-chuan at the advent of the qin dynasty
as of old they ward off the water demons who bring the floods
they look after the big stream which flows past them to the east

because of them the people of si-chuan boast of a thousand years
when the waters of the flood have not touched the tower zhang yi in cheng fu
yet this year the high water destroyed many lives in peng-zhou
i believe this brings embarrassment to the water buffalo

in the end all forces had to be mustered to manage the misfortune
beams and stones were piled high to resist the autumn floods
all earlier rulers had sought order through their proper rituals
how wonderful that magical powers might substitute for human effort

now it seems the three water buffalo cannot protect the people
such worthless superstition should be washed away by the stream
yet if only the world mind could obtain the harmonious way
then it should avoid by itself the evil brought by the blind waves

would that a brave man could be found to lead the government
and to help forge the way to the highest moral perfection
he could bring peace and rest to the entire land
and the water buffaloes could be rejected as worthless

murphy rattling the side of the teepee for the shaman inside
11/27/2007 9:54 AM

von zach VIII,13

the swelling of the stream

the large stream that rises in the west with the barbarians
has swollen to flood with rain and melting snow
the power of its waters shakes the ground with its sound
the crashing waves splash up against the sky

people take advantage of the bewildered fish and turtles
and even the dragons are helpless to protect themselves
now if only i could seize this propitious moment
to take a boat and splash my way to the coast of the eastern sea

murphy baiting the trotlines at 3 in the morning
11/28/2007 8:06 AM

von zach VIII,14

morning rain

the winds this morning are forbiddingly cold
driving chaotic clouds over the river
ducks hide themselves behind nearby islands
swallows escape the rain in the thickets

huang and qi made themselves scarce from the emperor
chao and you said no to succeeding emperor yao
and i still have my wine in my thatched hut,
i shall sip it warm on this chilly day

murphy toasting his feet before an open fire

11-1-05 8:45 am

von zach VIII, 15

a sunny evening

this afternoon a storm swept over the town
drenching the grass in my courtyard
now a warm sunset steams it dry
the swollen stream is reflected on my curtains

my books are strewn around and i'm too lazy to work
my wine cup sits empty but i can fill it
i know people talk about me too much
as i sit here in my seclusion like old wang fu

murphy carefully combing his hair before his annual medical checkup
11-1-05 10:15 pm

von zach VIII, 16

the sickly cypress

on a high hill grew an old cypress with an excessive crown
it stretched over her like the covering of a wagon
proudly she stood there for many, many years
like a dragon or tiger controlling the wind and the weather

the gods loved and protected her presence
older native peoples were always coming to honor her
no one imagined the roots of a thousand years
could allow her to lose half her canopy

the ground she grows on is rich and productive
her place high-situated and open to the sun
but suddenly now in the cold season she seems unprotected
shedding branches and needles both day and night

the fabled red phoenix trailed by his nine scions
has been seen flying plaintively all around the tree
the old owl also views her as benevolent
she uses the hollows of the old tree to raise her young

a lone traveller from an unknown land has come
he stands long under the tree with disheartening sighs
he would like to investigate the secrets of her creation
but she stands unfathomable, and he finds no clue

murphy contemplating with awe the oak in the acorn
11/28/2007 8:40 AM

von zach VIII,17

tangerine trees are sick

my tangerine trees yield little or nothing this year
though there are many trees the fruits are paltry
small, bitter, and often filled with worms
any sane man wouldn't bother to pick them

pick from ten, not one good enough to eat
useful only to dry their peels for cooking
the half-dried leaves still hang onto the old limbs
though harsh weather has brought sleet and driving wind

i have heard that in the palace gardens of chang'an
many healthy beautiful tangerine trees are planted
though this year they bore no fruit to grace the emperor's table
the rebellion is still very much with us

the crop's failure signals the ill will of heaven
though i fear the officials will bear the blame
i remember back to the time of emperor tang
and how the messengers galloped to bring lichees

hundreds of horses died for that fresh fruit
ever since old men grieve over their loss

murphy wrestling mightily with his mortality

11-02-05 3:00 pm

von zach VIII, 18

the withered palms

in si-chuan there are many palm trees
nine out of ten grow very tall
but their fronds are stripped and used
then very many of them die and rot

vainly they spread their feathery leaves
still green after the onset of winter
hatchets and axes have scarred their sides
and they decay faster than even the water willows

these times are hard and i regret the army's needs
every natural product is called in by the tax officials
pity the poor inhabitants of si-chuan
what is being left to them for their use

they are indeed like the poor palm trees
i weep for them, stripped of goods, bereft
the already dead are no longer in need
but how will the still living provide for themselves

i hear the plaintive trill of the oriole
note the sad demise of the thistle down
yet my most painful feelings are for those palms
lying broken and withering among the weeds

murphy raking the leaves after the first bitter frost
11/29/2007 8:37 AM

von zach VII,19

the withered old evergreen

this old machilus tree has been dry for countless years
no one from the village remembers when its death began
one cannot know how many hundreds of years it has lived
and here now it stands lifeless in sad isolation

its dead branches reach high up to the sky
its roots plunge deep into the earth's belly
its immense trunk has long before been split by lightning
within its dead trunk nest ants and boring insects

summer storms have leached away its resin
autumn gales have snatched away its faded fragrance
the snow geese no longer pause here in their flight
only a solitary grouse spends her sad loneliness

and although it could still serve for a pillar or a beam
it no longer has ambitions to strive for the sky
good carpenters know how to select such good material
how they would cry for this tree which finds no use

an elm whose wood is useless grows only too well
if planted in or near water it becomes big in a few years
but one wishes a tree such as this to use for an imperial golden bowl
it, like a competent man, fears not failure carrying out any task

murphy growing old and gnarly, but still producing worthwhile words
11/29/2007 9:13 AM

von zach VIII,20

thinking of a friend

i grieve when i think of my friend cui yi
the police officer from jing-zhou who was always drunk
and although he has been sent into exile
he will always have his mug of wine

even when the sun was sinking over the mountains
he had still not become sober from the night before
it is to me an unfortunate thing entirely
that he seems to have completely forgotten me

i have often wished to know of his circumstances
but i have met no one who came from the area he is in now
so i can only send to him on the waves of the big river
tears of friendship which might make it through the long way to him

murphy remembering his first beer on liberty after marine corps boot camp
11/30/2007 8:49 AM

