



The Selected Poems of Tu Fu

TRANSLATED BY DAVID HINTON





**TU FU'S
CHINA**

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A NEW DIRECTIONS BOOK

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INTRODUCTION

Tu Fu lived from 712 to 770, during the illustrious High T'ang literary period. In addition to being an unparalleled watershed for Chinese poetry, it was a particularly infamous moment in the country's political history, a moment of social upheaval which determined the shape of Tu Fu's life and art. As his poems are heavily dependent on the details of their biographical/historical context, readers may want to read through the Biography before beginning the poems themselves. It is designed so that while reading the poems, a reader can easily place each poem in the biographical narrative.

1. TU FU'S POETRY

The poet's transformation from craftsman to artist was perhaps the most fundamental of many High T'ang innovations in poetry. Singular artistic personalities emerged, culminating in the "banished immortal" Li Po made of himself, and in Tu Fu, the first complete poetic sensibility in Chinese literature. Suffused from the beginning with Confucian humanism, the Chinese poetic tradition is essentially lyric and secular. It is a poetry of entirely vulnerable and human dimensions, and Tu Fu remains its great exemplar. He explored the full range of experience, and from this abundance shaped the monumental proportions of being merely human.

Tu Fu's inquiry was so comprehensive and original, in fact, that it produced the poetic possibilities which came to define the tradition. Although the radical innovations of his poetry denied him recognition during his own lifetime, his work soon inspired such dissimilar poetics as Po Chü-yi's plain-spoken social realism and Meng Chiao's black, quasi-surreal introspection. And after the T'ang fell, the Sung's poetry of things at hand, with its composed simplicity, also found its source in Tu Fu. Indeed, his influence is so pervasive that China's poetic tradition can be located in terms of his work almost as readily as his work can be located in terms of it.

One dimension of Tu Fu's range is an objective realism unheard of in earlier poetry. He brought every aspect of public and private experience into the domain of poetry, including life's more unpleasant aspects, which traditional decorum had frowned upon. And the spirit of Tu's engagement with this unexplored terrain was profound in its implications: he conceived experience in the precise terms of concrete detail. As a result, the very texture of his poetry is an act of praise for existence itself.

Certain stereotyped hardships of the common people had long been treated indirectly in

yüeh-fu ballads (p. 135), but Tu Fu was the first poet to write extensively about real, immediate social concerns. The devastating An Lu-shan rebellion, about which Tu Fu wrote relentlessly, was scarcely mentioned by Wang Wei, though he had a broader range than any poet before him and was as deeply affected by the rebellion as Tu Fu. And in his private poems, Tu found poetry in the most pedestrian experience. Such things as a poet's family and the small beauties and trials of ordinary life had scarcely appeared in Chinese poetry, and never in such a comprehensive, naturalistic way. But there is rarely such a clear distinction between the public and private in Tu Fu's poetry. Tu, who is known as the "poet-historian," lived at a particularly turbulent period in Chinese history, and few of his private poems are without social concerns. At the same time, his public poems rarely lack a private dimension. This dovetailing, in and of itself, was a substantial innovation in Chinese poetics, which traditionally required thematic unity.

Even during the High T'ang, poems were expected to address one topic while maintaining a single setting, mood, and tone. As these restrictions precluded the density his poetry required, Tu Fu routinely shifted between thematic concerns while combining discontinuous moods, tones, images, perspectives, etc. Indeed, he often juxtaposed these disparate elements within a single couplet, the fundamental unit of Chinese poetry, radically altering its traditional poise. Another strategy Tu Fu invented to increase the complexity of his poems was the lyric sequence: a series of lyrics not just grouped together, but closely interwoven to form a single long and complex poem (pp. 48, 81, 95). His comprehensive sensibility also seems to explain Tu's relative lack of distinction in the 4-line quatrain form, and why his most significant contributions to that form are three integrated sequences (pp. 60, 63, 70).

In addition to a new world of objective clarities, Tu Fu's realism opened up new depths of subjectivity, not only in terms of subject matter, but formally as well. During his later years of wandering, Tu's writing focused more and more on the solitary self cast against the elemental sweep of the universe, and that new subject matter was reflected in Tu's innovative language. While the discontinuous organization continued to give his poems a kind of intuitive complexity, Tu Fu's highly refined language extended richness to the extreme, and beyond. It became so distilled and distorted as to be nearly unintelligible at times, while his imagery often approached the surreal. And in his K'uei-chou poems, Tu also became the first Chinese poet to exploit syntactic ambiguity in a calculated, generative way, often with quite dissonant effects.

