

SEVEN
VARIATIONS
ON A POEM
BY DU FU

*Confucius Institute
and
School of Languages
Rhodes University*

*Edited by
Robert Berold*

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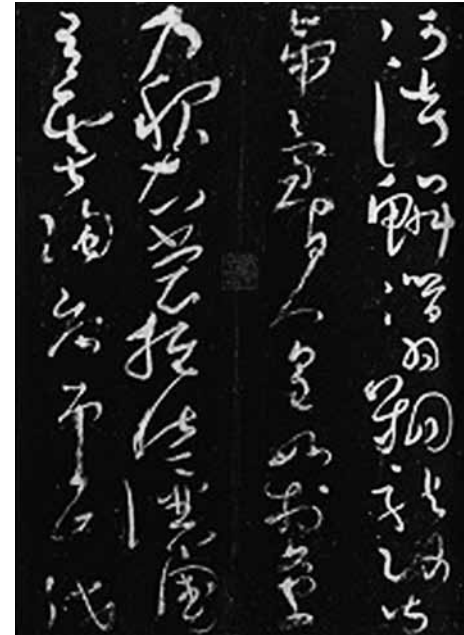
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Introduction

Marius Vermaak
Director, Confucius Institute, Rhodes University

Some years ago I read Vikram Seth's *Three Chinese Poets: Wang Wei, Li Bai, and Du Fu* (1992). I immediately knew I had to change my life; I had to work to understand those poems.

It was Seth who gave me the idea for this project. In his introduction he presents a poem in this format: each line is first given in Chinese characters, then in an alphabetical Chinese (pinyin) version, then in a shockingly literal English version, and finally in poetry. Could we do the same here and now in the Eastern Cape, in the 21st Century? In all the languages taught at Rhodes?

Some months ago I approached the poet, Robert Berold (he was changing a flat tyre on his bakkie at that very moment), and asked him if he would guide the project. Ma Yue, my colleague, and Robert chose a classical Chinese poem by the great Tang dynasty poet Du Fu. They followed the Seth model. The starting point was to present the poem in its most elementary English form, character-by-character English: no syntax, no plurals, no tenses – pristine and pulsing with potential meaning. Then they gave it to each of the language divisions in the School of Languages and the English Department to translate.

After practice sessions run by Robert and Ma Yue on two other classical poems, small teams of lecturers

and students translated Du Fu into Xhosa, Afrikaans, English, French, German, and Latin – and wrote short essays on the process of translation. The wonderful results are in this little book.

Despite the fact that so much is lost in translation – shades of meaning, word associations, rhyme schemes and poetic forms – people still continue to translate great poets because a good translation can magically carry a human voice over time, geography and culture. Are Du Fu and Wei Ba again briefly reunited and celebrating together in Grahamstown, thirteen centuries later? Read and judge for yourself.

DU FU

Robert Berold

Du Fu (712-770) is generally considered China's greatest poet. Besides his mastery of poetic forms and many other subtleties of language which cannot be translated, his universal appeal lies in his remarkable ability to describe ordinary reality in direct and unflinching ways. As one of his best English translators, David Hinton, explains "He explored the full range of experience, and from this abundance shaped the monumental proportions of being merely human. ... He brought every aspect of public and private experience into the domain of poetry, including life's more unpleasant aspects... in the precise terms of concrete detail."

Kenneth Rexroth, another fine translator of Du Fu, writes: "[His] kind of elegiac reverie has become the principal form of modern poetry, as poetry has ceased to be a public art and has become, as Whitehead said of religion, 'What man does with his aloneness.' You feel that Tu Fu brings to each poetic situation, each experienced complex of sensations and values, a completely open nervous system. Out of this comes the choice of imagery – so poignant, so startling, and yet seemingly so ordinary." The seven versions of the Du Fu poem included in this book are supplemented by Hinton's and Rexroth's translations.

The middle T'ang period (the 8th century) was a golden age of poetry and several of its poets are well known in the West, including Li Po (Li Bai in more modern

spelling), Wang Wei, Po Chu-i (Bai Juyi), and Tu Fu (Du Fu). The T'ang dynasty began to disintegrate during Du Fu's lifetime, with war and rebellion making it impossible for him to find employment and settle in one place. He had a hard life in other respects too, often separated from his family, and mourning the early deaths of children.

In ancient China the civil service (the formal economy, one could call it) was a meritocracy, and educated men applying for the civil service had to sit an examination based on the five Confucian classics. Part of the requirements were a knowledge of music and poetry and the ability to compose poetry in various forms. (One wonders what a civil service today would look like with such qualifications – or, as Ezra Pound also wondered "The thought of what America would be like / if the Classics had a wide circulation / troubles my sleep"). In fact Du Fu failed his civil service examinations, and struggled for most of his life to get a government post. He succeeded eventually, mainly through the emperor's recognition of his poetic abilities.

