

Classic Poetry Series

Du Fu
- poems -

Publication Date:

2012

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Du Fu(712 - 770)

Du Fu was a prominent Chinese poet of the Tang Dynasty. Along with Li Bai (Li Bo), he is frequently called the greatest of the Chinese poets. His greatest ambition was to serve his country as a successful civil servant, but he proved unable to make the necessary accommodations. His life, like the whole country, was devastated by the An Lushan Rebellion of 755, and his last 15 years were a time of almost constant unrest.

Although initially he was little-known to other writers, his works came to be hugely influential in both Chinese and Japanese literary culture. Of his poetic writing, nearly fifteen hundred poems have been preserved over the ages. He has been called the "Poet-Historian" and the "Poet-Sage" by Chinese critics, while the range of his work has allowed him to be introduced to Western readers as "the Chinese Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Shakespeare, Milton, Burns, Wordsworth, Béranger, Hugo or Baudelaire".

Life

Traditionally, Chinese literary criticism has placed great emphasis on knowledge of the life of the author when interpreting a work, a practice which Watson attributes to "the close links that traditional Chinese thought posits between art and morality". Since many of Du Fu's poems prominently feature morality and history, this practice is particularly important. Another reason, identified by the Chinese historian William Hung, is that Chinese poems are typically extremely concise, omitting circumstantial factors that might be relevant, but which could be reconstructed by an informed contemporary. For modern Western readers, "The less accurately we know the time, the place and the circumstances in the background, the more liable we are to imagine it incorrectly, and the result will be that we either misunderstand the poem or fail to understand it altogether". Owen suggests a third factor particular to Du Fu, arguing that the variety of the poet's work required consideration of his whole life, rather than the "reductive" categorisations used for more limited poets.

Early Years

Most of what is known of Du Fu's life comes from his poems. His paternal grandfather was Du Shenyan, a noted politician and poet during the reign of Empress Wu. Du Fu was born in 712; the birthplace is unknown, except that it was near Luoyang, Henan province (Gong county is a favourite candidate). In later life, he considered himself to belong to the capital city of Chang'an,

ancestral hometown of the Du family.

Du Fu's mother died shortly after he was born, and he was partially raised by his aunt. He had an elder brother, who died young. He also had three half brothers and one half sister, to whom he frequently refers in his poems, although he never mentions his stepmother.

The son of a minor scholar-official, his youth was spent on the standard education of a future civil servant: study and memorisation of the Confucian classics of philosophy, history and poetry. He later claimed to have produced creditable poems by his early teens, but these have been lost.

In the early 730s, he travelled in the Jiangsu/Zhejiang area; his earliest surviving poem, describing a poetry contest, is thought to date from the end of this period, around 735. In that year, he took the civil service exam, likely in Chang'an. He failed, to his surprise and that of centuries of later critics. Hung concludes that he probably failed because his prose style at the time was too dense and obscure, while Chou suggests his failure to cultivate connections in the capital may have been to blame. After this failure, he went back to traveling, this time around Shandong and Hebei.

His father died around 740. Du Fu would have been allowed to enter the civil service because of his father's rank, but he is thought to have given up the privilege in favour of one of his half brothers. He spent the next four years living in the Luoyang area, fulfilling his duties in domestic affairs.

In the autumn of 744, he met Li Bai (Li Po) for the first time, and the two poets formed a friendship. David Young describes this as "the most significant formative element in Du Fu's artistic development" because it gave him a living example of the reclusive poet-scholar life to which he was attracted after his failure in the civil service exam. The relationship was somewhat one-sided, however. Du Fu was by some years the younger, while Li Bai was already a poetic star. We have twelve poems to or about Li Bai from the younger poet, but only one in the other direction. They met again only once, in 745.

In 746, he moved to the capital in an attempt to resurrect his official career. He took the civil service exam a second time during the following year, but all the candidates were failed by the prime minister (apparently in order to prevent the emergence of possible rivals). He never again attempted the examinations, instead petitioning the emperor directly in 751, 754 and probably again in 755. He married around 752, and by 757 the couple had had five children—three sons and two daughters—but one of the sons died in infancy in 755. From 754 he

began to have lung problems (probably asthma), the first of a series of ailments which dogged him for the rest of his life. It was in that year that Du Fu was forced to move his family due to the turmoil of a famine brought about by massive floods in the region.

In 755, he received an appointment as Registrar of the Right Commandant's office of the Crown Prince's Palace. Although this was a minor post, in normal times it would have been at least the start of an official career. Even before he had begun work, however, the position was swept away by events.

War

The An Lushan Rebellion began in December 755, and was not completely suppressed for almost eight years. It caused enormous disruption to Chinese society: the census of 754 recorded 52.9 million people, but ten years later, the census counted just 16.9 million, the remainder having been displaced or killed. During this time, Du Fu led a largely itinerant life unsettled by wars, associated famines and imperial displeasure. This period of unhappiness was the making of Du Fu as a poet: Eva Shan Chou has written that, "What he saw around him—the lives of his family, neighbors, and strangers— what he heard, and what he hoped for or feared from the progress of various campaigns—these became the enduring themes of his poetry". Even when he learned of the death of his youngest child, he turned to the suffering of others in his poetry instead of dwelling upon his own misfortunes. Du Fu wrote:

"Brooding on what I have lived through, if even I know such suffering, the common man must surely be rattled by the winds."

In 756, Emperor Xuanzong was forced to flee the capital and abdicate. Du Fu, who had been away from the city, took his family to a place of safety and attempted to join the court of the new emperor (Suzong), but he was captured by the rebels and taken to Chang'an. In the autumn, his youngest son, Du Zongwu (Baby Bear), was born. Around this time Du Fu is thought to have contracted malaria.

He escaped from Chang'an the following year, and was appointed Reminder when he rejoined the court in May 757. This post gave access to the emperor but was largely ceremonial. Du Fu's conscientiousness compelled him to try to make use of it: he caused trouble for himself by protesting the removal of his friend and patron Fang Guan on a petty charge. He was arrested but was pardoned in June. He was granted leave to visit his family in September, but he soon rejoined the court and on December 8, 757, he returned to Chang'an with the emperor

following its recapture by government forces. However, his advice continued to be unappreciated, and in the summer of 758 he was demoted to a post as Commissioner of Education in Huazhou. The position was not to his taste: in one poem, he wrote:

"I am about to scream madly in the office/Especially when they bring more papers to pile higher on my desk."

He moved on in the summer of 759; this has traditionally been ascribed to famine, but Hung believes that frustration is a more likely reason. He next spent around six weeks in Qinzhou (now Tianshui, Gansu province), where he wrote more than sixty poems.

Chengdu

In 760, he arrived in Chengdu (Sichuan province), where he was hosted by local Prefect and fellow poet Pei Di. Du subsequently based himself in Sichuan for most of the next five years. By the autumn of that year he was in financial trouble, and sent poems begging help to various acquaintances. He was relieved by Yan Wu, a friend and former colleague who was appointed governor general at Chengdu. Despite his financial problems, this was one of the happiest and most peaceful periods of his life, and many of his poems from this period are peaceful depictions of his life in his famous "thatched hut". In 762, he left the city to escape a rebellion, but he returned in summer 764 and was appointed as an advisor to Yan, who was involved in campaigns against the Tibetan Empire.

