

return in the spring to the straw hut at cheng-du-fu

the mossy path leads down to the bamboo grove near the stream  
the porch of the reed hut is covered with wildflowers  
since i left this place many months have passed  
i return now to all the splendors of spring

i walk with my cane to visit the lonesome rocks  
i sit to drink wine on the sandy shore of the shallow river  
in the distance gulls swim quietly on the waters  
swallows dart obliquely through the winds

all my life i have met many obstacles  
soon i feel my life shall come to its end  
after awhile i keel over from the drink  
where i feel fine, there is my home

murphy nursing his head from the night before  
4/25/2008 9:23 AM

von zach XI,1

the homecoming

i went away from my straw hut to zi-tong and lang-zhong  
only by coming home did i realize the sheer drudgery of traveling  
i open the gate and see the martens fly away from me  
i untie my books and see they are filled with dried bookworms

i wash my old mug and pour myself my new-bought wine  
i lower my head to adjust my old small cap  
who will supply me with such wine in the future  
i sip slowly and contemplate growing old by this shore

murphy finding his final roost  
4/25/2008 9:42 AM

von zach XI,2

away from my straw hut

when i left my straw hut years ago  
cheng-du-fu was filled with western barbarians  
now as i return to my old home  
the town is free from all such dangers

i would not like to describe those riots  
they occurred quite unexpectedly  
the general yan wu had left to the court in chang-an  
seditious plans were made by the rabble

a white horse was killed during the night  
conspirators coated their faces with blood and ran rampant  
from the southwest came barbarians from lin-qiong-xian  
in the north corner of si-chuan the pass at sword gate towers was taken

some dozen prominent officials were approached  
they all agreed to take the most important official posts  
but there cannot be two equal entities to rule a land  
and the chinese and the renegades soon fell out

the rebels brought in from the west turned against their brothers  
soon after their leaders began killing themselves  
who could have predicted that internal strife  
should have led the beasts to mutual destruction

loyal patriots had become more and more outraged  
there were no lawful barriers among these people  
the empire had all at once three supreme leaders  
and the entire population were as fish on the chopping board

the rebels and their followers behaved as tyrants  
heeding not guilt or innocence they meted out marks of favor  
they had many brought before them in fetters  
while behind them courtiers played music

they ordered death as they blithely enjoyed their banter  
and the blood flowed down in the streets  
even now during storms in the place of execution  
one hears wails and groans as if the axes were still swung

the women and horses of the murdered  
were fair game for the pleasure of the murderers  
the fact that the state finally restored order and law  
fills me with righteous satisfaction

but then there was nothing left for me but to flee  
for three years i thought about going to the southeastern coast  
but continual fights darkened that region of the big river  
and it would have been difficult to escape to the tai hu lake region

so i have not given up my old straw hut for good  
i have returned and begun to remove the thornbush and the weeds  
by the gate entrance the four pines i left behind are still alive  
though the bamboo around the garden are fewer in number

my old dog is still here to greet me with happiness  
he pushes close to my side, filled with devotion  
the neighbors appear and wish me well  
bringing much wine in gourds for a party

the governor yan wu sends mounted messengers to ask me  
if i have any special needs that he can help with  
indeed, the entire town seems happy to see me  
guests from everywhere crowd around my small area

yet since the world at large is still not at peace  
warriors are to be preferred to scholars such as i  
in these times of warring riots i uselessly wandered  
where will i now choose to stay into my elder years

i know that i have become only a parasite  
but my bones are not rotten as of yet  
i will be ashamed if i only eat and drink without action  
if nothing else i can end my days picking wild ferns in the wilderness

murphy returning to his work after too long a vacation  
5/30/2008 11:09 AM

von zach XI,3

the four pines beside my straw hut

when i transplanted these four pines next to the hut  
they were hardly more than three feet tall  
since i have been gone for these three years  
they are unmoved but of the size of a man

i inspect the roots and find they are firm and well set  
the limbs are a bit dry though and droop  
fortunately they retain the deep rich color desired  
and the lower branches have a strong spreading presence

i replace the small fence surrounding them  
it will afford them a bit of protection  
if they had in the end been damaged  
their yellow needles would have pierced my heart

i do not dare to think all the old woods are clear of menace  
many of my neighbors have still not returned  
i have just returned from my escape from the rebels  
and the spring grasses are full around my hut

i go to inspect the weir and the boat i left behind  
i sit under the spruces and sigh over their advanced decay  
a chill breeze arises and refreshes me  
it blows over my face like a light frost

the pines will please me in my old age  
i must wait a few years til their crowns are mature  
my life has been rootless unlike them  
and my life with them is still uncertain

they have moved me to write these verses  
and to make common destiny with their lives  
do not become too proud, but think that in a thousand years  
your dark green canopy will reach the sky's vault of blue

murphy drowning in his books  
6/2/2008 8:25 AM

von zach XI,4

the river weir

the river weir has been destroyed by the waves  
it must yet again be fully restored  
the blue stream suffers constant wind and storms  
clouds and rain fly by, day and night

even my straw hut has been damaged by the flooding  
it will also finally succumb to the waves  
this traveller stayed away too long  
and his straw hut was left without any guard

in the end the water reached high on the shore  
no wonder the ramshackle old river weir was destroyed  
people admonished me to support the structure better  
but i felt a support beam for the hut would be laughed at

to support the river weir is more difficult than to support the house  
so what would a beam do there since a beam did not fully support the house  
from the shore of the big stream one sees for miles nothing but water  
how should a flimsy weir be able to stand up in such a rush

people are predilected to remember things with melancholy  
i am seized by grief at the destruction of the river weir

murphy pulling up the stringer holding his still living catch of fish  
6/2/2008 8:52 AM

von zach XI,5

the useless boat

all my life my heart longed for the rivers and lakes  
i have had a small boat with me for years  
and it was my wont to row up the creek every day  
to get out and beyond my brushwood gate

since i abandoned my hut because of the rebellion  
i have longed from afar for the comforts of my home  
now on my return i find many new neighbors  
with only the wild bamboo still growing tall

i can no longer knock cadence on the side of the boat as i sing  
it has long since become buried and begun to rot  
standing on the shore i watch the birds flying west  
looking down at the water flowing east i am ashamed

i can dig out the old boat again  
or buy myself a light new one  
what bothers me is my constant moving  
even in my old hut i cannot guarantee my peace

murphy walking far to maintain vigor in his old age  
6/2/2008 9:11 AM

von zach XI,6

six quatrains (1 of 6)

the sun rises over the water to the east of the hedge  
clouds arise from the mud to the north of my buildings  
a kingfisher sings from on high in the bamboo grove  
on the far bank a wild partridge performs a mating dance

murphy relaxed within the cocoon of his physicality  
6/2/2008 9:23 AM

von zach XI,7



six quatrains (2 of 6)