At first glance, Tu Fu's ceaseless worry over political affairs may seem familiar to us, though extreme. As citizens of a democratic state, we live with the promise that we determine the government's policy, and we each suffer a peculiar grief of personal responsibility for the abuses of "our" government. A scholar-official in the Confucian order lived with a much greater promise and responsibility because he belonged to the class whose very *raison d'être* was to administer the government. And in Tu Fu's case, the grief of implication was compounded by an almost metaphysical sense of displacement which is quite foreign to us. While a scholar-official's one proper place in the Confucian universe was helping the emperor care for the people, Tu briefly held only two governmental positions in his lifetime.

But a much deeper despair can be heard in the background of Tu Fu's poetry: the despair of a Confucian loss of faith. The human community was itself sacred and absolute in the Confucian order (its "religious" structure was manifest in a system of myth and ritual). By the end of his life, Tu had precious little reason for faith in that order. And without it, without civilization which was its full embodiment, nothing remained for him but an abyss—a

metaphysical abyss come to life in the form of barbarian armies threatening to destroy China. —Nevertheless, there is at the heart of Tu Fu's sensibility a profound detachment from things, himself included. Rather than offering freedom from the mundane world, Tu's detachment is hopelessly complicated by a deep love for all things. While it allows his empathy to surpass the bounds of personal response, it also graces him with an exquisite sense of humor, one capable of subtly bringing a geologic perspective to even the most trying of his own circumstances. In his later years, Tu Fu forged an identity of his life and art. His wandering in a decimated and increasingly foreign world became not just his predicament, but the human predicament. And the myriad details of his daily life became correlatives for the bones of exile which shape our spirit. He was a man of great wisdom speaking of an encounter with the extremes of our human experience, and in the measure of his voice even those extremes find repose.

2. CHINESE POETICS

All of the poems in this book are *shih*, the primary poetic form in the Chinese tradition. The basic structural unit of *shih* is the couplet. Individual lines are almost without exception endstopped. End-rhymes occur in the second line of every couplet (and optionally in the poem's first line). Generally, a poem uses a single rhyme throughout, though in longer poems, the rhyme may shift, so that the poem will have several sections, each using its own rhyme. A caesura divides every line in a *shih*, almost always at the same place: after the second character in a 5-character line, and after the fourth character in a 7-character line.

Syntactically, *shih* poetry is classical Chinese pared to an absolute minimum. In fact, substantial amounts of the grammar are often absent. The resulting ambiguity is one of Chinese poetry's great strengths and beauties, especially as it is combined with the remarkably concrete nature of Chinese characters. This extreme reduction is facilitated by the seemingly monotonous and simplistic formal structure of *shih*. These two aspects of *shih* are bound together in a mutually supporting relationship: while the tight formal structure helps render the open syntax meaningful, the open syntax keeps the formal structure from becoming monotonous. Instead of monotony, the uniform structure gives the poem an underlying sense of balance and order.

During the High T'ang, the *shih* form could generally be divided along two axes. The first distinguishes between poems using a 5-character line and those using a 7-character line. In order to make this distinction clear in English, I have translated 5-character poems in quatrains and 7-character poems in couplets. The second axis distinguishes between ancient-style (*kushih*) and the recently developed modern-style (*chin-t'i-shih*). Ancient-style is the less rigorous of the two forms. Eight lines is one standard length for ancient-style poems, but they are frequently longer. And though they generally maintain a uniform line-length, exceptions are allowed. The primary forms of the highly regulated modern-style are the *lü-shih* (8 lines) and the *chüeh-chu* (4-line quatrains). The much less significant *p'ai-lü* has no length restrictions. In modern-style poetry, lines are without exception uniform in length, and the words making up every line must follow an elaborate tonal pattern, a kind of metrical equivalent to the parallel construction described below.

