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

1.

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 Chi-
nese Regulated Verse that provide the model for “Tsuyu II,” only to suggest
his tone, imagery, complex resonance and structure.