Last Years

Luoyang, the region of his birthplace, was recovered by government forces in the winter of 762, and in the spring of 765 Du Fu and his family sailed down the Yangtze, apparently with the intention of making their way there. They traveled slowly, held up by his ill-health (by this time he was suffering from poor eyesight, deafness and general old age in addition to his previous ailments). They stayed in Kuizhou (now Baidicheng, Chongqing) at the entrance to the Three Gorges for almost two years from late spring 766. This period was Du Fu's last great poetic flowering, and here he wrote 400 poems in his dense, late style. In autumn 766, Bo Maolin became governor of the region: he supported Du Fu financially and employed him as his unofficial secretary.

In March 768, he began his journey again and got as far as Hunan province, where he died in Tanzhou (now Changsha) in November or December 770, in his 58th year. He was survived by his wife and two sons, who remained in the area

for some years at least. His last known descendant is a grandson who requested a grave inscription for the poet from Yuan Zhen in 813.

Hung summarises his life by concluding that, "He appeared to be a filial son, an affectionate father, a generous brother, a faithful husband, a loyal friend, a dutiful official, and a patriotic subject."

Works

Criticism of Du Fu's works has focused on his strong sense of history, his moral engagement, and his technical excellence.

History

Since the Song dynasty, critics have called Du Fu the "poet historian". The most directly historical of his poems are those commenting on military tactics or the successes and failures of the government, or the poems of advice which he wrote to the emperor. Indirectly, he wrote about the effect of the times in which he lived on himself, and on the ordinary people of China. As Watson notes, this is information "of a kind seldom found in the officially compiled histories of the era".

Du Fu's political comments are based on emotion rather than calculation: his prescriptions have been paraphrased as, "Let us all be less selfish, let us all do what we are supposed to do". Since his views were impossible to disagree with, his forcefully expressed truisms enabled his installation as the central figure of Chinese poetic history.

Moral engagement

A second favourite epithet of Chinese critics is that of "poet sage" (?? shi shèng), a counterpart to the philosophical sage, Confucius. One of the earliest surviving works, *The Song of the Wagons* (from around 750), gives voice to the sufferings of a conscript soldier in the imperial army, even before the beginning of the rebellion; this poem brings out the tension between the need of acceptance and fulfilment of one's duties, and a clear-sighted consciousness of the suffering which this can involve. These themes are continuously articulated in the poems on the lives of both soldiers and civilians which Du Fu produced throughout his life.

Although Du Fu's frequent references to his own difficulties can give the impression of an all-consuming solipsism, Hawkes argues that his "famous

compassion in fact includes himself, viewed quite objectively and almost as an afterthought". He therefore "lends grandeur" to the wider picture by comparing it to "his own slightly comical triviality".

Du Fu's compassion, for himself and for others, was part of his general broadening of the scope of poetry: he devoted many works to topics which had previously been considered unsuitable for poetic treatment. Zhang Jie wrote that for Du Fu, "everything in this world is poetry", and he wrote extensively on subjects such as domestic life, calligraphy, paintings, animals, and other poems.

Technical excellence

Du Fu's work is notable above all for its range. Chinese critics traditionally used the term 集大成 (jídàchéng- "complete symphony"), a reference to Mencius' description of Confucius. Yuan Zhen was the first to note the breadth of Du Fu's achievement, writing in 813 that his predecessor, "united in his work traits which previous men had displayed only singly". He mastered all the forms of Chinese poetry: Chou says that in every form he "either made outstanding advances or contributed outstanding examples". Furthermore, his poems use a wide range of registers, from the direct and colloquial to the allusive and self-consciously literary. This variety is manifested even within individual works: Owen identifies the, "rapid stylistic and thematic shifts" in poems which enable the poet to represent different facets of a situation, while Chou uses the term "juxtaposition" as the major analytical tool in her work. Du Fu is noted for having written more on poetics and painting than any other writer of his time. He wrote eighteen poems on painting alone, more than any other Tang poet. Du Fu's seemingly negative commentary on the prized horse paintings of Han Gan ignited a controversy that has persisted to the present day.

The tenor of his work changed as he developed his style and adapted to his surroundings ("chameleon-like" according to Watson): his earliest works are in a relatively derivative, courtly style, but he came into his own in the years of the rebellion. Owen comments on the "grim simplicity" of the Qinzhou poems, which mirrors the desert landscape; the works from his Chengdu period are "light, often finely observed"; while the poems from the late Kuizhou period have a "density and power of vision".

Influence

According to the Encyclopædia Britannica, Du Fu's writings are considered by many literary critics to be among the greatest of all time, and it states "his dense, compressed language makes use of all the connotative overtones of a

phrase and of all the intonational potentials of the individual word, qualities that no translation can ever reveal."

In his lifetime and immediately following his death, Du Fu was not greatly appreciated. In part this can be attributed to his stylistic and formal innovations, some of which are still "considered extremely daring and bizarre by Chinese critics." There are few contemporary references to him—only eleven poems from six writers—and these describe him in terms of affection, but not as a paragon of poetic or moral ideals. Du Fu is also poorly represented in contemporary anthologies of poetry.

However, as Hung notes, he "is the only Chinese poet whose influence grew with time", and his works began to increase in popularity in the ninth century. Early positive comments came from Bai Juyi, who praised the moral sentiments of some of Du Fu's works (although he found these in only a small fraction of the poems), and from Han Yu, who wrote a piece defending Du Fu and Li Bai on aesthetic grounds from attacks made against them. Both these writers showed the influence of Du Fu in their own poetic work. By the beginning of the 10th century, Wei Zhuang constructed the first replica of his thatched cottage in Sichuan.

It was in the 11th century, during the Northern Song era that Du Fu's reputation reached its peak. In this period a comprehensive re-evaluation of earlier poets took place, in which Wang Wei, Li Bai and Du Fu came to be regarded as representing respectively the Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian strands of Chinese culture. At the same time, the development of Neo-Confucianism ensured that Du Fu, as its poetic exemplar, occupied the paramount position. Su Shi famously expressed this reasoning when he wrote that Du Fu was "preeminent... because... through all his vicissitudes, he never for the space of a meal forgot his sovereign". His influence was helped by his ability to reconcile apparent opposites: political conservatives were attracted by his loyalty to the established order, while political radicals embraced his concern for the poor. Literary conservatives could look to his technical mastery, while literary radicals were inspired by his innovations. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Du Fu's loyalty to the state and concern for the poor have been interpreted as embryonic nationalism and socialism, and he has been praised for his use of simple, "people's language".

Du Fu's popularity grew to such an extent that it is as hard to measure his influence as that of Shakespeare in England: it was hard for any Chinese poet not to be influenced by him. While there was never another Du Fu, individual poets followed in the traditions of specific aspects of his work: Bai Juyi's concern for the

poor, Lu You's patriotism, and Mei Yaochen's reflections on the quotidian are a few examples. More broadly, Du Fu's work in transforming the lushi from mere word play into "a vehicle for serious poetic utterance" set the stage for every subsequent writer in the genre.