The two central couplets in a *lü-shih* must be parallel in construction (*chüeh-chu* may or

may not employ parallel construction). That is, each word in the first line of a couplet must be paired in the second line with a word from the same semantic area, and the syntactic constructions of the two lines must mirror one another. The resulting contrasts and similarities between words and phrases create richly expressive relationships which are very important to a poem's field of meaning. A particularly good example is the second couplet of "Impromptu" (p. 75):

(bank)
sand head / sleep egrets // gather fists / tranquil
boat tail / jump fish // spread cut / cry (sound)
(wake)

Throughout this couplet, the pairing of contrasting elements creates a sense of poise, which is the most basic function of parallelism. This balance of contrasts is uncomplicated in the first three positions (sand-boat, head-tail, sleep-jump). But in the fourth, a threatening tension arises when predator is coupled with prey, an impending violence already foreshadowed in the striking description of egrets as clenched fists in the first line (it is when reading the second line of a couplet that this added dimension of parallelism is registered). The tension builds through the fifth and sixth positions, and is released by the ambiguity in the couplet's final character: while a derivative meaning of "ming" is simply "sound," which accurately applies to the leaping fish, the written character is made up of the elements for mouth and bird, and its primary meaning is "a bird's cry." When read in its original sense, then, "*ming*" sets off the relentless life-and-death struggle of existence, shattering this peaceful scene (as well as the couplet's poise).

This is a remarkably expressive couplet, in which parallelism goes far beyond its basic function of holding the two lines together in a balanced relationship. Parallel construction creates another dimension in the poem, an interiority which is impossible to reproduce in English, although some of its effects can be rendered indirectly:

Serene

Flock of fists on sand—egrets asleep when
A fish leaps in the boat's wake, shivering, cry.

It is only because Chinese is such an austerely minimal language that individual words have enough weight and immediacy for these parallel interactions to occur. If a translator mimics parallel structures in English, the very lines which are richest and most intricate in the original become the most noticeably flat, simplistic, and monotonous.

Poetry had traditionally been a social practice of the classically educated aristocracy. Its proper occasions were restricted by convention, as were the form and subject matter considered proper to any particular occasion. Although many of Tu Fu's 1,450 poems are occasional in the

conventional sense, he came to see virtually any human situation as the occasion of poetry. At the same time, he superceded restrictions of formal category. He was a master of all forms, and he employed each of them for a wide variety of occasions and thematic concerns, the innovative combinations giving poems new qualities of diction and tone.

A particularly good example of this is Tu Fu's innovative use of the *lü-shih*, a form which developed during the T'ang Dynasty. In his later years, after deciding to leave government service and his homeland in the capital region, Tu Fu brought this form to perfection. Prior to that decision, his major work was written in a balance of forms tending toward ancient-style. Afterwards, in his devotion to the artistic discipline of poetry, he became preoccupied with the technically demanding *lü-shih*, almost to the exclusion of the ancient-style. As ancient-style makes the fewest formal demands on a writer, it was traditionally used for more serious topics. The *lü-shih*, on the other hand, being so extravagant in its formal demands, had generally been used as a mere showcase for a poet's technical facility. Tu Fu was so adept with the *lü-shih* form, however, that he could use it for the most serious and demanding topics. The result not only gave his late meditations an intricate elegance, but the parallel structure also added a new dimension to the poetic argument. Equally remarkable was Tu's extension of this form to poems on daily experience, both his own and that of peasants, gracing the commonplace with a striking beauty.

Because the qualities of tone and diction created as a poem's form interacts with its content can be significant, I have indicated form by using capital letters to begin lines in modern-style poems, and lower-case letters for those in ancient-style. As for the poetic language itself, however, I have made no attempt to render the distinction between them. The price paid would far outweigh the rewards.

Classical Chinese is a language quite distinct from spoken Chinese. It is a literary language defined by usage in the corpus of its standard texts, many of which were memorized by writers during their education. As a result, nearly every word and phrase is allusive in some sense. And Tu Fu was the most erudite poet in a tradition which expected poems to employ calculated allusion regularly. Generally, however, I have not tried to identify allusions unless they are essential to the poem's meaning. Although this eliminates a rich texture informing much of Tu Fu's poetry, and is the very nature of the language itself, to do otherwise would be a detailed scholarly endeavor having little to do with the translation of poetry.

