

at a party to welcome spring

in a spring party fresh young vegetables are finely sliced
every where in court they are served in fine bowls
i am suddenly struck by the memory of past times
plum blossoms in the capitals of lo-yang and chang-an

there they had jade bowls filled with these delicacies
served by young girls as an imperial presentation
how could now my eyes see nothing more than here
staring at the cold waters of wu gulch

i, the old man from du-ling, far from his home country
all my life i am filled with an unspeakable pain
i have never known a steady place to live in peace
i tell my son to fetch paper so i can write this poem

murphy never knowing when the muse will seek him out
7/16/2008 9:27 AM

von zach XIII,1

i think back to my stay on the shore of the jin river, two poems (1 of 2)

the imperial troops are on the march to the west of si-chuan
there have been many battles being fought in that region
i hear everywhere the old people of si-chuan singing songs
they have not stopped praising the tang emperor xuan-zong

so these mountains of western si-chuan will never fall to the rebels
in these circumstances maybe i can return to my old straw hut
daily the waters of the wu gorges mix in the distance with the jin-jiang
yet i must remain in my place here far from cheng-du-fu

murphy exiled to the northeast of boston for the duration
7/16/2008 9:39 AM

von zach XIII,2

i think back to my stay on the shore of the jin river, two poems (2 of 2)

my straw hut stands west of the wan li bridge
and only a bit north of the bo-hua pond
the high windows all look out on the flowing water
the old trees all around have withstood many winters

the snowy mountains to the west point their white tips to the sky
the village around lies golden in the rays of the setting sun
now all i have are hazy images in my mind
as i gaze steadily in the direction of cheng-du-fu far away

murphy calling for more booze to settle his spirits
7/16/2008 9:48 AM

von zach XIII,3

old and ill in the mountains of wu

i am old and ill here in the mountains
i live among strangers in si-chuan
i have used up all of the medicines i carefully bundled
the blossoms on the bushes are those of another year

during the night the rain soaked the sandy shores
this spring the wind blows mostly against the current
as an official in chang-an i would have received my monthly pair of brushes
but here i am still only thistledown blown by the wind

murphy feeling sorry for his decrepit old self
7/16/2008 2:25 PM

von zach XIII,4

incessant rain

since the first day of the new cycle it has continually rained
and it persists even now after the holiday of the beginning of spring
when the promised dry spell shall come light work can begin in the fields
then i fear even the thin silk clothes will be too thick for the heat

because of the fogs around the rain is accompanied by darkness
and the wind blows the spray straight into the face
one is reminded in the darkness of the night's rain
that song-yu was induced to write his autumn lament in these wu mountains

murphy shrugging his shoulders and soldiering on
7/16/2008 2:40 PM

von zach XIII,5

in southwest si-chuan, kui-zhou

in southwest si-chuan the spring comes differently than elsewhere
the warmth replaces the cold sooner than one would expect
on the shore of the big river are numerous herbs i don't recognize
the clouds move slowly over the high mountains

the bees swarm here even in the first month of the year
the birds sing their twittering songs before their time has come
i support myself with a cane on the floor of my shelter
i came here to escape the riots and to withdraw from the world

murphy snug in his isolated hunting lodge
7/17/2008 6:28 AM

von zach XIII,6

the cuckoo

yun-an-xian lies in the gorges of the yang-zi
the roofs on the shore of the stream jut out in an even glory
on both shores the cliff walls are covered with trees
there from morning til night one hears the calls of cuckoos

as soon as the gentle winds of spring the small bird arrives
blending his sad song with the sougning of the leaves
how can one endure the grief of his sound far from home
and he seems to situate himself quite near to where i sit

murphy listening to two cardinals chirr in combat over territory
7/17/2008 6:38 AM

von zach XIII,7

at the water tower in nice morning weather, i respectfully send these verses to district judge yan
from yun-an-xian

the hills east of town are wearing their spring jewelry
from the water tower one looks down on the craggy rocks
the white clouds are like mountains tumbling around each other
the morning sun irradiates the fragrant fields

as a result of the night rains the window ledge is strewn with fallen flowers
as a result of the wind my many books lie scattered around
while i fix the curtains rice birds fly from their sleeping nests
while i fix my medicines the fickle orioles begin their song

i call for the serving maid to bring a full jug of wine
i recite the wen-xuan with my son, prompting when he forgets
late in my life i have made the acquaintance of district judge yan
and will certainly wish to visit him more often now

murphy always the teacher pedantically explaining
7/17/2008 6:59 AM

von zach XIII,8

earlier when i was still in chang-an

earlier when i still lived in chang-an
an-lu-shan came to take the emperor's palace
during the night troops burned the nine forefather temples
the milky way reflected red from all the fires

cinders from the roofing tiles were carried ten miles away
the curtains flapped, and flamed in the swirling air
with deep sorrow i remember the souls who burned
as all their ashes rose up in the plaintive winds

in the conflagration the armored riders of an-lu-shan approached
they were returning from their attack on fan-yang
turncoat officials like chen-xi-lie turned their back on the true emperor
and welcomed an-lu-shan on his success as the new supreme ruler

at that time all the harem women were slain
their bodies thrown in piles upon the fertilizer heap
the throne beyond the great gate was destroyed
the venerable screen with the painted pheasants was mutilated

no one knew if both emperor's xuan-zong and su-zong had fled
the old people's fears for them led to copious, though secret, tears
then, much later, when the imperial coaches were able to return to chang-an
the restored buildings soon again raised their roofs to the sky

the old people's tears returned when they saw how to obtain new trees
which were planted to music from the officials of the sacrificial ceremonies
and although the temples were not so immensely grand as before
they reflected the honor and dignity of the emperor su-zong

at that time the emperor personally sacrificed to the earth and the sky beyond the town
then he carried out the same actions at the forefather temples of the dynasty
at that time my small person was a member of the emperor's retinue
together with other officials i followed the emperor like his shadow

we mounted the stairs with imperial prayers in our hands
we stood then in our high caps and listened to the sacrificial music
i was ashamed of my small status being part of this great sacrificial ceremony
though my office stood quite near the gate of the emperor's palace

emperor su-zong showed himself to be a most pious grandson
when five colored clouds rose from the emperor's palace
the empress and harem ladies received new powders and grease-paint
fresh kingfisher feathers were presented in all their marvelous beauty

first xuan-zong left the capital on the run from an-lu-shan
then tai-zong fled before the onslaught of the turfan
at that time the sacrificial bowls were dishonored by the tatars
while curved horn-rim bows and arrows defiled the sacred quarters

how could it be that imperial orders were only carried out
by the people in the far west and up to shan-dung
there everything was brought before the court
and everyone was made to be true to the court

the generals were ruled either loyal or disloyal
the people were told to return to their original obedience for their own good
later the emperor would confess his own mistakes in a decree
then the whole world could once again be united under him

weapons would finally be transformed into agricultural tools
and the soldiers manning the borders could be dismissed
the numerous idle officials would be returned to their duties
and the country dwellers would again be involved in their fieldwork

the emperor and the ministers would show thrift and restraint
the court and marketplace would resound in calls of joy
the empire would rise again like the beginning of the dynasty
and the prestige would reach to the highest for tai-zong

on the cherry tree branches by the emperor's red stairs
there would be lights hung from silver threads
for one thousand years one would sacrifice to the forefathers
the dynasty would last forever without end

the residence of the emperor would never be burned again
and the people on the shores of the jing and wei rivers would no longer be sad
then i could return to my native country and sacrifice at the grave of my forefathers
i am quite old and can no longer bear the life of a blowing thistledown

murphy looking into the crystal ball and seeing only great success
7/17/2008 9:03 PM

von zach XIII,9

living away from home

the hall i live in lies among strangers in yun-an-xian
behind it lies the mountains, before it the stream
there in a deep gulch between extremely high cliff walls
the blue waves roll by in an uninterrupted cascade

behind me are the light green tops of trees
upright or crooked they mix within the craggy rocks
i hear the sad song of the cuckoo both day and night
even a courageous man would be intimidated by these surroundings

here in the gulches of the yang-zi the river has run for thousands of miles
a hundred rivers have united to one, and now it begins its final run to the sea
here both people and tigers have made their homes
and though they damage each other they still coexist

the hemp from si-chuan no longer ships in the boats
the sea salt is piled up in jian-ling before it can make it here
when recently si-chuan lost its main general guo-ying-yi
all the businessmen stopped thier trade in fear of the rioting to come

now chang-an has appointed the capable du-hong-xian
who has reportedly already left the capital and is on his way
the boat captains all eagerly await his coming
they expect him to quell the rioting so they can resume their trade

i live here now halfway between cheng-du-fu and jiang-ling
the difficulty of my life here is too painful to go into
enough to say that if i lie around too much my legs will become useless
so i putter around my garden using only slow steps

i look out on only small patches of green grass and sadly recall
the rhapsodies of chu-ci the prince who never returned to his homeland
both yan-wu and the emperor xuan-zong have now left us
and the twittering of sparrows in the evening remind of the continuing riots

if i look out on the local scenery i am only reminded of the old homeland
if i think back i know i have been gone for ten long years
how many of us, a few birds, remain in the woods of an evening
i fear this northern forest is getting darker and affords a poor roost

oh would that i could overturn the eight seas, and with their floods
sweep the homeland free of rebels for the emperor
if only we had ministers like ji and xie under emperor shun
we could be successful and easily destroy these evil barbarians

yet i, this wizened old scholar, have achieved nothing with my life
and as a concerned citizen i worry about the riots on the borders
i found an old paintbrush in my suitcase and seized it
so that in my overwhelming grief i could write this poem

murphy stuck in the middle again, with no way out
7/18/2008 11:09 AM

von zach XIII,10

my house away from home

i am reminded that i only recently left cheng-du-fu
and now stay here in yuan-an which is neither si-chuan nor china proper
i have ended my boat ride and am again up in the mountains
where i am stuck deeply hidden on a woody slope

i have come to rest in yun-an-xian where i now reside
my diabetes rages through my body and poisons it
the illness has been with me for twenty years
i should be contented that i have already lived this long

if i die here i will become a ghost in a foreign land
but my white hair proclaims i shall not die as a younger man
i anticipate death like an old horse who always looks up to the clouds
i am like a wild goose in the south always wishing to travel north

since i left my native land my children have grown up
i wish to return to my original home but do not have the strength
the season has changed from spring to summer here in yun-an-xian
as i hold on here far away from home i am acutely aware of the changes of nature

on the rocks heated by the sun spring up a purple fern
along the craggy shores lies delicate young reedy grass
the oriole from the land of ba thickly populates the trees
the wheat of the borderlands matures quite early