Du Fu has also been influential beyond China, although in common with the other High Tang poets, his reception into the Japanese literary culture was relatively late. It was not until the 17th century that he was accorded the same level of fame in Japan as in China, but he then had a profound influence on poets such as Matsuo Basho. In the 20th century, he was the favourite poet of Kenneth Rexroth, who has described him as "the greatest non-epic, non-dramatic poet who has survived in any language", and commented that, "he has made me a better man, as a moral agent and as a perceiving organism".

A Homeless Man's Departure

After the Rebellion of 755, all was silent wasteland,
gardens and cottages turned to grass and thorns.
My village had over a hundred households,
but the chaotic world scattered them east and west.
No information about the survivors;
the dead are dust and mud.
I, a humble soldier, was defeated in battle.
I ran back home to look for old roads
and walked a long time through the empty lanes.
The sun was thin, the air tragic and dismal.
I met only foxes and raccoons,
their hair on end as they snarled in rage.
Who remains in my neighborhood?
One or two old widows.
A returning bird loves its old branches,
how could I give up this poor nest?
In spring I carry my hoe all alone,
yet still water the land at sunset.
The county governor's clerk heard I'd returned
and summoned me to practice the war-drum.
This military service won't take me from my state.
I look around and have no one to worry about.
It's just me alone and the journey is short,
but I will end up lost if I travel too far.
Since my village has been washed away,
near or far makes no difference.
I will forever feel pain for my long-sick mother.
I abandoned her in this valley five years ago.
She gave birth to me, yet I could not help her.
We cry sour sobs till our lives end.
In my life I have no family to say farewell to,
so how can I be called a human being?

Du Fu

A Second Farewell To Governor Yen Wu At The Fengji Post Station

We have come far together, but here we must part;
the green hills vainly echo my feelings.
When will we again take wine cups in hand
to stroll as we did beneath last night's moon?
Every district sings sad songs at your leaving;
three reigns now you have served with distinction.
Now I must go back to my river village alone,
and alone live out the rest of my days.

Du Fu

A Short Poem Written At The Moment When A Rising River Looked Like A Rolling Ocean

I was stubborn by nature and addicted to perfect lines,
fought to the death to find words that startle.
Now in old age my poems flow out freely, the way
flowers and birds forget deep sorrow in spring.

A new water pavilion has been built for fishing with a rod.
I choose to use a bamboo raft instead of a boat.
If only my thoughts were guided by poets Tao and Xie,¹
we'd travel and together write poems.

Du Fu

A Song Of Painting: To General Cao Ba

You, General Cao Ba,
descendant of Cao Cao,
now live as a peasant,
a cold-door commoner.
Your ancestor's heroic age
carved out kingdoms of old,
and its cultural brilliance, its style,
still survive in your work.

To learn calligraphy
you first studied Lady Wei;
your only regret was not surpassing
the great Wang Xizhi .
You said, 'Caught up in my painting,
I give no thought to old age;
riches and rank are to me
no more than clouds floating by.'
Often summoned to court
during the Kaiyuan period,
frequently you ascended the dais
to receive the Emperor's praise.
In the Gallery of Famous Men
the noble faces were fading;
going to work with your brush
you brought back their freshness.
On the ministers' heads you repainted
their hats of office,
at the waists of the fierce generals,
their great feathered arrows.
The Duke of Bao and Duke of E--
so lifelike their hair bristles--
stand grim, bold and heroic,
as if in the midst of battle.

The late Emperor's imperial horse,
Jade-Flower Dapple,
had been painted by artist after artist,
but none could capture his essence.
One day he was led into the courtyard

below the red steps of the palace;
standing there by the palace gates
he embodied the wind of the plains.
At the Emperor's command
you stretched white silk to paint on;
calling up all of your skill,
you formed the image in your mind.
In a flash, from the nine-fold heavens,
the true 'dragon' emerged!
At one stroke, the horse paintings of ages
were obliterated.
When the painting was taken up
and hung above the throne,
the horse on the wall and that in the yard
gazed proudly into each other's face.
Smiling, the Emperor hastened his aide
to bring a handsome reward;
stable-boys and grooms stood long-faced,
jealous of His Majesty's favor.

Your pupil Han Gan was long since
shown all your techniques;
he too can paint horses,
horses in every stance imaginable,
but Gan paints only the outer flesh,
not the strength that lies beneath;
his brush would dampen the spirit
of legendary Hualiu!

The General is a superb painter
because he captures the essence.
In the past you often rendered
likenesses of distinguished men;
in the present troubled times,
uprooted and homeless,
you are reduced to painting portraits
of humble passersby.

So desperate are your straits, you put up
with the snubs of commoners--
never in the world
has anyone been as poor as you!

But look at the lives of famous men
throughout history--
they too were forced to deal
with endless frustrations

Du Fu

A Woman Of Quality

Matchless in breeding and beauty,
a fine lady has taken refuge
in this forsaken valley.
She is of good family, she says,
but her fortune has withered away;
now she lives as the grass and trees.
When the heartlands fell to the rebels
her brothers were put to death;
birth and position availed nothing--
she was not even allowed
to bring home their bones for burial.
The world turns quickly against
those who have had their day--
fortune is a lamp-flame
flickering in the wind.
Her husband is a fickle fellow
who has a lovely new woman.
Even the vetch-tree is more constant,
folding its leaves every dusk,
and mandarin ducks
always sleep with their mates.
But he has eyes only
for his new woman's smile,
and his ears are deaf
to his first wife's weeping.
High in the mountains
spring water is clear as truth,
but when it reaches the lowlands
it is muddied with rumor.
Her serving-maid returns
from selling her pearls;
she drags a creeper over
to cover holes in the roof.
The flowers the lady picks
are not for her hair,
and the handfuls of cypress
are a bitter stay against hunger.
Her pretty blue sleeves
are too thin for the cold;

as evening falls
she leans on the tall bamboo.

Du Fu

Advent Of Spring

The city has fallen: only the hills and rivers remain.
In Spring the streets were green with grass and trees.
Sorrowing over the times, the flowers are weeping.
The birds startled my heart in fear of departing.
The beacon fires were burning for three months,
A letter from home was worth ten thousand pieces of gold.
I scratch the scant hairs on my white head,
And vainly attempt to secure them with a hairpin.

Du Fu

Alone, Looking For Blossoms Along The River

The sorrow of riverside blossoms inexplicable,
And nowhere to complain -- I've gone half crazy.
I look up our southern neighbor. But my friend in wine
Gone ten days drinking. I find only an empty bed.

A thick frenzy of blossoms shrouding the riverside,
I stroll, listing dangerously, in full fear of spring.
Poems, wine -- even this profusely driven, I endure.
Arrangements for this old, white-haired man can wait.

A deep river, two or three houses in bamboo quiet,
And such goings on: red blossoms glaring with white!
Among spring's vociferous glories, I too have my place:
With a lovely wine, bidding life's affairs bon voyage.

Looking east to Shao, its smoke filled with blossoms,
I admire that stately Po-hua wineshop even more.
To empty golden wine cups, calling such beautiful
Dancing girls to embroidered mats -- who could bear it?

East of the river, before Abbot Huang's grave,
Spring is a frail splendor among gentle breezes.
In this crush of peach blossoms opening ownerless,
Shall I treasure light reds, or treasure them dark?

