

red slope mountain chi-jia

earlier i looked for a new apartment on chi-jia mountain
and have only recently found one and moved there
for the last two springs i lived on mount wu
looking out on the waters below kui-zhou

what i especially liked while i was living there
was when the sun shone and warmed my back in comfort
i always strove to think what i might set before the emperor
to remind him to recognize the good heart of the country people

here my friends zheng-shen and xie-ju are close by
they can easily be reached by letter in the town of jing-zhou
but in my extended sickness i find it difficult to be productive
and to communicate adequately my deepest feelings

murphy a true nomad even into his dotage

von zach XVI,1

i move into the new apartment, three poems (1 of 3)

behind my new apartment is the steep cliff wall of chi-jia
in front the rough scree at the bottom of yen mountain
i am ashamed of having to constantly travel from place to place
just now i have moved again in the spring sunshine

i note the flowers in the shade of the bamboo are quite small
so i transplant the bamboo and startle the birds outside my window
in my senile decay i am determined to make life more bearable
that is why i have chosen such a scenic place

murphy topping up his glass of wine in celebration
12/11/2008 10:02 AM

von zach XVI,2

i move into the new apartment, three poems (2 of 3)

since the beginning of the riots i have been unable to stop moving
now once again i meet the spring far away and can't get back home
now the waters around yu-fu-pu have swollen with the rains
while steamy clouds boil all over nearby musk mountain

i comb my hair each morning though it covers only half my head
i walk out resting my weight on my knobby old cane
many commissioners from chang-an visit me here
i question each one closely on the rigors of travel from there

murphy hoping against hope for a miracle
12/11/2008 10:16 AM

von zach XVI,3

i move into the new apartment, three poems (3 of 3)

in kui-zhou lies the old house of the famed poet song-yu
it lies under the clouds close by the fortress bo-di-cheng
i have been held back here by advancing age and illness
how can i build up my poetic reputation so far from home

here at the mouth of the yang-zi gorges the winds are fierce
and the waves of the big river are often in flood stage
i am constantly on the move with my family these days
and must always find a different place for us to vegetate

murphy sounding like a broken old record with his whining
12/11/2008 10:24 AM

von zach XVI,4

while descending the river in the rain, i think of crown prince zheng

the darkness of the rain permeates deep within the gorges
it will soon pass by where once the palace of chu-xiang-wang stood
the roiling waves toss and turn, and tear against the shore
soon the clouds weaken and are swept away by the strong winds

the rain has refreshed the leaves of the orchids and deepened their green
peach buds are moistened and begin to show a hint of the red to come
i remember zheng-zi-zhen of gu-guo near chang-an
prince zheng and i are separated by the wide nang river with its high shores

murphy back home again, mud splattered and climbing the front stairs
12/11/2008 10:43 AM

von zach XVI,5

the rain does not stop

the fullness of rain has now passed by
and little by little become a soft drizzle
the air seems filled with flying silk threads
they softly touch and wet the freshened skin

the stains on the steps have not washed away
the waters spread was of but a short duration
the souging twist of the courtyard trees
has eased into a spreading calm

one looks to the stone statues of swallows
and imagines the dance of swooping birds
the nymphs ensconced in the moving clouds
must have also wet their gauzy clothes

when my gaze encompasses a river boat
what is it that focusses my thoughts on it
it certainly has not waited for the calm now here
before it has ridden the waves toward shore

murphy imagining effect preceding cause
12/11/2008 5:13 PM

von zach XVI,6

my young friend cui has not arrived to pick me up, doubtless because he feels an old man will not go out in the rain. i dash off this joke poem to send him.

you invited this old man who lives in the west tower
and promised to send horses to pick me up for a visit
i have waited here from morning until midday
getting up to move around and then sitting once again

the scudding clouds dim the light from the sun
but they do not hide the delightful greens of spring
why should this rain get in our way
we can surely get up to bo-di-cheng

if i can but stroll among your flowerbeds
what matter is it that i should be wet from the rain
and i remind you that i ride very comfortably
no matter how drunk i may have become

you must think that i am a doddering old man
who cannot brave the mess of a rainy street
the truth is very simple, i own no horse
and without one that you send i cannot come to visit

murphy turned seventy and still swilling the brew
12/12/2008 10:15 AM

von zach XVI,7

dreaming during the day

in this second month i sleep a lot
often delirious and in a feeble haze
i doze throughout the nights which grow shorter
but now i also spend part of each day nodding out

the warm breezes bring the odor of peach blossoms
i barely raise my head to eye them as if i were drunk
as the sun shines on the shore in its spring splendor
i slip into a dream of my old home and its gate lined with thorns

i dream the emperor and his ministers are beset by leopards and tigers
but then wake up and think anew of the farmers plight, and how to stop the fighting
and how can one deal with these problems when throughout the realm
the officials promote only iniquitous blackmail to line their pockets

murphy lying down for a little nap after his liquid lunch at the irish bar
12/12/2008 10:27 AM

von zach XVI,8

during the day of cold food i show these verses to my sons zong-wen and zong-wu

in my sickness with diabetes i wander between the big river and the han
i am forced to always stay away from my old home by the riots and war
for too many years i have celebrated the cold food day away from my old haunts
now i am once again thousands of miles away from my forefather's graves where i should be

my forefather's lie among cypresses at the foot of bei-mang mountain
now however i am in bo-di-cheng with an easterly wind and blossoming flowers
i look upon my two sons and freshly realize i am already an old man
and then my tears flow in streams down to the river to run to my native country

murphy in the cold northeast thinking of his family in texas
12/12/2008 10:43 AM

von zach XVI,9

i show these verses to my two sons

this celebration of cold food day leads me to feel my age
in the future you two will be left to honor me with your filial hearts
throughout one's life one notes the ongoing change of the seasons
on this special day i feel most strongly the distance from my own fathers

i receive no letters from relatives in he-nan, nor from giu-giang
thinking of this loss i cannot hold back even more copious tears
i am filled with longing to once more be with my extended family
i will let down my white hair and sing my loyalty to all my clan

murphy contemplating writing his memoirs for his children
12/12/2008 10:55 AM

von zach XVI,10

fair weather, two poems (1 of 2)

during the long lasting recent rain wu mountain has been shrouded in darkness
now the weather has turned fair and the mountain is embroidered with vibrant color
the green of the grass reminds of the meadows beyond famed dung-ting lake
the sunrise reminds of the red clouds of sunrise over the eastern sea

orioles can be heard announcing their presence the whole day through
while crowds of graceful flying cranes soar high in the winds
in a long lasting sun wildflowers dry up in the drought and drop
though with fresh winds bringing rain they spread fast everywhere

murphy thanking lady bird johnson for the roadside bluebonnets of texas
12/12/2008 3:31 PM

von zach XVI,11

fair weather, two poems (2 of 2)

ravens and their young bicker amongst themselves
cranes call to each other joyous in the fair weather
some come down to search for food in the mud banks
while others continue their happy flight after the rains

the noisy rain that assailed bo-di-cheng has ended
the rays of the sun bring warmth to the river below
i think of si-ma-tan who was long held back in lo-yang
his heart filled with longing to see the gates of imperial chang-an

murphy unable to afford plane passage home for the holidays
12/13/2008 10:07 AM

von zach XVI,12

rains, again

just as i am luxuriating in the stoppage of the long rains
i sigh again as i hear a distant thunder approach
i notice how all the rain has come again into the gorges
and begins to pour thick streams into the yang-zi

the cattle and horses on the banks of the river can no longer be seen
whitecaps on the river resemble hornless dragons endlessly fighting
nature has assumed an increase of yin which explains this abundant rain
it is not the natural effect of the yang promontories of the mountains

murphy using folk wisdom to explain the strange weather
12/13/2008 10:20 AM

von zach XVI,13

i search for a new home

i envy the crane of liao-dong calling as he returns to his homeland
as once the ill zhuang-xi sang songs of his native country while in si-chuan
i have still not succeeded in reaching the blue eastern sea
and meanwhile must strive to find a suitable place to live

on the northern shore of the stream i have found a small level ground
the mountains are far enough away that i can prepare to cultivate in the spring
then after a time should a guest come at the peak of the peach blossoms
he might become bemused there like the old man of wu-ling

murphy imaging eden but settling for warm and dry
12/13/2008 10:34 AM

von zach XVI,14

at the end of spring i write five poems on the wall of my newly rented straw hut in nang-xi
(1 of 5)

for a long time i have sighed at my extended stay in the yang-zi gorges
now here again i am experiencing the end of the spring season
the songs of the mockingbirds are nearly ended now
how short a time will the luxuriant blooms still last

in this desolate valley now only thin clouds rise
though during the day the sun glints on the rippling waves
how can one bring these perpetual battles to an end
in truth my grief is more because of the fighting than the end of spring

murphy continually disappointed at the instincts of his fellow human beings
13.12.2008 18:18

von zach XVI,15

at the end of spring i write five poems on the wall of my newly rented straw hut in nang-xi
(2 of 5)

here in nang-xi the stony ground is good for orange trees
but a prince would look for better land as his fief
now here during the continuing riots i try to simplify existence
i try to lead a life as if in the midst of a herd of deer

i hide away in the grassy shores of the northern yang-zi
i eat the food of strangers in the midst of the clouds of nang-xi
far away from the home country for the last three years of tedium
i am forced to listen to the folksongs of the natives of fu-yu

murphy becoming only a little more accustomed to listening to modern jazz
12/15/2008 9:32 AM