von zach VIII,21

aboard a small boat

for some time now i have lived as a stranger in cheng-du-fu
tending my fields south of the town proper
often i find myself sitting ill by the northern window
gazing northward with an old man's wounded spirit

some days i venture out in a small boat
content to drift along with my old woman
in the sunlight we take our leisure
and watch our children bathe in the clear waters

two butterflies fly by together chasing one another
on a stalk nearby sit two lotus blossoms, another natural pair
i have brought along tea and sugarcane from the house supplies
alas, my pottery these days is not comparable to the court's delicate jade

murphy trying the new oolong handed him by his adopted son
11/30/2007 9:30 AM

von zach VIII,22

what i see from my thatched hut

in this eleventh month the village lies under a blanket
an isolated tree rises by the side of the house before mine
while the snow falls a boat slips by on the stream
the soft wind gently bends the stand of bamboo

in the frigid waters fish nestle under the water plants
a wild goose flies from the sand bank where she spent the night
the strong wine of si-chuan would be able to assuage my sorrow
but i have no money and am unable now to borrow more

murphy aching in the depths of february
12/6/2007 8:38 AM

von zach VIII,23

i am visited by xu, under-prefect of cheng-du-fu

you came at sundown riding with others
came to my lonesome village on a visit
this new friendship gives me only joy
my middling talents unworthy of your gifts

when will you come again to enjoy the tall bamboo
come to lose track of time on the balcony in the moonlight
when again will you be here to see the pristine buds
burst into plum blossoms on the banks of the stream

murphy greeting his visitors with fresh coffee as is his wont
12/6/2007 9:40 AM

von zach VIII,24

when ministerial secretary fan miao (2nd of his clan) and censor wu yu (10th of his clan) came especially to visit with me, i was unfortunately unable to receive them properly, so i can only send them these verses instead

i had gone for a short time to visit the house of a neighbor
and was ashamed to hear two such renowned calligraphers had come and gone
in my seclusion i have become forgetful, guilty of inhospitality
your visit to me, this old dilapidated man, is a great honor

my poor thatched hut lies far from the center of town
and we in this village seldom see such noble guests
but this old man dearly loves to talk about literature
perhaps you might knock again on his twisted thornbush gate

murphy picking out his favorite tee shirt to wear for the party
12/6/2007 10:01 AM

von zach VIII,25

censor wang lun (17th of his clan) promised me to visit bringing wine. to remind him of this i respectfully send the following verses, and ask him at the same time, please, to bring gao shi (35th of his clan) along also.

i, an old man, still yet sleep hard and deeply
and am thus slow to rouse myself in the morning
at night my thatched hut grows very cold
only when the morning sun streams in does it begin to warm

that is when i see at the end of my quiet road
the cranes on the shore entering the stream to bathe
and also the neighbor's chickens begin to stir
and several fly over the wall into my back yard

and you who wears the embroidered uniform of a censor
have promised repeatedly to visit bringing home made wine
and the imperial commissar gao shi in his black carriage
will not have forgotten the wild plum blossoms he once picked here

if it is not too burdensome to use your authority
to make it possible that gao shi, my dear friend, also comes
i promise he will return home completely drunk
like shan jian when he left the pond of the xi family

murphy cracking the seal on the bottle of single malt drinking with two of his friends
12/6/2007 3:04 PM

von zach VIII,26

as wang lun and gao shi drink continuously with me, we write verses, all using the rhyme “han”

far from the bright town of cheng-du-fu i am sickly
and it is a difficult trek for anyone to come see me
yet my old friend has brought with him a guest
and by the amount of wine he has brought he is happy to see me

i am ashamed that my garden has no vegetables to serve
so i have arranged for a rider to bring some over to me
every now and then i lift my cup and request gao shi to drink up
i fear that he, old, with white hair, will grow cold in my poor hut

murphy regaling the guests with tales of his college days
12/7/2007 7:53 AM

von zach VIII,27

respectfully i send these farewell verses to the prefect ba zhou

you are bound for great success as was ma yuan in olden times
while i, a mere minor secretary, have no such prospects
so i keep a small boat ready near the sandy beach on the river
and keep thinking of all the floating clouds above the southern waters

taking my fishing rod i will finally sail far away
and i regret not being able to fly like a bird to be with you now
but i know you are not attracted to the hermit's ways on spring lakes
you are thinking more of the glory of riding to an early court audience

murphy shaking the hand of his colleague leaving to take over a new school
12/7/2007 8:08 AM

von zach VIII,28

together with the police officer li, seventh of his clan, i watch on the shore of the zao river the construction of a bamboo bridge which is still to be finished today; before travelers had to wade in the winter cold through the water. i have written a short poem about this and have presented it to master li.

bamboo has been brought and a bridge has been built
it appears to be as sturdy as a wooden one
now without wading through the waters with lifted garments
travellers may walk comfortably to the far shore

now white cranes can rest in the cold weather
flying to the bridge pillars to find a roost
and when the sun has finally set
black dragons can gather round in the water

as once si-ma xiang-ru wrote on a bridge pillar, being an old man,
i will walk across when high officials use this bridge again
your competence in erecting this structure is becoming well known
and you should make much money as you rise in position

together we watched with joy the work's quick completion
and laughed about emperor chinshi huang's efforts a thousand years ago
who, in spite of the help of the spirits who pelted the waters with stones,
never completed his bridge to the island of the immortals

murphy telling an old cherokee story about the rabbit to his grandson
12/7/2007 8:44 AM

von zach VIII,29

after inspecting the completed bridge from a boat in the moonlight, i return home to write this
verse to send to police officer li

i sit in the boat as a guest of police officer li
we watch as the work on the bridge is completed by torchlight
as we turn for home i note the sky is clear of clouds
looking down the river i see the moon rising late

in my advancing years i have become ill and afflicted
yet i was able to be invited to see this wonder
though as we return home my joy begins to pall
and i sink once again into my melancholy of old age

murphy hearing the doctor remind him that arthritis is progressive and incurable
12/7/2007 9:03 AM

von zach VIII,30

when police officer li finishes the bridge, imperial commissioner gao shi returns from his official offices in shu-zhou

recently many workers worked here on the shore of the stream
an entire bridge was built in only three days, a remarkable achievement
all the boys for miles around now ride around on bamboo horses
i suspect this satisfies the imperial commissioner to the east of the bridge

murphy at the age of three dressed to the nines in his cowboy costume
12/11/2007 10:02 AM

