
After Du Fu

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—For JBH

Tsuyu I

The rain falls listlessly, and halts, and falls
again to drumming on the roof with teeth
cut from the mountains lost in flaying mist.
Beyond the wall they tear all sound to shreds
and leave my little lamp indenting books
chair, desk, couch, *shoji*, window and roof beams
so solidly and reassuringly
a moment just before they snatch away
a thousand centuries from the house and chew
them, mindlessly, into oblivion.

Tsuyu II

I.

Light rain relents. A frail cicada sings
among the rows of tea, engulfing hills;
indefinite, half-drifting mist still clings
to midnight trees so motionless it fills
the slopes with vacant mountains blotting out
the indent of their branches on the sky.
The Classics lie round my chair, but thought
relents, and words, among these mountains, die.

2.

No wind to stir a bush, no silence now
but solitude of sound becoming song.
Stars vacant, gravel under foot: below
among those houses, drifting slow and long,
smoke exiles shape and draws the fields close.
A leaf-fall on the roof releases night.
Horizons shrink about my little house
as carp scales crease the water, creasing light.

3.

Some minutes in the mist and then return.
Books lie about the study, dim with cold,
but words exile me coldly when I turn
to them, and as they dwindle still withhold
their music: they are exiles too this day,
from emptiness they pass to emptiness
creasing the darkness, carp in silent play,
and briefly break the mountain's deep abyss.

The Color of Spider Lilies
Lycoris radiata

October shadows cross fields of tea.
The spider lilies, dim in cold green,
still grasp the darkening air
that spirals in their arms.

Autumn colors cross, the dragonflies
recross, hedgerows that slant to a river:
color vanishing at twilight, poised just
a moment, dreams of lilies.

A farmer trimming tea can only see
leaves fallen, trodden under foot, lost
where the spider lily holds
a dragonfly of red.

The wind dies, hedgerows fade like smoke,
plum trees, with their ragged marine skeletons,
magnify the hesitant autumn mist
curling up from the river.

NOTE

This series makes no pretense to imitate Du Fu's versification, especially the syntactical parallelism of the two internal stanzaic couplets required by Chinese Regulated Verse that provide the model for "Tsuyu II," only to suggest his tone, imagery, complex resonance and structure.