At Madame Huang's house, blossoms fill the paths:
Thousands, tens of thousands haul the branches down.
And butterflies linger playfully -- an unbroken
Dance floating to songs orioles sing at their ease.

I don't so love blossoms I want to die. I'm afraid,
Once they are gone, of old age still more impetuous.
And they scatter gladly, by the branchful. Let's talk
Things over, little buds ---open delicately, sparingly.

Du Fu

Ballad Of The Army Carts

Wagons rattling and banging,
horses neighing and snorting,
conscripts marching, each with bow and arrows at his hip,
fathers and mothers, wives and children, running to see them off--
so much dust kicked up you can't see Xian-yang Bridge!
And the families pulling at their clothes, stamping feet in anger,
blocking the way and weeping--
ah, the sound of their wailing rises straight up to assault heaven.
And a passerby asks, 'What's going on?'
The soldier says simply, 'This happens all the time.
From age fifteen some are sent to guard the north,
and even at forty some work the army farms in the west.
When they leave home, the village headman has to wrap their turbans for them;
when they come back, white-haired, they're still guarding the frontier.
The frontier posts run with blood enough to fill an ocean,
and the war-loving Emperor's dreams of conquest have still not ended.
Hasn't he heard that in Han, east of the mountains,
there are two hundred prefectures, thousands and thousands of villages,
growing nothing but thorns?
And even where there is a sturdy wife to handle hoe and plough,
the poor crops grow raggedly in haphazard fields.
It's even worse for the men of Qin; they're such good fighters
they're driven from battle to battle like dogs or chickens.
Even though you were kind enough to ask, good sir,
perhaps I shouldn't express such resentment.
But take this winter, for instance,
they still haven't demobilized the troops of Guanxi,
and the tax collectors are pressing everyone for land-fees--
land-fees!--from where is that money supposed to come?
Truly, it is an evil thing to bear a son these days,
it is much better to have daughters;
at least you can marry a daughter to the neighbor,
but a son is born only to die, his body lost in the wild grass.
Has my lord seen the shores of the Kokonor?
The white bones lie there in drifts, uncollected.
New ghosts complain and old ghosts weep,
under the lowering sky their voices cry out in the rain.'

Du Fu

Ballad Of The Old Cypress

In front of the temple of Chu-ko Liang there is an old cypress. Its branches are like green bronze; its roots like rocks; around its great girth of forty spans its rimy bark withstands the washing of the rain. Its jet-colored top rises two thousand feet to greet the sky. Prince and statesman have long since paid their debt to time; but the tree continues to be cherished among men. When the clouds come, continuous vapors link it with the mists of the long Wu Gorge; and when the moon appears, the cypress tree shares the chill of the Snowy Mountains' whiteness.

I remember a year or so ago, where the road wound east round my Brocade River pavilion, the First Ruler and Chu-ko Liang shared the same shrine. There, too, were towering cypresses, on the ancient plain outside the city. The paintwork of the temple's dark interior gleamed dully through derelict doors and windows. But this cypress here, though it holds its ground well, clinging with wide-encompassing, snake-like hold, yet, because of its lonely height rising into the gloom of the sky, meets much of the wind's fierce blast. Nothing but the power of Divine Providence could have kept it standing for so long; its straightness must be the work of the Creator himself! If a great hall had collapsed and beams for it were needed, ten thousand oxen might turn their heads inquiringly to look at such a mountain of a load. But it is already marvel enough to astonish the world, without any need to undergo a craftsman's embellishing. It has never refused the axe: there is simply no one who could carry it away if it were felled. Its bitter heart has not escaped the ants; but there are always phoenixes roosting in its scented leaves. Men of ambition, and you who dwell unseen, do not cry out in despair! From of old the really great has never been found a use for.

Another Translation:

In front of K'ung-ming Shrine
stands an old cypress,
With branches like green bronze
and roots like granite;

Its hoary bark, far round,
glistens with raindrops,
And blueblack hues, high up,
blend in with Heaven's:
Long ago Statesman, King

kept Time's appointment,
But still this standing tree has men's devotion;

United with the mists
of ghostly gorges,
Through which the moon brings cold
from snowy mountains.

(I recall near my hut
on Brocade River
Another Shrine is shared by
King and Statesman

On civil, ancient plains
with stately cypress:
The paint there now is dim,
windows shutterless. . .)

Wide, wide though writhing roots
maintain its station,
Far, far in lonely heights,
many's the tempest

When its hold is the strength
of Divine Wisdom
And straightness by the work of the Creator. . .

Yet if a crumbling Hall
needed a rooftree, Yoked herds would, turning heads,
balk at this mountain:

By art still unexposed all have admired it;
But axe though not refused,
who could transport it?

How can its bitter core deny ants lodging,
All the while scented boughs
give Phoenix housing?

Oh, ambitious unknowns,
sigh no more sadly:
Using timber as big

was never easy!

Du Fu

Ballad Of The Press-Gang At Shihao Village

One evening I found lodging in a village where
A press-gang stole by night to seize my aging host,
Who, hearing them, scaled the wall and hid nearby.
Furious, the bailiff bellowed at the gate
Until the woman of the house unbarred the door,
Stepped out, and offered up this pitiful reply:
"Three boys I nursed and raised and, on the selfsame day,
Saw them sent off to the garrison at Yeh.
My oldest boy, he sent a letter by and by
To say the other two were lying in their graves
And he himself was living but a stolen life—
'O Mother dear, how short we live, how long we die!'
And now there's not another male under my roof
Besides this man-child nursing at his mother's breast.
That you could find some use for her I'll not deny,
But as you see she hardly has a stitch to wear,
And there's the child to think of—so why not think on this?
Granted I am old and gray yet I am spry
Enough to keep up with the other conscripts, and
I know I've strength to serve the men their morning meals."
With that the voices died, though now and then a cry
Or plaintive sob choked off the silence of the night.
At break of day, when I continued on my way,
No one was left but that old man to say goodbye.

Du Fu

Behind The Gates Of The Wealthy

zhu men jiu rou chou
lu you dong si gu

Behind the gates of the wealthy
food lies rotting from waste
Outside it's the poor
who lie frozen to death

Du Fu

By The Lake

The old fellow from Shao-ling weeps with stifled sobs as he walks furtively by the bends of the Sepentine on a day in spring.

In the waterside palaces the thousands of doors are locked. For whom have the willows and rushed put on their fresh greenery?

I remember how formerly, when the Emperor's rainbow banner made its way into the South Park, everything in the park seemed to bloom with a brighter color.

The First Lady of the Chao-yang Palace rode in the same carriage as her lord in attendance at his side, while before the carriage rode maids of honour equipped with bows and arrows, their white horses champing at golden bits.

Leaning back, face skywards, they shot into the clouds; and the Lady laughed gaily when a bird fell to the ground transfixed by a well-aimed arrow.

Where are the bright eyes and the flashing smile now?

Tainted with blood-pollution, her wandering soul cannot make its way back.

The clear waters of the Wei flow eastwards, and Chien-ko is far away: between the one who has gone and the one who remains no communication is possible.

It is human to have feelings and shed tears for such things; but the grasses and flowers of the lakeside go on for ever, unmoved.