von zach VIII,31

i visit mister xu to ask for seeds of fruit trees

i have only a few blossoms around my thatched hut
so i decide to plant a few stands of fruit trees
i do not care so much either way
whether they are green or yellow plums

in cheng-du-fu on the street of stone columns
i return by way of the fruit orchards
i stop there by the house of mister xu
and impose myself on his good nature

murphy reading a catalog of the various dwarf pear varieties available for order
12/11/2007 10:19 AM

von zach VIII,32

respectfully i await the arrival of governor yan wu

in this distant region i once again wait for an old friend
it requires a special talent for one to become a governor in si-chuan
and i notice how your under generals eagerly wait as do i
how much has been accomplished by your one year here in office

i am about to leave si-chuan now while the orioles still sing
to travel to far-off jiang-ling in a boat that is ready to depart
but i crave to see you to share thoughts of these terrible times
i am old and i have no better friend to confide in with my deepest concerns

murphy in his dotage still imagining that he matters
12/11/2007 10:50 AM

von zach VIII,33

five poems singing of nature along the shore of the great river (1 of 5)

the lilac

the nature of the lilac lies in its weakness
even intertwined stems will sag and droop
its narrow leaves are covered with tiny hairs
it has only few blossoms but of a delicate white

i have planted them deeply behind my small study pavilion
there they will always be close so i can enjoy them while alone
as the blooms age they are often gathered for use in drugs
crushed to powder their pungence is widely appreciated

murphy watering his bonsai a bit more now that they are in bloom
12/11/2007 3:53 PM

von zach VIII,34

five poems singing of nature along the shore of the great river (2 of 5)

the monthly rose

of all plants presenting their finery in the spring
the monthly rose might have the finest blossoms
this rare flower is desired everywhere because of its beauty
all others compared seem merely to fill up their branches

one sees scions of peaches and plums in every garden
they are fortunately able to be transplanted easily
how valuable then has this rare bloomer become
as if it feared being discovered by everyone

murphy searching the internet for a source of the fabled blue rose
12/12/2007 8:35 AM

von zach VIII,35

five poems singing of nature along the shore of the great river (3 of 5)

the gardenia

it is rare to come across the useful gardenia plant
it has not often been imported from the west into china
it occurs in many colors of the artist's palette
and is useful as a remedial herb of purgation

i especially admire the fruits which turn red after the frost
while rain and heavy dews produce deep glossy green leaves
i do not, however, transplant them into my garden
i prefer their natural beauty on the shore of the great river

murphy deciding on the variety of bamboo to plant in the corner of his garden

von zach VIII,36

five poems singing of nature along the shore of the great river (4 of 5)

the wild duck

i have built for her an isolated spacious cage
she would damage herself fluttering in a smaller one
she should not long for the floating clouds that pass by
and should not wish to be released to the stream

i have clipped her six important flight feathers
and she cannot fly up even were she to escape
she should be thankful for her safety from falcons and hawks
and remain quietly in her cage without grumbling

murphy discussing indian tumbler pigeons with his father
12/12/2007 9:24 AM

von zach VIII,37

five poems singing of nature along the shore of the great river (5 of 5)

the dappled duck

the dappled duck shows distinction of white and black
often waddling slowly before the hall steps of my thatched hut
she spreads her wings in a special way flaunting her great beauty
then the white and the black best manifest their stark contrast

but does she not then notice the attention of those around her
does she think it wise to provoke them to shoo her away
there is plenty of rice and millet here for her to eat her share
no need for any ostentatious display or quacking

murphy deciding to wear one bright red and one bright blue sock
12/12/2007 9:36 AM

von zach VIII,38

a long look over the lands

three walled camps in the glittering snow of the western mountains
on the southern shore of the clear stream is the wan li bridge
how separate i am from my brothers in this desperate time of war
in si-chuan here, at the end of the world, i cry out my loneliness

because of my age i now concentrate on my many illnesses
and bemoan my inability to be of service to the illustrious court
i ride my horse out into the land to let my eyes wander
i can't bear to continually deal with all my sad daily affairs

murphy sneaking a swig of whiskey in the local watering hole
12/12/2007 10:21 AM

von zach VIII,39

three shortened stanzas (1 of 3)

i sit under the spreading smell of the catalpa trees
down by the rock where the fishermen gather
i wish only that the wind would not blow too hard
the fresh blossoms of early spring should not fly away

better it would be for the wind if it has to come
to wait for when i am insensible with drink
for now i look with appreciation with sober eyes
while the rain gradually, one by one, knocks them down

murphy explaining his dislike of the ephemerality of cut flowers
12/12/2007 10:40 AM

von zach VIII,40

three shortened stanzas (2 of 3)

the cormorants which were outside my gate
had not been seen for some time
yet today they suddenly reappeared on the shore
but their eyes were full of mistrust

if only they could learn to experience
to know the gentleness of my mind
they might come up to the hut
up to a hundred times a day

murphy sitting still by the window watching as the birds gather at his feeder
12/12/2007 10:59 AM

von zach VIII,41

three shortened stanzas (3 of 3)

there are countless bamboo in the thick grove
it completely surrounds my old thatched hut
the hedge gate is now unable to be opened
and i find it difficult to get in and out

time and again i have marveled at the many shoots
how they slowly become thick and tall bamboos
for now, if visitors come they can go away if they wish
i will not come out in order to greet them

murphy thinking once again of paving the front yard so as not to have to mow grass
12/12/2007 11:17 AM

von zach VIII,42

a retiring man

everywhere in early spring the blossoms open
and in this foreign land the birds begin to sing
yet i remain a thousand miles away from my native country
beyond the big river i have seen three years worth of sunsets

i have retired into a small thatched hut i built for myself
my singular nature harmonizes with its seclusion
i leave the weeds and undergrowth rampant along the path to my gate
shielding the solitary nature of he within who waits for visitors

murphy shaving only rarely through the winter months
12/14/2007 11:24 AM

von zach VIII,43

what i regret

the season of flowers is just now hurtling past
an old man like me would appreciate a more leisurely pace
it's a pity i'm surrounded by such beauty to replenish the heart
when my decrepitude precludes accepting its joy

when i look for cheering up now i return to my wine
releasing my feelings to burst forth into verse
the old tao yuan-ming would understand this
but born far apart we cannot sing together our songs

