A LITTLE PRIMER OF
TU FU

DAVID HAWKES

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FOR JEAN

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

I HAVE written this book in order to give some idea of what Chinese poetry is really like and how it works to people who either know no Chinese at all or know only a little. To write it I have taken all the poems by Tu Fu contained in a well-known Chinese anthology, *Three Hundred T'ang Poems*, arranged them chronologically, transliterated them, explained their form and historical background, expounded their meaning, and lastly translated them into English prose. The translations are intended as cribs. They are not meant to be beautiful or pleasing. It is my ardent hope that a reader who is patient enough to work his way through to the end of the book will, by the time he reaches it, have learned something about the Chinese language, something about Chinese poetry, and something about the poet Tu Fu.

Tu Fu (712–70) is regarded by many Chinese as their greatest poet, but his poems do not as a rule come through very well in translation, which makes him a particularly rewarding poet to study in the original. Partly for this reason, and partly because he lived in eventful times and often referred to them in his poems, he seemed a good poet to choose for the purposes of this book.

The anthology *Three Hundred T'ang Poems* dates from the late eighteenth century. It became the gateway through which generations of Chinese schoolboys were initiated into the pleasures of poetry, just as Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* became a schoolbook over here. Its selection of Tu Fu's poems (thirty-odd out of a total of more than fourteen hundred) is an intelligent one. The advantage of using it is that nearly all the poems of the anthology have been translated elsewhere, some several times over (see, for example, Soame Jenyns' *Selections from the Three Hundred Poems of the T'ang Dynasty* and *Further Selections*), and the venturesome reader of this book who wishes to extend his conquests should have little difficulty in obtaining a copy of the Chinese anthology—in which the Tu Fu poems will be familiar landmarks—and continuing his study with the help of translations.

When preparing this book I gave a good deal of thought to the problem of transliteration. T'ang phonology was quite unlike that of any Chinese spoken today: indeed, its sounds have to be reconstructed; and though scholars can get a very good idea of what they were like, their exact nature remains a learned guess. Moreover the reconstructed sounds are as a rule written in complicated and unfamiliar phonetic symbols. If we use the modern sound-values of the characters, many of the rhymes and much of the musical effect of the verse disappears. On the other hand, to insist that a reader who knows no Chinese or very little should begin with a kind of learned algebra unintelligible to the majority of Chinese living today would be to deprive him of the chance of relating whatever he might learn from this book with any Chinese he might succeed in learning subsequently. And the modern pronunciation will give him *some* idea of the sound and feel of Chinese verse. Even the different tones of Mandarin Chinese will give him a notion of the effect of tonality.

Having decided to transliterate into the sounds of Modern Chinese—i.e. Mandarin, which is the dialect most often learned by foreigners and most widely taught in Chinese schools—I was still faced with the problem of spelling. Which of the many systems should be used? In the end I decided to use *Pin-yin*, the system officially adopted by the Chinese Government, as being the most 'international' form and also the simplest (compare *Pin-yin* **quán** with Wade–Giles **ch'üan²**, for example). In the transliteration of T'ang verse it unexpectedly has the added advantage of producing eye-rhymes in many cases where the rhyme has been lost.

The most serious disadvantage in using *Pin-yin* is that in those cases where a reader is likely to know the Chinese word already—I am thinking particularly of place-names and personal names—*Pin-yin* will produce forms which are weird and unrecognizable. 'Kiangsi', for example, becomes *Jiāng-xī* and 'Chungking' *Chóng-qìng*; whilst even Tu Fu himself is transmogrified into *Dù Fǔ*. The answer to this particular problem seemed to be to keep the familiar spellings in the notes and translations while using the *Pin-yin* forms for transliteration of the text. This may strike some people as confusing but is, I believe, less confusing than any alternative would have been.

I should like to have given the reader a gramophone record of the sounds of these poems. As this is not possible, I recommend him

to seek, if he can, a Chinese speaker who will make the noises for him. I do not propose to undertake the impossible task of trying to explain them in unscientific language. There are, however, a few symbols in *Pin-yin* which are used in unaccustomed ways, and these I shall explain briefly and approximately in the following table.

x is used for a 'sh' sound made with the tongue-tip pressed against the lower teeth. *xī*, for example, is a sound midway between 'see' and 'he'.

q is used for a 'ch' sound made in exactly the same way.

c is like 'ts' in 'tsetse fly'.

z is like 'dz' in 'adze'.

zh can be achieved by omitting the first vowel from 'giraffe' and pronouncing the 'g'r' on its own.