the brilliant sun sparkles atop the long distance of the stream
everywhere the summer brings thick leaves to the trees
ministerial secretaries are picked from the most able of men
i was cocky enough to think i might so qualify

but famous scholars older than i were not selected
they passed into oblivion and achieved no success
then against all expectations i received an unusual sash of authority
while i was by nature more suited to a life of seclusion

wherever i have been fortunate enough to stay for a while
i have planted bamboo shrubs to grow around and give a little privacy
my employment consisted in my having to drink too much wine
and my work was limited to building my beloved straw hut

among the high dignitaries was yan wu governor of si-chuan
who repeatedly asked the throne for a small salary for me
now how can i help the ruler so far away in these times of riots
in this far country i can only fulfill less official duties

i would like to be there in the forefront at the forefather temple
i would like to give useful advice to help the emperor choose his course wisely
i would like hurry to chang-an to be of use to the court
but my old body is stricken and i don't know if i could make it there

murphy dreaming the dreams of an old man with still a young mind
7/21/2008 9:02 AM

von zach XIII,11

the cuckoo bird

in western si-chuan one finds the cuckoo, in eastern si-chaun they are missing
in fou-zhou and wan-zhou there are none, but they abound in yun-an-xian
when i made my way to cheng-du-fu earlier on i built myself a straw hut
on the banks of the big river i planted bamboo to reach toward the sky

at the end of the first spring came the cuckoos with their sad songs
i felt in them the soul of the old emperor du yu who was transformed into a cuckoo
the cuckoo puts its eggs into other bird's nests, and they are not annoyed
they feed them and honor the father cuckoo as if he were emperor

wild geese and lambs own their own offspring from the oldest times
wild geese fly in orderly rows, the lamb kneels to suckle his mother
the holy and wise of antiquity are our models which we pass on to our children
one need look only at the animal models of behavior to understand how to serve

now it is spring again in yun-an, a year since i lay down here in sickness
because i am ill i cannot deferentially meet the cuckoo as i did in cheng-du-fu

murphy re-reading aesop so he can tell his grandchildren bedtime stories
7/22/2008 8:05 AM

von zach XIII,12

i dedicate this poem to zheng-fen, 18th of his clan

you, sir, are a noble and distinguished scholar
i revere you and love you with my whole heart
you are like the miracle mushroom leading all other plants
how could i not want to share in your august presence

as a result of the riots you cannot travel back to our native lands
you fled to si-chuan but not to withdraw nor become a hermit
limited people incline to forbearance and familiarity
your visage however, is always courtly in its graceful friendship

your noble heart knows the world and how evil too often triumphs
how could one who knows you then not take seriously your honorable disposition
if you are content here now with your lowly position, what are you waiting for
you surely know you can achieve prosperity easily enough

meanwhile you have shown me hundreds of your beautiful poems
they can serve as models to learn from for even the greatest of poets
here in this foreign land you have reminded me of qu-yuan and song-yu
in my deepest desolation i compared you to yan-hui and min-sun

i still do not know whether my trip will continue by water or by land
i have interrupted my travels to restore my health with medicines
the time of the noble men of antiquity is long now gone
but their writings still exist and we are guided by them

on our walks we praise the epoch of the emperors yao and shun
in our continuing sharing we normally eat only marsh mallows and violets
we drink our mugs of wine which we owe to our benefactors
and sometimes the district judge sends us some more interesting foods

although it would be my pleasure to return to the court at chang-an
at the present time my lack of physical strength prevents it
certainly to drag my frail and ill self before the emperor
would not show him the proper deferential reverence

murphy fading into the twilight of decrepitude
7/22/2008 8:43 AM

von zach XIII,13

i take leave of cai, the secretary of the historical archive, 14th of his clan

since jia-yi so bitterly described the dangers to the empire
the world became isolated and no other so patriotic a man emerged
who would have thought that master cai's patriotism is of such an order
he has excelled in this regard far beyond his contemporaries

he presented a petition and appeared at audience before emperor su-zong
he had no further ambition then, other than suppression of the rioting
his copious tears fell on the throne of the emperor
and the emperor was touched by the depth of his pain

although misery ruled throughout the vast land
there remained many loyal officials at the court of emperor su-zong
and upon this rare occasion a talent such as yours, o cai, appeared
and the government became better every day afterwards

you came as an imperial commissioner to si-chuan and met me
we, as friends long separated, embraced and our sad faces became brighter
guo-ying-yi, the old governor of si-chuan, had died
and you brought back his coffin to cheng-du-fu

here in yun-an-xian we meet each other again
here where i lie ill on the shore of the big river
i remember when we met ten years ago in feng-xiang
and in a very short time were again parted

i am very ill and can no longer serve the state
i wish only that you are successful at presenting your views to the emperor
if only they will listen to you we may find a little peace
and you will again be in the swim of things at the capital

although i suffer greatly from diabetes, i am still aware
i keep up with the emperor's concerns over the troubles of state
i hope to offer my services quietly in the future before my death
perhaps in agronomy, or the cultivation of the silk worm

now you journey to chang-an and the water is high in the three gorges
the dragons of the river detain the floods of the stream
your big ship will proceed on the high waves
and you will confide in those you think will help the people

later you will mount a horse and proceed to shen-si
where the imperial city stands steady like the pole star in the sky
now many soldiers are gathered in si-chuan in their black war wagons
if they remain for very long they will strip the area to provide for their needs

this poor region has no excess grain and no more linen for cloth
nevertheless, imperial commissioners still come to demand more provisions
if you meet in chang-an such a commissioner on his way here
send a letter along to me by him to this end of the world place

murphy hobbling around for a few days with his lower back acting up again
7/23/2008 9:14 AM

von zach XIII,14

a short stanza in answer to the poem of the gentleman-in-waiting, zheng, 17th of his clan

after the rain i visit your drenched garden
i walk slowly among my favorite blooms
i liken the poetry of your younger brother to that of lu-yun
your hospitality brings to mind that of zheng-zhuang in han times

murphy dutifully fulfilling his social obligations
7/23/2008 9:24 AM

von zach XIII,15

i send this poem to wang-cheng-jun

you, o general, are an extremely courageous man
two bows decorated with horn hang from your shoulders
you take up the bridle of your magnificent pinto
and ride regally in and out of cheng-du-fu

in these dangerous times no authority was given to you
in your dependent position no great rewards will be given
yet numerous guests fill your visitor's hall
who can hope to equal your virtue and hospitality

murphy kowtowing to the unofficial power structure in his school
7/24/2008 9:03 AM

von zach XIII,16

i send this poem to ministerial secretary wei-you-xia

you, o ministerial secretary, took pity on this poor, ill scholar
you sent some sweat inducing herbs with your last letter
i have drunk a bit of the tea and am delightfully sweating
i wish i could repay you with pearls for the pills

here at the end of the world i have few relatives and friends
and there are few medicines to be found in the gorges of the yang-zi
the ship which is to carry me to the native country lies idle
water plants grow around it, amongst which the gulls play

and i believe you are to proceed on your way quickly upstream
you wish to begin your long journey to gui-zhou
yet you, an imperial commissioner for this far-flung region
took time to remember this useless scholar who was once your colleague

murphy amazed at the long memory and generosity of his fellow teachers
7/24/2008 9:17 AM

von zach XIII,17

the song of the cuckoo

before the forefather's altars du yu became ruler of si-chuan and was named wang-di
his soul was trasnformed into a cuckoo after his death, such a small bird
he hops from branch to branch and hides under the hemlines of the woods
when flushed he flies first here then there, followed by the female

his plumage is dark black and his appearance is one of melancholy
why should the other birds give fealty to him and his offspring
with his tawdry appearance he would not grace a fine house
he takes his short wings to nest only in the deepest thicket

he pecks at the bark to find rotten places and will often dull his beak
he suffers hunger until at last he succeeds in finding a single mite
people will argue that he does not feed his own brood himself
even the foolish will perpetrate this old story

his song is serious and lengthy as if he had much to say
his whining reminds of nothing so much as that of a small child
when his beak flows blood from his search for food his tones are full of misery
he seems to wish to announce his grief to the sky

when the people of si-chuan hear him they stand quiet in reverence
even now the teaching of this old custom persists
whereby everyone knows the lessons of nature are inexhaustible
it is said that in his deep hidden palace red flower maidens stand on either side of him

murphy reading the br'er rabbit stories to his grandchildren
7/26/2008 10:46 AM

von zach XIII,18

eight poems of grievance (1 of 8)
after the death of minister of offices wang-si-li

our minister of employment came from korea
from his early youth he was successful in the arts of war
he followed the courageous sons of the land of zhi-li
nothing could hinder the growth of his talents to their mature strength

he served first under the redoubtable ge-shu-han
and thought nothing of serving in the great desert wastes
for the longest time he served in the rows of the common warriors
especially when the turfan were numerous and held the advantage

although he was small in stature he owned a great strength and energy
and was held in the greatest esteem by the strong rebel leaders
he penetrated through the center of the enemy lines
it seemed easy for him to drive into and then fight out of their lines

he hung the head of the hostile leader on his saddle horn
and knew how to frustrate the whirring arrows of the enemy
he washed his sword in the flood of the kukunors
he chiselled inscriptions of war deeds on the rocks of the tian-shan mountains

the land of the nine bends of the huang-he belonged no more to the turfan
their king fled in his shame to his remote forest lands
wang rode the marvelous racer "flying hare" far away from home
he was the falcon who swooped from on high to pounce on his prey

he deeply understood the teaching of the best strategists
and immersed himself in the teachings of chun-jiu as once did du-yu
everyday his mind became calmer and more sedate
he went about fulfilling his duties in a reverential manner

when at first the tung-guan pass was lost to the rebels
the royal court was forced to flee in all directions
when undercommander wang-si-li could help no more
the generalissimo go-shu-han was captured

the crown prince went north to ling-wu
the exalted emperor went to the west, to si-chuan
the tatar cavalry roamed around the yi and lo rivers
the loyalists of china rushed into the fray

then it was that su-zong accepted the exalted throne
having been forced by circumstances to fulfill the wishes of the people
at that time wang-si-li prostrated himself in ling-wu before the new emperor
he requested punishment for himself, and the emperor was ready to agree

however, at the same time, fang-guan, the governor of ching-he appeared
carrying with him dispatches from the old emperor in si-chuan
after the emperor had paid reverence to his father's wishes
he received the frank advise of fang-guan and remitted the punishment of wang si li

the imperial flags fluttered in the blizzard as the court returned to chang-an
the courageous troops lined both sides of the entry of the entourage
the emperor stationed his warriors on the phoenix mountain of chang-an
he directed that his tents be placed on the shores of the jing and wei rivers

