



ARTS MIDWEST WORLD FEST



TU FU TRANSLATIONS

Compare the following translations of Tu Fu's poem about war.

1) The View in Spring (translated by David Owens)

A kingdom smashed, its hills and rivers still here,
spring in the city, plants and trees grow deep.

Moved by the moment, flowers splash with tears,
alarmed at the parting, birds startle the heart.

War's beacon fires have gone on three months,
letters from home are worth thousands in gold.

Fingers run through white hair until it thins,
cap-pins will almost no longer hold.

2) Spring Scene (translated by David Hawkes)

The state may fall, but the hills and streams remain. It is spring in the city: grass and leaves grow thick. The flowers shed tears of grief for the troubled times, and the birds seem startled, as if with the anguish of separation. For three months continuously the beacon fires have been burning. A letter from home would be worth a fortune. My white hair is getting so scanty from worried scratching that soon there won't be enough to stick my hatpin in!

3) Spring Prospect (translated by Burton Watson)

The nation shattered, mountains and rivers remain;
city in spring, grass and trees burgeoning.
Feeling the times, blossoms draw tears;
hating separation, birds alarm the heart.
Beacon fires three months in succession,
a letter from home worth ten thousand in gold.
White hairs, fewer from scratching,
soon too few to hold a hairpin up.

4) Spring Yearning (translated by A. R. Davis)

The country is destroyed but hills and rivers remain;
In the city, spring, with plants and trees thick.
In sorrow, at the time, the flowers are splashed with tears;
In grief at separation, the birds alarm the heart.
Beacon fires have linked three months;
Family letters are worth ten thousand pieces.
My white hair, through scratching, is still shorter;
It very nearly fails to support my hairpin.

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Compare the following translations of Tu Fu's poem about traveling on Double Ninth Festival, a holiday marking the ninth day of the ninth month of the Chinese calendar.

1) Climbing on the Ninth Double Day (translated by Wai-lim Yip)

Shrill winds, high sky, monkey's heart-rending cry.
Clear river, white sand, birds soar and wheel.
Leaves, leaves of a rimless forest rustle down.
Waves upon waves, the endless Yangtze comes drumming in.
A million miles of grievous autumn, constantly a traveler.
Entire life in sickness, I alone climb the terrace.
Hardships, bitter regrets propagates my frosty hair.
Wretched! That I have recently stopped going for the cup!

2) Climbing on Double Ninth (translated by William Hung)

The wind storms across the sky and brings the gibbons' bitter wails—Clear river, white sands, birds wheeling, Trees everywhere with silently falling leaves, Endless is the Yangtze with its rolling currents. I am so many times a stranger in a distant land during autumn; With an illness that has spoiled my whole life; I climb alone to this high terrace. My difficulties and regrets exceed the number of white hairs on my head; Too bad I can not drown them in the wine cup I have so recently abandoned!

3) From a Height (translated by David Hawkes)

The wind is keen, the sky is high; the apes wail mournfully. The island looks fresh; the white sand gleams; birds fly circling. An infinity of trees bleakly divest themselves, their leaves falling, falling. Along the endless expanse of river the billows come rolling, rolling. Through a thousand miles of autumn's melancholy, a constant traveler racked with a century's diseases, alone I have dragged myself up to this high terrace. Hardship and bitter chagrin have thickened the frost upon my brow. And to crown my despondency I have lately had to renounce my muddy cup of wine!

4) Climbing to a High Place (translated by Burton Watson)

Wind shrill in the tall sky, gibbons wail dolefully;
beaches clean, sands white, overhead the circling birds:
leaves fall, no end to them, rustling, rustling down;
ceaselessly the long river rushes on.
Autumn sorrow ten thousand miles from home, always a traveler;
sickness dogging each year of my life, I climb the terrace alone.
Troubles, vexations coat my sidelocks with frost;
listless at this new blow, I forgo the cup of muddy wine.