i am dazed by the bewildering effusion of blossoms  
bemused by the many fluttering butterflies  
i am sunk in delirium in the shade  
what should a visitor think of my indulgent seclusion

murphy getting up to refill his cup with sake'  
6/2/2008 9:34 AM

von zach XI,8

six quatrains (3 of 6)

dig a new well, plait ropes of palm leaves  
harvest bamboo, make pipes for drains  
the little boat tied securely at its mooring  
a narrow footpath winding, binding to the village

murphy writing out his shopping list for the gourmet store  
6/2/2008 9:41 AM

von zach XI,9

six quatrains (4 of 6)

after the rain pelts against the banks of the creek  
the sun's rays gradually penetrate into the trees  
the oriole stays hidden, dry in her nest  
some bits of reed float, there, a white fish leaps

murphy replete with the growing warmth of late spring  
6/2/2008 9:47 AM

von zach XI,10

six quatrains (5 of 6)

bamboo sprouts go under the wall and sprout inside the hut  
the climbing plants of the courtyard disappear into the eaves  
gossamer threads of summer float above the sun lit ground  
the green reeds on the shore outline the shining stream

murphy zapping the leftovers for lunch  
6/2/2008 10:35 AM

von zach XI,11

six quatrains (6 of 6)

the waves of the stream moving moon's reflection  
the visage of the stream accepting clouds, flowers waxing on the shore  
the bird which returns to his nest understands the tao  
a passing sail drifts to an unknown fate

murphy relaxing into the apartment after a hard week's work  
6/2/2008 10:43 AM

von zach XI,12

about my peaches

the narrow path to my hut used to be straight  
now i've let the peach trees take over  
i placed the trees so i could see their flowers  
the very next spring they were fully abloom

i let those five peaches take over though  
and in the fall they give wondrous fruit  
and the very next spring they will fill with blossoms  
the kind that are ephemeral and amuse the eye

i will always let in the swallows by the gate  
they can stay within the bamboo curtain  
and i insist the children do the same  
but they must leave old crows alone

how could i believe it could be a time  
when all the killing and raping would go on  
our footpaths are left for our children and kin  
we are all part of our children and clan

murphy setting up the table to play dominoes  
6/2/2008 3:20 PM

von zach XI,13

at the gate-turn-off from cheng-tu-fu

the flowers are rife here, near the high tower  
they assuage the souls of passers-by  
i have come here to think about the many riots  
i need this healing place, this consoling

the spring vigor of the brocade river knits heaven and earth  
spread to bring with it the entirety of nature  
the clouds float above yu-lei mountain, change glints  
now it's back to the lazy way of before, the waft of cloud

only the court retired to the extreme north of chang-an remains  
through all the events, in the end everything has stayed the same  
there should be no more dreams by the wild turfan of the western mountains  
though the commemorative temple for the deplorable hu-zhu is here in cheng-du-fu

as the sun sinks i sing the song of chu-ko-liang  
i can think of no more fitting end to my contemplation  
and what this says about castinataspersions  
and how they might deflect a ruler from his duties

murphy seditious but quietly so  
6/2/2008 7:45 PM

von zach XI,14

i visit the wet pavilion in the center of the pond of my southern neighbor, the hermit zhu

all around the pavilion the bamboo shields high and low  
while i approach i cannot be seen by the other people  
trees are pendulous, rich with marvelous blossoms  
a small brook runs its swift course into the pond

it is not far from my hut to visit here  
so i can continue my carouse in this place  
and in consideration of my friend zhu's high standing  
i intend to take ample advantage of his hospitality

murphy reconnecting the dots as a final edit  
6/3/2008 8:08 AM

von zach XI,15



i visit the villa of the late proofreader hu-si, two poems (1 of 2)

my old friend has already died  
but his neighbor du fu's distress continues  
up until his end he was not appointed to the court  
only after the encomiums began was he so raised

his widow and children are forced to accept help from strangers  
now even his garden where we were wont to walk has changed  
only the white shrouds of the death room remain  
the autumn winds stirring them to plaintive life

murphy becoming ever more the recluse as his contemporaries drift away  
6/3/2008 9:50 AM

von zach XI,16

i visit the villa of the late proofreader hu-si, two poems (2 of 2)

the swallows fly into no other house but this empty villa  
the gull returns to the old pond again and again, as if searching for him  
the old bridge has gone to ruin and has no more solid boards  
new branches peek out from the fallen trees in the pasture

this is a small attempt at what xiang-xiu once wrote for the apartment of xi-kang  
i am a bit ashamed at likening my efforts to his high wisdom  
but my old friends are dying bit by bit, every one  
that is why my white head pours its streams of tears

murphy holding on to the old habits, good food, good drink, and attention paid to each day  
6/3/2008 10:18 AM

von zach XI,17

i send these verses to the archivist cui of qiong-zhou

i have heard that the archivist cui of qiong-zhou himself  
has taken up residence in the guo-yuan district of cheng-du-fu  
i have expected his visit for some time now but have heard nothing  
i wonder what important work has taken up each whole day long

maybe he has been told my straw hut is too far away  
and fears finding only a coarse hut in the wilderness  
perhaps he has not been apprised of the peaceful atmosphere  
as well as the delightful smell of well fermented wine

murphy waiting for the world to beat a path to his door  
6/3/2008 8:22 PM

von zach,XI,18

i send this poem to the hermit si-ma who understands how to prepare the elixir of life

once we parted with appropriate ceremony in chang-an  
now i have become a whirling thistledown blown to the end of the world  
but i don't wish to speak so much of my current conditions  
our earlier colloquies in chang-an always revolved around the same subject

i have always thought deeply about becoming a taoist apprentice  
and from early on you have been my teacher about such matters  
all families recognize and revere you as a second ji-zi-xun  
everyone knows you as truly a second hu-gong

for a long time now you have kept yourself to the north of e-mei mountain  
or you seclude yourself around to the east of mount yu-lei  
you are rumored to ride on the back of a wild tiger  
and in your spartan cave you use an immortal as your servant

why does my pitiable thin hair remain white  
how can my dilapidated face regain the bloom of youth  
i look up to the clouds to complain about my wretched life  
in my old age i envy you your youthful looks

with these riots this old body cannot find its rest  
i am full of grief that no letters reach me from the old country  
everywhere one sees soldiers standing guard at checkpoints  
i even take my sword with me to the postal station in case of bandits

it seems i must wander in foreign areas for the foreseeable future  
and i am already an old man with only a limited number of days remaining  
oh, if only you could truly rejuvenate the passion in my bones  
perhaps you could teach me to ride on the pure winds with you like an immortal