3. TRANSLATION PRINCIPLES

My primary concern in these translations has been to recreate Tu Fu as a compelling poetic voice in English. To that end, I have freely used the resources available to contemporary English, though these resources share rather little with those of the High T'ang poetic language. The *shih* has so acutely distilled the extremely spare language of classical prose (to say nothing of the spoken language) that an equally reduced English would not be just uninteresting language, it would be virtually inarticulate. The language of *shih* is located, to a large extent, not in its *apparent* (written) elements, but in the reader. The knowledge, expectations, and conventions which the reader brings to a poem are so much a part of the language that even substantial areas of grammar are supplied in this way. In addition, a T'ang poem aspires to

present the most concise sketch of its subject possible, and one fundamental convention is that ~~the reader will take a very active role in creating the full picture in all its detail.~~ Therefore, an extreme reduction in the *apparent* linguistic elements results in the most elegant and complex utterances in the language. English, on the other hand, is almost entirely manifest in its *apparent* language, which is why Chinese can appear so clear and simple when seen from the perspective of English. The characteristics required by English are altogether unlike those required by Chinese. Eloquence in English demands language which has *apparent* intricacy, variety, subtlety, drama, and a form of rhythm and music which is qualitatively different from that of Chinese.

So, although I have tried to remain faithful to the content of Tu Fu's poems, I have made little attempt to mimic the formal or linguistic characteristics of the originals, because to do so would be to misrepresent them entirely. The configuration of characteristics which defines the Chinese poetic language is so fundamentally different from that of contemporary English that individual characteristics (some of which are shared) cannot have the same value in both systems. My overall intent has been to create reciprocal configurations in English. And rather than resolving the uncertainties of the originals, I have tried to recreate Tu Fu's poems as new systems of uncertainty, as the poems he might have written had he been writing in today's English.

*

Tu Fu's years of wandering did not end with his death. Because of the poverty and dislocation of his family, he was not finally buried in the family graveyard near Lo-yang until his grandson managed to arrange it in 813, forty-three years after his death. Although Tu's work had aroused relatively little interest during his lifetime, the praise in Yuan Chen's tomb inscription indicates that his poems had begun to startle and move readers. Thus, he satisfied the terms of his famous statement on poetics: "If my words aren't startling, death itself is without rest." My hope for these translations is that they might deepen Tu's millennial repose.

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David Hinton

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No one knows your thoughts, master,
And night is empty around us, silent.

EARLY POEMS

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.

VISITING FENG-HSIEN TEMPLE AT LUNG-MEN

I leave the temple, but stay another
night nearby. The dark valley all empty
music, moonlight scatters lucid
shadow among trees. Heaven's Gap

cradles planets and stars. I sleep
among clouds—and stirring, my clothes
cold, hear the first bell sound
morning for those waking that deeply.

WRITTEN ON THE WALL AT CHANG'S HERMITAGE

In spring mountains, alone, I set out to find you.
Axe strokes crack—crack and quit. Silence doubles.

I pass snow and ice lingering along cold streams, then,
Late light wavering at Stone Gate, enter these woods.

Deer graze here each morning, for you harm nothing.
And because you want nothing, auras of silver and gold

Grace nights. Pacing you *on a whim* in bottomless dark, the way
Here lost—I feel it drifting, this whole empty boat.

THOUGHTS, FACING RAIN: I GO TO INVITE HSÜ IN

Clouds summit above T'ai Mountain, peak
And summit, serene as full-river voices
In vacant space. Lightning skitters swallows
On painted screens. Fish dip back below

Steady rains, deepen and drift. When I
Hear you outside, I am drinking cheap wine.
Ashamed of mud, calling *Bring your horse*
Right up to the porch here, I invite you in.

FOR LI PO

Autumn returns, and again we are cast thistledown together
On the winds. The elixir of immortality has eluded us—

Ko Hung must be ashamed. Days drunk and singing too loud,
Given to the wind, yet resolute—so brave, and for whom?

CH'ANG-AN I

**A LETTER FROM MY BROTHER AT LIN-YI ARRIVES
LAMENTING RAINS AND FLOODING ON THE
YELLOW RIVER. AS ASSISTANT MAGISTRATE, HE
IS WORRIED ABOUT THE COLLAPSING DIKES, SO
I SEND THIS POEM TO EASE HIS THOUGHTS**

The Dual Principles have ended in rain and wind,
Billows and waves falling from a hundred
Mountain valleys. I hear the river is broken
Wide open and gathering every distance into one

Cold rising sea. Lament seizes every district.
Officials grow quiet with worry. And directing
Defenses against the river, you are also
Helpless. Your foot-long letter arrives, saying

There isn't time for new dikes. Enlisting
Mu Wang's turtles and crocodiles is impossible,
And looking to magpies from the Celestial River
Futile. South of Yen, farmlands are nothing

Now but wind. Even Chi hills are no more
Than sunken thistleweed. Waters thick with
Clams and snails lap at city walls; hornless
Dragons and dragons with scales roam every pool.