von zach XVI,16

at the end of spring i write five poems on the wall of my newly rented straw hut in nang-xi
(3 of 5)

early morning clouds brood in darkness then burst with color from the sun
the brocade of sparkling trees becomes greener and greener as the morning advances
the grief in my life however has made my hair whiter and more sparse
in the entire world i have only one straw hut to call my own

my songs are sad and break off suddenly as i am overcome
only by getting drunk can i make my dances last for very long
after a short drizzle of rain i shoulder my hoe to do a bit of work
while the monkeys chatter up among the green mountains beyond the shore

murphy as always paying careful attention to his surroundings
12/15/2008 9:42 AM

von zach XVI,17

at the end of spring i write five poems on the wall of my newly rented straw hut in nang-xi
(4 of 5)

in my younger years i learned calligraphy and the art of swordplay
later on they both faded from my life as i neglected them as useless
while i was able to serve the emperor i never thought of salary
now that i have no official position my life is very limited

in my straw hut i have gathered medicines for my illness
and spring again finds me far from my native country
the continuing riots tear at my patriotic heart
as do reports of infighting amongst the servants of the emperor

murphy in the second balcony looking down into the arena
12/15/2008 9:48 AM

von zach XVI,18

at the end of spring i write five poems on the wall of my newly rented straw hut in nang-xi
(5 of 5)

i would like to be able to present suggestions to the emperor to end the rioting
but i have become too old and feeble to serve as a ministerial secretary
the bickering amongst the generals will never come to an end
i can do nothing more than be ashamed i belong to an official body which permits this

in these critical times the destiny of the chinese people changes quickly
in a flight against an ill wind the wings of any bird will tire
the fading sun of day in kui-zhou finds me lamenting my lot in life
by the middle of the night my tears are overflowing

murphy raging against the fading of the light
15.12.2008 09:57

von zach XVI,19

i hear the governors of he-bei have gone to chang-an for an audience. with joy i write these twelve impromptu short verses (1 of 12)

an-lu-shan brought down the wrath of heaven when he began his outrage
as a result he was eventually murdered by his very own son
his partner in crime shi-si-ming was similarly doomed
from all reports he has already completely disappeared

the whole world has been shaken to its foundation
but the riots and turmoil have yet to begin to settle down
why do these riots continue to flare up in the provinces
who stands to profit from all the bloodshed and destruction

murphy trying to wrap his head around the idea of anyone's becoming a suicide bomber
12/15/2008 1:21 PM

von zach XVI,20

i hear the governors of he-bei have gone to chang-an for an audience. with joy i write these twelve impromptu short verses (2 of 12)

these tumultuous times must settle down
the empire must rest and find the will to rebuild
the different ways brought by the barbarians
are tantamount to an invitation to criminality

our emperor has the same problems as xuan-wang of zhou
or of emperor guang-wu-di in the time of the han
reverent sons and loyal officials seem nowhere to be found
though to later generations they will be obvious

murphy calling spades digging tools
12/16/2008 3:21 PM

von zach XVI,21

i hear the governors of he-bei have gone to chang-an for an audience. with joy i write these
twelve impromptu short verses (3 of 12)

the streets are ruled by an outbreak of joy
the excitement is shown in loud singing of songs
the generals who command in the northern districts
have all been called to an audience in chang-an

truly one can now proclaim to the world
that the imperial house is again in proper order
here far away in kui-zhou my soul is sad
i am sorely estranged from the seat of power

nurphy typing slowly with two fingers in his dotage
12/16/2008 3:33 PM

von zach XVI,22

i hear the governors of he-bei have gone to chang-an for an audience. with joy i write these
twelve impromptu short verses (4 of 12)

there is however the fact that no single report
has been sent by the governors to the imperial court
this indecisiveness is dangerous and allows for mischief
the population at large becomes a hotbed of suspicions

the governors massed their troops and flaunted their might
they competed together in the sharpness of their weaponry
imperial commissioners visited again and again
trying to refocus the energies of the governors more productively

murphy in close order drill with his marine platoon
12/17/2008 9:54 AM

von zach XVI,23

i hear the governors of he-bei have gone to chang-an for an audience. with joy i write these twelve impromptu short verses (5 of 12)

girded well with gold and precious stones the governors have assembled
they are met in their solemn audience by loyal dignitaries
they wish to devote their energies again to administrative affairs
and they wish the air to be cleared of its bellicose atmosphere

if the benevolent re-establishment of good government is to occur
the rebellion must be completely destroyed in the minds of the people
then and only then will there be a new and auspicious beginning
a moral dynasty which will last for ten thousand springs

murphy ecstatic over the democratic victory in the last election
12/17/2008 10:02 AM

von zach XVI,24

i hear the governors of he-bei have gone to chang-an for an audience. with joy i write these twelve impromptu short verses (6 of 12)

the present ruler appears decisive in his position
he seems to be one who is lit from within by his spirit
when he acts he is wise in the direction he points
he is his own person moving against the background of history

the empires yan and zhao need no longer boast
that they have the most beautiful women to send as wives
now in the emperor's palace no one has a priority
of choosing women to grace the imperial throne

murphy eschewing the booty of high position
12/18/2008 9:59 AM

von zach XVI,25

i hear the governors of he-bei have gone to chang-an for an audience. with joy i write these
twelve impromptu short verses (7 of 12)

i am an old white haired ministerial secretary
who remains in his illness by the shore of the big river
the flowering of spring is coming to its end
as i look out from the tower in these desolate mountains

today is the day for the audience of the governors
they will meet in chang-an with heaven's son
when will i again have such an opportunity
to present a petition to the emperor as solemn duty

murphy put out to pasture but still feeling his oats
12/18/2008 10:06 AM

von zach XVI,26

i hear the governors of he-bei have gone to chang-an for an audience. with joy i write these twelve impromptu short verses (8 of 12)

on the eastern side of the sacred tai mountain
there are many and varied, scattered districts
they have once again been brought to peace
and they buffer and protect the center of china

tribute has begun to be transported through the passes
all is brought again to the capital of chang-an
the source of imperial gifts is restored once more
from all the lands down to the shore of the sea

murphy replete in his home, snug in his study
12/18/2008 10:14 AM

von zach XVI,27

i hear the governors of he-bei have gone to chang-an for an audience. with joy i write these
twelve impromptu short verses (9 of 12)

in the east as far as the liao river
in the north all the way to the hu-to
the signs of the zodiac reflect a harmony
they coincide with the movements of the clouds

down from the han-gu pass in shen-si
all the lands are now allied in peace
and on the golden balcony in the capital
numerous worthy men are now assembled

murphy sleeping the dreamless sleep of quietude
12/18/2008 10:22 AM

von zach XVI,28

i hear the governors of he-bei have gone to chang-an for an audience. with joy i write these
twelve impromptu short verses (10 of 12)

among the light cavalry of the yu-yang
and the valiant sons of the han-dan
riding with joy in the practiced formation
the whips dangling alongside the golden sleeves

now they will take pride, now they will return
the palace itself will bear witness to their strength
now again the courage will be shown
the courageous men of wu-ling in chang-an

murphy shining his shoes for inspection
12/18/2008 2:14 PM

von zach XVI,29

i hear the governors of he-bei have gone to chang-an for an audience. with joy i write these
twelve impromptu short verses (11 of 12)

the general li-guang-bi hovered in ji-men
he continued to intimidate the rebels
his hair has settled into whiteness
only his heart remains fiery red

in the end he outshown all the other governors
from he-bei he leads the governors in chang-an
and he is renowned for understanding
above all else heaven's son is to be revered

murphy buttering his bread on the correct side
12/18/2008 2:23 PM

von zach XVI,30

i hear the governors of he-bei have gone to chang-an for an audience. with joy i write these
twelve impromptu short verses (12 of 12)

for the last twelve years i have been troubled
the fights have never ceased for this long time
now, finally, the imperial authority has come
the full might of the military power has been imposed

the full might of the emperor dai-zong is felt
the dynasty has begun to assume its magnificence
general guo-zi-yi has been amply rewarded
he is raised into a full principedom of the tang dynasty

murphy understanding that the full pay lies only at the end of endeavor
12/18/2008 2:37 PM

von zach XVI,31

i receive a letter from my brother du-guan

he has traveled from chang-an to jiang-ling. it is now the end of the third month and i believe he will soon arrive here at kui-zhou. i am reminded sadly of our long separation but am joyful at our possible reunion. i take this opportunity to give voice to my feelings.