murphy facing the inevitable with his lop-sided grin  
6/4/2008 8:20 AM

von zach XI,19

i dedicate this poem of 40 rhymes to the censor yang-qi, 24th of his clan

during my wanderings i have often found myself remembering about you  
i couldn't help thinking how ashamed i am of my ephemeral life  
i cannot say that i agree with you in your attitude toward public service  
and, at any rate, i have always fled from the fighting arenas

since that night we parted on the pleiades bridge in cheng university  
the signs of the zodiac have slowly revolved three times  
the rebels have still not been dealt a death blow  
these brigands remind me of the yellow turbans of hou in han times

while you returned to chang-an in all peace of mind  
i had to hide, though hardly like a hermit visiting loneliness for itself alone  
i saw no wild goose fly over who could take a letter to you  
and i was reduced to wearing old, torn clothes like a beggar

i was always fearful in packing up my belongings  
i staggered on in my escape because i was weakened repeatedly by illness  
the orioles knew how to draw tears from me in the mornings with their song  
the autumn moon always brought back the memories of the old country

in chang-an then you sighed when you looked upon my distraught face  
while i gabbled on and on about my burdensome woes  
you were originally from cheng-du-fu and moved to chang-an  
i cannot get to chang-an now and must remain in si-chuan

i have come again to my straw hut in cheng-du-fu and my medicines  
here on the huan-hua-xi river i will again cast out my fishing line  
with my heavy illness i can do nothing else except deplore my fate  
i get up late in the mornings, and have found no one who could be a close friend

i have heard that you would come early to the palace archives to work  
now you might return to cheng-du-fu like zhang-qian once did  
you are like a phoenix or swan who has difficulty making friends  
you are like a dragon or tiger who can never be tamed

after you give up your office you might come here as a traveller  
and meet with a friend who was well known to you in earlier times  
our inclinations then tended to always be in agreement  
and we mutually valued only the truth of our characters

although i am a poor vagabond you are welcome to come live with me  
i do not remember you ever being ashamed of my poverty  
here in si-chuan i still have a garden with sugar cane and root vegetables  
we both have the same liking for spruce and bamboo

unfortunately i still make do with coarse rice as in my penurious youth  
and i am very sick and spend many days in misery  
though my adult daughter is a competent seamstress  
and my big son is good with books; unmarried, both live with me

close to peng-kou the river flows like a white ribbon of silk  
and far off the snow on the zan-yai pass glimmers silver in the sun  
there your famous garden lies next to the green mountains  
and one's oars disappear among the waterchestnuts in the stream

i was always delighted to be in that house which belonged earlier to princes  
i was often there upon gracious invitation to this vagabond  
the time we spent together flowed by without notice  
you always extended your hospitality for a full ten days

when one's friendship runs so true and deep  
one need not live together side by side  
all distinguished guests head straight for you  
and you understand as once did shao-dang-shi

we often spent our time in riding excursions  
and i was overwhelmed by your kindnesses  
early on we visited the temple at liu-fei  
riding out to visit through shao-cheng gate in cheng-du-fu

we visited the grave of the king of shu's wife, with the stone mirror  
at the lute-balcony of si-ma-xiang-ru we shared the secret of zhuo-wen-jun's red lips  
now only the dirty earth covers the poor queen  
and the dead poet's wife embraces brambles

you packed wine baskets high into the mountain's woods  
we often played go on the shore of the pond  
i took pleasure in the opportunities to rest my tired limbs  
and to recover a bit from my earlier troubles

when we drew in our cast-out nets, fat carp were delivered  
we cooked their bounteous meat in fine vegetable soups  
we drew out the singing and spent our time sipping from well formed beakers  
and then we would retire for a short siesta in our hammocks

however, in the months important for farming one must tend the fields  
a farmer such as myself can never let this go undone  
everyone who exists needs his simple food and i must so provide  
so it is, unfortunately, back to the fields for me this morning

the provinces are still darkened by the fighting  
but the peaceful serenity of the new ruler portends well  
i would only like to hear that the rebels have been exterminated  
and have quit trying to earn salaries and a place in the unicorn gallery

if we look closely at the world, friendship is short and usually full of self interest  
we should remain friends whether one of us now has luck in life or not  
it is not only the friendship of lei and chen that people should speak of  
we should be counted as inseparable, mixed as glue and varnish

murphy stuck in a bad place with no way out  
6/4/2008 11:27 AM

von zach XI,20

i write these verses upon the resignation of tang-jie and send them with jia of the ministry of ceremonies

within the last nine years we chanced only once to speak  
about how seldom we will meet in our retired lives  
now we are to separate, and you will move the immense distance to luo-yang  
i will accompany you in spirit up to the foot of the first mountain

two white cranes have lived long together in the woods  
two fish living in the depths come both from the same stream  
no one can know whether the future will be good or ill  
though we are old and dilapidated we can still sing strongly a resignation song

if the song is to end we are both deeply saddened  
oh, sun wagon drawn by the six dragons do not hurry so  
when we look at our white hair we know how impossible  
for the driver of the sun wagon xi-he to come to a stop

the leader of the western barbarians has been killed  
but the earlier imperial general bu-gu huai-en still rebels  
it seems unlikely but big rich china within the four seas  
may see the citizens become fewer than the panthers and tigers

where there are few people approach them with care  
where there are many tigers you may still get past  
for when men starve they will sell or eat their children  
while the beasts still fear the nets of the hunters

you possess a great organizational talent  
but the emperor's palace rises to an unattainable height  
now you proceed to eastern zhou, to luo-yang  
your haste to leave reminds me of onrushing waves

my old friend jia-zhi is in the ministry of ceremonies  
he is a vice-president and rides a carriage with golden decorations  
the strength of his paint brush rivals the best in the past  
when he meets a nobleman neither has a bigger heart

i hope you will look upon him as a teacher and serve him  
also in these bad times be watchful and keep a selfless character  
xia will bring my excuses that i could not appear personally with him  
that i am bedridden with bad lungs here on the shore of the big river

murphy still maintaining the proper politesse

6/5/2008 8:35 AM

von zach XI,21



i sing these verses languidly

over on the shores of the stream the gulls play as they float by  
the shade of the pasture extends over the government bridge  
at the moment while the blossoms are fullest comes the dragon boat festival  
the grasses are thick and one thinks of small excursions

already i have abandoned all my books and working  
and thrown myself into the joys and beauty of nature  
i seal these unusual new verses with quiet assuredness  
and sing them instinctively in a long drawn-out tone

murphy busy making up his own verse forms for the heck of it  
6/5/2008 8:56 AM

von zach XI,22

the wild goose flies back to her native country

many travellers arrive from a thousand miles to the east  
the riots are ended in the native country, when will i finally return  
the wild goose seen on the river near cheng-du-fu tears at the heart  
how he soars to inaccessible heights directly to the north