jin-cheng occupied the key position of the rebel enemy
wang-si-li was sent to wu-kung to sweep into the rebels and crush them
by suppressing the rebels he led the land back to priceless peace
and showed the mildness of a gentle spring rain after a severe storm

wang-si-li was praised in spontaneous songs from the streets
in the country nothing was left but the marvelous green of fresh wheat
after the emperor had shown his grievance in the forefather's temple
he appointed wang-si-li to be the governor of shen-si

but wang feared the position would be too exalted for him
he also saw with grief that the imperial rule was restored in only a narrow area
alas, the peace he achieved was not experienced by him for very long
he suddenly passed over into the deep night of the grave

i have moored my boat for good among the strangers of the five lakes
and my grief over the death of wang-si-li has no bounds
for a thousand years his deeds will live in the annals of shen-si
like the everflowing grace of the rivers and the clouds

once while reading the history of the worthies of literature
i looked for the accomplishments of lian-po and lin-xiang-ru, and found them not
wang-si-li's successor was a scholar deng-jing-shan
his unfortunate fate was to be murdered by his troops

murphy musing on the fates of the more effete of the cognoscenti
7/26/2008 12:26 PM

eight poems of grievance (2 of 8)
the late education minister li-guang-bi

our education minister gathered troops from all around
in the north of the empire during the last years of the old regime
the tatar cavalry attacked the town of tai-yuan
being unsuccessful they went on to attack other places

the people of tai-yuan felt secure and remained quiet
it was as if the western arm of an-lu-shan had been amputated
in suo-fang men began to regain their courage
as a new imperial government was installed at ling-wu

both emperors met in the western part of chang-an and wept copious tears
the nine forefather temples of the dynasty were rebuilt on the ashes of the old
the troops of the emperor were not yet dismissed in lo-yang
consequently shi-si-ming was fearful and feigned submission

then he suddenly attacked from jie-shi by the sea
as if he were on a hunting expedition he laid waste all in his path
full of pride he thought nothing of attacking lu-shan
but there our li-guang-bi gained a shining victory over him

because of his victory the emperor appointed him to be duke of lin-huai
but the evil shi-si-ming was still lurking in the bei-mang mountains
even so li collected troops and occupied he-nan and kai-feng
bringing peace again to an area of a thousand square miles

yet calumniators busily denounced him at court with unfounded suspicions
and our li was stripped from the tree like an autumn leaf to lose his office
he reproached himself when he was not called again to chang-an
he died in the end still with the tears of remorse on his eyelashes

the mighty building of state lost its ridge beam by his death
the protective wall of defense was robbed of its parapet
his life reminds one of ju-ge-liang directing troops waving a fan of feathers
but now death has overtaken him and he lies in a coffin decorated with dragons

his distinguished appearance of marvelous being are gone forever
they stand now mourning at his grave in the huai-li area
the shine of the army was brought to darkness by his death
his brave officers are debilitated by the pain of his departure

a balanced account of his life awaits the hand of the historian
he should find justification for his actions in the future archives
i would like to grieve at his gravesite, but i am stuck here in the south
my boat is anchored and my health prevents my travelling

he supported the tottery state with the might of his efforts
but now he is gone and the state has lost his able assistance
and who is most affected by the untimeliness of his death
it is i who fills the gorges of si-chuan with my tears

murphy watching the titans of old slowly shrivel into husks of old age
7/28/2008 9:31 AM

von zach XIII,20

eight poems of grievance (3 of 8)
after the death of the honorable yan-wu governor of si-chuan

the duke of zheng-guo was like a sacrificial vessel of the xia or yin dynasty
he was a mountain crystal clean cut from the massive mount hua
from the earliest days of his youth he was confident
and carried himself as a man already laden with experience

he shone as a son of the accomplished noble yan-ting-zhi
and was clearly the gifted offspring of a marvelous bloodline
when he spoke it was with the confidence of a general or state minister
yet he was always reserved in the offering of his friendship

he read incessantly a hundred rolls at a time
he always surprised with the depth of his written works
he obtained many different positions without the aid of his illustrious father
as censor he hated the bad and fought against them with inexhaustible energy

the prestige of the tang dynasty was then at its height
when suddenly the tatar cavalry ran amok throughout china
the imperial suite fled from chang-an yan-wu went north to shen-si
he took an express carriage inquiring of everyone where the emperor might be

since he did not know the emperor's whereabouts tears flooded his face
he continued his sad journey as the storm of rioting proceeded apace
then by order of the emperor xuan-zong in si-chuan
he continued on to ling-wu to serve the new emperor su-zong

there all was quiet and there was little movement by the guards
the flags of the emperor's palace fluttered in the winds of the desert
although only a few envoys from the provinces of china appeared
the noise of the drums and flutes bespoke the steady will of the new emperor

he was among the brave men who spoke to each other shedding bloody tears
all these loyal subjects were filled with barely contained battle lust
yan wu shared in the refashioning of the empire along older models
and fully agreed to the sending of expeditionary armies from feng-xian

his unrivalled patriotism contributed to the reestablishment of the whole empire
and both capitals, chang-an and lo-yang, were recaptured in rapid succession
the troops of both emperors gathered on the western outskirts of chang-an
they feasted together with meats and wine while the forefather temples were restored

but like once kuang-heng and ji-yin, yan wu fell from favor
but history shows able men such as he were often recalled for the good of the state
four times he was given the post of provincial governor
three times he was appointed the commander of si-chuan

when he was finally sent to si-chuan he abandoned his prefecture in chang-an
the ministry in the capital no longer heard his manly footfall
in the morning before the censor's hall only crows flew about
to return in the evening, but he was no longer there to bravely mount his horse

in si-chuan he was loved by the people much like they loved zhu-ge-liang
he resembled wen-weng in the importance of his reformations of procedures
when yan-wu came to the mountains of si-chuan the people were in extremis
when he left them they were free from their heavy worries

he appointed a friend secretary who, he said, rivalled he-xun, poet in the liang dynasty
his strategical advisor was a friend reportedly cut from the mold of sun-qu
in his district there were no entrenched camps filling up the land
his offices were not filled with officials but were open to all guests

he proudly showed his friends his maps and artwork
and had the musicians of his troops entertain at the banquets
there was always plenty of the great wine of cheng-du-fu
but he himself drank sparingly to uphold the traditions of his position

he often would visit with the fishermen of the village
where he would learn the customs and mores of the people
he wished to first suppress the rioting foreigners
then to refill the granaries with rice for the populace

he thus wished to repay the mercy of the emperor
and as always he wished to make himself useful to the wider world
he could not have been a more shining star in his services
but he became incurably ill which brought grief to his last efforts

like yan-hui, the best disciple of confucious, he also died in his younger years
like jia-yi, the finest servant of the early han, his loyal service was cut short
his coffin was brought with flying banners over the rivers yang-zi and han
a single ship led carried him past jing-zhou and heng-yang

his favorite flute, like that of ma-yong, is played no more
sadly i was unable to share my grief with the others at his funeral
now i, his old satellite, am bereft of purpose at his death
i am ashamed to wear my official robes given to me in his mercy

murphy counting on his fingers the friends of boyhood still left alive
7/30/2008 9:11 AM

von zach XIII,21

eight poems of grievance (4 of 8)

after the death of "the great controller of the crown prince" li-ji from ru-yang

the prince of ru-yang was the son of li-xian, the emperor who resigned
and gave his imperial favor to his younger brother ming-huang
li's curly beard reminded one of his forefather tai-zong
his angelic face shone like the spring sun after cold winter nights

earlier in the long kai-yuan period of government
he and the new emperor often met together
he was seen in public only with the emperor
and his reception was different from that of all other officials

the emperor appreciated li's restraint and selflessness
and he was after all embodied a full blood relationship
the emperor often took leisure at the end of his audiences
or sometimes if the snow drifts were high he held no audience

the emperor often used these times to hunt wild animals
and in the imperial park the pure dust of his cavalcade rose high
flags bedecked with feathers were waved in unison
while the countless cavalry made up an impressive order

once prince li was invited to come along and shoot wild geese
the bidding was deferentially heard and the prince hurried to the emperor's side
when the emperor shot his arrow from a galloping horse
he turned his favorite racer to watch the bird fall

it fell on the other side of the great wall of the park
just over the curve which bent like a half moon
and although the group shot many birds
the emperor did not always applaud the efforts

however, as soon as prince li was successful in a shot
the emperor responded with spontaneous gold and silver gifts
yet in his armor the prince carried a special message for the emperor
he handed over the missive and spoke lengthily with his majesty

he warned that a danger existed of a torn rein or a broken axle
and though the emperor felt this to be negligible he did stop the hunt
the officials then had no other reasons to remain in the park
and the fish could remain undisturbed in the waters there

this showed on the one hand the experience and temperance of the emperor
and on the other hand underlined the care and loyalty he felt toward the prince
as our prince grew older, however, he was given over to heavy drinking
he filled his house with guests like bo-sheng and shen-gong

his magnanimity was also shown to lesser men such as myself
i remember one special time we sat together on perfumed mats
he loved learning and respected independent character
his empathy was such that he poured tears upon hearing of an injustice

his paintbrush was so deft as to produce the richness of embroidery or brocade
his poems were so marvelous they carried the wit and wisdom of several men together
when he died i was unable to travel the rivers to his grave site
now he is buried for a long time and now fox and hares live by his side

his younger brother li-yu now stays in the han-zhong district
you can recognize his kinship by the extreme depth of his learning
how can i bring comfort to his brother's saddened heart
i would hasten to his side in han-zhong but that is as far as li's grave

li's friendship was magnificent in its manifestation
it meant much to me in my younger, more heedless, days
i have made this poem as these memories are not forgotten
and now, as i have grown old, my grief is deeper and more profound

murphy remembering fondly his first interactions with the nobility at harvard
7/31/2008 10:14 AM

von zach XIII,22

eight poems of grievance (5 of 8)
after the death of "imperial confidential secretary" li-yong from jiang-xia

i chant a long drawn out disappointment for this world
where major talents are daily pushed aside by arrogance
one can see no more the likes of the old ones
who can ever hope to attain the heights of li-yong

i remember back to his time of fame
was there ever such a sturdy root for literature
he was most famous for his strong paintbrush
but his ingenuity shone clear in all the products of his mind

his fine education is found by all who know to look
for his numerous inscriptions scattered on tombs in the mountains
his inquiring mind searched the world to penetrate its secrets
his studies encompassed the relationship of the heavens and human talents