murphy stuck in the early 21st century as an old man
12/14/2007 4:09 PM

von zach VIII,44

the sinking sun

the red of the sinking sun irradiates the door curtains
beyond by the river the beauty of spring is still seen
the vegetable garden grows and sends its creeping smells
food is cooked in the small boat by the sand bank

birds twitter and fight for the best place in the branches
the hum of insects permeates my courtyard
who might it have been who brewed this heavy wine
a mug of it banishes a thousand worries from my mind

murphy sitting zazen to calm his nerves
12/14/2007 4:38 PM

von zach VIII,45

drinking alone

i walk deep into the woods thick with evening
i rest, pour some wine, sip it slowly
bees crawl upside down into sagging blossoms
a train of ants march up a withered pear tree

i am ashamed to have become worthless before my time
a true hermit would have early chosen this secluded place
though i often said i truly desired no official position
i am not altogether proud of my present state

murphy finding singularity to be an envious position
12/14/2007 4:55 PM

von zach VIII,46

the gong cao archivist duan from guang-zhou arrives with a letter from general adjutant yang (5th of his clan). he now returns and i give him this poem for yang.

while wei qing held supreme command
he named yang pu to command the war ships
far away beyond the mei ling mountain chain
the town of guang-zhou basks in the sunshine of spring

here within the tung liang mountains a letter arrived
and its bearer will soon return to those pearly beaches
the fact that i am poor and ill here far away from home
is the message i wish my friend to carry to his distant destination

murphy lost but reluctant to ask for directions
12/15/2007 9:07 AM

von zach VIII,47

i receive a letter from the judge zhang shu-qing from guang-zhou; when his bearer starts the return journey, i give him these verses as an expression of my feelings

my homeland is now cut-off from me, flooded with tatar cavalry
far from my world i live here in the capital of si-chuan
suddenly i receive a letter from the war torn southern regions
brought to me from a distance up through the moon gorge of the yang ze

far away under thick clouds lie the headquarters of the governor of guang-zhou
and i cannot reach through the long nights of travel that separate me from you
i can only send along these words bearing my feelings
the tears of longing which well from my sorrowful eyes

murphy seeking the right words for a condolence card
12/15/2007 9:37 AM

von zach VIII,48

i accompany the archivist duan as he begins his journey back to guang-zhou

guang-zhou lies beyond this marvelous spring sky far to the south
to reach the ocean will take a journey of many months
you will have to pass through the clouds of the yang ze gorges
the setting sun will gild your boat passing over dong ting lake

you will encounter traders of the heavy cinnabar of cambodia
as well as purveyors of the light white cloth from shao-zhou
perhaps you will find it possible to send a few things along to me
back to my humble dwelling here in the town of cheng-du

murphy reluctantly asking his friend for a favor
12/15/2007 10:03 AM

von zach VIII, 49

i request three or four bundled cuttings of the cotton bamboo from the garden of wei xu, district
judge of mian-zhu-xian

when i visited your marvelous house in earlier years
i was struck by how it lay completely in shade
even from a distance one saw the cotton bamboo
standing tall, surrounding your domicile

when i think of the thatched hut where i now live
there are no such tall plants there, on the shore of the great river
so i hope you will send me some blue-green cuttings
i'm sure they will touch the waves with their branches

murphy considering what sort of plant should go in the corner of the living room
12/16/2007 10:17 AM

von zach VIII,51

farewell poem for he yong

we once spoke of being friends through life and through death
how could i meet another man to become closer than you
how sad it is skittering about like swallows and sparrows
struggling as a small official in these troubled times

if i were on the han river i could float down to you
but the to stream in si-chuan can't carry me over the land to qin
if you have arrived in chang-an flowers at five tombs now please your eyes
please send me tidings of spring in the homeland

murphy remembering april bluebonnets in texas
12/17/2007 11:39 AM

von zach VIII,52

i say goodbye to zheng lian as he leaves for xiang yang

during this time of war cavalry is met everywhere
ill in my old age i stay behind the hedge of my hut
i have spent many of my days reading your poems
i am filled with dismay knowing you are leaving

here from the flats of cheng-du-fu the evening sun rests on o mei mountain
under the high sky of xiang yang you will see xian mountain in the spring
then you will understand how i think of the old traditions
and always speak of hermit bang de gong's sense of well being

murphy making a list of items to put in a survival kit
12/22/2007 6:19 PM

von zach VIII,53

a second farewell poem for zheng lian in the form of a shortened stanza

master zheng is resigned, on his way out
finished as an imperial commissioner
without even the smallest present in his satchel
to take home to honor his worthy parents

his way over the mountains and rivers is long
the trek will entail many long, arduous days
would that there were a rich man
to take pity on such a poor reprobate

murphy hanging out in a gin mill with the local sots
12/25/2007 11:46 AM

von zach VIII,54

governor yan wu visits me

the grand general comes with a small retinue
here to the outskirts of cheng-du-fu
seeking to see wild flowers, he reaches by chance
my pavillion built to observe the forest

with full reverence he has gazed over si-chuan
to the east and the west, over all the emperor's lands
while i wandered from the north to this southern land
like a waterplant uprooted, floating on the river's waves

i accompanied him only once before on a ship
as once before he xun did with zheng han
but i am also like guan ning the hermit with a black cap
who lived with his patron gong-sun for 30 years

now in silence i live midst the clouds of ground fogs
which move along between the large river and the heavens
what brings him now, who told him
that here a small star might be hidden

murphy surprised when the door bell rings at 6 in the morning
12/25/2007 12:29 PM

a respectful reply to verses of honorable yan wu on the pavillion in the wilderness

once as a censor i wrote some columns of verse and fell from favor
since then i have had a life of leisure here among the bamboo at the water's edge
earlier i rode in the imperial procession on a steed from the sha yuan stables
now i fish in fittingly quiet seclusion along the jin jiang river

as once xie an you never tire of visiting old friends in the mountains
as once yuan ji i know i too often am brusque with my friends
yet i hope if you take a vacation and leave the town behind
you might visit my thicket and teach me how to weed

murphy overwhelmed with the day to day business of being a high school principal
12/26/2007 11:01 AM

von zach VIII,56

i meet a farmer who entices me to drink and to praise governor yan wu

i walk about here to there in a delightful spring wind
every village sports red blossoms and green pastures
farmers prepare for the festival of the spring goddess
one of them invites me to taste his spring wine

tipsy from the wine he praises the new governor
pressed on the issue he has found no one better
he turns to his eldest son and proceeds to say
there is none who stands better than he as an archer