in your travels you have already come to jiang-ling
when will you arrive here in kui-zhou in the yang-zi gorges
as a result of the rioting we have been long separated
seeing you again will certainly improve my sickly being

i sit here full of longing with tear filled eyes
every morning i climb the tower to look for your arrival
as an old man i must have someone to help me get around
you are coming and i no longer worry my bones will not be buried

murphy riding the bus to texas to see his brother
12/19/2008 10:07 AM

von zach XVI,32

i am glad my brother du-guan soon comes and have written two short poems (1 of 2)

in the gorges of wu mountain darkness still rules and spring is late
while on zhong-nan mountain in chang-an the hillsides are blooming
now marooned here in my illness i will see my younger brother
your letter has arrived and i know you still live, and prosper

i have answered all your questions about my sons in a recent letter
and i also warned you of the prospect of new rioting in the district
when you arrive we will first cry and then we can laugh
then we can talk at leisure about your return to chang-an

murphy rising early in anticipation of the celebration to come
12/19/2008 10:20 AM

von zach XVI,33

i am glad my brother du-guan soon comes and have written two short poems (2 of 2)

as i wait for your arrival i complain to the ravens and magpies
who do not yet announce your arrival, and i hide away your letter
so the wagtails will make known to me what their appearance signifies
whether or not my younger brother has met with misfortune

to my joy the ravens and magpies sit and noisily make their presence known
while the wagtails have all flown away, both signify good tidings
i stand on the tower and look for the boat sailing through the winds
we will soon catch up on ten years and i will see if your hair has also turned white

murphy measuring his age in the wrinkles of his friends
12/19/2008 11:27 AM

von zach XVI,34

i send this poem to ministerial secretary xian-zhu, third of his clan

both the clever and the inane suffer in this world
they are mere dust whirled around by eddies of wind
and except for those who have achieved a place with the immortals
we all face dangers, especially in these riotous times

we are both becoming older and white-haired
this is hastened by our grief attendant on continually wandering
although we both hold the rank of ministerial secretary
we are not as successful as the farmers in villages far from the towns

i remember well meeting such men earlier on in my travels
their innate joy cannot be adequately described in its totality
when mulberry trees and flax prosper in abundance
their happiness approaches that of imperial dukes and earls

the heavens still allow the fighting to continue
so scholars like us sit constantly in our misery
you are still wandering around in jing-zhou
while i am cooped up here on the shore of the big river

i am laid low by illness here in kui-zhou
my fever has lasted all winter and spring
in late spring came another woe, congested lungs
an illness which has quite specific causes

in my youth i drank heavily with su-yuan-ming
he and zheng-qian were my closest two friends
both these men are dead now and returned to the dust
while i have continued loyalty to my drinking habits

now i meet my destiny whether it is long or short
why should i beat myself up further about my misfortunes
i have long known you to have a strong constitution
wherever you go it is always remarked upon

you still mount the horse without extra support
in fact you become ill-tempered when someone offers
you can be counted on in festive occasions for graceful poems
when your brush touches paper the characters sing

yes one knows you are a poet and calligrapher for the ages
and your skills become more pronounced as you advance in years
the waters of lakes qing-cao and dung-ting flow east
they will eventually merge into the vast eastern sea

on jun mountain in dung-ting lake one can cool off on summer days
there are also white waterchestnuts there for the picking
don't you have a small boat you could ride up the big river
why do you always stay down there in jing-zhou

i have not traveled down the ju-tang gorge as yet
and am reminded of da-yu who also waited in vain
when i hear tales of the beauty of song-men gorge
i spit out my medication and try to make ready to depart

unfortunately i am too ill to embark on the journey
while your robust nature means you should hesitate no longer
you will find a reasonable ruler on the throne
and officials who want to help with reforms for the people

murphy hatching up a plot once more with like-minded friends
12/23/2008 9:33 AM

von zach XVI,35

an occasional poem

in late spring in the third month i stand in the sun
thin wispy clouds pass over the long wu gorges
then rapidly clouds mass and bring rain to the thousand crags
the smells of different flowers spread and become stronger

yellow orioles fly out over the river
only to return without attempting the other side
swallows continue their work in the wet weather
beaks filled with mud they patiently build their nests

on the high tower i roll up the curtains on the windows
i look out at the scenery which usually makes a beautiful painting
however, the picture presented now says nothing to me
i note only that i cannot see the xiao river or the xiang

murphy spoiled in his old age by having too many good restaurants to choose from
12/23/2008 9:46 AM

von zach XVI,36

i remember traveling along the shores of the ba river

i look back sadly on the area beyond the east gate in chang-an
i am reminded of my youthful wanderings on the shores of the ba river
in that marvelous spring i stopped on a ride in the wilderness
and spent the night on a tower where i enjoyed a vista on the world

where are the men i knew at that time, they must be dead
because of my age i know we can never ramble together again
as i sit here in my memory's cage i wish nothing else
than to return to my ship and skim down the big river to chang-an

murphy agile within his imagination and not in his frame
12/23/2008 3:31 PM

von zach XVI,37

the moon

i sit here today in the qu-tang gorges far from my native country
it is the second year and sixth time here i watch a bright spring moon
too many times it has returned to light my sombre room
its purpose appears to be to fill the dark sky with illumination

my garments which move in the wind glint with its presence
high in the heavens it looks down on my tear ridden face
i see ravens and magpies flying south stirred by the light
only later in the dead of the night do they settle on the shore of the big river

murphy sleepless again in his dotage
12/23/2008 3:42 PM

von zach XVI,38

late in the evening i climb to the straw hall on the shore of the nang river

i deliberately climb to the high shore of the nang river
up here i escape the feeling of encirclement by the rocks
i loosen my garments at the breezy hall of wilderness
as i tether the horse a fragrant wind flows from the flowery woods

far off the parapet of bo-di-cheng resembles a white cloud
the wheat fields extend their luxuriant growth as far as one can see
as evening approaches the delightful spring fragrance intensifies
at this time the spring floods are standing at their highest

each time the four seasons change my heart is touched
just as one becomes accustomed to each a revolution occurs
the dark haired natives of this region suffer in these riots
the sky sun becomes thirsty in the coming calm of summer

all my thoughts concentrate on chang-an to the north-east
the longer i stay the more i feel caged in by these steep gorges
it seems natural that this old man should have become ill in this place
and it is this illness which keeps me from serving as an official

in my misery i no longer long for the appearance of a tai-gong or zhu-ge-liang
and i no longer dream of zhou-gong or of the actions of confucius
those few men who could set this world aright are from an earlier time
they have long since been placed in their graves and can never return

here in the south of chang-an black clouds conceal the stars
in western si-chuan thick fogs conceal the moon, the riots still occur
how can i sprout wings to follow the birds in their flight
i would flee from here, from this perpetual fear of the rebels

murphy in a muddy ditch and unable to gain traction to get out
12/26/2008 10:18 AM

von zach XVI,39

the song of the ba-fen and xiao-zhuan calligraphy of my nephew li-chao

the bird track characters of the cang-jie are gone
they have disappeared into the darkness of history
the forms of the figures have changed from that time
they have shifted their shape like moving clouds

on the other hand the writing on the stone drums
was recognized as forgeries by chen-cang a long time ago
and as is well known the ba-fen style of writing
developed from the characters on the big and the small seals

in the qin time li-si was famous for inventing the new writing for the small seal
in the han time cai-yong developed the ba-fen style of the big seal
from then until now all new styles which were invented
have faded from use and no one knows them anymore

the inscription by li-si of the qin-shi-huang on the yi-shan
was unfortunately destroyed by a fire in the wilderness
the copy which was carved on the wood of the red date
is not fine enough to convey the essence of the script

the inscription of cai-yong on lao-zi in the wu district
is a good example of ba-fen and still stands there
these written characters should be thin and vigorous in execution
formed properly they have a miraculous attraction

these days there is no one who comes up to the old standards
we will not see the equals of li-si and cai-yong ever again
however, li-chao, the son of my sister is talented
his calligraphy comes close to the classical standard

and since the kai-yuan period famous calligraphers have included
minister han-ze-mu and the descendant of cao-yong, cavalry captain cai-you-lin
you, my nephew li-chao, share the ability of these two men
you three may be said to form a triumvirate of talent

but your specialty lies with the xiao-zhuan style
wherein you come quite close to the work of li-si
when one looks carefully at your characters
one perceives sharp swords and long lances entangled

i have heard that an example of your ba-fen script
is valued at over one hundred taels if you can find one for sale
in this style upon close perusal one may see
writhing fighting dragons with tense protuberant muscles

there is, of course, the current work of the mad zhang-xu
in giang-su he is valued for his conceptual script
but this style is not found anywhere in antiquity
and thus it is ephemeral and not to be valued

and how could he compete against the work of my nephew
who moreover does not deign to paint extravagant signs
my nephew is a devotee to the ancient heroic styles
those of minister li-si and chamberlain cai-yong

here in kui-zhou i met li-chao more than a month ago
he asked me then to write a song about his calligraphy
but i am old now and my poetic strength is waning
how could i find the words to reflect the grace of his style

murphy writing acrostics for his friends
12/28/2008 9:42 AM

von zach XVI,40

in a drunken state i am thrown from my horse, and some friends came to commiserate with me
bringing some more wine

as i have often done when a guest of the governor of kui-zhou
i overindulged in wine and sang songs waving a golden lance
pixilated i remembered my youth and suddenly mounted a horse
the horse galloped off to the cliff wall of the ju-tang gorge

there at the gate of the bo-di-cheng fortress i was among the clouds
then the horse plunged down the incline directly for 3000 feet
a white flash of city wall saw my purple bridle flying past
until we leveled out to the east on a ridge beyond the cliff

then we came to a village beside the stream near my straw hall
i let my whip dangle and we galloped along a red dirt path
this white haired rider on a galloping horse brought surprise and fright
i reverted to the instincts of my youth when i fired arrows from horseback

who would have thought the horse would have bolted and pursued the wind
it sweated blood and the foam at its mouth resembled pearls
then all of a sudden it stumbled and we fell in a heap and i was hurt
why is it that often when we are at our most exalted we humiliate ourselves

now i am brought home injured and will rest in bed
i should pay more attention to my age and declining health
instead i went for a gallop pell-mell and at my age injured myself
now my friends and family come to visit me in my embarrassment

supported by my servants i force myself to rise and greet
after all the hullabaloo dies down i am forced to laugh at myself
my friends support me down to a pleasant place on the bend of the clear river
thoughtfully wine and meat are again piled up as though a mountain