As evening falls, the city is full of the dust of foreign horseman. My way is towards the South City, but my gaze turns northward. (tr. Hawkes)

Du Fu

Day's End

Oxen and sheep were brought back down
Long ago, and bramble gates closed. Over
Mountains and rivers, far from my old garden,
A windswept moon rises into clear night.

Springs trickle down dark cliffs, and autumn
Dew fills ridgeline grasses. My hair seems
Whiter in lamplight. The flame flickers
Good fortune over and over -- and for what?

Du Fu

Dreaming Of Li Bai (1)

Separation by death must finally be choked down,
but separation in life is a long anguish,

Chiang-nan is a pestilential land;
no word from you there in exile.

You have been in my dreams, old friend,
as if knowing how much I miss you.

Caught in a net,
how is it you still have wings?

I fear you are no longer mortal;
the distance to here is enormous.

When your spirit came, the maples were green;
when it went, the passes were black.

The setting moon spills light on the rafters;
for a moment I think it's your face.

The waters are deep, the waves wide;
don't let the river gods take you.

Du Fu

Dreaming Of Li Bai (2)

Clouds drifting the whole day;
a traveler traveling who never arrives.

Three nights you have been in my dreams;
as your friend, I knew your mind.

You say your return is always harrowing;
your coming, a hard coming;

Rivers, lakes, so many waves;
in your boat you fear overturning.

Going out the door, you scratch your white head
as if the purpose of your whole life was ruined,

The rich and high positioned fill the Capital,
while you, alone, are careworn and dejected.

Who says the net of heaven is cast wide?
Growing older, you only grow more preyed upon.

One thousand autumns, ten thousand years of fame,
are nothing after death.

Du Fu

Dreaming Of Li Po

After the separation of death one can eventually swallow back
one's grief, but
the separation of the living is an endless, unappeasable anxiety.
From
pestilent Chiang-nan no news arrives of the poor exile. That my
old friend
should come into my dream shows how constantly he is in my
thoughts. I fear
that this is not the soul of a living man: the journey is so
immeasurably far.
When your soul left, the maple woods were green: on its return
the passes were
black with night. Lying now enmeshed in the net of the law,
how did you find
wings with which to fly here? The light of the sinking moon illumines
every
beam and rafter of my chamber, and I half expect it to light up your face.
The
water is deep, the waves are wide: don't let the water-dragons get you.

All day long the floating clouds drift by, and still the wanderer
has not
arrived! For three nights running I have repeatedly dreamed of you.
Such
affectionate concern on your part shows your feelings for me!
Each time you
said goodbye you seemed so uneasy. `It isn't easy to come',
you would say
bitterly; `The waters are so rough. I am afraid the boat will capsize!'.
Going
out of my door you scratched your white head as if your whole life's ambition
had been frustrated.

The Capital is full of new officials, yet a man like this is so wretched!
Who is going to tell me that the `net is wide' when this ageing man
remains in difficulties? Imperishable renown is cold comfort when you can only
enjoy it in the tomb!

Du Fu

From Autumn Thoughts, Poem 1

Jade frost bites the maple trees
and Wu Mountain and Wu Gorge breathe out dark fear

as river waves rise up to the sky
and dark wind-clouds touch ground by a frontier fortress.

The chrysanthemums have twice bloomed tears of other days,
When I moor my lonely boat my heart longs for my old garden.

The need for winter clothes hurries scissors and bamboo rulers.
White Emperor City looms over the rushed sound of clothes beaten at dusk.

Du Fu

Full Moon

Above the tower -- a lone, twice-sized moon.
On the cold river passing night-filled homes,
It scatters restless gold across the waves.
On mats, it shines richer than silken gauze.

Empty peaks, silence: among sparse stars,
Not yet flawed, it drifts. Pine and cinnamon
Spreading in my old garden . . . All light,
All ten thousand miles at once in its light!

Du Fu

Gazing At The Sacred Peak

For all this, what is the mountain god like?
An unending green of lands north and south:
From ethereal beauty Creation distills
There, yin and yang split dusk and dawn.

Swelling clouds sweep by. Returning birds
Ruin my eyes vanishing. One day soon,
At the summit, the other mountains will be
Small enough to hold, all in a single glance.

Du Fu

I Stand Alone

A falcon hovers at the edge of the sky.
Two gulls drift slowly up the river.

Vulnerable while they ride the wind,
they coast and glide with ease.

Dew is heavy on the grass below,
the spider's web is ready.

Heaven's ways include the human:
among a thousand sorrows, I stand alone.

Du Fu

Jiang Village

Red evening clouds are mountainous in the west
and the sun's feet disappear under the horizon.
Sparrows noisy over the brushwood door.
I am a traveler home after a thousand miles.
My wife and children are startled to see me alive.
The surprise ends but they can't stop wiping tears.
In the chaotic world I was tossed about;
I've found my way home, alive by accident.
Neighbors crowd over our garden walls.
They are moved, sighing and even weeping.
In deep night we hold candles,
facing each other as if in dream.

I live my late years as if I've stolen my life.
Very few joys after I returned home.
My little son never lets go of my knees,
afraid I will go away again.
I remember I liked to chase cool shade,
so I walk under trees by the pond.
Whistling, the north wind is strong,
I finger past events and a hundred worries fry in my mind.
However, the crops are harvested,
wine spurts from the mouth of the flask
and I have enough to fill my cups
and console me in my dusk.

A group of chickens make chaos
and fight each other as guests arrive.
I drive them up bushes and trees,
before I hear knocking on my brushwood gate:
four or five village elders greet me
and ask about my long absence.
Each of them brings a gift in hand.
Their wines pour out, some clear, some muddy.
They apologize for their wine, so watery,
as there was no one to grow millet.
Weapons and horses can't rest yet;
the young men are gone on the expedition east.
I offer a song for my old village folks,

feeling deep gratitude.
After singing, I sigh and throw back my head
and tears meander down our faces.

Du Fu

Lone Wild Goose

Alone, the wild goose refuses food and drink,
his calls searching for the flock.

Who feels compassion for that single shadow
vanishing in a thousand distant clouds?

You watch, even as it flies from sight,
its plaintive calls cutting through you.

The noisy crows ignore it:
the bickering, squabbling multitudes.

Du Fu

Looking At Mount Tai

How is Mountain Tai?

Its green is seen beyond State Qi and State Lu,
a distillation of creation's spirit and beauty.

Its slopes split day into Yin and Yang.

Its rising clouds billow in my chest.

Homecoming birds fly through my wide-open eyes.

I should climb to the summit

and in one glance see all other mountains dwarfed.

Du Fu

Meeting Li Guinian In The South

At the home of the Prince of Qi
I have often seen you,
and in the hall of Cui Jiu,
I have heard you sing.
Truly these southlands
boast unrivaled scenery-
to see you once again
when the flowers are falling.

Du Fu

Moonlit Night

Tonight at Fu-chou, this moon she watches
Alone in our room. And my little, far-off
Children, too young to understand what keeps me
Away, or even remember Chang'an. By now,

Her hair will be mist-scented, her jade-white
Arms chilled in its clear light. When
Will it find us together again, drapes drawn
Open, light traced where it dries our tears?