murphy anthropomorphizing with the best of them  
6/6/2008 7:43 AM

von zach XI,23

two quatrains (1 of 2)

late afternoon lingers with sun gilding the mountain and stream  
a spring wind brings the taste of flowers and herbs  
swallows fly up from the soft, melting mud  
mandarin ducks sleep on the warm sandy shore

murphy dipping his toes into the clear running river  
6/6/2008 7:52 AM

von zach XI,24

two quatrains (2 of 2)

the white gulls contrast sharply with the jade blue stream  
the massive dark background of mountain gleams with fiery red blossoms  
i see that the beginnings of spring has passed me by once again  
when shall i ever enter the year of my final return to the motherland

murphy marooned in tahiti with willing wahines  
6/6/2008 8:04 AM

von zach XI,25

praise of the horse portrait in the house of archivist wei-feng, painted by the general cao-ba

in this dynasty the best painted horses have been by li-xu, prince of jiang-du  
though in the last 30 years general cao has made a name for himself  
now among the cognoscenti one sees again, if only in paint  
war horses such as the bucephalus cheng-huang from emperor shun's time

once cao painted the earlier emperor ming-huang's horse  
the one entitled "the white who illuminates the night"  
when it was finished it thundered ten straight days  
dragon lake seemed in celebration of its beauty

a blood red carnelian bowl was selected from the imperial treasury  
to be presented in recognition of the marvelous work  
the lady in waiting transmitted the imperial decree  
and the lady's maids presented the rich reward to the general

the gifted general extended his heartfelt thanks  
and returned to his home replete with great honors  
the best white silk was sent to him from all sides  
requesting he paint the sender's request

members of the imperial family were so honored  
as well as the highest dignitaries who wished his work  
they were all of the same feeling about this man  
his art would surely add luster to their homes

first came the curly-maned horse of emperor tai-zong  
then the pinto with the lion's heart received as a gift by guo-zi-yi  
now i see both these horses among the nine in this painting  
they move a horse expert to sigh deeply in appreciation

both are vigorous war steeds to carry their rider  
into the face of thousands of enemies  
they throw up thick clouds of the white sands of the desert  
but this is only on the white silk of the painting

the remaining seven horses are also unusual  
and each is presented as individual in style  
from a distance they give the distinct impression  
as if they moved through a misty cold day of snow

their ice chipping hooves stamp the ground  
as they move with power under great fir trees  
they are surrounded by officers and servants  
each one vying to stand out from all the rest

the eyes of each are clear and proud, the fire of their nature deeply shown  
and they ask of each viewer, which horse do they prefer  
now it is asked of wei feng a friend of horse painting  
earlier it was zhi-dun a friend of horse breeding

i remember when the late emperor came in procession to his summer palace  
the procession of 30,000 riders, all on excellent horses, swept in rows from the east  
they all resembled in conformation the splendid horses in this painting  
but now the imperial ghost receives the secret jade of the river gods

that was the last gathering of such magnificent animals  
and dragons are no longer shot as did han-wu-di in xun-yang  
since the emperor's death we no longer see such excellent horses  
the bird's plaintive cries at his tomb bemoan their loss

murphy cinching the belly rope on the brahma bull prior to settling himself on his back  
6/6/2008 9:25 AM

von zach XI,26

i escort wei-feng as he leaves for lang-zhou to take up his post as army archivist

the destiny of the empire is still in danger  
and the riots have still not been quelled  
everywhere the people complain of famine  
for ten years the armies have exacted their provisions

the entire corps of officialdom recognizes this problem  
but cannot begin to ease the terrible deprivation  
they know how hard pressed the people have become  
and the worthy official will proceed in an even-handed way

wei-feng is still a young man who is thoroughly educated  
he has acquired all the required indispensable knowledge  
he knows the law and how to uphold it  
he sees complex matters tied up neatly with a string

he must now see to it that extortionist under-officials  
should be made to understand and to fear him  
if he really wishes to ease the festering wounds of the people  
he must first eliminate the culprits gnawing at their marrow

my tears flow as i say good bye to him on the shores of the big river  
the high turbulent sky reflects my conflicted state  
he goes now to bring competency to managing his district  
and thus brings comfort to my grieving heart

murphy carefully picking his way through the thorn bushes  
6/6/2008 9:59 AM

von zach XI,27

the song of the painter's art, to general cao-ba

general cao-ba is a descendant of emperor cao-cao of the wei dynasty  
the family has lost its nobility and now has only private respectability  
and is no longer interested in territorial occupation or past heroics  
but their brilliant culture comes down to the grandson today

the general first studied the calligraphy of madame wei in the chin dynasty  
and was regretful only that he could not surpass her pupil wang-xi-zhi  
since he started to paint he has forgotten that he is aging  
he has no need for wealth or respect, they being no more than moving clouds

early in life for almost 30 years he was often called to serve the emperor  
he was a semi-permanent visitor to the southern fragrance hall at the palace  
the portraits of the past statesmen in the ling-yen gallery were faded  
the general seized his paintbrush and restored the pictures to perfection

he painted all the state ministers with the special cap of the emperor's approval  
all the generals were given arrows hanging from their belts  
the hair of the duke duan zhi-yuan and yu-chi-jing-de were set aflutter in the wind  
their fierce faces as imposing as if returning from the fight

the late emperor ming-huan owned a marvelous horse call yu-hua-cong  
many painters before had tried to capture his essence and failed  
one day the horse was brought before the throne steps  
he stood proudly within the chang-he gates raising dust with his hooves

the emperor ordered the general to use white silk and get to work  
cao-ba sank into deep thought before he started on the cloth  
and then with sudden inspiration he brought down a real dragon from the ninth sky  
with this painting he surpassed all other horse paintings from the past

the picture of the racer yu-hua-cong was hung above the imperial throne  
the horse over the throne and the horse at the gate faced each other in astonishing similarity  
the elated monarch smiled and immediately presented the painter with gold  
so much so that the stable masters of state officials were jealous and envious



cao-ba's pupil han-gan has been improving for a long time  
he also is a great painter of horses and returns to their beauty time and again  
however, he has never quite mastered the underlying structure of bones  
he even let the horse hua-liu appear weak in the picture of the 8 horses of mu-wang

general cao-ba was a master at capturing the spirit of his subjects  
as soon as he met an excellent man he painted his portrait  
now during this time of war and rioting he walks in misery  
and will now often paint just any old nobody who happens to be around

in his distress he is often looked down upon now  
there is no one in the world quite as poor as he seems to be  
he should take heart by reminding himself of famous men in the past  
who were met with frustration during their productive lives

murphy taking the vow of poverty to become a public school teacher  
6/10/2008 9:54 AM