Hsü Pass deep as any water god's palace,
Chieh-shih Mountain a mere tip of autumn hair,
Nothing remains of peasant villages but a lone
Tree and ten-thousand boats lost in azure sky.

Adrift, slight as a flood-charm, I sail for peach
Branches of immortality. There, at the edge of
Heaven with my fishhook and line, surely
I will land the P'eng-lai tortoise for you.

SONG OF THE WAR-CARTS

War-carts clatter and creak,
horses stomp and splutter—
each wearing quiver and bow, the war-bound men pass.
Mothers and fathers, wives and children—they all flock
alongside, farewell dust so thick Hsien-yang Bridge
disappears. They get everywhere in the way, crying

cries to break against heaven, tugging at war clothes.
On the roadside, when a passerby asks war-bound men,
war-bound men say simply: *Our lots are drawn often.*
Taken north at fifteen, we guard the Yellow River. Taken
west at forty, we man frontier camps. Village elders
tied our head-cloths then. And now we return, our
hair white, only to be sent out again to borderlands,

lands where blood swells like sea-water. And Emperor Wu's
imperial dreams of conquest roll on. Haven't you heard
that east of the mountains, in our Han

homeland, ten hundred towns and

ten thousand villages are overrun by thorned weeds,
that even though strong wives keep hoeing and plowing,
you can't tell where crops are and aren't? It's worst for
mighty Ch'in warriors: the more bitter war they outlive,
the more they are herded about like chickens and dogs.
Though you are kind to ask, sir,
how could we complain? Imagine
this winter in Ch'in. Their men
still haven't returned, and those
clerks are out demanding taxes.

Taxes! How could they pay taxes?
Even a son's birth is tragic now.
People prefer a daughter's birth,
a daughter's birth might at least end in marriage nearby.
But a son's birth ends in an open grave who knows

where. You haven't seen how bones from ancient times
lie, bleached and unclaimed along the shores of
Sky-Blue Seas—how the weeping of old ghosts is
joined by new voices, the gray sky by twittering rain.

CROSSING THE BORDER

1

So far from my village—sent so far
away to the Chiao River. Reporting
dates are final, and nets of calamity tangle
anyone who resists. Our lands are rich

enough and more for a king, what good
can a little more ground bring?
Shouldering my spear, lost, parents'
love lost—tasting silence, I go.

2

I left home long ago. Now, the early
abuse is over. My bones a father's love,
my flesh a mother's—how are they so
broken in a son still alive to guess at

his death (shaking free of its reins,
a horse tearing blue silk from my hands, or
after inching down a mountainside, eighty
thousand feet, trying for a fallen flag)?

3

In a river of muted cries, I sharpen
my sword, longing for the heart's
silence long laced with cries of stricken
people. But the water bleeds, the edge

cuts my hand. Once devoted to his
country, what has a good man to resent?
Heroes live forever in Unicorn Pavilion,
and the bones of war rot quickly away.

4

Always some clerk to scare-up men and
send them out. The frontiers are well-
supplied. Death certain as life,
we advance. And still, officers rage.

Meeting a friend on the road, I send
letters home....O, how are we cast so
far from one another, broken apart, never
to scrape by in sorrow together again?

5

Distant, ten thousand miles and more
distant, they take us to join vast armies.
Soldiers come to joy and grief by chance,
how could generals hear everything? Riders

appear across the river. Then suddenly
they arrive, ten hundred Mongol brigades.
From this rankless beginning, how long
until my reputation is made and confirmed?

6

In drawing bows, draw the strongest;
in using arrows, use the longest.
To shoot men, first shoot their horses;
to take enemies, first take their generals.

But killing must be kept within limits:
a country is nothing without borders. Far
beyond any claim of defense, what is ours
now with all this slaughter and death?

7

Pushing our horses hard through mixed
rain and snow, we enter high mountains.
The trail narrows. Our fingers breaking
through layers of ice, we hug frozen rock.

So far from our Chinese moon,
building walled forts—will we ever
return? At dusk, clouds drift away
south, clouds I cannot mount and ride.

8

The Mongols descend on our positions.
For hundreds of miles, dust-filled
winds darken skies. A few brave

sword strokes drive armies before us.

We capture their famed chieftain and
present him, tied by the neck, when
we return. Preparing to march, we stand
in formation. One win—so much talk.