he serves in the elite guard of mounted troops
his service has been long and without interruption
but just now he has been released from duty
to come home to help his frail father on the farm

even if the duty is heavy, he will endure to his death
i will swear here, he will never desert to flee to his family
this year there is a grand festival, will you not stay
take pleasure with us honorable censor, bide for a while

he tells his wife to open the big jar of wine
bids her to fill my cup without measure
the joy of the farmers touches me deeply
harmony devolves from the wisdom of officials

his words are somewhat tangled from the drinking
but the praise of the governor is always in his mouth
this drinking began early in the mists of morning
and extends into the deepening veil of evening

i have been away from home for a long time
it is good to have the friendship of a neighbor
he raises his voice, asks his wife for fruits and chestnuts
i try to leave, but he holds me back by my elbow

he rudely insists that i continue our drinking
his intentions are good though rough and crude
even after the moon has risen high, he holds me back
and seems surprised when i say i've drunk enough

murphy drinking the other man's beer in friendship
12/26/2007 9:30 PM

von zach VIII,57

a countryman sends me wild cherries

in western si-chuan the cherries are as red as those in chang-an
a man from this country has given me a whole basketful
and as careful as i can be i put them in a bowl
it amazes me how uniformly round they all are

i remember as yesterday the gift from the emperor
after the audience i carried my cherries from the da ming palace
alas, i no longer sit with platters of gold, chopsticks of jade
yet this whirling thistledown still dines on cherries

murphy slurping his sticky rice like a champion
12/27/2007 10:19 AM

von zach VIII,58

in my thatched hut i give myself over to inspiration and respectfully send these verses to governor
yan wu

the river of the wilderness has flooded to reach the bridge
the village nestled among the bamboo is reflected on the spring waves
in a light wind white butterflies dance their joy
in the warming air the hum of bees come from the opening flowers

here we must both seize our wine cups and drink deeply
then we can perhaps do justice to our poetic efforts
i yearn for the visit of the muse to your yamen on the shore of the stream
i remember with pleasure your deep artistry in your earlier visits

earlier we unwittingly served together at the imperial court
but it is only here with you as governor that we have become friends
when i first met you here i was awed by your trappings of office
now my only fear is that you will cease to visit this poor hut of mine

murphy clearing the path to a ceremonial tea house
12/27/2007 10:49 AM

von zach VIII,59

young goslings swim before the boat

the goslings have the yellow color of wine
we share with them our delight with our drinking
they stretch their necks in anger when we approach
then they scatter away and lose their swimming in line

the evening rain catches them and they spread their wings
but still young they have not the strength to fly away
as night breaks on the town of cheng-du-fu the guests scatter home
perhaps so too should young birds to escape the fox

murphy double locking his door before he retires for the night
12/27/2007 11:17 AM

von zach VIII,60

wild geese return in the spring to the dried-up pond 2 poems (1 of 2)

since ancient times wild geese have searched for rice and millet
then they often make friends with the ducks of the pond
though now they should not look with longing for the spring waters
i fear they should continue their flight through the clouds without stopping

murphy pulling his coat tighter in the cold winds of february
12/28/2007 9:59 AM

von zach VIII,61

wild geese return in the spring to the dried-up pond 2 poems (2 of 2)

the splendor of spring is nearly past so you must hurry on your way
why should the frost remaining on the great wall deter you
your strength permitting, once you rise up into the clouds the way is wide
and if you remain here the arrows of the hunters will surely find you

murphy packing his bag for a trip to italy
1/1/2008 3:00 PM

von zach VIII,62

a respectful reply to the poem of governor yan wu: “evening on the western city wall”

ji an helped his emperor han wu-di by vigorous admonitions
lian po fought his many battles throughout the land
speaking openly as did ji shows an individual strength
adopting lian po’s strategy collects a powerful energy

through unselfish service you have improved the customs of the people
the clarity of your poetry carries invigorating ideas
in your poem you look down from the western wall
from chang-an to the distant areas, all enjoy the late spring day

while your dragon banners are massed atop the town wall
the swallows and sparrows have become quite tame
before you the great river flows from cheng-du-fu in si-chuan
far on the distant horizon woods cover the land of qin

your duties as a general shine forth as loyalty to the emperor
by contesting the army’s expenses you oppose heavy taxes
yet you shower the emperor with butterfly embroidered silk
and rich brocades with interwoven golden unicorns

you have foregone the pleasures of a place in the palace
and have chosen duty as have the great men of antiquity
my forefather du yu was a successful general fighting in the south
your generalship reminds me of his considerable strengths

murphy making the most of his meager supplies
1/2/2008 8:59 AM

von zach VIII,63

a short song dedicated to the young inspector wang

the young nobleman wang heated from his wine
strikes the ground with his sword and says, "do not be sad"
one can speak well of his developing talents
but now in his befuddlement they are unused

he is like a great bay tree in the force of the wind
breaking up the full glory of the shining sun
he is like a giant whale broaching the waves
making a temporary dent in the great world sea

he should scabbard his sword
and stop his restless efforts
there is now in the west in si-chuan
a governor boating on the yang-ze

he should consider travelling there
in search of preferential treatment
he has been too long here in jiang-ling
as once was wang can in the house of liu biao

i sing proudly here this song of praise
and trust he will heed my council
he should not forget a man
already deemed to be too old

murphy marveling at the weird music of the young
1/2/2008 9:36 AM

von zach VIII,64

the story of the report to the throne, dedicated to censor dou sent by the emperor to inspect the frontier defenses in the west mountain's of si-chuan

censor dou is a war-horse colt, a youthful phoenix
although not yet thirty, he is trustworthy and conscientious
his singular sincerity shines like a glacier filling many valleys
he is a jade ewer fit for the ying-feng or the han lu palace

he is a delicacy prepared in the imperial kitchens
a chilled sweet nectar offered in a golden goblet
he sweeps away problems, refreshes and strengthens the emperor
his official acts reconcile the will of the people and heaven's harmony

related to the highest nobility he still offers proper esteem to all scholars
now when the rebellion is not ended and normal life has yet to return
he is sent to the southwest corner of si-chuan to represent the emperor
where the turfan present a perpetual raw and violent face

censor dou is sent to to remedy the present miseries
he will build rope bridges to bring needed food to the troops
he will fell so many trees to fire the salt-works, the apes will lose their homes
the eight prefects of si-chuan will prepare for a thorough final defeat of the turfan