until finally with the sun sinking in the west we know time does not wait for us
then another shouts that we should think of nothing but emptying our mugs
oh, why do these people come to honor a man who foolishly injured myself
when such a good man as xi-kang who wrote about good health was rewarded with execution

murphy stumbling home past the gossiping neighbors
12/29/2008 2:13 PM

von zach XVI,41

a servant boy brings fruit

the small hawthorn fruit and the pears remain green
and the plums and apricots are only half-ripe
the servant boy emerges from my hidden garden
he bears ripe crab-apples in his light basket

here mountain winds blow down much fruit but he still finds some
i must eat them quickly while they still carry the dew of the morning
this traveller of the lakes and streams lies on his cushion
these fruits will bring him pleasure for the next several months

murphy plowing his quarter acre garden in a cold vermont spring
12/31/2008 9:29 AM

von zach XVI,42

the agar gelatin made from leaves of the pagoda tree

the leaves of the high pagoda tree are delightfully deep green
i pick them myself to hand over the best for the cook
fresh flour to be used is brought from the nearby market
it and the juice of the pulped leaves is mixed with some shreds

this mixture is put into a kettle and cooked slowly for a long while
when i begin to eat this food hardly any is ever left over
the green and the fresh agar glisten on the chopsticks
and is to be eaten with aromatic rice and fresh sprouts

after cooling this dish shocks with the surprise of ice
i recommend this dish to everyone as a tidbit of pearls
i would like to bring this dish to the emperor and his court
preferably riding in state on a fiery steed as i bring it to give

i know that in this world my idea is foolish
but i cannot get the notion out of my mind
to be able to offer this to the court and the emperor
this small bit of green magnificence to show our loyalty

in the distant capital of chang-an ice is kept in jade jugs
it would be just the thing to cool the dish properly
when the emperor enjoys the evening breeze in the summer
he should understand how enjoyable this dish would be

murphy demonstrating to his son how to cook river-camp food
12/31/2008 3:28 PM

von zach XVI,43

my garden

in the second summer month the river is still at high water
in the early morning i proceed to my small garden
the green floods are wide as i row my boat to the site
red fruit hangs down in abundance and is almost overripe

originally i bought this garden because of the views
and i still greatly prefer the quietude of here to the bustling market
vegetable beds surround the small straw hut used for the tools
this produce is more than enough for me to set a tasty table

murphy the gentleman farmer picking seeds from the catalog for next summer's crop
12/31/2008 3:36 PM

von zach XVI,44

i return from the vegetable garden

after tightening my belt i return home on horseback
riding along the shore of the river from the east to the west
i come to the small clearing where my hut is found
although it is a bit beyond the gorges one still sees but little sky

hermits who bask in the sunshine of the mountains find peace
in the dark low places one is beset with worries of the world
and when one spends his old age in a foreign land
one needs to hold on to poetry to lighten one's burdens

murphy still scribbling his way to sanity
1/2/2009 9:41 AM

von zach XVI,45

i climb the hill behind my garden

in midsummer the heat often becomes overpowering
so my habit is to walk early in the morning in the north woods
my small garden lies at the foot of a high mountain
i use the hanging plants as hand holds when i scramble up the slope

after a while the wide view pleases my eye
a brisk wind flutters within my loose garments
fish who wish to remain hidden do not like a fast current
migrating birds seek shelter deep in the woods

the value of the world lies not in its great expanses
a small place on the side of a mountain is safe from the riots
here there are many shi-yuan trees which grow all over the empire
in times of famine their bark is eaten by everyone to tide them over

since i climbed lung mountain in gan-su ten years ago
i have spent my time on many such green mountains
i came over the sword gate mountains to reach the wu gorges
and here where i stay i am continually overwhelmed by mountains

my old native country continues to be oppressed by riots
the homes of my blood relations have all been obliterated
in these dangerous times i have no news of my family
the older i get the more wistful i become

a gifted, competent man regrets dying without achieving success
and to stay away from his home for very long requires much money
how can i whistle contentedly as hermit sun-deng did in the su-men mountains
i only wish to sing one sad song like ju-ge-liang did on mount ling-fu

murphy determined to wring his hands in despair
1/2/2009 10:06 AM

von zach XVI,46

the commemorative temple of ju-ge-liang

i have long walked the area around kui-zhou
and often find myself revisiting the temple for ju-ge-liang
the sun falls behind the bamboo at the rear of the sacrificial hall
the wind coming from the rivers billows through the thin curtains

for rulers and ministers to succeed they must cooperate
sagacity and power must always be linked together
in truthful admiration ju-ge-liang joined liu-bei
and waged successful campaigns to re-unite the han dynasty

the painted walls of the temple have been undermined by digging reptiles
magicians seem to move drunkenly behind thick spider webs
suddenly i am reminded of the liang-fu song of ju-ge-liang's youth
in his old age he still plowed his own fields as he continued to sing it

murphy at the age of 71 belting out the columbus stockade blues
1/2/2009 10:23 AM

von zach XVI,47

my younger brother du-guan leaves for shen-si to meet his wife (1 of 2)

you leave now for shen-si to meet your bride
you say you might return later this autumn
it is near the end of summer and luminous beetles abound
i hope you come back when the wild geese move south

i look to the east to see the everflowing waters of the big river
when you return from the south i will have my gate wide open
then we can find a quiet apartment for you in jiang-ling
there i am sure we can find a few drinking friends

murphy reeling home from the new year's party
1/3/2009 9:52 AM

von zach XVI,48

my younger brother du-guan leaves for shen-si to meet his wife (2 of 2)

the chu gorges are difficult to get through
try not to stay too long there in lan-tian
take care and keep the cold dew off your garments
and be sure to urge your horse to move quickly

if the waters in the gorges is not too high
i will try to sail in the eighth month to jiang-ling
then we can have a blast drinking together there
probably the best place for that would be the tower of wang-can

murphy anxious as usual for the festivities to begin
1/3/2009 9:59 AM

von zach XVI,49

the wandering master zhang-wang returns to his work on the improvement of the irrigation of the rice fields

in the extreme east of si-chuan not far from kui-zhou
by the shores of the big river are hundreds of acres as level as a table
in the sixth month the area is busy with the rice paddies
more than a thousand fields are watered with the floods

the cuttings have almost all been planted by then
there remains only the opening of the gates of irrigation
there master wang incessantly oversees the plowing of the fields
and makes sure the square walls are prepared for the inundation with water

both state fields and private fields receive the gift of the waters
so all are content with their possessions and do not fear a drought
i asked master zhang-wang about his work as he left
and from his description i clearly saw the work being done in the fields

the paddies must be luxuriantly green like kingfisher wings
the rice grows thickly together like the stars in the milky way
gulls are attracted and see their reflection on the water surface
the mountains and passes are also seen reflected in the fields

when the rice grains form their black grains in the fall
they are reaped and threshed to form shining pearls
the white grains are very good when eaten in the morning
the rougher, reddish grains i toss away as useless

here because of the good work of zhang-wang food is abundant
after all that is the reward of all the hard work in the fields
after the first harvest the people are allowed to glean from the stubble
by this time my storage rooms are full to overflowing with food

murphy on especially good terms with the local butcher
1/3/2009 10:20 AM

von zach XVI,50

in the rays of the setting sun

i stand to the north of the palace of duke xiang of chu
it is the time of the very beginning of dusk
i look to the west toward the bo-di-cheng fortress
the rain has moved to there and is fading out

the rays of the falling sun irradiate the stream
shadows of the rocks undulate with the waves
the clouds returning to the mountains gather over the woods
no longer am i able to see the villages in the heights

i consider my senile decrepitude and my lung illness
there is nothing i am capable of rather than keep to my bed
here in this border land in this time of rioting
i am in the habit of closing my gate quite early on

one can not stay out long in the country here
the tigers and the leopards are often prowling around
i find myself in the southern regions like once did chu-yuan
however no second song-yu calls my soul to return

murphy bemoaning his feeble body and its inevitable decay
1/3/2009 2:12 PM

von zach XVI,51

the yan-yu-dui rock at the entrance of the ju-tang gorge

now in the summer the yan-yu-dui rock is almost submerged
a tip still shows, but its vast presence lies deep beneath the surface
the mass of water pouring in from the west is overpowering
i have been especially saddened by this heavy rainy season

i look out to the blurred juncture of the stream and the sky
several pairs of water birds are flying here and there
the roar of wind and rain seems to never let up
the dragons within the mighty floods hiss incessantly

skippers of the barges sing out after passing the narrows
fishermen look back again and smile at the dangers they have passed
merchants and travelers from turkestan pour out their tears
they have escaped the rock and now have thoughts of returning home

i have sage words of advice for young people wishing to travel
it is dangerous indeed to travel the river gorges to si-chuan
do not imagine your salt is easily won from the salt wells
nor is hard earned money wrested from a life without peril

murphy resigned to the sedentary contemplative life of old age
1/5/2009 9:54 AM

von zach XVI,52

in the third month of summer i give this poem to du shao a young friend from the village, and
escort him at the start of his journey to the home of my uncle du-hong-jian near the court in
chang-an

you my friend have been like a brother to me
yet you are also an official in the water ministry
though the post has only a small dignity
you belong to the family reaching back to du-ling

the minister du-hong-jian was posted here only recently
he was sent to pacify the province of si-chuan
after his service here he has passed through shen-si
and has now returned to a place in the court at chang-an