petitioners flocked to his house asking for his writings
his tomb inscriptions were erected in the most distant areas
every visitor he accepted went home satisfied
the fruit of his brush shone bright above all others

the sad winds blow over the poplar avenues leading to those graves
his illuminated inscriptions prayer beads for the viewer
from dragon lakes rise the temples with his grave writings
the high pagodas protected by the moving clouds

confucianists wanted his work to ennoble their tombs
as earlier officials had been held in honor by the people
when other authors disappointed hopes they came to him
who always honored such requests without deferment

from ancient times this art has been extensively practiced
and li-yong was amply rewarded for his magnificent renderings
he gathered unto himself spacious houses well furnished
with coral hooks for curtains, carpets and unicorn embroideries

he received marvelous horses, swords, inlaid tables
all these presents year in and year out for his outstanding works
he often gave away the houses and the horses to his neighbors and others
everything he had was grist for the generosity of his being

those he gifted praised his open heart, and willing hands
these counteracted the dirty accusations of his enemies
for forty years he was without equal in these endeavors
his imminence spread like the penetrating call of a crane in the marshlands

what is there to say about the death of this marvelous man from jiang-xia
we cover eyes with our sleeves as confucius did when told of the killing of the unicorn
earlier on during the time of the empress wu-hou
many men were sought out and pulled into state service

some of these criticized li-yong concerning his honorary titles
they petitioned the empress to discredit this fine man
there was suddenly a cold wind of degeneration for a time
before governing again became fair and the skies clear as in autumn

so the loyal li-yong endured more than his share of hardships
this because the court was weaker than the thin pennons on a lance
soon he was sent down into exile where he soon became sickly
he was beaten down by the heat of the southlands and its malaria

as the sun descended the bird of misfortune appeared to him
his heart was broken by longing for the emperor, the second shun
misery followed upon misery, and he was forced to wander
his mounted car could never find rest as he moved from post to post

he was repeatedly named by the emperor to new positions
where he was always received deferentially as befitted his eminence
but unfortunately in the end he ended up in prison in lo-yang
his declining health caught up with him and he suffered the death of a lowly servant

his misfortunes began with a growing number of calamitous slanders
why was it to be that only he was to suffer so deeply this bitter cup
once in a happier time i met him in the pavilion of lin-zi
we drank wine in our happiness and pledged a life-long friendship

we spoke of our mutual service in lo-yang long before
we sat together and celebrated until long after sunset
we spoke of literature and recalled cui-yong and su-wei
they had already been dead for at least ten years

during his later years li-yong was taken by the poems of yang-qiong
but he was not so praising for the works of li-qiao
he often criticized the state minister zhang-yue
they feuded with one another and one had to draw the short straw

ambitious competition has often be shown by men in antiquity
by his criticisms li-yong nailed his words on the gate and couldn't rescind them
but when he came to speak of my forefather du-shen-yan
he recognized the worth of his accomplishments and held back any criticisms

he especially praised one poem in answer to li-si-zhen
calling it a cinnamon tree by a rock of precious stones
the tuneful verses of that poem are of a rare beauty
and remind one of the iridescent spume of a great whale

the steep grounds of shan-dung were colored by the blood of li-yong
his grave there in wen-yang is now overgrown with weeds
the condolences offered by the emperor felt chilly in the end
and only the posthumous award of title by dai-zong recognized his worth

the line of his descendants is thin and weak like a thread
and i cannot travel to present my case for him to the emperor
rulers and minister are now busy with military affairs
for the rioting of an-lu-shan continues in the north

yet here with a loud voice i sing li-yong's poem about six patriots
i have become very sad and this will ease my pain and suffering

murphy singing a sad song as therapy for his broken heart
8/1/2008 9:48 AM

von zach XIII,23

eight poems of grievance (6 of 8)

the late under-confidential secretary su-yuan-ming from wu-gong

su-yuan-ming from wu-gong led a solitary life in his youth
he walked on foot through the lands of xu and yan
he studied literature in the mountains around dai-shan
he spent ten full years there with the old classics

sometimes he came to the outskirts of lai-wu-xian
this was only when he was most hungry living in the heights
he knew it was too late to bring rice home for his parents who were dead
so he often had a face full of tears while he ate

at night he read his books from the light of his fire
green moss sprouted on his dirt-covered clothes
he hoped to be prosper through his diligence
he hoped to repay the sacrifice of his parents

his study penetrated deeply into the way of the true confucian
his literary efforts reflected the beauty of the old historians
he formed his brilliance lonely in the mountains
when he returned to chang-an he chose a life of seclusion

he was successful in his answers in the emperor's eastern exam hall
the examiners rated him to be the best of all those tested
the imperial approval was not yet dry on his proclamation
when his fame as jin-shi was propagated far and wide

in his literary production he became more sure day by day
he was repeatedly appointed to ever higher positions
every morning he hurried to the emperor's palace
never forgetting how his soles had thickened in his earlier wanderings

when he had finished his first appointment as governor of dung-ping
he returned to chang-an for further assignment when an-lu-shan attacked in the north
su-yuan-ming had no opportunity to follow the emperor to si-chuan
and was saddened when appointed to the government of the rebels

he was a staunch friend of a full wine glass his whole life
but now the entertainments with friends were interrupted by the uprising
as a result of his disappointments he fell ill for a full two years
he hated an-lu-shan for his callous crushing all like a huge rolling stone

when emperor su-zong recaptured the capital chang-an he had to decide
between loyal officials and those who had accepted hostile employment
and those disloyal were sentenced to death like fan-ye and his son
or li-si who spoke of his brown hunting dog on the execution grounds

but su-yuan-ming had the steadfastness of the spruce in winter
and was soon following the emperor's carriage to the grand sacrificial ceremonies
throughout his life he wrote hundreds of literary roles
and all were accepted and appreciated by the emperor

his style reminded one of the famous yang-xiong
and was deeper than the sea from beginning to end
his style was a sharp sword shining like the lotus blossom just emerging from the water
and with it one could kill not only water buffalo but rhinoceri

but the younger generation undervalued his skills
yet when i remember him i am filled with grief
his works were like miracle mushrooms for the emperor's chambers
and were not accessible by the gross multitude

they merit consideration by future generations
and should be models they would wish to emulate
he had no aspirations to attain high rankings
why did his superiors treat him so unfairly

i was his friend for a full thirty years
and now have no one to wander about with
zheng-xian is also now dead and gone
after he suffered so long in his vile exile

oh, when su-yuan-ming died the government had many difficulties
glaring complications had to be faced and conquered
in chang-an the price of rice had risen to absurd heights
and those, who wished only to draw breath, were dying

when will the fighting ever stop, so finally i could return to chang-an
but now i am prevented from doing so by the clear mian river
liu-zheng on the shore of the zhang river lying ill in bed
i am greatly depressed that i cannot provide the last honors to my dead friend

murphy taken ill and having to miss the agony of the third and final act of the drama
8/4/2008 8:52 AM

von zach XIII,24

eight poems of grievance (7 of 8)

the late state archiver (reduced to finance minister of tai-zhou), zheng-qian from rong-yang

the bird yuan-qu flew to the gates of the capital of lu
but he did not understand why he was given a party with bells and drums
the peacock and kingfisher look out on the pink mist of dawn on the lake
and think of their grief caused by the caretaker of the cage

in he-nan zheng-qian stood out above all the other scholars
and quite early he received the praise of worthy men
that land is in the habit of producing great scholars and dignitaries
and he was one of its highest examples, and full of youthful energy

he had a sharp mind about the workings of nature
and his independent studies were of the caliber of zi-you and zi-xia
shen-nong author of ben-cao still had gaps in his knowledge
huang-shi-gong teacher of tactics was not fully his master

his works concerning medicines included those of the extreme west
and his explications of the strategists were deep and clear
he investigated everything without holding himself back
even his smaller works led one to expect much from more extended efforts

he was a profound geomancer and astrologist
he was an excellent calligrapher and painter
though he wasn't as widely read as yang-xiong
he was appreciated for his joking asides in his debates

his miraculous brushwork reminded one of gu-kai-zhi
the art of his characters rivalled both zhong-yao and zhong-hui
his essays were passed from hand to hand throughout the empire
his large characters are still resplendent on the temple boards

once he was commanded to deliver his calligraphy to the emperor
then he was bade to present his poems and paintings
his picture of the marble steps to the island of the blessed was special
its image was so real it startled a passing crane to cry out

the emperor wrote in his own hand on this marvelous painting
"outstanding in all three arts, painting, calligraphy, and poetry"
he became even more unbound in his inspiration due to a love of wine
when he chanted his verse he looked to heaven and to earth, not to his audience

his appearance was natural and unaffected like the earth or untreated wood
he had no intimates except the floor where he paced and his small writing table
he did not live near his official colleagues but all alone
preferring to stay at home and lean only on his bookshelves

he was later appointed to work in the imperial library
and then came the darkness of the tatar invasion
he at first was coerced into working for an-lu-shan, then recanted
but nothing could remove the awful stain of his initial betrayal

in his old age he became a finance controller in tai-zhou
and was fond of being rowed about on the zhe-giang river
he wore out his boots wandering in the snows of si-ming-shan
when hungry he would pick the acorns on the shore of the yo-xi

in the mountains he heard only monks chanting songs of the miracle purple mushrooms
and did not meet with any of his learned colleagues for a very long time
always i looked to the mountains in the distant northeast and thought of him
i am to this day filled with grief at our parting, and white-haired think of the past

at that time of late spring the mountains of chin were marvelous
later in autumn the brilliant leaves fell on the clear waters of the wei river
we had lively discussions in the palaces of the prince and other nobles
or we rode about the land and rested the horses in the woods

we brought along paper for the writing of our poems through drunken afternoons
our far ranging thoughts were concentrated on the physical phenomena of the season
but our literary circle was torn asunder by his banishment
at the time i was always unjustly praised by him

in my long life i have seen the death of too many friends
how can i regain my balance and rid myself of this feeling of isolation
zheng-qian left behind his nephew zheng-shen who is desolate
like his uncle he has also been exiled but to jiang-ling

i visited his nephew once in his house by the big river
we shared the depth of our grief at the sad changes in our lives

murphy counting up the sad stories of his unfortunate contemporaries
8/5/2008 9:41 AM

von zach XIII,25

eight poems of grievance (8 of 8)
the late right state minister zhang-jiu-ling from qu-jiang

our chancellor of the right comes from the southern regions
we raided her mines and brought the gold and precious stones for our use
like the crane of the immortals he rose among the people
where there he stood proud in his smooth, snowy plumage