Du Fu

Morning Rain

A slight rain comes, bathed in dawn light.
I hear it among treetop leaves before mist
Arrives. Soon it sprinkles the soil and,
Windblown, follows clouds away. Deepened

Colors grace thatch homes for a moment.
Flocks and herds of things wild glisten
Faintly. Then the scent of musk opens across
Half a mountain -- and lingers on past noon.

Du Fu

Newlywed's Departure

Chinese vines climb up low hemp plants;
the tendrils cannot stretch very far.
To marry a daughter to a drafted man
is worse than abandoning her by roadside.
"I just did my hair up as a married woman,
haven't even had time to warm the bed for you.
Marry in the evening and depart in the morning,
isn't that too hurried!
You are not going very far,
just to guard the borders at Heyang,
but my status in the family is not yet official.
How can I greet my parents-in-laws?
When my parents brought me up,
they kept me in my room day and night.
When a daughter is married,
she has to stay even if she's wed to a chicken or dog.
Now you are going to the place of death.
A heavy pain cramps my stomach.
I was determined to follow you wherever you went,
then realized that was not proper.
Please don't be hampered by our new marriage;
try to be a good soldier.
When women get mixed up in an army,
I fear, the soldiers' morale will falter.
I sigh, since I'm from a poor family
and it took so long to sew this silk dress.
I will never put this dress on again,
and I'm going to wash off my make-up while you watch.
Look at those birds flying up in the sky,
Big or small they stay in pairs,
but human life is full of mistakes and setbacks.
I will forever wait for your return."

Du Fu

No Sight

Li Bai, no sight of you for a long time,
It's tragic that you pretend to be insane.
The whole world wants to kill you.
I alone treasure your talent.
Quick-minded, improvising thousands of poems,
you roam like a falling leaf for a cup of wine.
You studied here at Kuang Mountain
and it's time to return, now that your hair is white.

Du Fu

Old Couple's Departure

The four outskirts are not yet safe and quiet,
I am old, but have no peace.
All my sons and grandsons died in battle;
it's no use to keep my body alone in one piece.
Throwing away my walking stick, I walk out the door.
The other soldiers are saddened, pitying me.
I'm lucky to still have all my teeth
but I regret the marrow has dried in my bones.
Wearing a soldier's helmet and armor,
I salute my officers before departure.
My old wife is lying in the road weeping.
The year is late and her clothes thin.
Though I know at heart this is our death-farewell,
her shivering in cold still hurts me.
I know I will never come back,
yet hear her out when she says, "Eat more!"
The city wall around Earth Gate is very strong,
and the Xingyuan ferry is hard for the enemy to cross,
so the situation is different from the siege of Ye City,
and I will have some time before I die.
In life we part and we rejoin;
we have no choice, young or old.
I recall my young and strong days,
and walk about with long sighs.
War has spread through ten thousand countries
till beacon fires blaze from all the peaks.
So many corpses that grass and trees stink like fish,
rivers and plains dyed red with blood.
Which land is the happy land?
How can I linger here!
I abandon my thatched house
and feel my liver and lungs collapse.

Du Fu

On A Prospect Of T'Ai-Shan

How is one to describe this king of mountains? Through the whole of Ch'i and Lu one never loses sight of its greenness. In it the Creator has concentrated all that is numinous and beautiful. Its northern and southern slopes divide the dawn from the dark. The layered clouds begin at the climber's heaving chest, and homing birds fly suddenly within range of his straining eyes. One day I must stand on top of its highest peak and at a single glance see all the other mountains grown tiny beneath me.

Du Fu

On Meeting Li Guinian Again, South Of The River

I often saw you at the palace of the prince,
And twice at Cui's I heard you sing for hours.
This southern scenery seems colorful indeed,
When you are here among the fallen flowers.

Du Fu

On Seeing A Pupil Of Kung-Sun Dance The Chien-Ch`i

On the nineteenth day of the tenth month of the second year of Ta-li (15 November 767), in the residence of Yuan Ch`ih, Lieutenant-Governor of K`uei-chou, I saw Li Shih-er-niang of Lin-ying dance the chien-ch`i.

Impressed by the brilliance and thrust of her style, I asked her whom she had studied under. ``I am a pupil of Kung-sun", was the reply.

I remember in the fifth year of K`ai-yuan (717) when I was still a little lad seeing Kung-sun dance the chien-ch`i and the hun-t`o at Yen-ch`eng. For purity of technique and self-confident attack she was unrivaled in her day.

From the ``royal command performers" and the ``insiders" of the Spring Garden and Pear Garden schools in the palace down to the ``official call" dancers outside, there was no one during the early years of His Sagely Pacific and Divinely Martial Majesty who understood this dance as she did. Where now is that lovely figure in its gorgeous costume? Now even I am an old, white-haired man; and this pupil of hers is well past her prime.

Having found out about the pupil's antecedents, I now realized that what I had been watching was a faithful reproduction of the great dancer's interpretation. The train of reflections set off by this discovery so moved me that I felt inspired to compose a ballad on the chien-ch`i.

Some years ago, Chang Hsu, the great master of the ``grass writing" style of calligraphy, having several times seen Kung-sun dance the West River chien-ch`i at Yeh-hsein, afterwards discovered, to his immense gratification, that his calligraphy had greatly improved. This gives one some idea of the sort of person Kung-sun was.

In time past there was a lovely woman called Kung-sun, whose chien-ch`i astonished the whole world. Audiences numerous as the hills watched awestruck as she danced, and, to their reeling senses, the world seemed to go on rising and falling, long after she had finished dancing. Her flashing swoop was like the nine suns falling, transfixed by the Mighty Archer's arrows; her soaring flight like the lords of the sky driving their dragon teams aloft; her

advance like the thunder gathering up its dreadful rage; her stoppings like seas and rivers locked in the cold glint of ice.

The crimson lips, the pearl-encrusted sleeves are now at rest. But in her latter years there had been a pupil to whom she transmitted the fragrance of her art. And now in the city of the White Emperor the handsome woman from Lin-ying performs this dance with superb spirit. Her answers to my questions have revealed that there was good reason to admire, my ensuing reflections fill me with painful emotion.

Of the eight thousand women who served our late Emperor, Kung-sun was from the first the leading performer of the chien-ch`i. Fifty years have now gone by like a flick of the hand - fifty years in which rebellions and disorders darkened the royal house. The pupils of the Pear Garden have vanished like the mist. And now here is this dancer, with the cold winter sun shining on her fading features.

South of the Hill of Golden Grain the boughs of the trees already interlace. On the rocky walls of Ch`u-t`ang the dead grasses blow forlornly. At the glittering feast the shrill flutes have once more concluded. When pleasure is at its height, sorrow follows.

The moon rises in the east; and I depart, an old man who does not know where he is going, but whose feet, calloused from much walking in the wild mountains, make him wearier and wearier of the pace.

Du Fu

Overnight At The Riverside Tower

Evening colors linger on mountain paths.
Out beyond this study perched over River Gate,
At the cliff's edge, frail clouds stay
All night. Among waves, a lone, shuddering

Moon. As cranes trail off in flight, silent,
Wolves snarl over their kill. I brood on
Our wars, sleepless here and, to right
A relentless Heaven and Earth, powerless.