there you will discuss with him whether to give up your office
and agree to serve him as a trusted military adviser
remember that he who serves his ruler with loyalty
will soon carry precious stones and a gold seal in his belt

do not tarry on the way to be caught up in a chill autumn
the house crickets chirp their song which such portends
i trust you will prosper in the future you decide
i look forward to seeing your portrait in the unicorn gallery of chang-an

murphy watching the young heroes assume their proper place
1/5/2009 11:53 AM

von zach XVI,53

songs of kui-zhou, ten short stanzas (1 of 10)

in the eastern regions of cenral ba province
the ba-dong mountains stand in their majesty
but waters of the big river have broken through them
the yang-zi flows through gorges carved from the rocks

the bo-di-cheng fortress commands the heights of the three gorges
it is by far the most important strategical point in the region
therefore the position of the town of kui-zhou near this pass
is far more important than the position of the lao pass in shen-si

murphy studying his geography in the seventh grade
1/5/2009 3:34 PM

von zach XVI,54

songs of kui-zhou, ten short stanzas (2 of 10)

there is a town at the site of the bo-di-cheng fortress
there is another separate town nearby at kui-zhou
indeed, the qu-tang and xi-ling gorges are separate
though they both are usually called the qu-tang gorges

brave gong-sun-shu seized this place for his kingdom
but that reality was not accepted by the heavens
in order for anyone to rule over a large area successfully
they must first and foremost capture the sympathy of the people

murphy always seeking the background at any event
1/6/2009 9:23 AM

von zach XVI,55

songs of kui-zhou, ten short stanzas (3 of 10)

i have learned that in earlier dynasties the area of kui-zhou
was often attacked by strong men who wished to take it for themselves
it is only under the current dynasty that the local people have become loyal
they have no wish for any other ruler than the accepted emperor

it caused me to wonder when recently an-lu-shan rebelled
that he thought he could capture the sympathy of this region
here in si-chuan one can hear in the old music of the loyalty of the people
and how this arose at the time of the blossoming of the tang dynasty

murphy reading the early history of ireland to understand its rebellious ways
1/6/2009 9:34 AM

von zach XVI,56

songs of kui-zhou, ten short stanzas (4 of 10)

the chi-jia mountain reaches high to the sky
so indeed does the bo-yan stretch its peak upward
villages lie upon the sides of both mountains
they exist from the bottom hills to the very top of the peaks

maple woods and orange gardens are interspersed around
their colors mix to resemble the colors in a painting
galleries and palaces exist over and under each other
they remind of hung brocades and embroideries

murphy always searching for a pleasant vista
1/6/2009 9:45 AM

von zach XVI,57

songs of kui-zhou, ten short stanzas (5 of 10)

both to the east and to the west of the nang river
there live countless families in many villages
to the north and south of the stream
one can see flowers in winter as well as in spring

indeed when the young cranes fly away south
they leave behind the most marvelous blooms
the young ducks who follow seek the water plants
in order that they can feed there on the sprouts

murphy bewildered by the weather at christmas in miami
1/6/2009 9:53 AM

von zach XVI,58

songs of kui-zhou, ten short stanzas (6 of 10)

the rice fields to the eastern flats stretch wide
they cover over one hundred acres of land
the torrents of water come down from the north
they flow to fill the ching-miao lake

when there is fine weather one sees gulls everywhere
bathing themselves lazily in the calm waters
every morning a refreshing rain comes down
it is the gift of the spirit of the wu mountain

murphy as animistic in his beliefs as christian
1/6/2009 10:39 AM

von zach XVI,59

songs of kui-zhou, ten short stanzas (7 of 10)

the flax of si-chuan is brought here to trade
it is most often exchanged with the salt of wu
many huge boats come crowding to the docks
they unload and reload with lightning speed

the old skippers are a hardworking lot
they are not often heard singing out
they while away their days on the river
counting up the money they have made

murphy bored with his business associates
1/7/2009 9:29 AM

von zach XVI,60

songs of kui-zhou, ten short stanzas (8 of 10)

i remember back when i was in chang-an
how the people came together at the marketplace
i visited there often to see the wares
i especially lingered over the landscape paintings

at that time i became acquainted with valuable screens
and among the most striking were those of the yang-zi gorges
today though as i look out over these green precipitous mountains
i wonder only where might lie the ruins of the palace of the prince of chu

murphy thinking how difficult life was before refrigeration
1/8/2009 9:52 AM

von zach XVI,61

songs of kui-zhou, ten short stanzas (9 of 10)

between the mythical lang-feng and xuan-pu mountains
and peng-hu island in the eastern sea, all places of the immortals
i wonder if the gao-tang balcony still exists
it is said to have had no equal in all the world

i have asked everyone in kui-zhou who might know
and i think i have discovered where the balcony lies
it occupied the corner of the town wall along the shore
it overlooked the entrance to the yang-zi gorges

murphy exploring the dim rooms of the alamo in san antonio
1/8/2009 10:03 AM

von zach XVI,62

songs of kui-zhou, ten short stanzas (10 of 10)

i will always remember one magnificent shrine in kui-zhou
it is the commemorative temple of the marquis zhu-ge-liang
there one may find magnificent cypress and spruce
old and stately they tower to touch the sky

i fled here to escape the riots enveloping the land
here in this temple i have been able to assuage my grief of exile
even when the day is hot and the sun burns like fire
under these regal trees is an especially cool and calm atmosphere

murphy finding repose in the shade resting from the days labors
1/8/2009 10:13 AM

von zach XVI,63

i send the following poem to my maternal uncle cui-ching, with a request to restore the delapidated statue of zhu-ge-liang in his commemorative temple

it is auspicious when a worthy man assumes high office
it is anticipated that his deeds will make him famous
it makes little difference whether his term is temporary
or whether it becomes permanent, his deeds will matter

so i draw your attention to an honored commemorative temple
it is that of zhu-ge-liang in the western outskirts of kui-zhou
his statue is in disrepair and has even lost its head
it is disrespectful that he cannot look out on the shore of the big river

murphy not believing in an afterlife but hedging his bets
1/8/2009 11:11 AM

von zach XVI,64

again i climb the hillside behind my garden

when i was young i climbed the eastern slope of tai mountain
i am reminded of my happy days in the southern part of the tai-shan
at the end of autumn i stood on ri-guan point
with head held high i looked out on all eight of the world areas

the pearl cliffs of hainan rose in the south sea like fine hair
the wind of the green eastern sea billowed my garments like sails
the spirit of autumn was quite tired by this time
the spirit of winter was cheekily making itself known

the water flowing to the east beckoned me toward the sea
the main mountains of the nine provinces could be seen clearly
at the time central china was in especially poor shape
the farmers had abandoned their fields and mulberry trees

it wasn't damage to the land by wind and storm
everyone had to leave to fight on the borders
at that time the imperial treasury was bountiful
and the cost of border defense was sustainable

but unfortunately the court chose bellicose generals
who made hostile all who lived beyond the border
so today the relationships of china with other peoples are tortured
and the old officials who understand pour rivers of tears

here in kui-zhou i can no longer visit kui and meng mountains
i was fond of visiting there but now i am left only with thoughts of home
my lung illness is exacerbated by my fear of the fighting
my grief causes me not to eat and my bones protrude

today the pain i feel over the destiny of the dynasty
causes me to recomb the mountain behind my garden
there i see birds and monkeys have succumbed to the toxic miasma
caused by the drying of the gorges and the sun shining fiercely

even when the cooling autumn winds begin to blow
it remains as hot as cooking water here in kui-zhou
i have climbed to this high place and cannot go further
the streams without bridges separate me from my goal

i grieve for the people who must fight far from their home
leaving family behind and dying here by the side of the road
they will not see again the graves of their fathers
and they will not be buried alongside their ancestors

murphy tonguing a sore tooth
1/12/2009 9:13 AM

von zach XVI,65

night rain

a fine rain comes down again at night
a whirlwind blows the mist in my face
by the closed gate the coolness of the forest penetrates
the swollen stream carries a row of laden ships

like former court officials i am angered by my continued illness
and as yuan-wai-lang i am shamed by my inability to get home
when the weather gets colder i will again attempt to leave the gorges
i stand tonight on the balcony of wang-can in the diffuse moonlight

murphy staring off into the distance once again
1/12/2009 9:26 AM

von zach XVI,66

again in the night rain

i must wait here only until at least the first snow
then i can ride a horse on the road from jing-zhou
what i fear now is the continual rain in these wu mountains
i am afflicted by this autumn in bo-di-cheng

in chang-an now the officials put on their their jade pendants
heaven's son wears his fur with the blue cloud ornaments
my old colleagues hurry to the early morning audience
why, oh why, am i held back here so far away

murphy indulging himself with dreams of the past
1/12/2009 9:37 AM

von zach XVI,67

the narrowness of the gorges

in this season the horizon in xiang-ling can be seen again
now one may watch clouds join with the sandy shore far away
the white fish there are as pale as white jade
and red oranges can be had for little money

on the shore of those distant lakes there are beautiful trees
but my ship continues to be moored in kui-zhou not there
in my internal eye i see far on both sides of the river in xiang-ling
while here i can see only the sky high above the gorges

murphy beating his chest in frustration
1/13/2009 9:35 AM

von zach XVI,68

it is autumn and i send zhang-wang to supervise the weeding of the rice fields in the village to the east. the work is nearly finished, i send my slave a-ji and my servant a-duan to find how the work goes.