proudly he thought longingly of the rivers and the sea
but he was ineluctably linked to the clouds and the sky
in his youth he desired that the emperor should become a yao or a shun
and this meant he had no time to waste becoming the hermit he wished to be

but he rose quickly in the ranks to the emperor's precious stone hall of wisdom
there he worked in the jin-hua offices nearest to the emperor
meanwhile the might of an-lu-shan was growing greater each year
and the frogs in the imperial pond began to increase their croaking chorus

returning home from his office he sang of the ideal service of da-ting
how could he have foresoon the slander which he would suffer
deep inside he feared nothing except not living up to the models of antiquity
his hair became white through worry about not yet having made his mark on the world

the emperor raised him from the position of zhong-shu-ling to right state minister
yet he was ashamed to take the post because of his lack of accomplishments
he always thought of returning to his native country as others had done
but he was deeply pained by not being allowed to show this love for his mother

in his old age he was awarded the violet seal of the zhang-shi position
and for this post he thanked the emperor graciously for the honor
he like yu-liang used this platform to make many suggestions
though his official activities were more quietly done like those of huang-ba

he had as his guests men of the same poetic inclinations
and they were sealed as soon as official permission was granted
as he wrote a poem one felt the subject was not exhausted
as he finished one felt the clarity, and the economy of expression

he brought forth major keys from minor sources
he brought forth solemn rituals as if before the tripods of state
he showed us his noble mind most when he chanted his verses
he gifted us especially when he turned his efforts to literary essays

when paging through his poetry one is in the presence of green dragons
which fly up and penetrate to the heights of the wu and lu mountains
his marvelous poems rival the beauty of those of xie-tiao
his reports and obituaries compete with those of ren-fang

by his genuine nature he has founded his own school which many should follow
there is not one single character in his work which should not rivet our attention
his fame in the southern regions from whence he came
is tied together with the sign of the red bird in the zodiac there

in his old age he returned to his beloved native country
and thought longingly there of his time in the imperial palace
his paintbrush created characters which had the large mobility of waves
now, however, his writing has stopped and he lies buried in the yu mountains

in his death he was honored by the emperor less than his due
but it has always been difficult to ask the emperor for a new decree
i have often read his marvelous grave writings for xu-ru-zi
it makes me wish to ready my ship to proceed through the river fogs to his grave

murphy freeing his mind to wander as his body becomes more frail
8/6/2008 4:33 PM

von zach XIII,26

i move from yun-an-xian to kui-zhou and complete this verse

earlier i was bedridden in yun-an-xian and could not travel
but now i move to live in bo-di-cheng, white emperor city
the spring seems to know of my plans and has greened the willows
the branches have become leaved and the big river has become clear

in kui-zhou i hear that the growing season promises to be fruitful
the mountains here are beautiful and filled with the twitter of birds
as a result of the tumultuous activity of da yu, the gorges are filled with boulders
i will search for more level ground to make my abode

murphy out and about once again
8/7/2008 3:36 PM

von zach XIII,27

on the boat trip to kui-zhou i spend the night on the outskirts of the town
because of the past drenching rain i cannot travel inland
with this verse i take leave of judge wang from yun-an, twelfth of his clan

i spend the night on my boat which lies along the shore
the moon shines brightly on the polished stones at the water's edge
the spring lights in the village flicker in the rising wind
the night rains have fallen off and the river waters freshen

the morning bell is muffled by the heavy humidity, reflected off the clouds
the beauty of kui-zhou's stone hall lies hidden behind the early fog
my sad thoughts move beyond the decrepit boat and the swimming gulls
and are concerned with my not seeing off such a worthy man as judge wang

murphy still restricted in his movements though coming back around
8/7/2008 4:30 PM

von zach XIII,28

a poem of sudden inspiration

the reflection of the moon lies only a foot away from me
the lamps flicker in the wind, it is nearly the third night watch
on the bank the heron stalks quietly on his webbed feet
behind the ship a fish jumps noisily out of the water

murphy alert and definitely unasleep in the wee hours, sniffing the wind
8/7/2008 4:44 PM

von zach XIII,29

i climb to the bo-di-zheng fortress

the fortress wall rises precipitously, leaning into the mountain
the turret tower juts out high above the parapet
at the sight of the stream one thinks of the strength of da yu
when the wind blows one remembers xiang-wang of chu

this delapidated old man hears the plaintive trumpets
the servant supporting me reminds it is getting late and we must return
gong-sun-shu made this fortress his base of operations
how far he wished his insurgent movement to reach

murphy checking out the new neighborhood
8/7/2008 4:57 PM

von zach XIII,30

i visit the temple of liu-bei in bo-di-cheng where he lies buried

the sad times of rioting always cause the same thing
ambitious men trying to seize the unfortunate opportunity
liu-bei, sun-quan, and cao-cao fought these divisive forces
but liu-bei's intentions were thwarted and his plans came to nought

he left a marvelous draft of a plan to restore the han dynasty
he trusted in his death zhu-ge-liang to regain the center of china
but zhu-ge-liang was unable to use the soldiers as he wished
and suddenly died after spitting up blood, and everyone mourned

the big river still continued to flow through si-chuan
but the swordgate pass was open to the barbarians
but after the old custom liu-bei's temple has been preserved
in the desolate mountains here demons and spirits cry around him

the eaves jut out into the winds where the birds soar over the mountains
the rotting bark on the trees surrounding the temple resemble dragon scales
the moon lights up the shore of the feng river where liu-bei's palace once stood
now there is only the shade of bamboo, and moss covering the throne of the deceased

although the population of the village has changed through the centuries
the custom of annual rituals remains with always new dances and songs
in these remote areas my decrepit boat remains far from its purpose of reaching chang-an
and i repeatedly tie my horse to the dilapidated town hall of bo-di-cheng

i wonder if i can manage the sadness of the fall of autumnal foliage
especially around here where the riots raged for such a long time
where can we find another guan-yun-chang or zhang-fei in these warring times
or someone to reach liu-bei's efforts which rivalled geng-yan and deng-yu in han times

liu-bei's talent was given by the god's and was indeed considerable
and his friendship with zhu-ge-liang was incomparable and indissoluble
even now during my decrepit older days i could still advise in the war tents
instead i wander in the wilderness and putter around fishing

i cry silently because of my incessant worries about the empire
my handkerchief and sleeves have become sodden with my tears

murphy wondering if the country will ever have another lincoln
8/8/2008 11:53 AM

the commemorative temple of zhu-ge-liang

the paintings in the desolate temple are well faded
the wild plants have engulfed the deserted mountain
yet i still hear him say about the resignation of liu-chan
that he would not retire to nan-yang but rather die for his country

murphy re-running the tape of the emergency program at madison square garden right after 9/11
8/8/2008 2:39 PM

von zach XIII,32

the war game of eight formations (64 stone heaps in eight rows on the sandy shore at kui-zhou)

zhu-ge-liang's merits rise above all others of the three kingdom period
his fame is enhanced by his skill at the war game ba-chen-tu
in spite of the floods of centuries the stones have not moved
they are a lasting tribute to his concern that the empire of wu should not fall

murphy giving his old scarred go board to his son
8/8/2008 2:50 PM

von zach XIII,33

i dedicate this poem to my maternal uncle, the auditor cui-gong-fu

you are like one of the swift steeds which come from the west
from the scenically attractive region around the wo-wa lake
you are like the swaying cassia trees of ten mountain
whose branches are heavily beaten down by heavy rains

i feel strongly that the emperor is just and honorable
why should you remain in shame and be inhibited
now, moreover, you have received an appeal to be the head of the army
while you earlier lamented that no one would take your side

in your new position you have nothing more to fear
and your future should remain clear of political dangers
your earlier superiors gave you a sword at your parting
your ship is now steered through the blossoming of spring

the emperor's palace in chang-an has been greatly expanded
there by the iron phoenix you drilled the young troops of the guard
as a result of the riots the emperor called an early audience
afterwards equipment was brought in from all surrounding provinces

all in all these different armies had to be fed
which led to the growing misery of the people
clever officials knew how to take advantage and get rich
while you came out against profiteering and were punished

the emperor searched for a competent leader for his army
and now he has found a courageous man like the famed zhou-wen-wang
behind the bravery of you as generalissimo the empire can revive
the rebels have shown fear since you were appointed

he has recognized your abilities which shine as water shows radiance on precious stones
the perfidious rebels will soon disappear from the rivers of the provinces
now you proceed to headquarters where many competent men are gathered
it is clear that you have been selected to your high position because of ability

you should succeed in your endeavors without difficulties
and rise high like the flight of the raptor to his craggy aerie
if you desire further advancement you can point to your military abilities
you will gain fame and your rewards will be presented on the ritual tripods

soon i will see you in the highest of positions, successful and honored
while i can only sigh in resignation of my inability and age
you are eloquent in the giving of your excellent advice
and you are an expert at dispersing the fogs of the rebels

old mirrors tend to be covered with dust and reflect poorly
however you as general are a well-scrubbed mirror throwing off a purity of rays
within my maternal uncles there are many competent men
i should not be ashamed if i must rest my exhausted wings

murphy remembering his mother's grandmother's ice cream after his tonsils were removed
8/9/2008 9:51 AM

von zach XIII,34

in the morning i look out on the salt mountain by bo-di-cheng

i slog slow steps with my cane over my splotchy floor
i lift my white haired head to stare out at the salt mountain
the sheer rock walls suddenly become a deep green with vegetation
the red fleck in the distance is a tower placed high on a shoulder

with sunrise i can begin to make out the clear stream below
the pleasant warmth begins to scatter my grief at being so far from my home
now from the town wall i will be able to still see spring snow on the spruce
there i will think once again of reaching the homeland on my boat

murphy obsessed with the dream of escaping his karma
8/9/2008 10:11 AM

von zach XIII,35

together with other scholars i climb to the bo-di-cheng fortress, and share a banquet in the hall of yang-su the duke of yue. while there i write this poem

this hall high on the town wall is in the style of the old architecture
from its balustrade one can look down on the river and its surroundings
the beams are dilapidated from the clouds and rain, and they sag down
the stairs are overgrown with scraggly grass and weeds

in the crevices of the pillars bees have deposited their honey
on the rotting roof swallows have made their nests
i sit with friends before a mug of strong spring wine
yet my heart is somehow saddened by the sight of the budding flowers

the marvelous mind of yang-su was short like a sun ray passing over a fissure
i am thus moved to wish never to be separated from festivities like this
i do not wish to be concerned in the future about the east flowing stream
i do not wish to give up my life here and leave my friends so soon

