

## 4.6

## 自京赴奉先縣詠懷五百字

杜陵有布衣，  
老大意轉拙。  
許身一何愚，  
4 竊比稷與契。  
居然成濩落，  
白首甘契闊。  
蓋棺事則已，  
8 此志常覲豁。  
窮年憂黎元，  
歎息腸內熱。  
取笑同學翁，  
12 浩歌彌激烈。  
非無江海志，  
蕭灑送日月。  
生逢堯舜君，  
16 不忍便永訣。

## 4.6

Going from the Capital to Fengxian County, Singing My Feelings  
(five hundred words)<sup>1</sup>

There is a man of Duling in homespun clothes,<sup>2</sup>  
as I age, my aims grow more inept.  
So foolish in what I swore to become!—

- 4 I secretly likened myself to Hou Ji and Xie.<sup>3</sup>  
At last I proved to be too large to be useful,  
white-haired, and willing to endure hardship.  
When the coffin closes, the issue will be settled,  
8 but these aims ever look to fulfillment.  
To the end of my years I worry for the common folk,  
I heave sighs, and my guts burn within.<sup>4</sup>  
I win mockery from old men, once fellow students,  
12 yet I sing out loudly, and with increasing fervor.  
It's not that I lack aims to live on the rivers and lakes,  
to see days and months pass, aloof and serene.  
But I live in the age of a ruler like Yao and Shun,  
16 and cannot bear to just take leave forever.

1 Original note: “Composed at the beginning of the eleventh month in the fourteenth year of the Tianbao Reign” 天寶十四載十一月初作。The eleventh month began on December 8, 755; on the 16th news arrived that An Lushan had rebelled, though the emperor at first did not credit the report.

2 Duling was a region south of the capital, and Du Fu's family home. “Homespun clothes,” literally “plain cloth clothes,” was the mark of a commoner; that is, someone with neither class rank nor official position.

3 Hou Ji was the creator of agriculture and Shun's Minister of agriculture; Xie helped Yu in draining the great flood during the reign of Shun. On the face of things Du Fu is saying that he wants to become a great minister of state like these two ancient figures; however, Hou Ji was also the ancestor of the Zhou ruling house, and Xie was the ancestor of the Shang. Given his grief at the death of his son and his sense of failure as a parent at the end of the poem, the situation in which the poem was written, these associations of glorious futures hoped for and lost cannot be entirely suppressed.

4 *Neire* 內熱 (“burn within”) is a medical term, but one associated with zeal in service.

當今廊廟具，  
構廈豈云缺。  
葵藿傾太陽，  
20 物性固莫奪。  
顧惟螻蟻輩，  
但自求其穴。  
胡為慕大鯨，  
24 輒擬偃溟渤。  
以茲悟生理，  
獨恥事干謁。  
兀兀遂至今，  
28 忍為塵埃沒。  
終愧巢與由，  
未能易其節。  
沈飲聊自遣，  
32 放歌頗愁絕。  
歲暮百草零，  
疾風高岡裂。  
天衢陰崢嶸，  
36 客子中夜發。  
霜嚴衣帶斷，  
指直不得結。  
凌晨過驪山，  
40 御榻在嵒嶮。

- Yet now the halls of State are fully complete,<sup>1</sup>  
 in the building's structure, no gaps at all.  
 Like mallow and pulse, I bend to the sun—<sup>2</sup>  
 20 none can rob a thing of its nature.  
 But I turn to consider that ant-breed,  
 seeking only their own little holes.  
 Why should they aspire to be Great Leviathan<sup>3</sup>  
 24 ever aiming to sprawl across the dark sea?  
 Hereby I grow aware of life's pattern.  
 and I alone am ashamed to beg for favor.  
 I have gone on thus persistently until now—  
 28 I could not bear just to sink into the dust.  
 In the end Chaofu and Xu You put me to shame,<sup>4</sup>  
 for they could not alter their firm resolve.  
 I drink deeply to banish such thoughts for the while,  
 32 then burst into song, so terribly sad.  
 It was year's end, all the plants were dying,  
 the high ridges, rent by the hard winds.  
 The royal avenues lay sunk deep in shadow  
 36 as the traveler set forth at midnight.  
 The frost harsh, my coat's sash snapped,  
 my fingers were stiff, I could not tie it.  
 At daybreak I passed by Mount Li,  
 40 the royal couch lay there on its towering height.<sup>5</sup>