Separation and ageing were common themes of T'ang poetry, but this short poem of reunion with an old friend has a vast emotional range that encompasses delight, sorrow, and detachment. That is Du Fu.

赠卫八处士

杜甫

人生不相见，动如参与商。今夕复何夕，共此灯烛光！
少壮能几时，鬓发各已苍。访旧半为鬼，惊呼热中肠。
焉知二十载，重上君子堂。昔别君未婚，儿女忽成行。
怡然敬父执，问我来何方。问答乃未已，儿女罗酒浆。
夜雨剪春韭，新炊间黄粱。主称会面难，一举累十觞。
十觞亦不醉，感子故意长。明日隔山岳，世事两茫茫。

PRESENTED TO WEI BA THE RECLUSE

*Character-by-character translation
by Ma Yue, Confucius Institute*

People (in) life no each other see
move like Shen* and Shang*

Today night repeat which (another)
share this lamp candle light night

Young strong can how much time
temples hair each already white

Visit old (people) half become ghost
shockingly shout warm inside intestines

How know twenty year again
go up to your home

Past depart you unmarried,
sons and daughters suddenly form a line

Pleasant and contented respect father's close
ask me come which direction (friend)

Question answers yet not finished
sons daughters display alcoholic liquid

Night rain cut spring chives
new cooking inbetween yellow millet

Host says meeting face difficult
with one action adds up to ten cups

Ten cups yet not drunk,
feel your old friendship long last

Tomorrow separated by mountains,
world matters each other distant and
indistinct

*Shen and Shang are stars which do not appear at the same time and thus can only be seen one at a time – in English astronomy they are Scorpio and Orion.

REUNION

English version
by Dan Wylie and Elzette Steenkamp

We've always been like Shen and Shang,
constellations which never meet.

But tonight, this night, we share
the soft flare of candle and lamp.

How muscled and young we were! Now
look how white at the temples we are.

Half our friends are already ghosts, but now
your greeting resounds warm in my belly.

How can we relive these twenty years,
as once again I enter your home?

You were unmarried when we parted; but now
your sons and daughters gather before me,

pleasant, contented, respecting their father's
old confidant. You ask which way I came:

that's a question that can't be answered yet.
The children are offering wine, and cut

spring chives crisp with the night's rain,
cooking their freshness, mixed with yellow millet.

You tell me that meeting face-to-face is hard.
Ten cups are drunk, faster than time, and

ten more cups still yearn to be drunk:
such is the endurance of your friendship.

Tomorrow, mountains and worldly affairs will
again
separate us, and we'll fade from one another's
sight.

On the English translation

The process of transcribing this Du Fu poem into an acceptable English version Dan found reminiscent of the poems derived from the !Xam testimonies of the Bleek-Lloyd archive; knowing nothing of the source language, and having to rely on one initial more or less literal translation, one is both alarmed at how much is self-evidently missing, and liberated into interpretative play; both aggrieved at not knowing enough of the source culture to even begin to reproduce the specific resonances, and challenged by the task of making the translation open enough to resonate in its new space. So in most respects this was not a translation at all, but a transcription and filling-out of a skeleton.

Since the literal translation included no pronouns or articles, no obvious indicators of relationship, it was confusing: who was unmarried; whose sons and daughters are these; who is cutting the chives? Dan made the mistake of thinking the 'host' was a true hermit, a guru being approached by a younger acolyte; but Elzette made more sense of it by reading both men as of similar age; and she, having some Chinese, could clarify some of the characters.

The very compactness of Chinese characters, even more compressed and vivid than Shona ideophones, laid temptations in two directions: one towards an understated simplicity of language, opening imaginative space but arguably over-simplifying the poem, particularly with total loss of structural and phonic resonances; or, on the other hand, searching for 'thicker' adjectives which might feel richer but also

threatened to be too specific. How much of Western translations of Eastern poetry has fallen into a kind of fashion of almost monosyllabic simplicity, arguably obscuring variations of style in the originals, we could not say; certainly there is a kind of relaxed chattiness which has come to characterise translations of much world poetry as a kind of substitute for trying to mimic structural and figurative effects in the source poems.

In this case, knowing that the original included strict syllabic order and rhyme scheme evoked mixed feelings of regret at loss, but also relief that this aspect need to be striven for in translation. So Elzette worked towards fidelity towards the characters; Dan looked for words which might carry emotional implication, and for occasional echoes of sound effect which would at least elevate the writing above a flat prosiness, and offer some distant recall of rhyme (for example, 'share' and 'flare').