now the fields of the eastern flood plain are flooded by the rains
and i can almost taste the fresh new rice which is growing
but heaven is impartial in its radiant beneficence
not only the rice is growing but also reeds and weeds

these are most often seen by the farmers as enemies
for they choke off the food bearing rice plants
so the farmers go to work with great diligence
destroy the weeds and throw them on the edge of the fields

the nutritious grains of rice are the basis of life
how can i possibly forget that here away from home
since the beginning of spring i have had my fields worked
and by constant weeding i hope to prevent a bad harvest

a water buffalo uses its great strength without a thought
my pair are always in the field and nothing resists their efforts
verdant sprouts are already everywhere to be seen
the rainwater gleams in the square reservoirs of water

the weeds also grow excessively by the sides of the paddies
so special exertions must be ordered to control this effusion
there is an official, zhang-wang who is charged with this task
and his strict orders are to make sure it is done properly

here in the region of the big river the climate is warm
and one waits with longing for the first cooling of autumn
yet i feel there might be problems with this weeding
and there might be still more work to be done

so i sent my two minions early this morning with my concerns
they must travel over several high hills to reach the paddies
but it is not all for me, i give freely to my neighbors
i have much more than enough to fill my barn for the winter

for then the north wind will blow through the stubble
and the cricket will chirp in the middle hall
then all the field work will done and over
and i will be once more merely a year older again

murphy the husband of all that he sees
1/13/2009 2:26 PM

von zach XVI,69

i am held back in bo-di-cheng by the rain and prevented from checking on my orange trees in nang-xi

the long hot days of summer are finally over
and now the sultry humidity has turned into a soaking rain
so i cannot return to my orange fields in nang-xi
the swollen streams prevent my traveling there

my old boat has disintegrated into splinters
the steep shores of the gorges extend for many miles
it is only now that rowers have again reached this port
the high waters and the danger chill my heart

i sit filled with longing in this place to the east of kui-zhou
i look up with sadness at the freedom of the birds high in the winds
yet my straw hall in nang-xi resembles a residence for immortals
and it is not far from the xuan-pu gardens in the kun-lun mountains

opacity of the air makes my straw hall seem far away
the high clouds have come down to separate us more
when the oranges in my garden are at the height of ripeness
they truly resemble golden orbs of precious gold

in this fief of old the emperor measured the worth of land
in multiples of the tribute of a thousand orange trees
so the people of this area grew no other crops
they feared the wrath of the violent under-officials

being a temporary presence i planted these trees as a stranger
though i delight in the winds rustling the leaves both day and night
these trees remind me of the five pastures of tao-yuan-ming
and ultimately disappoint for even they cannot ease my heart

i want this endless rain to leave and sunshine return
then i could climb into the mountains slowly using my cane
and i could estimate the number of the green fruit on the trees
and walk back to rest by the grassy shore of the nang river

i would like to dust off my black leather chair to sit upon
and listen again to the songs of the lumberjacks and shepherds
then i would call for my son to come to comfort me
he could scratch my back and loosen my tightly pinned hair

murphy indulging himself in his dotage
1/14/2009 9:39 AM

von zach XVI,70

my hut

on my boat i proceed upstream to my hut in nang-xi
i turn to shore after both cliff walls of the ju-tang gorge
in the east at bo-di-cheng dry weather predominates
the heat there reminds of the flames of firewood

the glare of the harsh sun pummels the mountain ranges
the reflection spreads throughout the valleys
the big river twines through the crags at the base of the cliffs
it hurries toward the sea to which it everlasting unites

here it forces its way through by digging deeply into the earth
while the surrounding walls seem cleaved by mighty swords
here the approach of autumn darkens the prevailing mood
a murky smoke surrounds, bedims the solar chariot

here the entrance at the beginning of the gorges is narrow
it permits the passage of only one oared craft at a time
da-yu's commendable work improved nature's creation
he bored a canal through the precipitous mountains

this canal has been here since the oldest of times
everything passing to or from si-chuan must line up here
the smoke whipped by the wind connects the lands of wu and shu
boats bring giang-si salt and si-chuan hemp to kui-zhou

here i am only a vagabond wandering in remote areas
in my travels i have become mired in ordure and sand
all living beings are born with their own special character
i wish for little and have no need for riches or luxury

a reed roof covers this hut where a single bed stands
close by is a pond surrounded by many flowers
murky wine and unshelled rice are by my side
without them i would have need for many sighs

here in these desolate mountains are only a few people
in this remote area both days and nights are fine
povety and illness have become my constant companions
seeking neither wealth nor fame in life i accept what life offers

yet i have become old in these times of continual rioting
but i am fortunate this hut is concealed by thick weeds
above a chaos of rocks gives birth to clouds
while green coniferous woods invite the moonlight

i enjoy the beauty of this spot and consider myself lucky to be here
i feel at peace with the dao though i do not boast of that
i could spend the rest of my life in this place
though i cannot count myself in the class of the exalted hermits

i seal these verses which describe my simple life of these last years
while i look out over the evening clouds which have not yet disappeared

murphy holed up in his room typing away
1/16/2009 11:31 AM

von zach XVI,71

the orange grove

after i have left my boat i climb the hill west of nang-xi
i walk into the orange grove and loosen my garments to relax
the horse has plenty of grass for it to forage for a while
the birds settle down recognizing a returning friend

the morning rays light up the distant mountain caves
the evening dew evaporates in the warming sun
as one gets older one eats and sleeps only a little
one is glad to find pure freedom in a paltry hut

after all my experiences i've had enough of the big world
in this small wilderness there is nothing that chafes
if you were to ask whether i eat goosefoot greens and beancurd
i would answer that i do not wish anymore for rich furs nor fast horses

hubbub and rest follow one another throughout the wider world
but home alone one may follow one's own internal rhythms
one needs not a shining breastplate of a gate to a noble home
do not despise the trifling appearance of this rude hut

tomorrow i go to the neighboring village to visit
the elders there are mostly a congenial lot for such as i
though when times are bad the taxes are always taken
so i hand over my share of this crude rice i have

together with my friends i visit the bean fields
the autumn blossoms are quite fragrant
one cannot eat the small pods there, however
they are sold at market and the proceeds sent to the emperor

everything is collected for the benefit of the army
the officials force the farmers to give up everything
the owner of the field kneels before me and asks
when will the imperial army finish its fighting

in my frailness i am easily moved to grief, i count on my fingers
how many times chang-an has been surrounded by the rebels
i advise him it would be best to remain loyal til death
to remain steadfast in his service and not to flee

murphy a member of the loyal opposition
1/16/2009 1:44 PM

von zach XVI,72

i walk in my garden to recover from my illness

i do not like to walk in town these days
since the people there are always questioning
while i am around my small hut
my neighbors are never annoyed with me

with my age and illness i avoid all formalities
the receiving of guests and visiting tires my mind
in the quiet village on the shore of the stream i am free
my heart takes pleasure from the trees in the woods

normally in autumn the prepared fields are very wet
the rains off the mountains deliver a proper amount of water
now winter turnips are grown as a substitute for rice
and the water buffaloes are at their peak of strength

i have planted winter turnips under a deep plowing
and this way i keep up with the labor of my neighbors
but i am not limited to this one crop and sow other seeds
i try all possible vegetables which can grow at this time

in the areas of jing and wu it is not very cold
so one may have a variety of vegetables at all times
i have just seen two white cranes fly up from the field
i go to pick a salad out of the mud as an evening meal

suddenly the left wing of one of the cranes hangs down
the muscles have been sorely torn and injured
he flutters along on the ground dripping blood
he fears the second arrow will kill him outright

within three steps he has visibly worsened
in his desperation he cries out repeatedly
because his friend the phoenix has abandoned him
he raises his neck and clamors his grief to the sky

i lean on my cane and stare at the scene on the sandy shore
i am moved to tears by the bird's tragic fate

murphy at one with nature's ways
1/20/2009 9:43 AM

von zach XVI,73

the moon after rain

for many days the rains have not stopped in the wu mountains
now finally on this night the milky way is seen once again
when he cannot see the moon above these green mountain ranges
this old white-haired man is assaulted with sadness

the mountain goblins fear the light and now move back in the woods
the lunar toad is seen again on the waxing half moon
my old home in chang-an lies below the northern bushel
i wish nothing else but that this moon shines there also

murphy visiting the old homestead engraved in his memory
1/20/2009 9:55 AM

von zach XVI,74

watching fireflies

in the wu mountains little fireflies fly around
especially they are everywhere on autumn nights
my bamboo blinds are open and they fly into my room
some even manage to light upon my clothes

it startles me and and i notice afresh that it is autumn
i reach out to touch books and the lute, all cold
i look out to see other fireflies flitting in the air
they mix delightfully with the sparkling stars

i notice also they float out above the balustrade
and their reflections glint back from the surface of the pond
willy-nilly they flit among the flowers
illuminating them by chance with their flashes of light

this old white head lives by the shore of the stream
and watches their delightful flight with sadness and distress
my thoughts once again turn to my native country
and if i can return there again next year at this time

murphy as a child in austin dancing with the lightning bugs
1/20/2009 10:16 AM

von zach XVI,75

forty rhymes sent to governor liu-bo-hua from xia-zhou

the gorges of the yang-zi are filled with clouds and rain
this autumn brings in a sombre muggy atmosphere
your xia-zhou mountains overlook bo-di-cheng where i am
the deep waters of the yang-zi reach you in yi-ling