After *s*, *z*, *c*, *zh*, *ch*, *sh*, and *r*, *i* contracts into a sound somewhat like the 'u' of 'suppose'.

After *j*, *q*, *x*, and *y*, *u* is narrowed into a sound like French 'u' or German 'ü'. (Elsewhere it is the Italian 'u'.) This sound is also found after *n* and *l*, when it is written with an umlaut: *nü*, *lü*.

After any of the above group of initials (*j*, *q*, *x*, and *y*) when labialized (i.e. when followed by a 'w' sound) or *any* initial when palatalized (i.e. when followed by a 'y' sound), *e* is pronounced like the 'e' in 'egg'. After any other initial an open *e* is a sound like French 'eu' or German 'ö', whilst a closed *e* (one followed by *n* or *ng*) is a short, neutral sound like the 'a' in 'ago'.

The four tones of Pekingese, high level (first tone), high rising (second tone), low rising (third tone), and falling (fourth tone) are written with the signs ¯, ´, ˇ, `. I shall not attempt to explain them here. The signs themselves can be regarded as crudely diagrammatic representations of the tonal cadences.

I think the only other really important point to bear in mind when reading these transliterations is that each cluster of letters represents only one syllable. Thus *piao* is a monosyllable consisting of a palatalized initial (py . . .) and a diphthong (. . . ow); NOT pee-ay-oh.

I make no apology for the inadequacy of this briefing, because I want the reader to meet Tu Fu straight away and to become

acquainted with him through his poems. If, after reading them, he is still desirous of more information about Tu Fu's life and work, he cannot do better than turn to Dr. William Hung's excellent *Tu Fu* (Harvard, 1952), which contains a full biography of the poet and translations of many more of his poems than are contained in this little book. D. H.

Oxford 1965

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1

望嶽

Wàng yuè

岱宗夫如何

1. *Daì-zōng fū rú-hé?*

齊魯青未了

2. *Qí Lǔ qīng wèi liǎo.*

造化鍾神秀

3. *Zào-huà zhōng shén xiù,*

陰陽割昏曉

4. *Yīn yáng gē hūn xiǎo.*

盪胸生曾雲

5. *Dàng xiōng shēng céng yún,*

決眥入歸鳥

6. *Jué zì rù guī niǎo.*

會當凌絕頂

7. *Huì-dāng líng jué dǐng,*

一覽衆山小

8. *Yī-lǎn zhòng-shān xiǎo!*

TITLE AND SUBJECT

Wàng means 'gaze at', 'look towards', and is commonly used in connexion with scenery or distant objects.

Yuè is a special word for 'mountain' used only of the Five Great Peaks of China: Sung-shan in the middle of China (Honan), T'ai-shan in the east (Shantung), Hua-shan in the west (Shensi), Heng-shan in the south (Hunan), and another Heng-shan in the north (on the borders of Hopei and Shansi). The '*yuè*' of this title is T'ai-shan, which was from earliest times regarded by the Chinese with special veneration. The god of T'ai-shan was a judge over the dead, and formerly stones representing him stood opposite the openings of side-streets to scare away demons.

This poem was written in 736 when Tu Fu was a young unmarried man of twenty-four. His father was at the time assistant prefect of a city only a few miles from the foot of T'ai-shan. Tu Fu had recently returned there after failing the Civil Service examinations in Ch'ang-an.

'Gazing at T'ai-shan' is a typically Chinese title for a poem. Our titles are substantival: 'Lycidas', 'Home Thoughts From Abroad', 'The Rape of the Lock'. The Chinese are partial to verbal constructions: 'Mourning Lycidas', 'Thinking of My Homeland While in a Foreign Country', 'Raping the Lock', etc. I should feel no compunction in translating this title 'On a Distant Prospect of T'ai-shan', or something of the sort.

Note that although this poem is about a view and not an ascent of T'ai-shan, Tu Fu does, in lines 5 and 6, imagine himself up on the mountainside. He may of course have climbed it a bit already. The poem merely tells us that he had never been to the top.

FORM

Although this poem is eight lines long and observes strict verbal parallelism in the two middle couplets (lines 3–4 and 5–6), it is usually classed as a poem 'in the Old Style'. The reason why it is not thought of as being 'in the Modern Style' (or 'Regulated Verse' as it is more usual to call it) is that it does not follow the elaborate rules of euphony which have to be observed in Regulated Verse.

The metre is pentasyllabic (five syllables to the line). The rhyme is the same throughout, and is found in alternate lines. Chinese call this type of verse 'Five-word Old Style' or 'Five Old' for short.