KODLA UMHLALA PHANTSI

Xhosa version
by Simphiwe Kanityi, Athambile Masola
and Lungisa Seplani

Ind' ingca kobu bomi, yinqab' ukubonan' ebantwini
Bangamakroza nomnye esibhakabhakeni
Kambe namhla sambathisene ngengub' enye
yokukhanya
Koda kube nini na sinawo la mandl' obutsha?
Kudal' amalang' etshona singabonani
Ngumnq' ukushiywa sisiqingatha sonke sezihlobo
zethu
Ngubani n' obesazi ukuba soze sibe kweli khaya
nani
Siwafincile amashumi amabini ezilimela sahlukana
Beningamasoka mhla safulathelana
Kodwa namhla seningoonozala boonyana
neentombi
Abawuphothe ngesanty' umsonto womnombo
Bagcobil' iintliziyo zimhlophe
Besamkel' izihlobo zooyise ngembekokazi
Bezibuza nemvelaphi
Bengekafumani nampendulo sebezibekel'
umqombothi
Bazilungiselela umphothulo wamazimba
Kwaselwa ke kunye konwatywe
Kambe k' umqokozo weengqayi akuzihluthanga
iingqondo
Amasithel' eentab' osisitha kodwa ngomso
Kweli hlabath' ibanzi kamb' imigam' esahlulayo!

On the Xhosa translation

The first thing we can say is that translation is never easy sailing, because there are always a number of technicalities that need to be taken into consideration. There were four aspects we thought would be worthwhile mentioning in this reflection: cultural substitution, translation method, language use and emotions.

Translation strategy or method: for the purpose of this poem we decided to use a functionalist approach. This means that the emphasis is on giving the content an equivalent meaning rather than getting the wording strictly true to the original. If we had gone for being true to the Chinese, the Xhosa meaning would have deviated from what the poem is really about. This aspect led us to the issue of cultural substitution because of the equivalency in-between these two cultures.

Cultural substitution: We had to take into consideration the fact that there were now two cultures involved, Chinese and Xhosa. We had to confront this issue a number of times. For example in Chinese culture, at least at that time, they used cups for alcohol whereas for Xhosa people *ingqayi* (clay pot) would be used. Then in Xhosa we have a very special way of counting, example 20 years is *izilimela* in Xhosa. Each year initiation school commences in June because the month of June is considered a month of *izilimela*; and when men who had undergone initiation meet, they will be counting *izilimela* to determine who is older than the other, or as in this case, to determine 20 years of not

seeing each other. The same applied with the stars, in Xhosa, the stars that do not appear at the same time, are *umnyele* and *amakroza* or *ikhwezi* (morning star) and *cel'izapholo* (evening star). Lastly, for the use of millet in the poem, this is the staple food, and taking into consideration the time it is served and the people who are being served, for Xhosa people that would be *umphothulo* because that is a maize dish, and what Xhosa men eat at the evening time.

Level of language: We had to ask ourselves some questions about the target readership or audience for this poem. We decided that the language used in this poem it is not intended just for any ordinary man on the street there but for more learned people. The words or language we use is therefore is aimed at more educated people in higher institutions.

Emotional aspect: Right from the beginning we could see that the poem is emotional. There is the reality of separation which causes nostalgic emotions combined with joy, the sense of happiness that they have met but also the apprehension that they will depart again. The last sentence of the poem relates back to the beginning in its emotional aspects. It alerts us to the human movement we experience today, the reality of life – human dispersal. In both Chinese and Xhosa mountains symbolise separation. The distance between people is marked by mountains, hence in Xhosa we say *ntab' ezikude ngamasithela*, this means that once people are on the other side of the mountain, finding each other again will be a hardship, it may be ages before they see each other again. It is also worth mentioning here is that emotions are not easy to translate in any

language, hence the use of metaphors and images. The poem does not start on a happy note and does not end on a good note either. The poem, therefore, would be said to be an expression of the human dilemma, you want to be with people but just cannot because of the circumstances of dispersal which even affect the settled traditional societies.

Otherwise we are happy with the end product that we have produced as our translation.

VIR WEI BA, 'N OU VRIEND, NOU AFGETREE

Afrikaans version

by Mia Pistorius, Liza Smith and Anton Vorster

Ou vriende se paaie kring só maklik uitmekaar
soos bane van sterre en planete.

Maar vanaand deel ons soos van ouds
'n lamp se gloed.

Die oormoed van jonkwees nou slegs 'n dowwe
herinnering,
is elk verras deur die gryns in die ander se slape.
Ons vra uit oor gister se kennis: goed die helfte
het al finaal afskeid geneem. Is dit waar?
Ons verbaasde uitroepe
is 'n vae getuigenis van die stom skok
wat deur ons binneste skeur.

Wie sou kon raai dat twintig jaar verby sou snel
voor ek my weer op jou drumpel sou vind?

Destyds was jy nog 'n vrygesel,
nou tree seuns en dogters aan
– die ene hartlikheid –
voor hul pa se ou vriend.

Hulle wil weet van my reis. Ek begin vertel
maar reeds het hulle die wyn gebring.
In 'n ommesientjie word 'n feesmaal berei
van uitjies, rys, die vars manna
van hierdie reëndeurdrenkte nag.

Jy praat: “Laat ons eet, drink, geniet –
só 'n aand is kosbaar want raar.”