Du Fu

P'eng-Ya Road

I remember fleeing the rebels
through dangerous northern canyons,

the midnight moon shining bright
on narrow P'eng-ya Road.

So poor we went on foot,
we were embarrassed meeting strangers.

A few birds sang in the valleys,
but we met no one returning.

My daughter was so starved she bit me,
she screamed her painful hunger.

I damped her mouth shut tight,
fearful of wolves and tigers.

She struggled hard against me,
she cried and cried.

My son was sympathetic
and searched the wilds for food.

Then five days of heavy rain arrived,
and we trudged through freezing mud.

We had no coats, no shelter,
we were dressed in cold, wet clothes.

Struggling, struggling, we made
but a mile or two each day.

We ate wild fruits and berries,
and branches made our roof.

Mornings we slogged through water;
evenings we searched for skyline smoke.

We stopped at a marsh
to prepare our climb to the pass,

and met a Mr. Sun
whose standards are high as clouds.

We came through the dark
and lamps were lit, gates opening before us.

Servants brought warm water
so we could bathe our aching feet.

They hung paper banners
in our honor.

Mrs. Sun came out with all her children.
They wept for our condition.

My children slept, exhausted,
until we roused them with food.

Our host took a vow
he'd always remain my brother.

His home was made our home,
to provide for every comfort.

Who could imagine in such troubled times
he'd bare his heart and soul?

A year has passed since that fated night.
The Barbarians still wage war.

If I had the wings of the wild goose,
I'd fly to be at his side.

Du Fu

Passing The Night At Headquarters

Clear autumn at headquarters,
wu-tung trees cold beside the well;
I spend the night alone in the river city,
using up all of the candles.
Sad bugle notes sound through the long night
as I talk to myself;
glorious moon hanging in mid-sky
but who looks?

The endless dust-storm of troubles
cuts off news and letters;
the frontier passes are perilous,
travel nearly impossible.

I have already suffered ten years,
ten years of turmoil and hardship;
now I am forced to accept a perch
on this one peaceful branch.

Du Fu

Poem For Wei Ba

Often a man's life is such
that he seldom sees his friends,
like the constellations Shen and Shang
which never share the same sky.
If not this evening, then what evening
should we share this lamp light?
How long can our youth and vigor last?
The hair at our temples is already gray.
We inquire about old acquaintances
to find that half are ghosts--
shocked cries betray
the torment of our hearts.
How could I have known
that it would be twenty years
before I again entered
your honored home.
When we parted last
you were yet unmarried;
now your sons and daughters
line up in a smiling row
to greet their father's friend.
They ask whence I have come
but before I can answer all questions
you chase them off
to bring wine and cups.
In the night rain, chives are cut
for the freshly steamed rice
mixed with yellow millet.
Saying how difficult it has been
for us to meet at last,
you pour ten cups in a row!
But even after ten cups
I'm not drunk, being so moved
by your lasting friendship.
Tomorrow we will be separated
by the peaks of mountains,
each of our worldly affairs
lost to the other's sight.

Du Fu

Rain

Roads not yet glistening, rain slight,
Broken clouds darken after thinning away.
Where they drift, purple cliffs blacken.
And beyond -- white birds blaze in flight.

Sounds of cold-river rain grown familiar,
Autumn sun casts moist shadows. Below
Our brushwood gate, out to dry at the village
Mill: hulled rice, half-wet and fragrant.

Du Fu

Restless Night

As bamboo chill drifts into the bedroom,
Moonlight fills every corner of our
Garden. Heavy dew beads and trickles.
Stars suddenly there, sparse, next aren't.

Fireflies in dark flight flash. Waking
Waterbirds begin calling, one to another.
All things caught between shield and sword,
All grief empty, the clear night passes.

Du Fu

Snow At Changsha

Out of the north the snow
Is assaulting Changsha:
Its clouds over Hunan go
(Where few snows are):
A myriad homes makes cold
Far borne on the gale
With scattered leaflets old
Where raindrops hail,
Not grown to flake-like flowers.

Empty of angels pale
Flaccid my purse.
Yet a silver pot may bail
Credit for wine.
No one to fetch it? Why then
I drain off the froth.
Must I wait again and again
Till the dizzy crows
Come home to their roosting bowers?

Du Fu

Song Of Lovely Women

Third day, third month festival,
and the air fresh with spring;
beside Serpentine Lake in Chang'an,
many lovely women stroll.
Their appearance is elegant,
their thoughts lofty and refined,
their complexions delicate,
figures in perfect proportion.
Their embroidered silk gowns
glisten with spring light;
golden peacocks and beasts of silver
strut upon the fabric.
What is it that they wear
upon their heads?
Jeweled headbands with kingfisher feathers,
dangling to their hairlines.
And what is it that we see
upon their backs?
Pearl-studded overskirts
drawn tight at the waist.
Among them are kin of the Pepper-flower Chamber with its cloud-patterned
curtains-
the Duchesses of Guo and Qin,
honored with the names of nations!

A great roast of purple camel hump
rises from a green cauldron,
and crystal plates gleam
with heaps of white-scaled fish.
But the rhinoceros horn chopsticks,
long-sated, are slow to descend,
and the belled knife-handles
dance vainly above the roast.
The flying steeds of the eunuchs
hardly stir the dust,
as they bear in eight exotic dishes
from the Imperial Kitchens.

Du Fu

Spring Night In The Imperial Chancellery

Evening falls on palace walls shaded by flowering trees, with cry of birds flying past on their way to roost. The stars quiver as they look down on the myriad doors of the palace, and the moon's light increases as she moves into the ninefold sky. Unable to sleep, I seem to hear the sound of the bronze-clad doors opening for the audience, or imagine the sound of bridle-bells bourne upon the wind. Having a sealed memorial to submit at tomorrow's levee, I make frequent inquiries about the progress of the night.

Du Fu

The Eight Formations

Your achievements overshadowed
any in the Three Kingdoms;
most famous of all was your design
for the Eight Formations.

Against the river's surge,
they stand solid, immovable,
a monument to your lasting regret
at failing to swallow up Wu.

Du Fu

The Firefly

Born from rotting grasses damp
Still the daylight thou must fear,
On my scroll thy tiny lamp
Scarcely lets the words appear.
But on stranger's dress from far
Shinest thou a tender star.
Or when wind-borne on the gauze
Of my window making pause,
Small thy phosphorescent beam
As a fairy's eye doth gleam.
From the rain you safely hide
In the woodland undescried.
But once November's frosts are chill
Thou leaflike fadest from the hill.

translated by W. J. B. Fletcher

Du Fu

The Mockingbird

What! Is the mocking bird come?
The Spring, he comes to say,
The Spring is here today.
All sounds, all words he knows.
His feathers preen how he will,
He is the same bird still.

Where flowers most thickly screen,
Difficult to be seen,
His varying notes deride
The topmost boughs between.
If out of time he chide.
Lo! slander at your side!

Du Fu

The Pitiful Young Prince

Hooded crows fly at night
over the walls of Chang'an,
uttering harsh cries
above Welcoming Autumn Gate,
then head for people's houses,
pecking at the lofty roofs,
roofs beneath which high officials
scurry to escape barbarians.
The golden whip is broken in two,
the nine horses are run to death,*
but it is still not possible
for all of royal blood to flee together...

