

Su Shi (1037-1101)

LISTENING TO THE RIVER

Translated from Chinese by Ouyang Yu

i wake up and get drunk again, drinking at eastern slope

it's near midnight on my return home

my houseboy is snoring like thunder

unresponsive to my knocks on the door

leaning on my stick, i listen to the river

for long i resent the fact that I'm not master of my fate

why can't i just forget about it all?

on this quiet night with no wind, all ripples erased from the river

i wish i could disappear in my tiny little boat

and spend the rest of my life with rivers and seas

SINGING A POEM IN A SLOW WALK

Translated from Chinese by Ouyang Yu

ignore the noise of the rain beating through leaves of the forest
why not enjoy yourself singing a poem in a slow walk
with a bamboo stick and a pair of straw sandals lighter than a horse?
what's there to fear?
I'd rather spend my life this way, mist and rain on my straw rain cape
the chilly spring wind waking me up from my drunken state
i feel a little cold
a diagonal ray of sunshine on the hills appears so inviting
turning my head back towards the gloomy and desolate place
i go home
little caring whether it's rain or shine

Translator's note: Did you realize that the last line is not actually about the rain and shine but something else? Well, if you don't understand, let me know at youyang@bigpond.net.au.

THE CREEK RUNS WEST

Translated from Chinese by Ouyang Yu

below the hill, the short orchid shoots are soaked in the creek

a sandy path among pines is so clean there is no mud

in the fine evening rain, cuckoos are singing

who says one can't return to one's young age?

even the creek before the door runs west

why can't a white-haired man crow at dawn the way a young rooster does?

Translator's note: Chinese believe rivers in China run east and most of them do so, physically. A river that runs west in China is a very rare thing.