EXEGESIS

In the parallel lines of Chinese text and English translation which follow it will be found that if every word or hyphenated compound or word-group is regarded as a single unit, there are as many units in each line of Chinese as in the corresponding English line; and since the English line follows the Chinese word order, the reader should experience no difficulty in correctly relating the English units to the Chinese units which correspond. The Chinese units will be found as separate entries in the Vocabulary section at the back of the book, the only exception being that hyphenated suffixes will sometimes be found as separate entries.

1. *Dài-zōng fū rú-hé*
   Tai-tsung then like-what?
2. *Qí Lǔ qīng wèi liǎo*
   Ch'i Lu green never ends

'Tai-tsung' is one of T'ai-shan's names as a god.

Ch'i and Lu were anciently the names of two states or principalities lying respectively north and south of the T'ai-shan mountain. Their combined area corresponded roughly to the modern province of Shantung. The names continued to be used as territorial designations long after these states had ceased to exist, rather as 'Wessex' and 'Provence' continue to be used although they long ago ceased to exist as political entities.

3. *Zào-huà zhōng shén xiù*
   Creator concentrated divine beauty
4. *Yīn yáng gē hūn xiǎo*
   Northside southside cleave dark dawn

Yin and *yang* are familiar enough not to need much explaining. They do not, of course, always mean 'northside' 'southside'. Their basic sense is 'dark' and 'sunny'. If you use them of river banks, *yin* rather confusingly becomes 'southside' and *yang* 'northside', since it is the north bank of a river which catches most of the sun.

5. *Dàng xiōng shēng céng yún*
   Heaving breast are-born layered clouds
6. *Jué zì rù guī niǎo*
   Bursting eye-sockets enter returning birds

Inversion is extremely rare in Chinese verse, for the obvious reason that the language contains no grammatical inflections and therefore depends on word-order as a means of expressing grammatical relationships. Any derangement of the usual order is liable to result in impossible ambiguities. These two lines look as if they *ought* to mean

> 'The heaving breast produces layered clouds,
> The bursting eyes enter the returning birds';

but it has long been recognized that this is a case of poetical inversion. Tu Fu's poems contain several such instances. They are considered extremely daring and bizarre by Chinese critics.

7. *Huì-dāng líng jué dǐng*
   Really-must surmount extreme summit
8. *Yī-lǎn zhòng-shān xiǎo*
   Single-glance many-mountains little

zhòng-shān: literally 'the many mountains', 'the multitude of mountains'; i.e. 'all the other mountains'.

TRANSLATION

'On a Prospect of T'ai-shan'

How is one to describe this king of mountains? Throughout the whole of Ch'i and Lu one never loses sight of its greenness. In it the Creator has concentrated all that is numinous and beautiful. Its northern and southern slopes divide the dawn from the dark. The layered clouds begin at the climber's heaving chest, and homing birds fly suddenly within range of his straining eyes. One day I must stand on top of its highest peak and at a single glance see all the other mountains grown tiny beneath me.

2

兵車行

Bīng-chē xíng

車轔轔

1. *Chē lín-lín,*

馬蕭蕭

2. *Mǎ xiāo-xiāo,*

行人弓箭各在腰

3. *Xíng-rén gōng-jiàn gè zài yāo,*

爺孃妻子走相送

4. *Yè-niáng qī-zǐ zǒu xiāng-sòng,*

塵埃不見咸陽橋

5. *Chén-āi bū jiàn Xiān-yáng-qiáo.*

牽衣頓足攔道哭

6. *Qiān yī dùn zú lán dào kū,*

哭聲直上干雲霄

7. *Kū-shēng zhí-shàng gān yún-xiāo.*

道旁過者問行人
8. *Daò-páng guò-zhě wèn xíng-rén,*

行人但云點行頻
9. *Xíng-rén dàn yún: 'Diǎn-xíng pín.*

或從十五北防河
10. *'Huò cóng shí-wǔ beĭ fāng Hé,*

便至四十西營田
11. *'Biàn zhì sì-shí xī yīng-tián.*

去時里正與裹頭
12. *'Qù shí lĭ-zhèng yǔ guǒ tóu,*

歸來頭白還戍邊
13. *'Guī-lái tóu bái huán shù-biān.*

邊亭流血成海水
14. *'Biān-tīng liú-xuě chéng hăi-shŭi,*

武皇開邊意未已
15. *'Wŭ-huáng kāi-biān yì wèi yĭ.*

君不聞漢家山東二百州
16. *'Jūn bū wén Hàn-jiā shān-dōng ér-bǎi zhōu,*

千村萬落生荊杞
17. *'Qiān cūn wàn luò shēng jīng qĭ.*