1 The "halls of state," literally "[palace] porch and ancestral temple," was a standard figure for the structure of government, in which particular *cai*, "talent"/"timber" might be used.

2 That is, he looks toward the emperor.

3 The "Leviathan," *jing* 鯨, is probably here simply a figure for greatness, but it is hard not to note that this was the standard figure for An Lushan, more "monstrous" than great.

4 \*Xu You.

5 Xuanzong made winter visits to Mount Li near Chang'an because of the hot springs there.

蚩尤塞寒空，  
蹴蹋崖谷滑。  
瑤池氣鬱律，  
44 羽林相摩戛。  
君臣留歡娛，  
樂動殷膠葛。  
賜浴皆長纓，  
48 與宴非短褐。  
彤庭所分帛，  
本自寒女出。  
鞭撻其夫家，  
52 聚斂貢城闕。  
聖人筐篚恩，  
實欲邦國活。  
臣如忽至理，  
56 君豈棄此物。  
多士盈朝廷，  
仁者宜戰慄。  
況聞內金盤，  
60 盡在衛霍室。  
中堂舞神仙，  
煙霧散玉質。  
煖客貂鼠裘，  
64 悲管逐清瑟。

- Ill-omened auroras stuffed the cold sky,  
 they have trampled the slippery valley slopes.  
 Vapors surged swelling from Alabaster Pool,<sup>1</sup>  
 44 where the royal guardsmen rub and clack.  
 There lord and courtiers linger in pleasures,  
 music stirs, thundering through empty space.  
 All granted baths there have long hat ribbons,<sup>2</sup>  
 48 no short homespun tunics join in their feasts.  
 Yet the silk bolts apportioned in the royal court  
 came first from the homes of poor women.  
 Whips flogged their menfolk,  
 52 gathering taxes to present to the palace.  
 His Majesty's gracious gifts of baskets  
 are in fact to preserve the domains.  
 If the courtiers disregard perfect government,  
 56 it is not that our prince throws these things away.  
 Many officers are now filling the court,  
 it is fitting that kindly men tremble.  
 What's more, I've heard golden plate of the Household  
 60 is now all in the homes of imperial in-laws.<sup>3</sup>  
 In the midst of halls goddesses dance,  
 diaphanous mists disperse over marble flesh.  
 Cloaks of sable warm the guests,  
 64 moving notes of flutes follow clear zithers.

1 "Alabaster Pool" was where the Queen Mother of the West feasted King Mu of the Zhou, and it was a standard figure for extravagant feasting and pleasures on the part of a ruler, generally to the detriment of the polity. In this case the vapors rising are literal, since the pleasure palace on Mount Li was built around hot springs.

2 The "long hat ribbons" mark great court officers.

3 Literally "the homes of the Wei's and the Huo's," powerful in-law families of the Western Han.

勸客駝蹄羹，  
霜橙壓香橘。  
朱門酒肉臭，  
68 路有凍死骨。  
榮枯咫尺異，  
惆悵難再述。  
北轅就涇渭，  
72 官渡又改轍。  
群冰從西下，  
極目高岑兀。  
疑是崦嵫來，  
76 恐觸天柱折。  
河梁幸未圯，  
枝撐聲窸窣。  
行旅相攀援，  
80 川廣不可越。  
老妻寄異縣，  
十口隔風雪。  
誰能久不顧，  
84 庶往共飢渴。  
入門聞號咷，  
幼子飢已卒。  
吾寧捨一哀，  
88 里巷亦嗚咽。