above all the border fortresses of bao, wei, and sung will be strengthened
a throne report is to be written concerning this important enterprise
censor dou's confidential orders from the emperor bespeak his special trust
he will return next spring to the imperial palace to give his account

soon after he can greet his family in his shining uniform of office
perhaps to be made a ministerial manager or governor of the palace
and perhaps then he can visit an old man on the shore of the huan hua river
who can provide enough wine to fill his bamboo cup to the brim

and who will have white rice for his servants and green grass for his horses

murphy cheering for the harvard football in the fall of his 25th reunion
1/2/2008 12:21 PM

von zach VIII,65

governor yan wu sends me a shortened stanza (during the rain) saying he is thinking of me. i answer respectfully with two short stanzas of my own. (1 of 2)

rain is falling on the visiting official's quarters in cheng-du-fu
i feel a bit awkward that while staying there you send me a poem
but this being the case i cordially invite you for a visit
please come out here to my land near the wilderness

although i am a bit frail from old age and sickness
there is much to do here on the shore of the great river
i am sure that as soon as the rain has stopped
i can prepare things for us to fish for a while

murphy minding the p's and q's of the haut monde
1/2/2008 3:20 PM

von zach VIII,66

governor yan wu sends me a shortened stanza (during the rain) saying he is thinking of me. i answer respectfully with two short stanzas of my own. (2 of 2)

when will these rains stop and fine weather reappear
when again will mists rise from the huan hua river
then the sand will be washed white by the rain
and the rocks will be smooth and cleaned of their mud

then all that might be needed is to chop a few bamboo
then the overgrown way to the shore will be clear
i will wait leaning on my cane among the flowers
there i will listen for the neighing of your horses

murphy imagining an elysium for the hoi polloi
1/2/2008 3:31 PM

von zach VIII,67

i remind archivist wang of his promise to send money to mend my roof

i should be a bit annoyed with you archivist wang
you have not sent the promised money to repair my roof
earlier you told me to be careful of the spring rains
now that spring is here have you forgotten this old thatched hut

murphy bemoaning his arthritis in the cold damp
1/2/2008 3:50 PM

von zach VIII,68

i thank governor yan wu for the gift of a jug of wine made by the taoist priest of the qing cheng mountain

a jar of thick milky white wine is sent from the clouds in the hills
i have long wished for the aroma and taste of this famous brew
you generously sent it by a special fast horse to this old hermit fisherman
the messenger is still here and i am savoring it from a fresh washed cup

murphy sniffing the beaujolais nouveau before the first sip
1/2/2008 4:11 PM

von zach VIII,69

i stand on the shore of the stream, gazing at waves incredibly like those of the sea; i write these words

all my life i have been enamored of writing beautiful poetry
before i would polish my lines until they amazed the reader
but now i write spontaneously only when an inspiration comes
even the blossoms and birds of spring sometimes fail to stir me

recently i built a platform on the shore to fish from
earlier i tied a small raft there to use as a boat
if only i could express my thoughts like tao yuan-ming or xie ling-yun
if they were here i would ask them to describe these wild waves

murphy shrinking more and more into himself, even in company
1/2/2008 4:33 PM

von zach VIII,70

two joke poems which i dedicate to friends (1 of 2)

in the fourth month of the first year of the dai-zong government
the book proofreader chiaio served under the chamberlain
he boasted of having extraordinary strength
and even of being able to ride wild colts

one morning though he was thrown by such a horse
kicked in the face, his lips were torn, front teeth knocked out
yet this hasn't stopped his courageous heart from further folly
now he wants to go to the east and capture fleeing mongols

murphy riding a brahma bull in the amarillo high school rodeo
1/2/2008 9:23 PM

von zach VIII,71

two joke poems which i dedicate to friends (2 of 2)

in the fourth month of the first year of the dai-zong government
there was among the officials of the da-li-si a certain mister wang
out riding one day his horse shied, he fell and broke his left arm
his face became blue-black as he fought back the pain

his old nag had carelessly wandered onto muddy ground
why had he not heeded the weather and stayed home in the storm
i suggest he not become too annoyed over this accident
perhaps it might lead to an unusually lucky break

murphy picking his lotto numbers based on the birthdates of his children
1/2/2008 9:36 PM

von zach VIII,72

on the balustrade of my water pavilion i express my feelings (1 of 2)

far outside the town of cheng-du-fu i have my open water pavilion
i have few neighbors so the views are especially free
the clear water is at its highest level now, the beach almost gone
the trees of this secluded place have yet to bring forth their blossoms

in the drizzling rain the little fish come to the surface
in the light breeze the swallows darting flight comes easily
in the heart of the city there are countless houses
in the country here only two or three families set wide apart

murphy thankful for the small park below his big city apartment windows
1/3/2008 8:19 AM

von zach VIII,73

on the balustrade of my water pavilion i express my feelings (2 of 2)

under the skies of si-chuan it rains throughout almost every night
only in the morning does fair weather come to grace the river pavilion
the humid leaves of the tree-covered dam shine thickly in the morning light
after the rains i sit in dry clothes on a padded seat with a fresh coverlet

i cannot stand the infirmities of old age
and what have i to show for life, perhaps a name as a poet
i slowly sip my wine, drop by precious drop
a steadfast friend for the time i have left

murphy enjoying his pre-dinner glass of cold sake'
1/3/2008 8:38 AM

von zach VIII,74

secluded from the world, two poems (1 of 2)

i persist in the direction my shattered life has taken
in the loneliness surrounding me i find pleasure in nature
mulberry trees and flax have received ample rain
the young swallows and sparrows are just beginning to fly

now and then the wind carries the sound of drums from the town
a few fishing boats ply their way up and down the river
standing with my cane i am resigned to growing old
my heart and lifestyle finally paired in their purity

murphy steadfast in his habit of early rising
1/3/2008 8:54 AM

von zach VIII,75

secluded from the world, two poems (2 of 2)

i rise late since there are few chores to be done
the land is not worked, the place pleasantly quiet
the landscape is framed by the bamboo shining in the sun
the reflection of my old hut dances on the waves of the river

i have given up pretending to discipline my lazy children
i ignore my wife's constant complaints about our lack of funds
i want to spend the rest of my life in a drunken haze
i have not even combed my hair for an entire month

murphy pot-bellied and proud of it
1/3/2008 9:12 AM

von zach VIII,76

four shortened stanzas (1 of 4)

