I. Texts

Tao Qian (365-427), “Returning to Dwell in Fields and Gardens,” five poems

I.

When young I didn’t rhyme with the vulgar;
my nature was always to love hills and mountains.
By mistake, though, I fell into the snares of dust,
and once gone, thirty years.
The caged bird yearns for its old forest;
the fish in a pond longs for familiar deeps.
So clearing land on the edge of southern wilds,
I’ll hold to simplicity, returning to gardens and fields.
My house sits on more than ten acres;
my thatched hut is eight or nine spans.
Elm and willow shade the rear eaves,
peach and plum hang over the front of the hall.
Indistinct, a far off village of people;
vaguely recognizable, their neighborhood’s hearthsmoke.
Dogs barks from its remote alleys, and roosters crow in their mulberry trees.¹
My gate and courtyard are free of dust and dirt; my empty rooms have plenty of leisurely space.²
Having been long inside a cage, again I get to return to what I am of myself.

II.
Out in the wilds there is little human business; on my dead-end lane, few carriages.
In broad daylight I close my thorn-wood gate; in my empty rooms, I cut off all thoughts of dust.
Now and again people of the village push back the grasses to visit one another.
I imagine they don’t engage in miscellaneous chatter, but only talk about growing mulberry and hemp.
Mulberry and hemp grow by the day, and by the day my land is broader.

¹ This couplet recalls the Daodejing 道德經: “Neighboring villages may be within sight of one another, where each can even hear the sounds of the other’s dogs and chickens, yet their people should have no intercourse with each other throughout their whole lives.” 鄰國相望，雞犬之聲相聞，民至老死，不相往來。
² In the Zhuangzi 莊子 we read that “in empty rooms, light arises” 虛室生白.
Still, I always fear the coming frost,
that I may wither and fall, just like the plants.

III.
I planted beans below South Mountain;
the foliage prospers, but my bean sprouts are few.
I rise in the morning to cut the weeds
and come back in moonlight, hoe over my shoulder.
The path is narrow, plants and trees growing tall;
the evening’s dew soaks my clothes.
My clothes being soaked is not worth regretting,
so long as I do not betray my vow.

IV.
Long have I not wandered in hills and marshes,
 Enjoying vast spaces, woods and wilds.
So taking along my sons and nephews,
pushing through thickets, we walk to a ruined village.
We linger among the grave mounds;
vaguely recognizable, the places people once lived.
There are remains of wells and hearths,
rotten stumps of mulberries and hemp.
I ask someone gathering firewood,
“Where did all the people go?”
The woodgatherer says to me,
“All dead and gone—no one left.”
In one lifetime court and market change—
these truly are not empty words.
Human life is like a conjured illusion:
in the end, it returns to empty nothingness.

V.

Dejected, I return alone, staff in hand,
walking the twisting path through the thickets.
The mountain brook is clear and shallow, and meeting it, I wash my feet.  
Straining some new wine, with a chicken I invite my neighbors.
The sun goes down, the room gets dark, firewood serves in place of bright candles.
Growing cheerful, we regret the evening’s brevity: once again, it is already dawning.

[Translated by Lucas Rambo Bender]

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3 This refers to an old ditty, mentioned in several early texts: “When Canglang’s waters are clear, I can wash my capstrings in them; when Canglang’s waters are muddy, I can wash my feet in them” 清斯濯纓，濁斯濯足矣.
My rush hut I lodged in a narrow lane,
content to decline visits from figured carriages.
In mid-summer, a steady wind blew hard;
forest and hut were suddenly burned up.
Of my house, not even an eave is left;
we shelter in a boat before the gate.
Vast are the evenings of early autumn,
and high the moon, about to be full.
Fruits and vegetables begin to grow again,
but the startled birds still have not returned.
In the middle of the night, I stand and think far;
a single gaze encompasses the nine heavens.
In my youth, I possessed a lonely integrity;
all of a sudden, I’m over forty.
My form and traces transformation can carry off;
the abode of my spirit has long been lonely and idle.  
Resoluteness is a quality I have naturally:
even jade-stone is no harder.
Raising my head, I imagine the time of Donghu,
when they left surplus grain in the fields at night.
Patting their bellies, they yearned for nothing;
rose at dawn and returned at dusk to sleep.
But since I didn’t meet with that time,
I’ll just water my western garden.

[Translated by Lucas Rambo Bender]
Poems read in Mandarin by Zhao Wenxuan

II. Episode Notes

• Chaisang 柴桑 county, modern-day Jiuzhang 九江, Jiangxi 江西
• Pengze 彭泽 county, in modern-day Jiuzhang, Jiangxi

III. Textual Source