von zach XI,28

i send this poem in 12 rhymes to ministerial secretary li-bu, 14th in his clan

your title, your name is listed among the guard officers of the crown prince  
you were appointed to your especial office as once was chen-fan by governor zhou-jing  
far back in the gulches of wu lies the district wan-zhou where you are to be stationed  
and thus it is a good time for me to send these verses out from my gate of thornbushes

now you are to begin a long, arduous trip and must take care  
how is it going with your bouts of returning fevers?  
just now is the high heat of summertime  
and there are only a few roadside inns along your way

the hwang-niu rocks on the river are now deeply covered  
and the boats with the painted bug mascot climb the waves into the air  
to wait further allows the water whirlpool to cease to function  
you must determine your day of departure to minimize your problems

if you are feeling depressed you might want to walk along my small garden path  
i can come along and we can pick some vegetables for the table  
the bank pastures lead out to a secluded place for us to enjoy  
the village flowers do not impede our way when we return

during the rainy season many white apples are produced  
and after these rains red water lilies bloom in a wild mess of color  
during the summer as the evening comes to my garden  
winds come off the river with a delightful coolness

the transparent water of the streams can clean your heart of despair  
we can carefully comb our hair in the cool of the bamboo grove  
come directly back to my straw hut with your clothes and other necessities  
in the autumn then i will open my hut to the yachtsman as he leaves

murphy especially southern in his gracious hospitality  
6/10/2008 10:28 AM

von zach XI,29

i send this poem of 10 rhymes to general dong-jia-rong

i have heard that you have pitched your general's tent near the highest sky regions  
there you hope to prevent any autumnal nomad's incursions  
you look down from the snow mountains to the west  
and far behind you lies the rope bridge of mou-zhou

within the four seas of the motherland everyone is wearing battle armor  
the audiences in chang-an run much longer than is normal  
the dogs and sheep, the enemy have spread everywhere  
the palaces in the capital have still not been restored

the courageous generals must drink bile as once did gou-jian to remind of his disgrace  
battle swords must be kept sharp and girded to the loins  
the turfan must be made to pay for the stain on the imperial honor  
the lunar caves of the west must be levelled in retaliation

it will not take an inordinate amount of time if you use the right strategy  
and you keep your troops focussed and always ready for combat  
you will become the second ma-wu in seizing your enemies  
and with a successful effort you will rise to emulate the great he-qu-bing

at sundown i think of your light cavalry riding to the west  
now in autumn i am reminded of your eagle defenders ready on high  
in yun-tai palace your picture will be painted and hung  
there you will be among the different victorious leaders of our people

murphy the old armchair quarterback reading his monday morning papers  
6/10/2008 11:58 AM

von zach XI,30

the white horse with the black bridle

who is that man on the white horse  
the one with the contrasting black bridle  
with his wild blood lust he will not hang back  
he has an abiding need to attack the insurgent turfan

have you not heard that the emperor in his mercy  
has freed the harem women as once did han-wen-di  
shortly the tung-guan pass will be cleared  
and the evil insurgents scattered like bees and ants

no one can stand up to the imperial guard  
and it has now been unleashed on the enemy  
the prediction is that the enemy will be crushed  
and this will be no later than by this tenth month

would it not be better that their leaders would submit  
and proceed alone to chang-an to beg the emperor's mercy  
maybe if they wait on the steps to the throne  
they might be given the imperial mercy

murphy always betting on the yankees to win  
6/16/2008 8:22 AM

von zach XI,31

the huang-he river (1 of 2)

on the northern shore of the huang-he river is the hai-xi army of the turfan  
their incessant gongs and drums are heard throughout the night  
the countless strong horses neigh loudly in their eagerness  
and more and more large nosed barbarians show up every day

murphy sharpening his sword for the coming battle  
6/16/2008 8:33 AM

von zach XI,32

the huang-he river (2 of 2)

on the south shore of the huang-he our si-chuan army is encamped  
because of their raids the enemy is not able to obtain food  
if i had my way the entire people of china  
would rise up to help their ruler defeat these curs

we would then have throughout the land  
the same measures, and the same writing  
and no more hording of gold and jewels  
but all efforts be brought to maintaining the troops

murphy tightening the belt on his dress blues for parade  
6/16/2008 8:44 AM

von zach XI,33

flying flags

the rain has reduced the heat of the long summer days  
the official office along the big river feels chilly  
general yan-wu has invited guests to a party  
his stately appearance adds to his pre-eminence

in the beginning of the festivities is a military show  
the wide court of the ya-men is used for the demonstration  
in the large parade ground appear six riders  
they are all swinging flags on their spirited horses

as they are waved before us they are caught by the wind  
the sound is that of a thundering rockfall  
when the embroidered flags are swung they form a canopy  
the streaks of colors remind of shooting stars

they lay down the flags side by side on the ground  
then riding by they reach to the ground to take them up again  
it is as if they had rainbows in their hands  
which they furl and unfurl with consummate ease

the three districts of song, wei and bao are in the hands of the turfan  
on the west mountains we see only the black smoke of the chinese guard fires  
you, o general, have come to train competent soldiers  
you intend to win back all the western towns

your position is certainly not an easy one  
yet since your arrival peace and calm has returned to the provinces  
now we have plenty of food to eat and no great worries press on us  
and we do not have to forage far afield to get our supplies

murphy on the parade ground for the graduation from boot camp  
6/17/2008 8:18 AM

von zach XI,34

after carousing in the field with the army of yan-wu i send these verses to my friend shen, 8th of his clan, and to old liu

i am thirsty after the pleasure of wine so i drink from the big stream  
still very drunk i rinse my mouth on the evening shore  
i lean lopsided on the soft sand to steady myself  
i awake from my drunken sleep on cold stones

i ate heartily of the field army food at bivouac  
and listened to the chinese songs provided by the camp  
because you were not there with me i only drank and did not speak  
therefore i rather quickly became so drunk i became comatose

murphy bleary eyed and not very happy  
6/17/2008 9:02 AM

von zach XI,35



a party while it is raining at the beginning of autumn. i seal these verses in yan-wu's headquarters in cheng-du-fu

the clouds move against the borders on the mountains  
the stars have returned to their autumnal places  
a rainstorm shakes the beautiful headquarters building  
the beams groan in the hard autumn winds

because general yan has helped me in my misery, i stand ashamed  
yet despite my age he has asked me to stand by his side  
i do so and every morning i attend upon him  
wondering how i could possibly help my superior with his far reaching plans

i don my official robes and open the northern door of my private apartment  
i go to the resting place in the southern tower where he stays  
from the wet trees a chill wind blows refreshing my room  
i look out on thick fog floating on the big river

because of my distinguished treatment by yan-wu my heart is at rest  
the invigorating weather has improved my ill health  
if my general and benefactor returns to chang-an  
i will return again to my old straw hut to stay a while