in spite of my advanced age i prosper here in kui-zhou
i still think of myself as one of your old friends
a melancholy monkey is anxious in his seat
a wild goose cannot fly against the strongest headwinds

i sit on my cushion and think of you as a marvelous tree
i look out my window to see the brilliant star you are
your character as the dark green spruce does not wilt in the winter
the emerald sea becomes more clear as it becomes greater

during our early years learned men governed the world
noble scholars were valued and most highly rewarded
both my house and yours were esteemed and honored
public opinion gave to them deference and exceptional praise

the empress wu held sway in a powerful way
many talents rose through the ranks without interruption
after the mountain goblins were expelled from the officials
the scholars swam to the top near the imperial throne

they were regaled at the imperial banquets with jugs of spring wine
the imperial mercy provided them with ice as they sat on summer mats
they wrote poetry with the five colored paintbrush of jiang-yan
in the inner sanctuary nine-colored lamps shined on imperial parties

they understood the teachings of lu-zhao-lin and wang-bo
their calligraphy was modelled on qu-sui-liang and xie-ji
you my good friend do not take second place before them
only i, an unimportant child, did not continue the fame of my forefathers

recently you have written marvelous poems of the moon over these gorges
i asked for them to be sent to me only a short time ago
in them one recognizes a fiery battle horse urged to go forward
one feels the wildness of the falcon with flared, flapping wings

why did the scrolls of your poems come so late into my hands
seeing them earlier in my life would have consoled much of my grief
now i will pore over them and the more often i sing them
the more completely will my ice of exile be melted away

who would not be overcome by the artistic elaboration on their first reading
the intricate small details combine to speak a beauty for the whole
your brush possesses a miraculous strength of movement
you have prevailed over others by avoiding the inferior modern forms

one does not perceive the sweat of effort in your work
your art is sublime and tops that of all other poets of today
as a white haired old man i am filled with grief as i read your work
few poets have such an appreciation of history as you

i think back to our earlier cheerful times together
at that time the struggling words of the poets put me to sleep
now the bloom of our youth has faded for good
and the raw world has exiled us both to si-chuan

you as a governor have the dignity of a feudal prince
while i as a ministerial secretary am a lonely star in the sky
i live far away from a cloud tower, a second pan-yo
while you, another huang-pa, expect further favors

hungry scavengers yowl in their need for food
hungry squirrels complain how little has fallen from the plants
yet i still have my bag of medicine from the taoist priest
the tibetan one who predicts another forthcoming world disaster

because of excessive use the finish of my black table is broken
because i have few hairpins my white silk cap is not worn formally
in my hut in the woods i study the swarming ant-hills
when i eat there i must wait for what the fisherman catch with nets

i have noted my energies in all ways seem to be decreasing
though here far from the imperial court i have no challenges from others
my earlier colleagues have all advanced in their service
while i am like huan-tan forever an under-official of liu-an

the fresh bought mercury is contained in its new container
the cooked elixir of life becomes cooler bit by bit as it is used
i think less on the world's problems and more on extending my own life
i do not worry about much like the man of qi thinking of the sky's collapse

i wish only to strengthen my body and make congruent my mind
you must use your military strength to defeat the rebels
by caring for my health i wish only to harbor my resources
while you must extend the enormity of your energy in destruction

in administrative affairs i am content with a background role
in the area of poetry i am ashamed i still try my hand at chanting verse
to express my feelings i seal prize songs to honor the ruler of lu
because of my illness i have had to cut back my indulgence in wine

instead of emulating yin-hao by only writing the signs of my verse on the air
i wish to be like the stork who flies far away to escape from the arrows
in the area of the river and the lakes there are many pure white birds
who fly to this wilderness to escape the pesky blowflies

murphy poking the sore tooth of his lack of fame

1/21/2009 2:22 PM

von zach XVI,76

the staw hut by the water

the straw covered hut stands at the edge of the water
its rustic gate of brushwood is never closed
at night fish and dragons hide beneath the dark water
as the autumnal moon brings silver to the mountains

there has been a heavy dew this night, welcome after the long drought
the clouds drift thinly far over head, not yet returned to the mountains
i am ashamed when i look out and see young women rowing their boats
their men are gone, their fatiguing work steals the youth from their faces

murphy resolute in his solitude
1/21/2009 2:40 PM

von zach XVI,77

the returning moon

the moon climbs behind the wu mountains pouring forth its rays
it looks down upon the clear floods of the yang-zi flowing through si-chuan
here away from home i am continually overcome with grief
for two years i have watched its return here to kui-zhou

we must observe the regularity of this climbing and sinking disc
it well knows when it should appear and when it should vanish
tonight i wait until the milky way has also disappeared
it joins the moon in setting in the yu-sheng sign of the zodiac

murphy pondering the difference between astrology and astronomy
1/21/2009 2:57 PM

von zach XVI,78

gazing at the moon on the night of the seventeenth

the moon in the middle of autumn is still round
i, an old man, sit in the village by the stream
opening the window illuminates this wanderer once more
i go for a walk with my cane and the silver light follows

this piercing light surely causes the water monsters to stir
the brightness certainly bothers the birds in the branches
my hut stands close by orange and pomelo trees
silver light of the moon sparkling on the fruit's fresh dew

murphy the old man sleepless again
1/22/2009 10:18 AM

von zach XVI,79

sparkling dew

sparkling dew gathers as iridescent drops on the oranges
i ride out in the early morning light to experience their beauty
already from a distance i see the trees of my orchard
near the place i moor my boat under the overhanging rock

sitting at a small table i observe the leaping play of small fish
much later, as the birds begin to roost i hasten to return home
i look forward to eating the fruit later in the season
but i have a niggling fear that many will by then be eaten by others

murphy anxious as ever for the harvest of his ideas
1/22/2009 10:27 AM

von zach XVI,80

the two brothers meng

a marvelous brotherly pair are the two mister mengs
they tend a small garden of produce to support their mother
to please her they work until they have thick calluses on hands and feet
as i pass by they invite me, a stranger, to share a meal with them

they travel a goodly distance to bring rice for their mother each evening
they often sit and read books under the trees in the autumn
i am surprised that their mother has asked me to educate her sons
she has given me a copy of meng-zi with which to begin

murphy hearing himself pontificate as only a retired teacher can
1/22/2009 10:39 AM

von zach XVI,81

i send my servant out to collect burdock root

autumn is well advanced in the region of the big river
but in the woods the warm mists still hang on
the gardener reports a lack of green vegetables
he has no plants to provide this food for my meals

as i think about it only the weeds are not completely dried up
and wild vegetation still sprouts on the edges of the springs
the burdock plant grows all over and is effective against rheumatism
my servant knows where to collect some as a substitute for finer food

in the early morning before the break of full day i send him out
he should go deep into the woods and bring back the best of fresh burdock
at noon he returns and gives me a full basket of these greens
after the roots are cleaned and peeled they are covered with a cloth and cooked

after they are properly done they are served on a platter
they are eaten with chopsticks and bring health with their consumption
they are often served stirred in a melon or onion dish
where they serve the same purpose as orange peels as a spice

now in these troubled times with its severely high taxes
even the local people have difficulty finding unpeeled rice
what is one to do to find food to eat in such times
how terrible it makes me feel to have some luxuries in life

in the kitchens of the rich much meat is left over to rot
while bones are bleached by the sun on the battlefields
i am moved to give sage advice to the young people around
they must be sparing in the use of their resources at this time

murphy fearing the great depression of the thirties is returning
1/22/2009 12:43 PM

von zach XVI,82

i pattern the following verse on the song of chong-ling by yuan-jie governor of dao-zhou

introduction: after i had read the "song of chong-ling" of yuan-jie and his poem "after retreat of the rebels i show these verses to the under-officials", i wrote on the manuscript the following words:

in a region where you accept the worries of the government for the emperor you should strive to be a competent official as were found in the han times. now where the riots are not yet suppressed and we know the needs of the people we need a dozen men such as you, and should make them all provincial governors. then we could hope that harmony could return to all living beings and the empire would prosper. now i have read your fine poems in the rhythmic style of the shi-jing. i am moved to write a poem patterned on them which i show to my friends though chagrined at its being compared to yuan-jie.