In plain sight below his waist
a precious ornament of blue coral,
the pitiful prince stands weeping
at the corner of the road.
When I ask, he refuses to tell
either name or surname;
he only speaks of his desperation,
and begs to become my slave.
For a hundred days now
he has lain hidden in brambles;
there is no whole skin left
on his entire body.
But the sons and grandsons of Gao-zu
all have the same noses-
the dragon-seed, naturally,
differs from that of ordinary men.

Jackals and wolves in the city,
dragons lurking in the wilds,
the prince had better take care
of that thousand-tael body!*

I don't dare talk long here
in plain view by the crossroads,
but for the sake of my prince
I will stay for a moment.
Last night the east wind

blew in the stench of blood,
and camels from the east
filled the former Capital.*
The Shuo-fang veterans
were known as skilled warriors,
they always seemed so fierce,
but now how foolish they look!
It is rumored that the Son of Heaven
has already abdicated,
but also that the Khan
is lending his support,
that the men of Hua gashed their faces
and begged to wipe out this disgrace.
Say nothing! Someone else
may be hiding and listening.
Alas, Prince, you must be careful,
stay on guard,
and may the spirits of the Five Tombs*
watch over you always.

Du Fu

The Temple Of Zhuge Liang

Zhu-ge's great name
hangs over the whole world;
the revered statesman's portrait
awes with its sublimity.
The empire carved into thirds
hindered his designs,
yet he soars through the ages,
a lone feather in the sky.
He is brother to such greats
as Yi Yin and Lu Shang;*
if he had established control,
Xiao and Cao would be forgotten.
But the cycle had passed; Han fortunes
could not be restored.
His military strategy a failure,
his hopes dashed, his body perished.

Du Fu

Thinking Of My Brothers On A Moonlit Night

Drums on the watch-tower have emptied the roads -
At the frontier it's autumn; a wild-goose cries.
This is a night in which dew becomes frost;
The moon is bright like it used to be at home.

I have brothers, but they're scattered;
My home's broken up; are they dead or alive?
If letters are sent, they never arrive;
This war that separates us seems unending.

Du Fu

Thoughts Of Li Po From The World's End

Here at the world's end the cold winds are beginning to blow. What messages have you for me, my master? When will the poor wandering goose arrive? The rivers and lakes are swollen with autumn's waters. Art detests a too successful life; and the hungry goblins await you with welcoming jaws. You had better have a word with the ghost of that other wronged poet. Drop some verses into the Mi-lo as an offering to him!

Du Fu

Thoughts On An Ancient Site: Birthplace Of Wang Qiang

Through flocks of mountains, myriad valleys,
I arrive in Jingmen,
where Ming-fei was born and bred--
the village is still there.

Once she left the crimson terraces,
there was nothing but endless desert;
only her evergreen grave is left
to face the twilight.

Portraits have recorded
her spring-fresh face;
the tinkle of girdle pendants heralds
her soul's vain return by moonlight.

For a thousand years the pipa
has wailed in its alien tongue,
as if its strings bemoan in song
her tragic tale of grief.

Du Fu

To Bi Siyao

Once stately figures in the art of rhyme,
Now sadly down at heels, our careers in ruin,
Regarded by our servants with disdain,
We are grown old and gray before our time.
Yet in your joyful, carefree company,
The most consoling thought occurs to me:
Though we are doomed to poverty and strife,
Our poems shall have a long and prosperous life.

Du Fu

To The Recluse, Wei Pa

Often in this life of ours we resemble, in our failure to meet, the Shen and Shang constellations, one of which rises as the other one sets. What lucky chance is it, then, that brings us together this evening under the light of this same lamp? Youth and vigor last but a little time. -- Each of us now has greying temples. Half of the friends we ask each other about are dead, and our shocked cries sear the heart. Who could have guessed that it would be twenty years before I sat once more beneath your roof? Last time we parted you were still unmarried, but now here suddenly is a row of boys and girls who smilingly pay their respects to their father's old friend. They ask me where I have come from; but before I have finished dealing with their questions, the children are hurried off to fetch us wine. Spring chives are cut in the rainy dark, and there is freshly steamed rice mixed with yellow millet. `Come, we don't meet often!' you hospitably urge, pouring out ten cupfuls in rapid succession. That I am still not drunk after ten cups of wine is due to the strength of the emotion which your unchanging friendship inspires. Tomorrow the peak will lie between us, and each will be lost to the other, swallowed up in the world's affairs.

Du Fu

Twenty-Two Rhymes To Left-Prime-Minister Wei

Boys in fancy clothes never starve,
but Confucian scholars often find their lives in ruin.
Please listen to my explanation, Sir,
I, your humble student, ask permission to state my case.
When I was a younger Du Fu
I was honored as a national distinguished guest
and wore out ten thousand books in reading,
My brush was always inspired by gods,
my rhymed essays rivaled those of Yang Xiong,¹
my poems were kin with those of Cao Zijian.²
Li Yong looked for a chance to meet me,
and even Wang Han³ wanted to be my neighbor.
I thought I was an outstanding person,
positioned at a key ferryboat route
and would assist an emperor like Yao or Shun,⁴
and make folk customs honest and simple again.
In the end this ambition withered.
I became a bard instead of a hermit,
and spent thirty years traveling on a donkey,
ate traveler's rations in the luxury of the capital,
knocked on the door of the rich in the morning,
walked in the dust of fat horses in the evening,
ate leftover dishes and half-finished wine.
Wherever I went, I found misery hiding beneath.
When the emperor summoned me,
I was excited at this chance to stretch myself .
I saw blue sky but my wings just hung.
I was set back, had no scales to swim far.
I feel unworthy of your kindness,
and I know your sincerity:
in the presence of one hundred officials,
you read my best poems.
I am as happy as Gong Gong.⁵
Since it's hard to imitate Confucius disciple Yuan Xian⁶
How can I feel unhappy about anything,
though my feet still drag as usual?
Now I plan to move east to the sea,
and leave the capital behind me in the west.
But I still feel attached to the Zhongnan Mountain,

and turn my head to look at the Wei River.
I think about my gratitude for one meal⁷
as I take departure from you, Prime Minister.
This white gull is lost in the waves.
Who can tame him in his journey of ten thousand miles?

Du Fu

Upon The Military Recovery Of Henan And Hebei

News comes to Jianwai¹ that Jibei has been recovered
and tears wet my garments when I hear the news.
I turn to look at my wife, all sorrows gone,
and roll up my writings carelessly in crazy joy.
I sing loudly in the sun and can't wait to indulge in wine,
With green Spring as companion it will be a pleasure to return home,
rafting through the Ba and Wu Gorges
then via Xiangyang coming to Luoyang at last!

Du Fu

View From A Height

Sharp wind, towering sky, apes howling mournfully;
untouched island, white sand, birds flying in circles.
Infinite forest, bleakly shedding leaf after leaf;
inexhaustible river, rolling on wave after wave.
Through a thousand miles of melancholy autumn, I travel;
carrying a hundred years of sickness, I climb to this terrace.
Hardship and bitter regret have frosted my temples--
and what torments me most? Giving up wine!

Du Fu