murphy finding a peace within non-action for the time being  
6/17/2008 10:11 AM

von zach XI,36

in respectful imitation of the poem by yan-wu, duke of zheng-guo, "confined to camp in autumn"

gentle labor pains of the fall winds move the high flags of the troops  
the general's tent has sent out the order to attack the enemy camp  
already the enemy has withdrawn from his high camp so the troops are withdrawn  
they await further orders to press on to the turfan headquarters in peng-bo

murphy polishing his boots and field stripping his rifle awaiting the next battle  
6/17/2008 2:56 PM

von zach XI,37

a beautiful evening at headquarters, i think of my straw hut in the western out-village  
from cheng-du-fu

in the headquarters a chill autumn wind blows day and night  
soft billowing clouds and fine rain surround the center of cheng-du-fu  
the red fruit among the leaves sag hang down the load of the season  
an unseemly blue-green moss climbs the stairway steps

but now the rays of the evening sun falls on the tower and balcony  
and it is too cliched to speak of the fine weather echoed by drums and gongs  
the flowers on the huan-hua river by my straw hut would laugh at me  
since they know i cannot be at the same time both an official and a hermit

murphy simultaneously patting his head and rubbing his stomach  
6/17/2008 7:16 PM

von zach XI,38

i come into my village

although the rain has been steady and my gulch is full  
only a little mud has washed up on the autumnal sands of my stream  
snakes and their young have gone to high ground  
the lotus and waterchestnut are barely above the top of the waters

i was already old when i moved to this straw hut  
and now i hurry my old horse in haste of my return  
the rice and millet would already stand in rows had i stayed  
now there are only thorns and weeds to hinder my way

for a long time i have wished to leave si-chuan and return to chang-an  
but i have been beguiled by this life on the land and have not gone back  
for now i must maintain my friendship with yan-wu in his headquarters  
i am grateful for the work but wish to return to the straw hut for good

murphy finally accepting his diminished future  
6/23/2008 7:54 AM

von zach XI,39

it rains in my village

the rain has pounded down for two straight nights  
the cold of late autumn is finally here upon us  
when i put my belt on i notice my old red sash of office  
when i open my suitcase i see the black fur coat i wore in chang-an

i am tempted more and more these days to simply sleep my life away  
but i cannot escape from officialdom and the difficulties of the rebellion  
the spruce trees and chrysanthemums are washed, and glisten in the rain  
the straw hut and its beautiful surroundings comfort this old exile

murphy making do with what he has  
6/23/2008 8:05 AM

von zach XI,40

a sleepless night

the coolness of the bamboo grove penetrates my bedchamber  
the wilderness moon illuminates the far corners of my court  
a heavy dew has begun to coat the surrounding world  
i see only a few stars which flicker here and there

the fireflies seek each other in the darkness  
the birds spending the night on the river set up a clamor  
in the middle of the maelstrom of this war  
i drift helpless before the dwindling of this clear, quiet night

murphy restless, but protected within his habitual routines  
6/23/2008 8:17 AM

von zach XI,41

i give voice to my sorrows, a poem in 20 rhymes, that i deferentially give to yan-wu

i am the wanderer with a fishing rod on the shores of the shining water  
i am the white haired old man full of sorrows in his autumn clarity  
why am i in your headquarters at this time  
i should have remained fishing in my boat

i am recorded as an official on the yellow register of service  
accordingly i am wearing the green robe befitting my position  
but my old wife worries incessantly about my rheumatism  
and even my daughters are always asking about my frequent headaches

i dodder around and am even apt to fall on level ground  
and i argue incessantly with my colleagues in office  
i use all my feeble strength to perform my duties  
and all for the kindness and friendship of yan-wu

early on we talked often of poetry and our friendship  
now your exploits in war bring fame that even i share  
your patient forbearance excuses my bumptious nature  
you have extended your help for my physical miseries

but when one is threatened by dew one seeks a wisteria arbor  
in a fine rain one seeks cassia bushes for protection  
i am like the river turtle caught in the fisherman's net  
or the bird who sings his songs from within a cage

the western mountains surround the north of my village  
the south stream flows around to the east of my straw hut  
the bamboo there remains green throughout the winter  
the berries of the pepper plant show red after the rains

my boat might have been damaged by high waters  
my wine jugs at home are empty and need refilling  
my hedge has gone wild and sorely needs trimming  
my young neighbors pray on my trees with their axes

for my friendship i have bound myself for work in your office  
i remain against my better judgement to prove my loyalty  
i had hoped to be of use by doing careful work  
but my superficial nature has led me to shoddy errors

i always appear for work in the morning when the gates are opened  
and stay through the day until the trumpet sounds at evening  
i have not yet been able to spend any time at my straw hut  
nor have i taken a brief vacation to rest my old body

i am the magpie who will never fly up to touch the milky way  
i am the decrepit horse who does not deserve an embroidered saddle cloth  
i hope your excellency will consider my humble nature  
and return my freedom to rest beside my old wu-tung tree at home

murphy turning in his papers and accepting the gold watch of faithful service  
6/24/2008 8:24 AM

von zach XI,42



a night at headquarters

the chill of autumn permeates headquarters  
the scarlet sterculia trees shiver by the well  
i sit alone through the night in cheng-du-fu  
the wax candle is nearing its end

the sounds of horns are heard throughout the long night  
while i hold a silent monologue with myself  
the moon shines brightly from the middle of the sky  
but there is no one here to enjoy it but myself

the reality here is that of incessant fighting  
there is no more news coming from the native country  
the border passes are dangerous and seldom ventured upon  
already i have endured this loneliness for ten years

i am forced to spend my time here at headquarters  
i must try to find my rest on the branch like a bird

murphy wiggling his toes to stay awake on guard duty  
6/24/2008 8:43 AM

von zach XI,43

under the trees at headquarters

the two orange trees stand to the side, alone  
their smell pervades the entire courtyard  
their intertwined branches bend down to my field desk  
their hanging fruit brush against my clothes, my walking cane

the whole year through their leaves are dark green like the spruce  
their fruits come at the same time as the yellow chrysanthemum  
i often become wet from the dew on the leaves  
as i sit among their branches enjoying the moonlight

murphy finding his pleasures where he can

von zach XI,44

i escort my brother du-ying as he leaves for qu-zhou (1 of 3)

i stay in the min mountains of si-chuan to the north of the southern barbarians  
now you proceed to xu-guan, to the west of the eastern sea  
who knows when you will finally arrive at your destination  
i give you filial escort as i weep copious tears

only here at the end of the world in si-chuan can one find safety  
and now i will be lonely on my walks in the chill autumn winds  
in these critical times we have been fortunate to spend some time together  
my white-headed old thoughts are muddled by the grief of our separation