Één heildronk word in 'n oogwink tien,
maar ná tien bekere is ek steeds helder
en vas op my voete

geskraag deur 'n vriendskap wat dúúr.

Môre skei die berge ons weer
en vervaag ons tot skimme,
verlore in wêreldse sorge.

On the Afrikaans translation

It is said that no translation can ever do the original literary work justice. This may be due to a number of reasons, not least of which is the loss of linguistic and cultural subtleties of the original. The challenge was therefore how to produce a translation that accurately represented the Chinese text, but could still stand independently as an Afrikaans poem immersed in the nuances of the language.

The process of translation was not easy. Firstly, standard interpretative practices had to be applied in order to discover the “meaning” of the poem. This included determining who the narrator is, who is being addressed, and the temporal framework within which the events are narrated. From here, it was possible to fill in the gaps left by a character-by-character translation of the original.

A central question we had to address was: would this be a literal or a poetic translation? A number of issues arose from this question, including matters of cultural practice and environment. On a most basic level, we had to ask whether a direct and accurate translation of words had to be favoured above the use of colloquial and idiomatic Afrikaans. We came to the conclusion that a more ‘faithful’ translation would preclude certain subtleties which could only be approximated by using specific Afrikaans expressions. The result is that some words were substituted by more appropriate Afrikaans expressions (consider *sterre en planete* as opposed to “Shen and Shang”).

Furthermore, cultural practice had to be considered: to turn a poem into an independent and viable example of Afrikaans literature, it has to represent the culture that it is a part of. Therefore, firstly, the “serious” and pensive nature of the Chinese poem was partly relinquished in favour of a slightly more congenial atmosphere, typical of Afrikaans literature dealing with the subject of friendship.

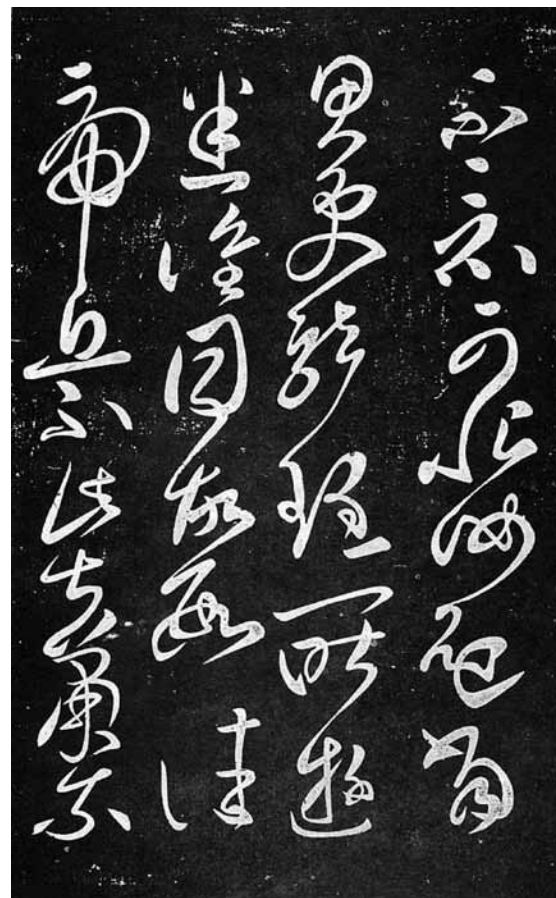
Another consideration was that of the food mentioned in Du Fu’s poem, which includes references to traditional Chinese ingredients. Familiar Afrikaans cultural equivalents, however, were hard to find. It was therefore decided to use the word *manna* – a food which represents simplicity, as well as a nurturing attitude towards the other – as a translation for “millet”, as well as a general description of the meal. In fact one of the dictionary translations of millet was *boeremanna*.

The final step was turning the text into a feasible work of poetry. This included aspects of rhythm and structure, as well as the recurring themes which lend the poem coherence. In our translation we aimed to unify the poem by means of recurring references, firstly to time (consider *vanaand, nou, gister, twintig jaar, destyds, oomblik* and *môre*). This is relevant, as the poem largely deals with the way in which time affects our lives and relationships. References to roads and travel (*paaie, bane, reis, voete*) are also significant, as it is our life travels which separate us from each other.

An accurate representation of the structure of the original poem was impossible, due to a need to preserve the narrative rhythm of our translation.

Instead, we chose to organise our poem into an irregular, but systematically diminishing structure, suggesting the gradual waning away of the time the two friends have left. Thus the fixed formal structure was replaced by a freer, symbolic structure.

The translation of this poem highlighted the complexities specific to unique literary traditions, thereby proving that no work of literature can ever be accurately relocated into another language.



Calligraphy by Zang Xu
8th Century

AN WEI BA, DEN EINSIEDLER

*German version
by Gisela Zipp*

Die Wege der Menschen trennen sich, wie ferne
Bahnen der Sternschnuppen

Wenn nicht heute Abend, wann dann teilen wir
nächstens Lampenlicht?