murphy attracted to the life of ease and plenty
8/9/2008 10:36 AM

von zach XIII,36

the highest tower of bo-di-cheng

a crooked path leads up to the corner of the town wall where sad flags blow
i am all alone as i stand on the high tower with the rising winds
in the distance where the yang-zi gorges open dark clouds hide dragons and tigers
where the clear stream is shown by the sun there are reptiles and crocodiles

if i look east i see the western branches of the fu-sang trees
they outline the steep walls of the yang-zi gorge
if i look west i look toward the eastern part of the ruo river
which eventually runs into the big river and into the gorges

who is it that stands here propped up by his cane
bemoaning the miserable condition of this world
it is i, this white-haired old fossil, weeping bloody tears
while i stand here, decrepit, looking around in all directions

murphy wanting a cold guinness to chase away his willies
8/9/2008 11:39 AM

von zach XIII,37

i climb up to the fortress of bo-di-cheng, two poems (1 of 2)

the fortress reflected in the stream below always shows a different scene
as often as i climb up here another image comes to mind
this morning the sky seems to want to rain
spring has made its eternal return to the mountains

the hero gong-sun-shu has left only his city of bo-di-cheng
as an old weak man i have lived for a long time in the midst of riots
i have a great urge to get drunk as a guest in this foreign land
for i have just run across a compatriot from chang-an

the fighting still rages in si-chuan, cui-han still rebels
nevertheless our taxes still flow to the motherland
it is not that i do not appreciate the beautiful scenery here
but i fear the deep grief of these people will overburden my soul

murphy feeling the weight of the people's tragedy as his very own
8/9/2008 1:37 PM

von zach XIII,38

i climb up to the fortress of bo-di-cheng, two poems (2 of 2)

over the desolate comemorative temple of the white emperor
a lonsome cloud floats and wanders here and there, around
the town wall stretches to me and bends between the stream and the mountains
i am a stranger and walk about the temple grounds

where now are the vast energies of gong-sun-shu
where has the immensity of that personality gone
his followers for a time brought sacrificial food and wine
but now the memorial hall only becomes dustier and dustier

the birds of the valley stop awhile to sing their songs
the blossoms in the woods come once again, and then fade away
i stand here ashamed that illness has robbed me of my strength
i ride my horse back home from the moss of this lonesome place

murphy walking the cliffs of weehawken where burr and hamilton staged their duel
8/9/2008 1:56 PM

von zach XIII,39

the story of the old cypress

an old cypress stands in the front of the zhu-ge-liang temple
its branches have a copper sheen and its roots are as sturdy as rock
it measures forty feet around with glistening, slippery bark
its dark needles rise 200 feet high into the sky

it connects the humidity in the clouds to the depths of wu gulch
reaching toward the cold of the lunar regions and the snowy mountain tops
the reverence given great ministers in critical times
is how the people visiting the temple love this tree

i remember as if yesterday on the road to the east of cheng-du-fu
where liu-bei and zhu-ge-liang are worshipped in the same temple
the mighty trunk of two cypresses rise there since ancient times
paintings on those walls had faded, the windows and doors were gone

yet the roots of this tree here have found a steady ground
this lonely tree rises into the strong winds with an accepting strength
the fact it has survived reflects the strength of the creator
and its continuing life is the lasting gift of providence

if a great building threatens to break down large beams are needed
but a thousand oxen could not carry off this heavy trunk from the mountains
this unflowering tree surprises and awes those who view it
it is ready to cut but too far from where it might be needed

even though its bitter inside has been eaten by the ants
the aroma of its needles has surely attracted the phoenix to spend the night
wise men and scholars do not complain that the wood cannot be used
since ancient times great gifts have only seldom found their proper use

murphy musing on why the greatest of the redwoods is named for the cherokee sequoia
8/11/2008 9:00 AM

von zach XIII,40

the song of the carriers of wood

these virgins of kui-zhou have hair going half gray
they are still single at forty years old
surely the times of the riots cause the lack of men to marry
they have spent their entire life in grief and it is pitiful

after the customs of this land the men tend to sit and the women to stand
all the work around the house and beyond is done by the women
from the age of ten or so the women collect wood in the mountain areas
they sell this firewood and thus provide for themselves

until their old age they wear a double chignon on the nape of their necks
they pin flowers and mountain leaves in their hair with silver ornaments
with their great strength they bring much firewood to the market
all their lives they pursue profits, often working in the salt mines at an early age

greasepaint and jewelry appear beside the tracks of tears on their faces
the ground is infertile and their clothes thin despite the cold of the mountains
when it is often said that the women of wu gorge are raw and ugly
i answer that is here that the village of the beautiful zhang-zhao-jun lies

murphy in awe of the centrality of persistent women
8/11/2008 3:29 PM

von zach XIII,41

song of the most able of men

the men in the gorges have an extreme contempt for death
few stay in the town, most are always on the water
the rich hire big boats and travel safely and leisurely
the locals ply their trade in nutshells

the young boys learn only the confucian analects
as youths they lace their bundles and follow the merchants
they tend the sails, ply the oars, and brave the waves
they skirt the eddies, skim through the waters, and ignore all dangers

from morning til night they cover several hundred miles
recently i went with one of them and now know for sure
the waters of ju-tang gulch splash high, at the tiger's beard they roar in anger
however even elderly rowers from kui-zhou navigate through with ease

the people of the yang-zi gorges are focussed and single-minded
they emulate men of the south and are hostile to men of the north
but i will challenge anyone who says they are devoid of talent
for didn't qu-yuan come from an old house up on these bluffs

murphy finding something good to say about his hosts
8/12/2008 8:54 AM

von zach XIII,42

in sad spirits

the grass on the shore of the big stream makes me sad this spring
the waters of the yang-zi rush through the gorges without thought
herons unthinkingly bathe in the swift swirling waves
a single tree opens its blossoms in an unaware beauty

for full ten years the si-chuan riots have brought their dark rage
as a guest in a foreign land i am growing old in this lonesome town
i do not know if i will ever see the wu river in chang-an again
i am tired and ill and surrounded by rapacious officials who only know taxes

murphy seeing no good no where
8/12/2008 9:06 AM

von zach XIII,43

i complain about the affliction of this rainy weather, and send a joke poem to the section boss lu,
nineteenth of his clan

last night thunder continued to rumble along the big river
early this morning rain continues in this cool spring in kui-zhou
two yellow orioles twitter sadly in the wet tree branches
vees of white herons rise through the rain desiring still more of the wetness

during this deluge i write poems following meter ever more strictly in my old age
who is it that treats me so poorly by bringing wine again and again
only you, lu, who brings a wild eccentric presence as a guest
we have visited a hundred times and our friendship continues to grow

murphy taking his favorite stool at the corner irish bar
8/12/2008 9:23 AM

von zach XIII,44

i read in the imperial orders the recognition of chief censor of bo-zhen-jie and younger members of his family. hence i praise his merits, his son's, and his brother's; and sing praise of the imperial orders at the same time

in these times of ongoing rioting i have been fortunate
to have become well acquainted with this reverent family
here in si-chuan they brought great pressure to bear
and succeeded in large part in ridding the province of insurgents

the head of the family bo-zhen-jia showed great devotion
he pursued his duty toward the people with a vigorous energy
three separate times he suppressed rioting along the big river
he succeeded in clearing the rebels from the yu-lei mountains

his great fame is now secured by the imperial mercy
all the world knows that he has become governor of kui-zhou
the younger members of his family fought at the front of his soldiers
one can only compare them to orchids growing among precious stones

they devoted themselves to the training of the troops with equal energy
they poured their blood while standing on their war chariots
everything i say here is mentioned prominently in the imperial decrees
one concludes that the entire family is shown unusual mercy by the emperor

they have all worked diligently in the state's service
and have been exterminating rebels now for over a year
on their war chariots there still lies the winter snow
the dust of the battlefield still streaks their red banners of war

i have heard so much of their military success
i have begun to lose some of my weakness and despair
if i were an enlightened ruler who experienced rebellion
i would attempt to surround myself with such worthy men

already in his new position as governor of kui-zhou
he has begun to root out the rebels as he has done elsewhere before
as i linger here in my illness i turn my head daily in the direction of chang-an
i ask myself who else could be compared to the great generals of the han times

i have written this verse in praise of the great success of bo-zhen-jie
and wish him too soar like an eagle when he is appointed as generalissimo

murphy as an old man relegated to the position of arm-chair quarterback
8/12/2008 1:51 PM

von zach XIII,45

i express my feelings

earlier i traveled through kui-de-fu in he-nan
once it was the han dynasty capital of prince xiao of liang
the fame of that place is akin to the renown of chen-liu
it is densely populated like bei-zhou or wei-zhou

in that district there are 90,000 families
the city has many high buildings and wide streets
the ships and wagons of half china pass through
one can meet many strangers alongside the residents

an injustice there is swiftly avenged with a shining dagger
but gold is given bounteously for the rich trade goods
cheaters are summarily killed in the middle of the street
nastiness is repaid in kind immediately

i still have strong memories of this time in my youth
i talked and drank with gao-shi and li-tai-bo in the wineshops there
both men were rich in literary ideas and deeds
when we were talking together our faces were filled with joy

when we were drunk we mounted the balcony where once shi-kuang played the flute
we looked out over the wide weedy expanse and spoke of historical times
han-gao-zu had disappeared long ago as the clouds do over the mang mountains
imperial power was long gone and only wild geese and ducks held court

at that time emperor xuan-zong ruled and was a friend of war
the empire was still expanding and had not suffered calamities as yet
courageous generals wanted to conquer the western borderlands
soldiers with long lances were sent against the ki-tan empire

one heard of victories of a multitude of warriors attacking small towns
but nothing was ever reported of difficulties or defeats
wagons and leather armor were wasted or thrown away
for little or no reason a hundred soldiers might be sacrificed

in trying to expand the borders of the empire nothing was achieved
rather the internal peace and prosperity of the empire vanished
at the moment of the outbreak of the rebellious riots my friends scattered
years have passed steadily and i have become an old and sickly man

yet who could i have relied on now at my age
while i remain both men died one after the other
i am left oppressed and desolate besieged by illness
lonely i live frugally in a distant corner of the world

the miracle horses like gao and li have disappeared
only the old nags and plow horses like me survive
i no longer have friends like yan-yan-nian or bao-zhao
i have my ship tied up at rest in the gorges between jing-zhou and wu-shan

the food disgusts me but i force myself to eat enough
i am now fear my looming death and leaving my children as orphans

murphy wondering if his genetic strengths are enough for his progeny to prosper
8/13/2008 9:32 AM

