



Looking to the Past: Poems Influenced by the Chinese Poet Tu Fu



WANG Zhen (Chinese, 1720-1797)

Fisherman in Landscape, 1784

Ink on paper, hanging scroll

Museum purchase with funds donated by Dr. Sidney Edelson to honor the memory of Erny Margaret Edelson

Tu Fu's poetry was known for its simplicity and realistic detail. There is an underlying sadness to his work- a sense of long dead ancestors, seasons passing and mythical legends of the past.

In the spirit of this Chinese master poet, write a poem that looks back on a golden time. Create an image of a remembered place of beauty and harmony. Perhaps you will think of a once cherished companion, or family member now gone - a parting from a friend, a happy moment made sad by the thought that such joy is fleeting.

Use the imagery of nature and the seasons to set a mood. Establish a sense of time and place.

Think as a painter of color. Think of the landscape of dreams and memory. Use resonant images such as rivers, sunsets, mountains, clouds, birds and the sea. You might want to write as though you are addressing an old friend or family member. Try to capture in your poem the bitter sweet quality of a single moment when something was lost or remembered or discovered. The tone is nostalgic, subdued. Your poem need not rhyme and may be as short as 6 or 8 lines.

To a Friend Bound East

The old fort brims with yellow leaves...
You insist upon forsaking this place where you have lived.
A high wind blows at Hanyang Ferry
And sunrise lights the summit of Yingmen...
Who will be left for me along the upper Yangzi
After your solitary skiff has entered the end of the sky?
I ask you over and over when we shall meet again,
While we soften with wine cups this ache of farewell

Tu Fu

Model based on Tu Fu's poem

The garden fills with fallen petals...
You must move on from the home where you have grown
A soft breeze stirs the jasmine
And countless stars light the cloudless skies above...
Who will remind me of the wish behind each star
After you have made your independent journey?
I ask myself when will we sit like this again
And soften the ache of farewell with the balm of memory.