Wie lange bleiben wir noch jung? Unsere Haare
ergrauen schon.

Ich suche alte Freunde - die Hälfte sind Phantome.

Mich überkommt die Seelenpein - ich stoß einen
Schmerzensschrei aus.

Wer hätte gewusst, zwanzig Jahren vergehen,
bevor ich mal wieder dein Haus einträte?

Letztes Mal warst du unverheiratet. Jetzt stehen in
einer Reihe Kinder,

die fröhlich den Freund des Vaters ehren, und nach
meiner Reise höflich fragen.

Ihre Fragen unterbrochen, bringen sie uns
Branntwein.

Im Nachregen wird Schnittlauch geschnitten, und
wird frisch mit gelber Hirse gekocht.

Du sagst, wie schwierig das Wiedersehen sei, und
gießt mir zehn Tassen ein in einem Mal.

Nach zehn Tassen, noch immer nüchtern, bin ich
von langer Freundschaft bewegt.

Morgen wird hohes Gebirge uns teilen, und
Gemeinschaft wird sich wie Rauch auflösen.

On the German translation

Ancient Chinese poetry is like no other poetry I have ever come across in the way that it can be so precise and create such moving images in so few words. The problem when translating it is that this density of meaning is a property not only of the poetry, but of ancient Chinese itself. The syntactic structure of the language allows for omission of verbs and prepositions, and lacks specific time reference. This kind of structure cannot be re-created in German, which requires verbs, prepositions, time reference and case markers, among other things! Ancient Chinese reveals the bones of the poet's meaning – German is too 'meaty' a language to recreate this. Thus I did not attempt to maintain Du Fu's ten-syllable-per-line structure, but did attempt to maintain the balance that Du Fu creates between the first and second halves of the line, each being perfectly matched in terms of syllables. Although the lines vary in length, each line has a centre point at which the syllables are perfectly balanced.

In translating this poem, I started with the elements of the original that struck me and that I wished to retain. The mood in general seemed one of loneliness and desolation, except for lines 6 to 11 where the long-awaited reunion occurs. The stark imagery was another element of the poem that I considered absolutely essential to the poem's effect on the reader or listener. However, translating a Chinese poem into German is like trying to recreate a jade sculpture using Lego – with enough skill the result may look similar, but it will never be the same.

I did however feel that I had some useful German tools in my Lego set. For one thing, German is very expressive – words and phrases are often very graphic and descriptive in the same way that ancient Chinese words and phrases are. Also, it is exceedingly easy to form compound words in German (definitely much more so than in English), making it much easier to concentrate the meaning of a line and create the kind of juxtapositions that Du Fu does.

There are certain aspects of this poem which may be puzzling to those unfamiliar with Chinese culture, such as the custom of asking where someone has come from as a way of showing concern, or the politeness of offering (and drinking) large amounts of alcohol, especially in northern China, where Du Fu spent much of his life. I chose not to 'domesticate' these aspects because I felt that the goal of the translation was to give German speakers access to Du Fu's poetry and the ancient culture from whence it came. I hope I have done his work and his culture justice.

**OFFERT PAR DU FU À WEI BA,
FONCTIONNAIRE RETRAITÉ**

*French version
by Aidan Prinsloo, Maxine Smith,
Ruth Steyn and Claire Cordell*

Sans se voir chacun suit son chemin,
Comme le Scorpion et Orion en orbites différentes.

C'était quand la dernière rencontre comme ce soir,
Cette lumière de bougie partagée?

Combien d'années durent la jeunesse et la force?
Chaque mèche aux tempes déjà blanchie.

La moitié des amis déjà fantômes,
Un cri d'étonnement, le cœur perturbé.

Après vingt ans,
Je sais toujours grimper chez vous.

A mon départ, célibataire,
Maintenant vos fils et filles se mettent en rang.

Aimables et contents, l'ami de leur père respecté,
Ils me demandent d'où je viens.

Questions et réponses interrompues,
Les fils et filles nous offrent du vin à boire.

Coupées sous la pluie nocturne, des ciboulettes
printanières
Cuites de frais parmi le millet jaune.

Mon hôte dit qu'il est difficile de se revoir ;
Sans arrêt, on avale une dizaine de verres.

Une dizaine de verres consommés, et pourtant pas
soûls,
Le sentiment d'une vieille amitié, toujours vivace.

Demain, séparés par les montagnes,
Les affaires du monde nous éloigneront,
nous estomperont.

On the French translation

Chinese favours short phrases and makes little or no distinction between nouns, verbs and adjectives; while French assigns each word a clear grammatical function. This means that the ambiguity and the image-generating language of Chinese poetry are not always directly translatable into French. With this in mind, in translating this poem, we opted to rely mainly on nominal phrases ('sentences' lacking a verb, consisting mostly of nouns and adjectives) to give the poem a "David Hinton" feel, albeit in French.