bamboo has blocked the west entry to my old hut so i moved the gate
to the north of the ditch i planted peppers, far beyond them is the village
when the plums have ripened i shall take some to old zhu
when the spruce grow a bit taller i shall speak of them with young yuan

murphy selecting dwarf pear trees from the nursery catalog
1/3/2008 9:26 AM

von zach VIII,77

four shortened stanzas (2 of 4)

i wanted to build a river weir but clouds brought heavy rains
all through the fourth month the cold rains fell
dragons must have found their caves in the blue waters of the river
i have gathered the bamboo and stones but i will not disturb them now

murphy thanking the four directions for the coming day
1/3/2008 9:38 AM

von zach VIII,78

four shortened stanzas (3 of 4)

two yellow orioles sing in the nascent green willows
white herons rise in a line high through the blue sky
through the window i see the eternal snowy mountains of tibet
on the river lies a boat able to carry me a thousand miles to the east

murphy checking that all the electricity is off as he leaves the apartment
1/3/2008 9:52 AM

von zach VIII,79

four shortened stanzas (4 of 4)

everywhere i see lush green branches and medicinal herbs
their colors stretch between the thatched hut and my pavilion
they are also abundant in the mountains and resist being moved
they take root in deep fissures and are reluctant to leave

murphy listening to the medicine priest explain the uses of wild plants
1/3/2008 10:12 AM

von zach VIII,80

the story of the barley

the barley has dried up, the wheat become overripe
the women weep, the men keep in hiding
in all the area east to ji and bi, west to liang and yang
the he and jiang tribesmen brazenly steal all the crops

the 3000 soldiers in si-chuan are not enough
their numbers insufficient to protect the land
o would that i had the wings of a bird
to fly in the clouds and return to my native country

murphy stuck in boston for christmas vacation his freshman year at harvard
1/3/2008 8:45 PM

von zach VIII,81

governor yan wu visits in the second month of summer bringing food and wine; a poem using the rhyme “han”

the jade dishes of your traveling kitchen are being washed in the bamboo grove
the horses with their golden saddles stand close together beside the flower beds
it is not that i willfully ignored the urgent messenger from the capital
but i knew the good governor would tolerate my absence with his usual kindness

now you have come to me in this remote place far from town
even in this summer month my old hut is chilled from the high waters
so we can spend the day on the fishing boat til the sun goes down
how better for this old farmer to reciprocate such friendship

murphy as a young boy perch fishing on the colorado river in austin
1/7/2008 1:44 PM

von zach VIII,82

a small poem for a dancer

her waist belt is studded with light-catching gems
her sleeves are finished with lustrous pearls
her eyes sport flowers when she laughs
her dance ends with a flourish of embroidered sash

murphy remembering the spring in his legs as a youth
1/7/2008 2:04 PM

von zach VIII,83

the story of the young nobleman

who is this fair young nobleman on the horse
he stops before the steps and comes to sit with me
he rudely does not state his family nor his name
merely points to the silver jug, demands wine to drink

murphy standing a round in the kiowa bar to forestall a confrontation
1/8/2008 8:46 AM

von zach VIII,84

in a party at the offices of governor yan wu the guests sing about the map of si-chuan hung on the walls; i am given the rhyme “kung”

the sun appears through the window of the office of the governor
among the pictures illuminated is a mighty map of si-chuan
the sword tower pass is north of cheng-du-fu and the star bridge
beyond lies the district song-zhou east of the snow mountains of tibet

china and the regions of the barbarians sewn together by continuous mountain chains
while si-chuan is connected directly to giang-su by the great river
my inspiration springs from the mountains and bodies of water on the map
and happily my cup is continually filled with a delightful clarity of wine

murphy being introduced to his prospective in-laws at a cocktail party in the plaza hotel
1/8/2008 10:24 AM

von zach VIII,85

substantial rains

in western si-chuan no snow fell this winter
the farmers in the spring were desperate for water
and all yearned for heaven's sympathy to be shown again
in the heat of summer eyes longed for clouds to form in the sky

the heat was that of a kettle boiling water
thin silk garments felt like thick heavy coats
then suddenly wind and thunder brought torrents of rain
stimulating waters poured forth for all vegetation

i didn't dare complain about the leaky roof of my old hut
i was completely happy for my millet and my peas
for three days no one ventured out to pass by my hut
here where the rising streams from cheng-du-fu hurry past

the rains have cleansed town and village of their awful miasma
and scrubbed the shore of the great river here even cleaner
storks and cranes swagger about my obliterated courtyard
i lie back in my easy chair and observe the waves

i have amassed many medicines for my protracted illness
but neglect to take them now the weather has invigorated me
similarly the rains have brought life back to nature
making infertile land become productive again

during the rains there could be no thought of working the fields
but then finally the authorities order the people to begin
all my neighbors bring out their plows and set to it
while i am forced by circumstance to forego such work

murphy recalling the bitter taste of the water piped into dallas from the red river in 1956
1/8/2008 11:03 AM

von zach VIII,86

the flooding of the huan hua, the great river

usually at this time of year under the bridge
the water of the huan hua, the great river, is about a foot deep
then the white stones of the river bed are clearly seen
and many carts prefer to ford the river at this time

but now as summer passes into fall the river suddenly rises
the waters well up and flood into my thatched hut
the dragons are disturbed in their flooded caves
even the turtles and fish are badly affected

when i rode into town this morning i found it half under water
on my way back i have seen only a few blurred footprints
my horse nickers and hesitates to go forward
the path is nothing but deep dangerous mud

yet now the hemp east of the house will show a luxuriant green
but i must hurry home to rescue the books i left lying around
i fear new rain is looming in the distant mountains
and by nightfall the river will rise once again

often before when i would visit i spent all day in town
but now a man wandering far afield fears for his home

murphy listening to his father explain flash flooding in the arroyos of the southwest
1/8/2008 1:31 PM

von zach VIII,87

i send these verses to gao shi when he is appointed to chang-an from si-chuan

the land of si-chuan lies at the opposite end of the world from chang-an
far from home here i am seriously ill and cannot journey far
we both share the joy of the art of poetry and the fame it can bring
after you have gone, with whom will i share songs and speak of state affairs

in chang-an the new emperor has assumed the throne
you have been summoned there to take your rightful place in the capital
i am left with only a fond desire to see you again
and to celebrate our reunion then with appropriately fragrant wine

murphy rising to his feet with filled flagon to sing bobby burn's auld lang syne
1/8/2008 1:55 PM

