

Du Fu: A Life in Poetry

By Fu Du

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Du Fu (712–770) is one of the undisputed geniuses of Chinese poetry—still universally admired and read thirteen centuries after his death. Now David Young, author of *Black Lab*, and well known as a translator of Chinese poets, gives us a sparkling new translation of Du Fu’s verse, arranged to give us a tour of the life, each “chapter” of poems preceded by an introductory paragraph that situates us in place, time, and circumstance. What emerges is a portrait of a modest yet great artist, an ordinary man moving and adjusting as he must in troubled times, while creating a startling, timeless body of work.

Du Fu wrote poems that engaged his contemporaries and widened the path of the lyric poet. As his society—one of the world’s great civilizations—slipped from a golden age into chaos, he wrote of the uncertain course of empire, the misfortunes and pleasures of his own family, the hard lives of ordinary people, the changing seasons, and the lives of creatures who shared his environment. As the poet chases chickens around the yard, observes tear streaks on his wife’s cheek, or receives a gift of some shallots from a neighbor, Young’s rendering brings Du Fu’s voice naturally and elegantly to life.

I sing what comes to me
in ways both old and modern

my only audience right now—
nearby bushes and trees

elegant houses stand
in an elegant row, too many

if my heart turns to ashes
then that’s all right with me . . .

from “Meandering River”

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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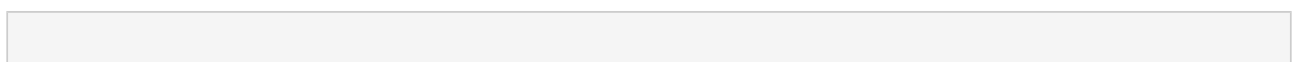
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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Not a biography, but instead a very coherent book of free translations, this new volume translated by Young (*Black Lab*) gives the sense of a life as lived, a life that belongs at once to Du Fu (712–770, also called Tu Fu) and to any sympathetic reader who has experienced beauty in nature, disillusion in politics, or love and trouble at home. These 168 poems, along with clear footnotes, also create a sense of the poet's own times. Du Fu began his poetic career as a bachelor writing beautiful seasonal poetry, a close friend of the great, and slightly older, poet Li Bai (Li Po). Autumn again and you and I/ are thistledown in the wind, he told his friend in one early poem. But Du Fu married and began a family, and then, seeking noble patrons, had to travel through war zones. He wrote, in consequence, poems about conscription, battle, poverty and loneliness: on my face new tears/ are running down familiar tracks. Search for secure employment later on brought him to far-flung provincial towns, where he produced his most tranquil verse: here comes some tea and sugarcane juice/ brought down from the house. (*Nov.*)

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About the Author

David Young has written ten books of poetry, including *Black Lab* (2006), *At the White Window* (2000), and *The Planet on the Desk: Selected and New Poems* (1991). He has also translated the poems of Petrarch and Eugenio Montale. A past winner of Guggenheim and NEA fellowships and a Pushcart Prize, he is the Longman Professor Emeritus of English and Creative Writing at Oberlin College, and the editor of the Field Poetry Series at Oberlin College Press. He lives in Oberlin, Ohio.

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17. REMEMBERING LI BAI ON A SPRING DAY
I know no poetry to equal his
his mind must be
unique
freshness of Yu Xin
Bao Zhao's delicacy
as I watch the trees leaf out
there, north of the Weihe's
probably gazing at sunset
there, east of the Yangzi
when can we share
a pot of wine
again
talk on and on about
poetry
until it's nearly daybreak?
21. FRIENDSHIP
A flick of the hand
and it's rain or storm
wherever I
look
change and fickleness
the old ideal of friendship
as loyalty and permanence
has turned into dirt
under our
feet.
23–24. A SUMMER OUTING
How nice to board the barge
as the sun meets the horizon
the breeze picks
up
the water ripples
we sail past groves
of thick bamboo
and anchor in the cool
of water lilies
the young men
mix
some icy drink
the girls are slicing
lotus roots
but the clouds right overhead
grow black
rain makes me
rush
my poem.
If the shower wets the benches
we were sitting on
the wind blows hard
and rocks the boat
the southern girls' red skirts
drenched
the northern beauties
seem to have ruined their makeup
the mooring
lines
saw and cuts the willow
the barge's curtains are soaked
from breaking waves
our going home
will be wet
and chilly
as if we were having autumn
right in the heart of summer.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Beverly Brown:

Playing with family inside a park, coming to see the marine world or hanging out with close friends is thing that usually you have done when you have spare time, in that case why you don't try factor that really opposite from that. Just one activity that make you not sensation tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition details. Even you love Du Fu: A Life in Poetry, you are

able to enjoy both. It is great combination right, you still need to miss it? What kind of hangout type is it? Oh can happen its mind hangout fellas. What? Still don't buy it, oh come on its identified as reading friends.

Larry Parrish:

Is it an individual who having spare time subsequently spend it whole day by simply watching television programs or just resting on the bed? Do you need something new? This Du Fu: A Life in Poetry can be the reply, oh how comes? A book you know. You are and so out of date, spending your time by reading in this completely new era is common not a geek activity. So what these publications have than the others?

David Auman:

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Doris Stone:

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