von zach XIII,46

at a banquet on the balcony of the house of mister wang, fifteenth of his clan

on the shore of the big river the fresh rain has stopped
the high balcony invites with its light spring breezes
friends have gathered here to enjoy themselves
a feast of freshly caught fish is being offered

although wang and i are neighbors he sent a written invitation
also a sedan chair was provided to assure my attendance
i can not bring my best to his festivities since i am still very ill
but my children will be very happy if i bring a bit of the food back home

murphy content to hang around in the background at the gala event
8/13/2008 9:49 AM

von zach XIII,47

the end of spring

as a result of my illness i am held up here in the yang-zi gorges
dung-ting lake and the rivers xiao and xiang wait in vain for me
here in the land of chu all four seasons have uninterrupted rain
and in the wu gorges the fierce winds roar incessantly

the pastures around the grass hut on the sandy shore are beginning their abundance
the lotus blooms of the desolate pond beyond the town wall are becoming quite red
mandarin ducks and herons are now fully established at the spring end of the islands
they gather in small groups around the area teaching their young to fly

murphy looking out his window at the traffic on the west side highway
8/13/2008 10:04 AM

von zach XIII,48

i send these verses to the scholar chang appointed by the emperor to be the prefect of kai-zhou

the shining water and the green mountains are open to all
the ever returning beauty of the efflorescence of spring
since you, chang, were appointed by the emperor
you will not be free to enjoy these days in your retirement

you are like the crane who has left the welcoming sea
and stands before the steps of the house with your shrill cries
you will be overwhelmed with the drudgery of countless papers
and you will not eat very well being above taking advantage of your position

you will become chained to an office in the yamen at kai-zhou
your life will become that of the busy urban hermit
i also know it feels chilly at the beginning of summer in kai-zhou
and it will not be so hot as you are now experiencing in yun-an

murphy commiserating with an old friend about a teacher's workload
8/13/2008 5:18 PM

von zach XIII,49

the keeper of the official gardens sends me vegetables

preface: the keeper of the official gardens every now and then will send me vegetables. during the last few days he has sent less and less. moreover, he has taken to bringing wild, bitter chicory and purslane. should i reprove him for his effrontery or rise above the annoyance as a superior being should. i feel this matter is reflective of an allegory in the shi-jing and write the following verse.

early in the morning a bundle of vegetables arrives from the official gardens
such is the mercy of the governor of kui-zhou for this insignificant man
however the official of the gardens does not send me a proper bundle
the gift is honored in its name only and not in its spirit

the thorns of the bitter chicory are sharp as needles
the leaves of purslane are tough and tasteless
good, fresh green vegetables are not to be seen
they remain hidden in the confines of the official gardens

one shouldn't be surprised at the actions of this official
but one can surmise the state of the world from his actions
too long there has been the involvement in this war
thornbushes of rebellion threaten to overgrow the land of china

now i understand that bitter chicory tends to crowd out other plants
their root system spreads and throttles the better vegetables
when allowed, the common people will become obstructive
and everywhere one sees the beginnings of loud, cheeky actions

also the common people mimic the rich growth of the purslane
they crowd out the better vegetables and hinder their growth
one must be ruthless in pruning this bothersome plant
its growth is like introducing hemp threads to ruin fine silk cloth

if the carrying baskets are used to carry chicory again and again
the vessel will be marked and the tracks of the thorns remain as scars
the ambition of a scholar should be to pick the purple fungus of longevity
he should send forth his songs and make way for the war chariots

when the garden official comes bearing his wretched basket
my breast seethes with anger and my mind throws out bitter thoughts

murphy complaining about the lazy teacher's assistant assigned to his room
8/14/2008 9:00 AM

von zach XIII,50

i give orders to fell trees

preface: i order my servants, bo-yi, xing-xiu, and xin-xing to climb down in the ravine and fell trees on the northern exposure of the mountain. each boy brings back four tree trunks each day, tied together with branches and stems, straight and strong. the boys leave at daybreak and return when they have finished and stack the wood in my court. all around my house there is a hedge whose dilapidated areas i mend with these wooden posts. there is also a spiny bamboo hedge which is broken and needs repair. they also go to cut dwarf bamboos and a large variety with joints six to ten feet apart. i need these to repair the hedge and afford me some safety in my temporary home. in the mountains here there are tigers and one must protect oneself from them. the tiger usually attacks at dusk rushing fiercely with his teeth and claws. the people of kui-zhou plant a stout hedge all around their houses and strengthen it with mud and bamboo walls inside. they do this because they are close to tigers and understand how dangerous they are. as a stranger i am also afraid of the dangerous beasts and wish to stay alive. i seal these verses and give them to my son to read aloud.

in the long summer i have nothing official to do
so i busy myself with ordering my servants to repair my house
in the early morning they eat breakfast and shoulder their axes
i tell them to go to the white valley and fetch straight poles

this ravine is behind the high mountains reaching to the sky
the place to cut the wood is ten miles away from here
after each has cut four tree trunks by the afternoon
he is to return here with the poles to stack in the courtyard

for the last few days i have seen the product of the axes grow
my servants are faithfully obeying my orders to them
all four sides of the court is filling up with poles with fresh gray bark
and stacked beside them are bamboo with their white knots

the wood is used as frames for the side of my hedge
they must support the inside wall of mud and bamboo
in the wilderness around my house bears and wolves also roar
their young wait for human meat to be brought to them

if one is not prepared to defend oneself from them
one may be eaten, and arms alone will not suffice
in the town of kui-zhou there is a worthy governor
who lives in a straw house like mine despite his position

during his management he has banished all villains
and there is no more petty thievery tolerated
but the caves of the tigers are quite near the settlement
and protection from them is also paramount

i have tied up my boat on the shore of the blue stream here in kui-zhou
i will be away from home for a long time and must protect myself
to the west of my dwelling the cliff walls are especially high
and in the wild corner there is where the tigers live

it is urgent that the encircling wall and my roof must be mended often
i am an old, sickly man and am afraid in my exposed loneliness
my servants endure the despised heat of this summer
and engage in quite heavy work for my sake

the shining autumn approaches these dark mountains
then one must dip chrysanthemums in spirits
when the cooler weather comes i will reward their efforts
and provide for all a suitably large barrel of fine wine

murphy becoming more paranoid in his old age
8/15/2008 9:17 AM

von zach XIII,51

i weed the grass

the coarse grass in this area grows quickly to an obstructive length
the poison of its slashes is worse than the sting of bees and scorpions
now i cannot go for an early walk to the big river to assuage my soul
wherever i look i see only the spear tips of the grass which must be removed

i cannot wait til autumn when frost and snow will beat it down
so i shoulder my hoe and am still working at the grass when the sun sets
the removed grass is thrown into the middle of the stream
i cannot allow the stubborn grass roots to stay and reinfest the hill

since i have done this weeding i see fully the beauty of the spruce and bamboo
one cannot allow such grass to remain, it is truly a pest, an enemy

murphy tidying up his desk to become more focussed in his work
8/15/2008 9:37 AM

von zach XIII,52

the water pipe

in kui-zhou, above the gorges, clouds form a thick roof
and in this chaos of rocks there has never been a well
when i stayed in yun-an i had to buy water which irritated my servants
since i moved here i have had no worries about water

to the west of bo-di-cheng fortress lies a thick grove of countless bamboo
from the bamboo trunks a water pipe was laid to bring fresh water
living away from home i am pleased to be able to slake my thirst
the convenience of its procurement eases one of my many worries

murphy at the age of six moving into a house with gas heat and running water
8/15/2008 9:50 AM

von zach XIII,53

by order of the governor the custodian of the official gardens brings me melons

although the high heat of summer rules in the valley of the yang-zi
the melons ripen here earlier than in any other place
since governor bo-zhen-jie has been in his position
he has ordered all extra fallow land to be cultivated

the soldiers are given the first fresh fruits for their use
but in the end this old man on the river also receives a few
when the basket is emptied i see the light-green melons
my eye is filled with the beautiful color which reminds of grass doves

i sit near the bamboo tubes which bring fresh spring water to cool them
it comes from the highest regions in the mountains where only birds fly
i put the fruit in the transparent water and their shine reminds of rock crystal
i am as happy to have them as if they were magic mushrooms

i cut through a fruit with my knife and fondle the cold flesh
my breast feels liberated, my senile decay is consoled by these melons
the gardener promises to bring a few more the next time
i will see my son again with melons in his arms

the history of the melons of shao-ping remains in the past
just as the fights of chu and han against the chin have stopped
you, oh gardener, are not famous like the old, impoverished count shao-ping
but how much trouble you have taken to grow such delectable melons

murphy lightly salting the spring cooled watermelon just the way his grandmother likes it
8/15/2008 10:08 AM

von zach XIII,54

my servant xin-xing mends the water-pipe far from my house

he tends not to eat much meat from animals
he is the purest heart among my servants
he understands his duties exactly
and leaves nothing he should do undone

the water-pipe has cracked high up in the mountains
beyond the forest, stones have fallen and smashed it
in spite of the summer heat he has agreed to fix it
so the water will again be available to cook with and to drink

there and back is a distance of forty desolate miles
on the way there lie dangerous gorges and steep walls
i am surprised when he returns next evening without having eaten
when i see his reddened face i worry about his health

i dip my melons which i eat now as an old, sickly man
he eats with pleasure as i divide my cake and share with him
thus i repay him for his extraordinary efforts
and distinguish him as best of all my servants

i did not have to throw a charm in the water like su-dan
or borrow the sword from li-er-shi to draw water from hitting a rock
xin-xing is a loyal, upright man, like a paintbrush
i will not forget what he has done for me up in the mountains

murphy determined to do everything for himself despite his advanced age
8/16/2008 10:14 AM

von zach XIII,55

i urge my son to complete the fence for the chickens

i am very old and fear my traveling days are numbered
the difficulties of life away from home become overwhelming
i have taken to raising black hens whose meat is good for rheumatism
so i have waited til after the breeding season to begin to eat their eggs

the young chickens are bred from the spring eggs
and i now have many chicks to raise to eat
but they come to the house and again and again
they make a clamor and i can't seem to chase them away

i am annoyed and decide to make a chicken run with a fence
i therefore ask a servant to cut green bamboos for a henhouse
they tend to upset everything, even plates and cups on the table
with the bamboo they can be kept away from the house

there is a proper place to do this east of my wall
there i plan to put in a high chicken fence
i go for my usual walk and return later because of the heat
i talk to my son about how far the work has progressed

i tell him to make a structure big enough for all the chickens
and that he must lead them into the enclosure gently, not throw them in
he should take care to place the bamboo close together to prevent their escape
i must not have their beaks and spurs scarring my table mats