von zach VIII,88

i respectfully escort governor yan wu as he leaves for chang-an. 10 rhymes

we view from afar the demise of our old emperor
as now a new reign has begun in the capital
though the land within the four seas is still in turmoil
the old loyal servants are being called to further service

your abilities are well known from your past record
you have done much to subdue the hideous rebellion
you have been instrumental in returning the capital to chang-an
step by measured step you bring peace to the frontier

now the great raptor is to fly away to the capitol
to the northern residence to give service to the new emperor
you will again participate in the courtly rituals at dawn
though the spring time of the orioles singing will be past

you leave behind sound strategic plans for si-chuan
though the people of cheng-du-fu will now be filled with worry
you will travel the plank road to the grand imperial palace
while i stay by the river among the early spring flowers

is this where i shall breath my last, here in si-chuan
i certainly wish to have time to return to my ancestral home
i wish you well and if you should become a state minister
remain fearless in your service against all danger

murphy a voyeur on the sidelines of the political wars of the 60's
1/9/2008 8:42 AM

von zach VIII,89

i accompany the vice-president yan wu to mian-zhou. we proceed together to the party of the imperial commissioner du on the river pavillion. i am given the rhyme "hsin"

the joy of the scenery far from the towns never palls
the river pavillion receives its exuberant guests
i have escorted governor yan wu this far on his journey to the court
it is now sundown as we admire the view from the tower

thin fogs creep onto shore from the peaceful waters
a cool, gentle breeze ripples through my robes
our transport boat is tied to the sandy shore below
birds circle up into the high banks of clouds

behind this high balcony one looks on a secluded valley
beyond the open windows stand luxuriant thick woods
the light of lamps spreads near and far
the light of the moon pours over the heights and the depths

people from the city mass to see the traveller who goes to court
after we have drunk much wine we note the rise of shen the star of the west
i become filled with sorrow as i think about my growing senility
i feel surrounded by both short and long melancholy song

yet how rare are the occasions of such an assemblage
when all the nobles visit my grandnephew du to see you off
we will delay the closing of the vermilion doors tonight
and delay our sleep to see the setting of the great milky way

murphy finding parties more and more difficult to face
1/9/2008 9:32 AM

von zach VIII,90

i escort yan wu even further to the postal station at feng-ji. four rhymes

i have escorted you a far distance but now we must part
these green mountains have tried in vain to hold you back
when will we lift our cups together again
as we did last night after our moonlit stroll

all provinces will unite to sing your praise
you have served three rulers faithfully and well
i now return alone to my thatched hut on the river
the balance of my years to be spent there in silence

murphy becoming ever more reclusive in his habits
1/9/2008 9:57 AM

von zach VIII,91

i escort imperial commissioner li as he leaves for his new post at zi-zhou

minister huang-ba of the han dynasty had an efficient administration
he especially thanked ying-quan in he-nan for his singular efforts
i recently heard you were to become governor of zi-zhou
it pleases me that we now have an equally competent leader in si-chuan

when do you think you will complete your journey there
i hope you will inform me soon after your arrival
perhaps you can then help an old man who needs new bamboo floors
and a new brocade cover to sleep under for the winter

as i leave you now i have no misgivings for your transport
and that you will have made the best time of all previous officials
as you become sweaty under muggy clouds on your trip
you can find refreshing springs at the postal stations in the mountains

the poet chen-zi-ang was imprisoned in his birthplace she-hong-xian
an unfair judge sent him to his death in the dungeons, a deplorable fate
when you come in your official rounds to preside at she-hong
i ask you to remember this and cause no more such bitter tears

murphy with hat in hand asking for a special dispensation
1/10/2008 8:46 AM

von zach VIII,92

a story of the bitter struggle

you have fallen in a bitter battle, o general ma
you may now be called a grandson of the famous ma yuan
the weapons are barely sheathed and we mourn the loss of a hero
this takes the life out of me and i despair in my misery

this last year you began the conflict with the rebels south of the fou river
we clasped arms in parting on that river shore, i fearing to never see you again
today not a single cloud floats above the place of that final farewell
again and again i search the sky and my tears pour down

murphy reading the lists of the war dead in iraq
1/10/2008 9:04 AM

von zach VIII,93

the tale of last autumn

last autumn when the waters of the fou river were low
who were those who lance in arm galloped out of town
to this day the resting place of their bones is unknown
from all the divisions and regiments no man returned

in the town of sui-zhou the governor lost half his staff
the countryside beyond the town is bereft of men
only the old are left to weep at night over their slaughter
and for the few fierce warriors left wretched in far flung camps

murphy imagining a 50,000 full football stadium slumped in death
1/10/2008 10:29 AM

von zach VIII,94

the song i sang after watching the fishing

by the eastern ford of the river in mian-zhou
there are many bream which shine white as silver
the fishermen row out into the stream with large nets
they block the whole width and net hundreds of fish

the usual rough fish are thrown back in the waters
some of the red carp with heavenly strength leap over the nets
dragons remain hidden in their caves, but old crocodiles growl their fury
a whirlwind descends and flings into the air the sands on the shore

the cooks wield their shining knives with both hands
filling their gilt bowls with snowy heaps of flesh
the tasty carp from xu-yin pale in comparison
the marvelous bream of han yin fade in the distance

compared to all, the local bream are plump, and are the best
however, after a plentiful meal our joy begins to pall
after you have seen the fins cutting the water in the morning
you remember they will never again return to these waves

murphy thanking the deer for giving his life to become food for mine
1/10/2008 11:14 AM

von zach VIII,95

i watch the netting of fish once again

early in the morning the fishermen gather on the shore of the blue river
they throw out their nets with the floats up and the fish begin to move
all the seasoned steersmen conn their boats like the wind
they breast the waves and the prows split the waters

the many smaller fish who escape the nets are nothing
the ones half dead caught in the nets are but a few
the big fish wounded by the spears swim sluggishly
many others seek to burrow themselves into the mud

this is the second time i have come to the ford to see the feast of fish
my host continues to fill my cup after all the eating is done
in the evening dragons and crocodiles move about
small fish hide in crevices as storm clouds thunder

the turmoil of the rebellion has not found its end
where are the phoenix and unicorn of peacetime
why do we enjoy ourselves so fully at this feast of fish
a wise man is troubled by questions of the turmoil of life

murphy baiting his own hook at the age of four
1/10/2008 2:06 PM

von zach VIII,96