Nominal phrases are often used by French writers and poets, and a poem that relies mainly on them would not be entirely out of place to a French readership. The reason we chose to emulate David Hinton's style is twofold. Firstly, we wanted to render as faithful a translation as possible and this meant avoiding the unnecessarily addition or removal information and structural elements from the poem. We felt that the allure of Chinese poetry often lies in ambiguity and we wanted to convey this, while making it accessible to French readers. Secondly, we nevertheless want to emphasise the poem's Chinese origins. Following this strategy, we have not applied cultural equivalence to certain elements. Examples of this include when the children asking where the visitor has come from, a traditional Chinese way of greeting someone, (line 14) and the remark that, after ten cups of wine, the friends are not yet drunk (line 21), an allusion to a Chinese idiom which states that good friends can never get too drunk for each other's company. Such phrases require the reader to have some background knowledge about Chinese culture and add to the exotic element of the poem.

We found it necessary, however, to include certain French cultural equivalents and French stylistic and structural elements in other places. For example, the setting and tone of the poem make the direct translation from the Chinese, "boisson alcoolisée" ('alcoholic drink'), entirely misplaced, as a French speaker would find this overly clinical. Rather, we opted to use "vin" ('wine') as a cultural equivalent (line 14). The original Chinese version speaks of the intestines getting hot (line 8) as a symbol of strong emotions. A direct translation would not convey this – the stomach is associated with anger in French writing and heat is a positive emotion, usually. Therefore, we used the phrase "le coeur perturbé" ('heart unsettled') in keeping with the theme of body parts. Also, we found it necessary to include the word "amis" ('friends') in line 7 to clarify what is merely implied by the Chinese original.

Finally, while we avoided as far as possible including tense and verbs in the poem, it was unavoidable in places. This especially so with the last line, in which we included two verbs in the future tense, rather than the single Chinese adverb (mángmáng). In our view, the use of verbs at the end contributes to the understanding of the poem, creating a contrast between the visit as a respite from worldly affairs, and the return to daily action after the visit. Similarly, we adjusted the form of the poem at the end to show the distance which will once again separate the friends.

As a final remark, we have included Du Fu's name in the title ("Offered by Du Fu to Wei Ba, retired government official") because this is more natural in

French. Also, we have chosen to translate what one would usually call a hermit by 'retired government official' because the Western understanding of a hermit would not give the sense intended by the Chinese in this context.

DU FU AD WEI BA, VIRUM DOCTUM

*Latin version
by Daniel Malamis*

Aetatem amici agant nec umquam competant,
velut poli adversi movent.
hac nocte rursus, ac velut prioribus,
lucem lucernae partimur.
durat iuventus quamdiu viresque? iam
tempora senes canescimus.
scitamur agnitos, sed umbrae plurimi;
cor mihi calet clamoribus.
annos tot esse transituros quis sciit
ante redii tuam ad domum?
te caelibem reliqui ephebum: nunc adest
series statim prolis tuae.
colunt amicum patris una liberi,
unde veniat comes rogant.
quaesita nondum explicata, filii
et filiae produnt merum.
vernas in imbro caepas nocturno metunt
croceumque milium decoquunt.
haud facile convenisse dicit hospes nos;
pocula decem mox hausimus.
bis quinque adhuc nec ebrius, amor tamen
tuus perennis me movet.
cras separabimur iugis, negotiis
mundi remoti, dissiti.

On the Latin translation

This competition has been a rare opportunity to explore the poetic compatibility of Latin and Chinese. In my translation I aimed to be as faithful to Du Fu's poem as the Latin permitted, and found that, for several reasons, a high degree of fidelity was possible, as Latin is very good at capturing the economy and epigrammatic brevity of Du Fu's style. Latin is an inflected language, with its grammar and syntax encoded in its word endings. This means that it is able to express an idea in very few words (without subject pronouns or articles for instance). It is naturally epigrammatic, and the five characters of a line of Du Fu's poem can often be rendered by five, or fewer, Latin words.

The nature of Latin verse offers many suitable forms for the translation. Latin verse is structurally formal, and uses metres which are based on fixed patterns of pitch accents. I chose a lyric metre, the iambic distich, which I felt suited the original in a number of ways. It reflects Du Fu's couplet, and it is frequently used by Horace, the Latin poet who, I would argue, is most similar to Du Fu stylistically. The 10 feet of the iambic distich, each with a rising tone, mirror the 10 characters of one of the original couplets, and to some extent reproduce the pitch rhythm of the Chinese. The economy of the metre (20 syllables per distich) enforces the brevity that the Latin makes possible, as it leaves little room for expansion. The metre also gives the translation some of the structural formality of the original.