Guests are urged to taste camel-hoof stew,  
 frosty oranges weigh upon sweet tangerines.  
 Crimson gates reek with meat and ale,  
 68 while on the streets are bones of the frozen dead.  
 Splendor and privation, a mere foot apart,  
 so upsetting it is hard to recount further.  
 My northward cart came where the Jing meets the Wei,  
 72 at the official crossing I again changed my track.<sup>1</sup>  
 Massed ice floes were coming down from the west,  
 looming high as far as the eye could see.  
 It seemed as if the Kongtong Mountains had come,<sup>2</sup>  
 76 I feared it would strike and break pillars of Heaven.<sup>3</sup>  
 We were lucky the bridge had not yet collapsed,  
 yet the sound of its crossbeams creaked and groaned.  
 Travelers held hands to help each other over,  
 80 if the river grew broader, we could not cross.  
 My wife was in a different county,  
 ten mouths separated from me by winds and snow.  
 Who could go long without checking on them?  
 84 I hoped to go share their hunger and thirst.  
 When I came in the gate, I heard crying out,  
 my young son had died of hunger.  
 I could not suppress a wail of my own,  
 88 when even the whole lane was sobbing.

1 The situation here is far from clear. A “crossing” was a ferry point; later we see Du Fu on one of the bridges, clearly crossing on foot. We know that some of the Wei River bridges could accommodate vehicles but this does not seem like one of them. It is possible that he “changes his track” because no boats are crossing under flood conditions.

2 Kongtong was a fabled mountain range in the Western Regions.

3 This alludes to the famous story of the rebel Gonggong battling with the mythic emperor Zhuanxu and breaking one of the pillars that supported Heaven.



所愧為人父，  
 無食致夭折。  
 豈知秋未登，  
 92 貧窶有倉卒。  
 生常免租稅，  
 名不隸征伐。  
 撫跡猶酸辛，  
 96 平人固騷屑。  
 默思失業徒，  
 因念遠戍卒。  
 憂端齊終南，  
 100 瀕洞不可掇。

## 4.7

## 奉先劉少府新畫山水障歌

堂上不合生楓樹，  
 怪底江山起煙霧。  
 聞君掃卻赤縣圖，  
 4 乘興遣畫滄州趣。  
 畫師亦無數，  
 好手不可遇。  
 對此融心神，  
 8 知君重毫素。

- What shamed me was my role as a father,  
 lack of food had caused this infant's death.  
 I could not have known that before the harvest  
 92 such calamity would befall our poverty.  
 All my life I have been exempt from taxes,  
 and my name is not registered for conscription.  
 Considering what bitter things still happened to me,  
 96 ordinary people must truly be desperate.  
 I brood silently on those who lost livelihoods,  
 then think of our troops in far garrisons.  
 Reasons for worry are as great as South Mountain,  
 100 a chaotic swirl that cannot be grasped.

*In the tenth lunar month of 755 Du Fu took a low appointment as an administrator in one of the imperial guard units. In the eleventh month he went to see his family, whom he had moved to Fengxian County. At the time An Lushan had already risen in rebellion, but the news had not yet reached the capital. We do not know how much this poem came purely from its moment or was revised in hindsight, but the sense of crisis—before the real crisis was known—is clear.*

#### 4.7

Song for the Painted Landscape Screen of Liu Dan, Sheriff of Fengxian<sup>1</sup>

- Maple trees should not be growing in a hall—  
 amazing!—how these rivers and hills give off fog and mist.  
 I've heard you wiped away all other pictures of the heartland,  
 4 as on a whim you have painted the zest of gray isles.  
 Painters are innumerable,  
 but a skilled hand can't be found;  
 Facing this, heart and spirit fuse with it,  
 8 and I know how you honor the brush-hair and silk.

<sup>1</sup> Whyb has the appended note: "Written at the house of Liu Dan, Sheriff of Fengxian"  
 奉先尉劉單宅作。