i will thus save the ants from being eaten by them
and i will keep the foxes and martens from eating the fowl
the single hens must be kept separate from the others
or else they will harm the chicks and they will not develop

then once he has finished making the fences and the coops
he must watch them closely and keep them in good repair
these then are my clear orders and he must see to them
and they should be carried out carefully one by one

the chickens will cry out at dawn rain or shine
and they will be a comfort to me in these troublesome times
and although they are quite ordinary birds, even common
they will carry out their morning rituals without fail

these chickens should give me their wholesome meat til the end of the year
as soon as the fence and coops are ready their nuisance will disappear
i am not like the old man of the shi-xiang mountains with chickens running loose
i will have an adequate henhouse built to corral my chickens

murphy staring out the window at the gathering clouds
8/27/2008

von zach XIII,56

i point out the nobility of my tibetan servant a-duan

the trees on the mountain seem blue in the twilight glow
a small spring is fed to here by long bamboo pipes
the people of this district jostle at night to get some of this water
but my servant, the noble duan, has found a new, unknown spring to tap

with my illness i often woke in the night thirsty with no water around
but now i hear the noise of running water and the smell of humidity in the air
people once marveled at the extraordinary service of the famous tatar servant tao-kan
my tibetan who has braved tigers and leopards to find new water is easily his equal

murphy running the tap to clear the pipes before he drinks
8/27/2008 2:18 PM

von zach XIII,57

i leave behind these verses when i visit under-district judge liu of hua-yang who has lost his post
and stays this summer in a temple in kui-zhou

i tie my horse to one of the tall trees
and ask where is the entrance to the cloister
nobleman liu has thrown his jacket over his shoulder
and smiles in welcome at seeing my face appear at his door

we sit together in the stone hall to enjoy the view
the big river rushes down the gorge below us
the breezes are cooled by the early morning dew
while the morning sun rises above the steep cliff walls

if i had chosen to visit my friend later in the day
i would have been felled by the brutal summer heat
in the sixth and seventh month in the southern areas
the time has passed for going for a leisurely walk

many people, old and young, die from sunstroke here
the sweat runs off the body in small streams
when i visit a excellent man like judge liu
i must take care to be at my peak of health

we proceed to have a lively, friendly discussion
he takes great care to point out the rioting is still with us
his tears begin to flow and fall on my garment
a sad wind carries his lament to the gate of the sky palace

i say it is a grief you bear with all your marvelous plans in your heart
surely some friend can carry word of them to the ears of the emperor
i am merely an old man who is resting by the side of the yang-zi
and am shamed by your praising me to be as valuable as a precious stone

my literary skills are comparable to those of a beginner
my philosophy of ethics and the propriety of one's life are of little value
i am happy that you agree sometimes with this old, white-haired man
i only ask that you hold my sons and grandsons close in your heart

now we are both living as strangers in old kui-zhou
we have situated our huts beside the dilapidated town wall
we live about four to five miles from each other
the path between our house is covered by fallen leaves

in these critical times it is fortunate for me to meet such a competent scholar
and all the more that our meeting is not in an area dominated by the war
when we get drunk we dance together like the dancers from the chao times
we beat a rhythm on pots as once did the musicians of the land chin

in your youth you look upon the misery of an old sick man
who weeps in exile despite the joy of our being together
the last years of my life will pass by quickly like a bird in flight
and i fear my home land might become obliterated by this war

murphy taking pleasure where and when he finds it

8/28/2008 11:13 AM

von zach XIII,58

i contemplate nature in the yang-zi gorges

earlier i worked diligently as an under officer in the court at chang-an
poetic inspiration came especially from the tung-guan pass of mount hua-zhou
as i was traveling in the gorges of the yang-zi, i came upon a scene
which suddenly coincided with my memory of the gigantic mount hua

and when i looked down on the big river coming out of si-chuan
i could believe in my mind that i looked again on the huang-he
then because i became too ill to travel on my boat
i came again to land and have taken to my bed in kui-zhou

here at the entrance of the gorges i enjoy the scenery
i find myself midst the luxuriant ivy of late spring
the bounty of nature in this area is outstandingly beautiful
but the customs of the people leave much to be desired

when, oh when, will i be able to leave this land
and resume my singing in a fullness of joy

murphy chasing the muse with a glass of sake⁶ in hand
8/28/2008 12:40 PM

von zach XIII,59

i remember the cloister to the south of zheng-xian

the fu-du cloister lies to the south of zheng-xian
and its marvelous beauty is reflected far out into the stream below
the shade of surrounding rocks enclose the buildings
the rushing of the spring accompanies the music of the priests

i remember how once in the early morning i leaned against a tree
winds shivered the leaves and pushed the overcast mountain clouds scudding by
now here in the gorges of the yang-zi i see an infinite wide flow of water
and in the depths of the river live only dragons and water snakes

murphy unsatisfied with the assisted living facility he finds himself in
8/28/2008 12:53 PM

von zach XIII,60

respectfully send these verses to the secretary of the chancellery cabinet li-wen-yi,
fifteenth of his clan (1 of 2)

to escape the heat of summer you have moved to yun-an-xian
when once the autumn winds start you will come here to kui-zhou
now i am living temporarily on the shore of the big river in kui-zhou
and would then like to visit the balcony of duke xiang of chu with you

here in the narrow bluffs of the countless mountains there are only monkeys and birds
if we have once left these behind us the area of the stream and lakes opens wide for us
all the time i have been here and i have not yet found a love for the people of kui-zhou
it would be nice if you were to hurry so we could leave the gulches together

murphy wishing hard upon a star
8/28/2008 5:26 PM

von zach XIII,61

respectfully i send these verses to the secretary of the chancellery cabinet li-wen-yi (2 of 2)

your friends have given you a thousand taels of silver for your trip
and you strike an imposing figure in your official uniform
i know that you wish to have a rapid rise in your career
your thoughts and deliberations are thus strongly focussed

you have already become a high official with an appropriate salary
a formidable talent has risen among the imperial family
you are especially strong as an author as was wei-xuan-cheng of the han dynasty
how well you and your family would have fit into those times

murphy buttering his toast carefully and fully
f8/29/2008 8:17 AM

von zach XIII,62

thunder

because of the long drought the mountains have become very dry
despite there being thick clouds around there is still no rain
the south is usually an area full of bad miasmal fogs
but this dryness has made difficult the field work of the people

in these districts there are men who claim to cause rain by dancing
in the gorges there is the constant beating of their drums
however, the holy dragon which produces rain has not appeared
all the bowing and praying to clay idols has not produced results

and the state as well as individuals suffer from this drought
in spite of extreme efforts to collect taxes the budget cannot be met
the old people turn their faces toward heaven and cry
in this time of misery who else can they complain to

earlier ascetics exposed themselves to the ravages of the sun
but we should not follow the old example by whipping the witches
we should first agree to lay down our weapons of war
then punish wrongdoers and balance all under the rule of the emperor

in each separate district we should return to the business at hand
and the state must not be rapacious in their taxes to ease the way to recovery
floods come, give way to drought, this is the natural way
all rulers are beset with the vagaries of nature's ways

the sky sends singing heat which would melt metal and stone
the hordes of robbers are worse than the wolves and tigers
if one were permitted to choose between the misfortunes
who would not prefer excessive heat to the robbers

last night, however, one could hear the roar of thunder
the storm sound was that of ten thousand arrows
then, alas, the thick, black clouds of rain scattered again
i was disappointed that the spirits of rain left their assembly

the heat comes back with even more oppression, my breath is ragged
my stomach and bowels melt, sweat drenches all my clothes
i am decrepit, old, and helpless, all my efforts are for naught
hope has fled and i look out on withered field and garden

murphy losing the resilience to weather adversity
9/5/2008 11:52 AM

von zach XIII,63

fires

fire has raged through the chu mountains for the last month
this is the age-old response to drought conditions
according to the old custom one frightens the dragons with the fires
they react by bringing on the thunder and the rain

because the caves of the goblins are singed they start to cry
fire melts the ice on the mountains and reddens the shadowed gorges
all around the hemlines of the woods the brooks start to boil
fire reaches to the roots of the thousand year springs

the green wood burns down to ash and cinders
clouds and fogs disappear and are nowhere to be seen
during the night the fires are especially striking
now at autumn they shine up to the shepherd and weaver in the skies

the winds pick up and a gigantic flame flares upward
the climbing smoke reaches up to the far milky way
the fire looks to spread to the kun-lun mountains in the west
the light grows brighter to reach toward the rivers and islands to the east

there is a dreadful stench of burnt giant pythons
a mighty roar rises where wild tigers are surrounded by flames
the miraculous dragons have all flown away to escape
they are not to be seen among the singed rocks of the earth

the people who wish to bring rain from the gods in this manner
show their blindness of belief in resorting to this method
officials are summoned as the fire reaches the outskirts of town
but they know nothing of the primitive magic involved

if the fire continues to spread who can contain it
i greatly fear it will come to consume my poor hut
bathed in sweat i lie in a room on the shore of the big river
the deeper in the night the more difficult it is for me to breathe

murphy hearing the sirens and smelling the smoke
9/5/2008 5:12 PM

heat three poems (1 of 3)

thunder has made its own great noise
but in the end produced no clouds nor rain
my clothes are adrip with sweat in this heat
the sultry air makes it hard for me to breathe

i ask the heavens to turn me to cold rock crystal
i wish to be reed grass in a cool autumn wind
would that this time resembled that of my youth
when after rain a chill breeze freshened the world

murphy visiting texas in the heat of summer
9/6/2008 11:17 AM

von zach XIII,65

heat three poems (2 of 3)

the water drenched clouds no longer writhe around here
only the toxic water of the lu river comes from the west
i lie by the open door and slowly raise my head
the bird just flown into the wood restlessly returns

in the yang-zi gorges everything is hot like a fire
one hears the distant rumble of thunder which brings no rain
i wish to see snow falling from the heavenly winter palace
i wish the wind gates of heaven to be flung widely open

murphy pouring precious water over his head to cool a feverish brow
9/6/2008 11:26 AM

von zach XIII,66

heat three poems (3 of 3)

red plums cannot be cooled though they are placed in fresh water
the grains of wild rice are being cooked but no one has an appetite
my bones have all begun to ache in this decrepit senile body
because of the heat beating me down i wave away the food served to me

yet even in this unusually long hot spell we all suffer from
the soldiers must continue to move with their accustomed quickness
it seems to me they could slow down after fighting for ten long years
i cannot help myself and fill my handkerchief with my tears

murphy old enough to know better than to hope for a better life
9/6/2008 11:38 AM

von zach XIII,67