murphy getting out of his brother's car at the airport  
6/24/2008 9:25 AM

von zach XI,45

i escort my brother du-ying as he leaves for qu-zhou (2 of 3)

the darkness of the riots is beginning to lift  
but you leave and i know not when you will return  
the separation of brothers is especially hard  
and i am old and sick enough as it is

on the big river you will reach yi-zhu-guan tower this evening  
while at sundown i will stand on the wang-xiang balcony in cheng-du-fu  
my thoughts will remain with you on your path to the northeast  
my spirit will search for you in qi-zhou where you are to be

murphy beyond all the rivalries of the past  
6/26/2008 8:24 AM

von zach XI,46

i escort my brother du-ying as he leaves for qu-zhou (3 of 3)

our aunts now live on the shores of the sea  
both younger brothers live to the east of tai-shan  
you will pass near the fighting in order to visit them  
when you first came to visit all that was possible

but you must now wear military clothes and be prepared  
you ride your horse into the gusting autumn winds  
i trust you will soon reach qi-zhou and not wander around aimless like myself  
i will look for the lone wild goose coming from your area with news

murphy looking forward to the retired staff's annual reunion  
6/26/2008 8:33 AM

von zach XI,47

the newly planted spruce before the stairs of the office apartment of governor yan-wu. i receive  
the rhyme "chan"

what could such a spindly spruce plant expect from the future  
you have only begun to put down roots after being transplanted  
yet wind rushing through your needles reaches the windows of the office  
and your green gleams fresh on the pearl curtains in the sun

one has yet to see the red smoky crown high on a mature tree  
up til now there has been no great growth despite tender care  
when will you reach full height and broaden your crown  
when will your shade protect the eaves of headquarters

murphy at a cocktail party and high enough to be witty  
6/26/2008 8:43 AM

von zach XI,48

yan-wu and i sing in the bamboos before the house of the general. i receive the rhyme "xiang"

the green bamboo is half burgeoning new shoots  
the young points rise just above the court wall  
the gems of the new leaves wraps the books in evening darkness  
the chill shade makes the wine seem even colder

the rain washes the plants to a pure freshness  
the breeze picks up and brings their light odor  
if they are not cut back soon for their own good  
they will reach far too high to touch the sky

murphy watering his prize bonzai sparingly  
6/26/2008 8:56 AM

von zach XI,49

respectfully i look at a picture of the min mountains in the office of governor yan-wu, poem in 10 rhymes, i use the rhyme "wang"

the to river flows past the middle seat of the great hall  
the min mountains have been moved to the north wall  
the white waves press on the white-washed expanse  
the green mountain tips reach up toward the the roof's carved frame

i am truly surprised at the coolness projected by the painted pines and spruces  
i can nearly smell the water chestnuts and the other water plants  
yet the snowy clouds appear to be a bit blurred  
and the grass on the sandy bank is weakly outlined

the wild goose flying above the ridges is only a small brushstroke  
the rainbow above the to river dives into the sleek water  
a cloud of red shows the chaos of flowers on the island  
the dark green lines of ivy tendrils search a large rock

the valley lies in darkness and seems to be in rain but it is not raining  
we stand before a painting for the maple is red from paint not frost  
the autumnal town is like the dwelling of a genius in kun-lun  
the scenery of the painting reminds me of dong-ting lake area

the artistry of the work is quite astounding  
my heart which loves nature leaps with joy  
it is true what xie-an said in earlier times  
mountains and valleys once seen are never forgotten

murphy sitting quietly exuberant at the exhibit of monet's waterlilies  
6/26/2008 9:25 AM

von zach XI,50



i accompany yan-wu on a boat ride in autumn over ma-ha lake. i receive the rhyme "xi"

we pass quickly through the waves and the wind whips away our drunkenness  
as evening falls we turn back and a fog rises around the levee  
autumn has returned with its cold winds to the town of cheng-du-fu  
the evening darkness hides the trees and we lose our way to the landing

we drift through the quiet mandarin ducks who then fly away  
we destroy by chance the nest of a kingfisher which falls into the water  
we shall not disturb the white heron who looms ahead  
he will be our pilot as dark grows on the clear water of the river

murphy whiling away his youth in cold cambridge  
6/27/2008 7:57 AM

von zach XI,51

in yan-wu's company i enjoy the scenery of the north lake

the clouds above the north lake blend with the waters stretching into the distance  
the autumn wind reaches into the marvelous roadside inn on the shore  
a lonesome crane maintains its vigil along the lake's bank  
a wilted lotus flower surfaces for a short time on the wind swept water

the stickered burr of the chestnut is gathered in the cold waters  
feet stir the mud for the roots of the lotus plants which are then taken  
people dip their leisurely oars to ply their trade here and there  
some offer their fruit in a golden bowl along the footpath

the luxuriant grass moistened by the dew sparkles its green  
a single red flag catches the eye as it flutters in the evening sun  
yan-wu allows the guard of the lake to present him with a mug of wine  
he has clothing handed out to the surrounding fishermen

in these distant areas chrysanthemums are in bloom early  
in my native land they would only just be ready to blossom under the wu-tung trees  
on my everlasting travels i think often of chang-an, longing to return  
yet i am stuck here with yan-wu until he succeeds in his military affairs

the strictly guarded town gates are about to be closed for the night  
but yan-wu knows how to end the party in time for us to leave  
what use can i be in advising him on military matters  
my job seems to be accompanying the general as he seeks pleasure

murphy the factotum of revelry  
6/27/2008 8:32 AM

von zach XI,52

the onset of winter

although i am quite elderly i go around in a tight military uniform  
but now i can go on a short vacation in the newly very cold weather  
the fishing boats go upstream on the quick floods  
a hunting fire glints its flickering light in the timber forest

every day now i have been in the society of general yan-wu  
when grief comes upon me i chant of calumny in the ancient liang-fu  
the fighting is still not coming to an end, and i am continually torn  
should i remain in headquarters or retire to the loneliness of my old straw hut

murphy standing at the cusp of uselessness  
6/27/2008 8:55 AM

von zach XI,53

chang, the prince's secretary, gives me a piece of fine brocade

a visitor comes here from chang-an to the northwest  
he brings with him a piece of fine brocade as a gift  
i open the string of the bundle and find wind flecked waves  
and within these waves a whale thrashes with his mighty tail

in long unbroken curves are many smaller creatures  
and in their numerous variety too many to name  
the visitor says, "if it is to upholster your cushion  
you will sit upon it with joy at glorious feasts"