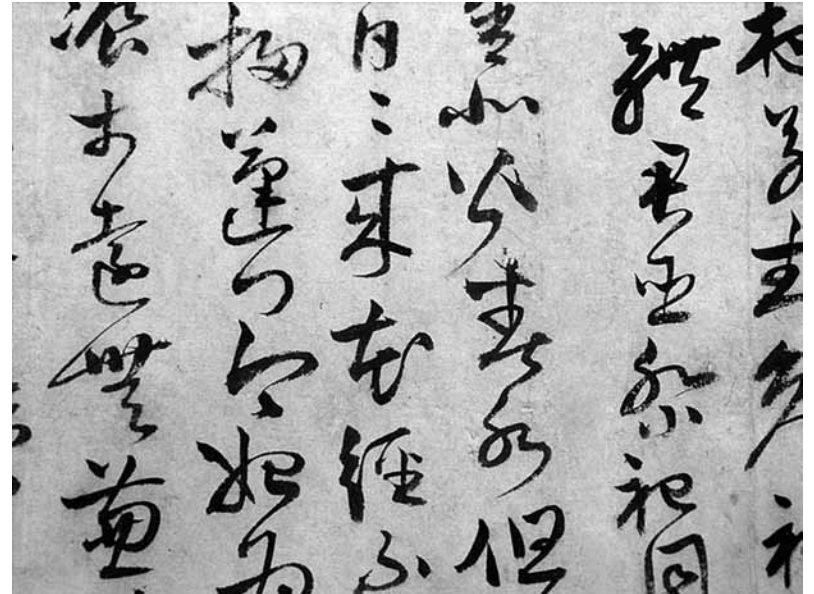
I've tried to stay as close to the tone of the Chinese as possible, expressing Du Fu's simple and powerful

images as plainly as I could. The constraints of the metre left little room for additional poetic effects, but I have tried to use word order (entirely flexible in Latin) to reinforce the sense in a few places: the emphatic 'iam' ('already') at the end of line 5; the apposition of 'te caelibem' ('you unwed') and 'prolis tuae' ('offspring your') in ll.11-12. The halting rhythm of the final line isolates its three words, and could be said to convey a sense of separation. The alliteration in line 8 also gives emphasis to an emotive line.

The translation was difficult but extremely rewarding. It has improved my understanding of Latin poetry and methods of composition in ways that mere reading could not. I am also very proud of the end result! – something like the satisfaction of finishing a complicated puzzle. Perhaps the most enjoyable aspect of this translation though has been comparing two different styles of classical poetry, and to some extent trying to fuse them. My version is very different to classical Latin poetry in terms of style. Latin poetry is descriptive, adjectival. It is often epigrammatic, but the epigrams are embedded in longer sense units, in sentences which may extend over any number of lines. A Roman reader would probably find my version halting, as it keeps the separate sense units of Du Fu's couplets.

Some elements of poetry cannot be translated, others (like style) can be, but unnaturally. The essence of Du Fu's poetry however is the beauty of the sentiments he expresses and the simple lucid images he uses to convey them. These can be translated, and I think they would have resonated with the Roman reader as well

as they do with us. They keep their relevance over time and distance and make him, like Homer and Horace, one of humankind's classics.



Calligraphy by Tang Shunzi
1507-1560

TO WEI BA, IN RETIREMENT

*English version
by Robert Berold*

People's lives can pass each other by
like Scorpio and Orion, stars that never meet

but tonight recalls another night
when we shared the warmth of candle light

We were young and strong then – how much time
has passed
the hair on our temples is already white

We visit old friends – half of them have died
it shocks us, wrenches our hearts

How could I know it would be twenty years
before I would visit your home again

When we parted you were unmarried
now look – a whole line of sons and daughters

relaxed, they respect their father's friend,
politely ask me where I have come from

So many questions, and before there's time to
answer
your sons and daughters have brought out the
wine

Food is offered too, fresh spring chives
mixed in with yellow millet

You say meeting again is difficult
It's not long before we've drunk ten cups

ten cups together and we're still not drunk
surely our friendship will last forever!

Tomorrow mountains will come between us,
and the world too, and fading distances

FOR THE RECLUSE WEI PA

Translated by David Hinton

*from The New Directions Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry
edited by Eliot Weinberger (New Directions 2003)*

Lives two people live drift without
meeting, like Scorpio and Orion,
without nights like this: two friends
together again, candles and lamps

flickering. And youth doesn't last.
Already gray, we ask after old friends,
finding ghosts everywhere, ghosts.
It startles the heart, and twists there.

Who dreamed it would be twenty years
when I left? You weren't married then,
and look already a proper little
flock of sons and daughters. In gleeful

respect for their father's friend, they
ask where I've come from. And before
the asking and telling end, they are
bundled off to help with soup and wine,

spring scallions cut fresh in evening rain,
steamed rice garnished with yellow millet.
Pronouncing reunions extinct, you pour
ten cups a throw to our health. Ten cups,

and I'm drunk on nothing like your unfailing
friendship. Tomorrow, between us in all
this clamor of consequence, mountain
peaks will open out across two distances.