9

In ten years and more at war, how could I
avoid all honor? People so treasure it,
I thought of telling my story, but sounding
like all the others would be too shameful.

War flickers throughout our heartland
and rages steadily along the frontiers.
With such fine men chasing ambition
everywhere, who can elude savage beggary?

NEW YEAR'S EVE AT TU WEI'S HOME

The songs over pepper wine have ended.
Friends jubilant among friends, we start
A stabled racket of horses. Lanterns
Blaze, scattering crows. As dawn breaks,

The fortieth year passes in my flight toward
Evening light. Who can change it, who
Stop it for even a single embrace—this dead
Dazzling drunk in the wings of life we live?

MEANDERING RIVER: THREE STANZAS, FIVE LINES EACH

1

Meandering River desolate, autumn skies deep—withered
bits of blown lotus and chestnut drift. Lamenting this

wanderer handed-down into old age is empty: White
pebbles and shoreline sand also chafe back and forth.
A wailing swan, alone, cries out in search of its kind.

2

Singing that which occurs, neither modern nor ancient,
my rising song only breaks against bushes and trees.
And those houses stand, in their lavish parade, countless.

I welcome this heart of ash. Dear brother, dear little
niece—why so hurt, why these tears falling like rain?

3

I have asked enough answers of heaven for one life.
Enough, having hemp and mulberry fields there,

to settle near South Mountain, in Tu-ling. Riding
with Li Kuang, in simple clothes, I will end my
failing years shooting phantom tigers as they appear.

LI STOPS BY ON A SUMMER DAY

In distant woods, summer heat thin,
you stop by. It could be in a village
somewhere, my little tumbledown
house near the city's south tower—

neighbors open and simple-hearted,
needs easily filled. Call across
for wine, the family to the west
gladly hands a pot over the fence,

fresh, unstrained. We spread mats
beside the stream. Clear winds arrive
carelessly, and you imagine autumn
stunning already. Everywhere, nesting

birds bicker, thickening cicada songs
fill lush leaves—who calls my home

among this racket of things secluded?
We linger out flawless, dusk-tinted

blossoms on water—a world enough now,
enough and more. And without worry,
the winepot still far from empty, I go
again with schemes aplenty for more.

9/9, SENT TO TS'EN SHEN

I step out for a moment, then back.
Foundering rain-clouds haven't changed;
ditchwater babbles everywhere. Thinking
of you, I grow thin. I mutter songs

on the west porch. Meals pass indistinct
as night and day. Meandering River a mere
half-step away—and yet, meeting you
there is impossible now.... How much

more must earth's simple people bear?
Their farms are beyond hope. And if we
scold the cloud-spirit, who will ever
patch these leak-sprung heavens? O,

sun and moon lost to a haze and waste
world, twitter and howl. Noble men
driven into twisted paths, simple-hearted
people, frantic, run themselves ragged.

Even the exalted South Mountain might
already have sunk and drifted away.
What is it for—here at my eastern fence,
this holiday confusion of chrysanthemums?

Your new poems? Our shared weakness
for wine? Cut them—I'll cut the yellow-
bloomed things and fill my sleeves
far too beautifully for nothing today.

AUTUMN RAIN LAMENT

Looming rain and reckless wind, an indiscriminate
ruins of autumn. The four seas and eight horizons all

gathered into one cloud—you can't tell an ox coming
from horse going, or the muddy Ching from clear Wei.

Wheat-ears are sprouting on the stalk, and millet-
clusters turn black. Nothing arrives from farmers,

not even news. Here in the city, quilts bring
one handful of rice. No one mentions old bargains.

FENG-HSIEN RETURN CHANT

An old man from Tu-ling unhinged a life
in twisted thought and harlequin rags
begging to rescue the times like any fool,
as if he were Chi or Chieh. He will end

empty as Hui Tzu's huge, useless gourd.
A white-haired man too willing to suffer,
once my coffin is covered, this longing for
what will suffice will end. And yet,

it is poverty's year. I mourn the people,
my song brimmed with lament, to my aging
schoolmates' amusement—a held sigh
and fever of the heart. Not that I haven't

a hermit's love for rivers and seas,
for a life wind scatters in vanishing
days and months, but with a ruler rare as
Yao or Shun, I couldn't endure that

endless farewell. We have everything
good government could possibly want now
but good government. The sunflower

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