"dispel it in your hall to dispel all ghosts  
sleep upon it and experience sweet dreamless sleep"  
i thank the visitor for his gift but i am truly ashamed  
for i am not a duke or a minister to merit such a treasure

if i keep this present i fear the envy of the gods  
if i take this to my straw hut its glory will shine too brightly  
the brilliance of clothing denotes one's level of importance  
such distinctions have been with us since antiquity

now i am an old man without any distinguishing rank  
in my short, plain blouse i own no further ambition  
this exquisite cloth is fit for the emperor's palace  
it will only bring misfortune to be shown in my bedroom

i sigh to myself that during this terrible time of war  
men in high places still place an emphasis on such luxuries  
because they are in high powerful positions they take advantage  
they wear fine mantles of fur and ride on the best fat horses

general li-ting perished in the feng-xiang-fu of old  
because he possessed such a pride of self-conceit  
and lai-tian was ordered to commit suicide  
because his arrogance showed his disdain of proper behavior

all my life i have heard the admonition against such show of finery  
that the extremely wealthy will always pay for their ostentation with sorrow  
how could such an old country bumpkin as myself  
accept such a rich example of the trappings of power

i roll up the marvelous woven material with the thrashing whale  
and return it to the visitor and feel myself on an even keel again  
i shake the dust from my coarse sitting mat and offer a seat  
though i am chagrined that i can only offer goose-foot soup to him

murphy in his favorite, ratty old jeans and worn cotton shirt

6/27/2008 11:22 AM

von zach XI,54

after the winter solstice

after the winter solstice the days slowly begin to lengthen  
i am deep inside si-chuan and look with longing eyes toward lo-yang  
i wear the office uniform of headquarters but am no officer  
i ride the best official horses, but all this has no meaning for me

i go to the park in the golden valley with the street of bronze camels  
the road there does not lead me back to the emperor's palace where i long to be  
the plum blossoms here so far from my homeland are deciding to open  
yet the beauty they bring leaves me cold and indifferent

being separated from my brothers, i think of them constantly  
when my grief overwhelms i turn poetry to express my feelings  
yet when i have finished the poem and i sing it  
i am driven yet deeper into my old regrets

murphy reflecting his understanding of the world's sorrow  
6/27/2008 11:42 AM

von zach XI, 55

i look at the landscape painting in the house of li-gu, painted by his younger brother the police officer, three poems (1 of 3)

the man of high standing has an unfeigned welcoming of guests  
he puts up a bed for me and heats his stove with bamboo  
in cold weather he advises i stay with him and not go travelling  
he recently added a painting of the green sea on his wall

i am surrounded with the natural beauty of si-chuan's mountains  
but i also look with pleasure at the picture of three isolated islands  
since the crowd of immortals have no sad thoughts like myself  
they fly over to sit with pleasure on the island of peng-lai

murphy reading about the aesir in valhalla  
6/27/2008 1:32 PM

von zach XI,56

i look at the landscape painting in the house of li-gu, painted by his younger brother the police officer, three poems (2 of 3)

the islands of the immortals are surrounded by an infinite water  
the tian-tai mountain is thoroughly enwreathed with clouds  
in this world one often sees images of this mountain and these islands  
at my age i would not only like to see them, but to fly myself there

fan-li's boat depicted here is exceedingly small  
wang-zi-qiao's crane is also quite diminutive  
my life follows that of the whole of nature  
but there must be a way to be freed from the dust of this world

murphy wondering if narcotics might free his mind to new levels of insight  
6/27/2008 1:45 PM

von zach XI,57



i look at the landscape painting in the house of li-gu, painted by his younger brother the police officer, three poems (3 of 3)

the high waves in the picture threaten to upset the house of li-gu  
the overhanging cliff wall falls nearly on my bed  
the bridge in the wilderness is sharply outlined  
the sandy shore limits the sea only in a blurry way

the red buried under the surface represents branches of coral  
the green hanging down from the rocks looks to be fig ivy  
the oared raft in the picture can still take up somebody  
oh how i wish the old immortal would take me along with him

murphy letting his daydream become too realistic  
6/27/2008 1:56 PM

von zach XI,58

i lament the death of zheng-qian, finance controller of tai-zhou, and of su-yuan-ming, under-secretary of the cabinet office, 764

who among my old friends loved me throughout our lives  
the two most true were zheng-qian and su-yuan-ming  
the living and the dead are forever parted  
and now in this time of war i must forge on alone

which authors of immense talent are still alive with us  
with both of these men gone, great literature has disappeared  
while i was wandering wide distances from chang-an  
both funeral messages reached me in the same year

su died during a summer day in the center of chang-an  
zheng-qian died on a clear autumn day in the bay of the big sea  
su's grave lies in chang-an under the zodiac sign of the big dipper  
the way into the underworld that zheng has taken lies in east wu

zheng was sent in exile to tai-zhou because of an offense  
at such a critical time a scholar such as he was sent away  
su was appointed to the court at chang-an, where he was reclusive  
this august man died of hunger when rice became too expensive

my tears can bring neither of them back to this life  
i am filled with indignation that neither was treated fairly  
because of the way the nobility handles itself i have given my life to poetry  
because my heart is so desparate, i have made wine my constant companion

both took me up into their circle of friends though my skill is low  
i always strove to follow their example without feeling overshadowed  
like ban-gu and yang-xiong they became more and more famous  
like xi-kang and ruan-ji they both treasured their independence

they both should have been appointed to high positions  
high character and unhappy destiny should not have been intertwined  
the competent cannot always show their true abilities  
and both these men were given only a short time in court

they were both active when emperor su-zong suppressed the riots  
as a result of divine regulations they did not receive adequate salaries  
later su-yang-ming in his leisure examined the old classics  
zheng-qian swallowed his disappointment studying the secrets of yin-fu-jing

the doubts and misunderstandings of our long friendship receded in time  
now in my misery about their deaths my will to live is filled with despair  
now i live in si-chuan whose customs are not those of the homeland  
i live as a stranger surrounded by the snowy mountains

already in my youth i strove to be like these two men  
our friendship has always been like the relations of brothers  
my wish to offer libation to my dead friends must now remain unfulfilled  
and alas they are both too far away for me to cry over their graves

i have become ill because of the waters of si-chuan  
here in my misery i have become old in cheng-du-fu  
i can certainly not find my way to their sides wandering in si-chuan  
as the world becomes more and more choked by the weeds of war

murphy carefully reading the obituaries in the harvard magazine  
6/27/2008 3:04 PM

von zach XI,59

i must leave

have you not seen the falcon on the leather sleeve of the hunter  
as soon as he is fed he wants to break away and fly off free  
how could he be like the searching house swallow  
who seeks a warm little place to build a nest with the mud in its beak

a man of the wilderness is freedom loving and ashamed to carry a mask  
how can such as he exist for long among princes and the privileged  
i have not tried the method of li-you who mixed elixir with jade  
i must be off to the lan-tian mountains on the morrow to seek my gems

murphy smelling the weed carefully before the purchase is consummated  
6/27/2008 3:19 PM

von zach XI,60