as a result of the rioting my hair is completely white
the older i become the more sickness ravages me
just now during the rebellion i am confined to my bed
in this precarious condition i continue life in kui-zhou

because of my anxieties my medicines sometimes fail me
and here in my long exile i have also contracted lung disease
despite this i count myself one of the competent poets of the time
and i pride myself on the ability to recognize great verse

i look now on the work of yuan-jie governor of dao-zhou
with the reverence of the later born for their elders
when i finished reading your poem about chong-ling
i was struck by the deep feelings of a man of high standing

when i read again your poem on the retreat of the rebels
i knew that yuan-jie is a strong pillar of the empire
as once jia-yi when he admonished the throne about the state of the empire
or when kuang-heng quoted the classics in his writings on politics

both your poems remind one of the bright moon of autumn
and both of them carry the shining glitter of the brightest stars
you also show the greatest compassion for the indigenous peoples
and through it all your poetry's strength is overwhelming

you wish the empire to achieve again the glories of emperors yau and shun
and have the easy, naive times of shen-nong be restored to us
when will the emperor recognize the worth of this ambition
and issue the edict to offer you a powerful minister's post

you would bring about a silence to these interminable ills
and not only weapons would be laid aside and not used
you think with grief about the burdens of taxation
and that is why your model of management is that of antiquity

i also understand that you have no self-interest in your actions
you do not strive to wear a more and more gaudy uniform
a cold autumn storm has come over the giant heng mountain of hu-nan
there you report for your difficult task as governor of dao-zhou

you looked upon your imperial appointment with grief
for your thoughts were directed to the pure, quiet life of the hermit
whereas i suffer greatly from the illness of diabetes as did si-ma-xiang-ru
and long day and night for an appointment to the emperor's court

my lungs have dried up and my great thirst is never ending
in the end after all my wanderings i am bottled up here in bo-di-cheng
i instruct my son to bring me paper, ink, and brushes
i lean upon my desk and look out the window before me

while i sigh about my sufferings i write this poem
and send it to my friends in hope they share with me their views
though the characters are shaky and written with a pale ink
i have been affected greatly by yuan-jia's sad poems

murphy thunderstruck on his first reading of of larkin
1/23/2009 11:31 AM

von zach XVI,83

i send these verses to the former governor di-bo-ji

you are the grandson of di-ren-zhi, duke of liang-guo
you are also the son of the sister of my mother
i have not seen you for ten long years
while other bureaucrats have slowly risen in position

in the end it always seems that the sons of imminent men
are faced with the unenviable prospect of inevitable decline
in the long span of history from antiquity to the present time
it has nearly always come to pass that this is so

look only at the history of your forty uncles in the last generation
they all had talent but had no luck in civil service and did not advance
now there are upwards of a hundred of your brothers and cousins
how few of them stand out, only you and your older brother

you have attained your prominence with justification
your brush displays the feather of a soaring stylist
while your older brother has a remarkable talent
he stands out from his contemporaries as once did ma-liang

i would like to explain the history of your family
and will start with your great-grandfather di-ren-jie
he served in the time of empress wu-tai-hou
as is well known she was an inveterate schemer

di-ren-jie was to become her prime minister
this was during the time of her last few years
the murky huang-he was not to be dirtied in the end
and the pure water of the ji river was to prevail

for when the empress wanted to hand over her throne
and pass it onto a member of her family, wu-san-si
it was di-ren-jie alone who protested against the empress
in his desire to maintain the integrity of the tang dynasty

only then was it decided at the court to appoint lu-ling-wang,
who then was living in fang-ling, to become the crown prince
then all the old officials from the time of shong-zong
wept with joy at the legitimate solution of the thorny situation

for it was then that the inheritance of the tang empire
reverted back to the correct lineage of tai-zong
the legitimate authority of the ruling house
had the mandate of heaven and was no longer in doubt

in those difficult times one thing stands above all others
di-ren-jie was an extraordinary man among the officials
who would say to him that the sow's thistle is bitter
he found them as sweet as the little shepherd's pocket

so both contemporary di brothers should receive fiefs
as once was di-ren-jie awarded the fief of liang
so your family must again lead the nation forward
and for this the emperor should give you flags and halberds

why is it that you now walk the land without a home
there where you stay between the rivers han and min
and do not other governors visit with you
one after another imploring you for wise counsel

and everone here knows all too well of the difficulties
si-chuan is a land of high mountains and stormy waters
here there are the unceasing inhospitable fall winds
and every day the ground is covered with heavy dews

the hungry tigers come down from the heights at night
and terrible dragons rise from the clear bodies of water
you should return to your home as quickly as possible
the dust of wandering dirties your face and blinds your eyes

murphy cheering from the sidelines, too old to play
1/26/2009 8:44 AM

von zach XVI,84

sent to the imperial counsel han-hong

i am saddened when i think of the south side of heng mountain
i would like to rise to fly there but sickness keeps me in bed
there beyond the autumn waters stands the beloved person of beauty
bathing feet in the dung-ting lake and looking out on the world

like when the wild goose flying beneath the sun and moon of autumn
the leaves of the maple have turned crimson and snow fills the air
the rulers of the sky assemble in chang-an beneath the pole star
some ride there on the back of a unicorn, some on a phoenix

their shadows fall on dung-ting lake and the xiao and xiang rivers
the lords of the starry palace become drunk on the wine of the immortals
only a few of the great ones will be missing from this assembly
i am reminded that recently i thought of the hermit qi-song-zi

and from the han era there was the estimable zhang-liang
once he followed liu-bang to bring peace to the residence at chang-an
though his strategical plans were not brought to execution
how could he not be concerned with victory or defeat of the empire

he disdained meat and wine and lived on the balm of the maple
and one remembers with regret the holding back of si-ma-tan in zhou-nan

may another si-ma-tan be given the star of long life
oh ye men of splendor why am i kept here all alone
and why are they separated from you here by the big river
why are you not summoned to the august hall of jade

murphy touting others to do the necessary
1/26/2009 10:37 AM

von zach XVI,85

sent to cen-shen prefect of jia-zhou

for more than ten years i have not seen my old friend
during all this time we have not corresponded
but i have wished over and over to see you face to face
but unfortunately the way over the mountains is very far

who would have thought you as prefect of a province
would settle in jia-deng the town on the wen stream
the river wen where you will now be living
and the three gorges where i am are close neighbors

yet the way to go is still too far for me to travel
so we will not drink wine and share poems together
every poem of yours is like from a second xie-tiao
and as such are deserving to be sung by all

i, however, am old and only an inferior poet like feng-tang
and thus dependent on your praise to spread my work
your boat landed there in jia-deng in the autumn
and it has now become the beginning of spring

here i lie supported on my upholstered bolster in si-chuan
far from the green maples of the emperor's palace
what do i choose to send as a present to you now
why, this poem in lieu of two carp from kui-zhou

murphy reconnecting with his old class mates
1/26/2009 11:13 AM

von zach XVI,86

the song of general wei

in the past you have worn the uniform of a successful general
on your war steed you rode to battle, heavy reins in your hand
with the armor on your breast, sword in fist, you conquered the west
you crossed the kun-lun mountains and the area of the lunar caves

ten thousand brave warriors accompanied you in the battles
they were as wild as roaring tigers and you were their leader
you have become famous, shining lances bedeck your palace in chang-an
and you are now returned from kukunor with your sails full of wind

your youthful colleagues are all completely in awe of your energy
the men of chang-an are breathless with admiration for your success
you remind everyone of the autumn falcon of the giant hua mountain
the ornaments on your horse glitter with the sparkle of fine gems

if you were to ride the mythical sky horse over the milky way
the comets and fire stars of the rebels would not dare to move
many marvelous flags accompany you and press on each other
i sing for you the old song praising general ding in the liu-song dynasty

in the celebration you drunkenly thrust your sword into the ground
there you stand as cheering erupts near the xuan-wu gate
i hope you will serve ten thousand years and then another thousand autumns
how could anyone else other than you be called to service by the emperor

murphy watching the roaring of the crowd at the super bowl
1/26/2009 1:41 PM

von zach XVI,87

the yang-zi gorges in autumn

since antiquity the floods of the yang-zi have passed through the gorges
for a long time now i have lived as a dilapidated old man with lung sickness
i fear the wild tigers of this land and my sleep is troubled here
though i have become friendly with the young people of si-chuan

my white hair hangs down straggling over my garments
the maple trees fall on the desolate path before my gate
i think often of the four white heads who came down from the mountains
they chose to serve the crown prince; alas i am too sickly to even try

murphy bemoaning his decrepitude and lack of muscle tone
1/26/2009 1:50 PM

von zach XVI,88

evening

the cattle and sheep have long since returned from the mountains
the country people have all closed their hedge gates for the evening
the lunar light might improve with a fair wind but i cannot gauge it
this land is not my homeland and i have yet to master its ways

i hear the spring which flows out from the dark cliff wall
i know dew is forming to seep into the autumnal grass roots
the lamp's light is bright as it illuminates my sparse white hair
the wick is strong and foretells a change for the better for this old man

murphy looking for anything to elevate his hopes
1/26/2009 1:57 PM

von zach XVI,89

moonlight late at night

at three o'clock in the morning the moon appears over the mountains
at the end of the night my house is suddenly illuminated with silver
it is as if a dusty old mirror was carefully wiped clean with brilliance
it is as if the hook for the curtain was moved by the wind to rise by itself

the white hare of the moon might be jealous of my white hair
and the freezing lunar toad might wish my sable furs to keep warm
i think of the lonesome chang-o up there exposed on the moon
how can she endure there this cold weather of deep autumn

murphy sleepless yet again through the long night
1/26/2009 2:07 PM

von zach XVI,90

looking out in the morning

in the fortress of bo-di-cheng the night guard's gongs have gone silent
one can look out this morning and clearly see the red tip of yang-tai mountain
the sun seeks first the highest points to bring to bright life
while the tumbled ridges of the lower slopes still sleep in their darkness

the rivermen disappear gliding their way down the stream
it is so calm one can hear the falling of the leaves in the forest
i see a young deer walking just past my hedge gate
would that i could make her my friend, lonely as i am

murphy in his dotage still paying attention to his surroundings
1/26/2009 2:14 PM

von zach XVI,91

i say farewell to court secretary li who he lives in the shi-xing temple

as long as i did not visit secretary li i could contain my grief
but when i finally saw him sadness overwhelmed me
the fact that repose is the foundation of effective movement is irrefutable
to me your life's mind has become livelier in your time of rest

over and over again i heard you chanting the zhi-guan-jing sutra
i sat there maintaining my frail old body touched by the chilly breeze
my family waits for its rice so i must take leave and go home
on a future date i will come again and listen even more carefully to the sutra

murphy wondering yet again why his emotions are triggered as they are
1/26/2009 2:35 PM

von zach XVI,92