TO WEI PA, A RETIRED SCHOLAR

Translated by Kenneth Rexroth

*from The New Directions Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry
edited by Eliot Weinberger (New Directions 2003)*

The lives of many men are
Shorter than the years since we have
Seen each other. Aldebaran
And Antares move as we have.
And now, what night is this? We sit
Here together in the candle
Light. How much longer will our prime
Last? Our temples are already
Grey. I visit my old friends.
Half of them have become ghosts.
Fear and sorrow choke me and burn
My bowels. I never dreamed I would
Come this way, after twenty years,
A wayfarer to your parlor.
When we parted years ago,
You were unmarried. Now you have
A row of boys and girls, who smile
And ask me about my travels.
How have I reached this time and place?
Before I can come to the end
Of an endless tale, the children
Have brought out the wine. We go
Out in the night and cut young
Onions in the rainy darkness.
We eat them with hot, steaming,

Yellow millet. You say, "It is
Sad, meeting each other again."

We drink ten toasts rapidly from
The rhinoceros horn cups.
Ten cups, and still we are not drunk.
We still love each other as
We did when we were schoolboys.
Tomorrow morning mountain peaks
Will come between us, and with them
The endless, oblivious
Business of the world.

Some Translations

The New Directions Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry

edited by Eliot Weinberger (New Directions, 2003)

The Shambhala Anthology of Chinese Poetry

translated and edited by J P Seaton (Shambhala, 2006)

The Anchor Book of Chinese Poetry

edited by Tony Barnstone and Chou Ping (Anchor Books, 2005)

One Hundred Poems from the Chinese

translated by Kenneth Rexroth (New Directions, 1956)

Love and the Turning Year

One Hundred More Poems from the Chinese

translated by Kenneth Rexroth (New Directions, 1970)

Classical Chinese Poetry: An Anthology

Edited and translated by David Hinton (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010)

Selected Poems of Tu Fu

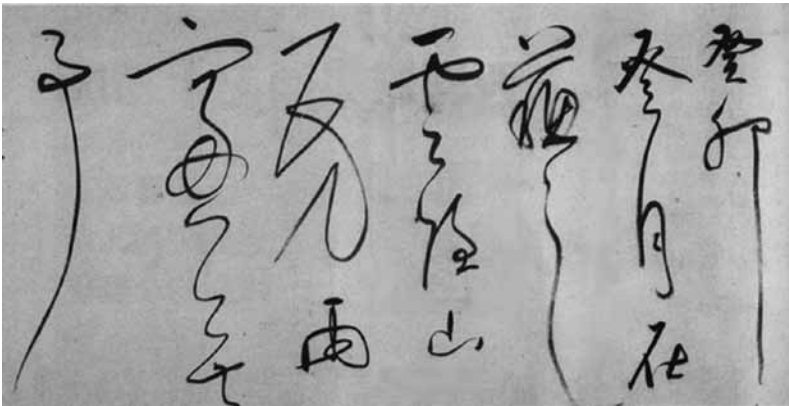
translated by David Hinton (New Directions, 1989)

Selected Poems of Li Po

translated by David Hinton (New Directions, 1996)

Selected Poems of Po Chu-I

translated by David Hinton (New Directions, 1999)



*Calligraphy by Tung Chi-Chang
1555-1637*

**Three Chinese Poets – Wang Wei, Li Bai,
and Du Fu**

translated by Vikram Seth (Faber, 1992)

Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei

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for Poetry**

Ernest Fenollosa, edited by Ezra Pound (City Lights,
1969)

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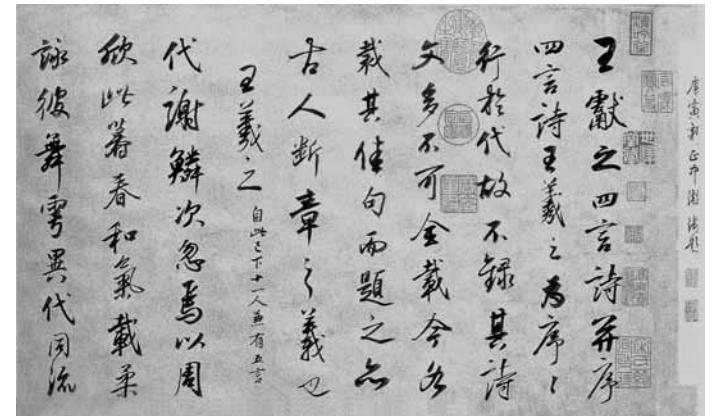
Chinese Poems

translated by Arthur Waley (Unwin, 1961)

The Art of Writing:

Teachings of the Chinese Masters

translated and edited by Tony Barnstone and Chou
Ping (Shambhala, 1996)



*Calligraphy by Dong Chi-Tsun
1555-1636*



Calligraphy by Zang Xu
8th Century