

consolations from Cold Mountain

by strannikov

(99)

awww, poor poor scholar—
“hunger” and “cold” are not just words!
not otherwise employed, writing verse,
line by tenuous line the substance of pulse.
—but no one collects unemployed verse:
self-lacerations must yield blood, not ink.
may as well print them on dog biscuits,
which discerning mutts won't even lick.

(81)

vain was my study of the Three Histories,
a waste of time my reading the Five Classics—
tabulating census figures I'll grow old,
unknown, curating what soon will be forgot.
the hexagram “obstruction” my own signpost,
“emptiness” and “danger” my own guiding stars:
I'd be better off a tree standing just next
to a river, turning green with life each year.

(69)

if your silence can't scream or just has no words,
what will children and grandchildren hear?
if you hide in a forest remote,
would anyone find wisdom crawling out?
no forts are built with withered trees,
wind and frost herald sickness and early death.
an ox moved from a clay field to plow a stone field
cannot be blamed for any poor harvest!

(43)

white crane soars, a bitter peach in its bill,
for a thousand miles it flies without a rest:
flying for the Immortals' isle,
the peach was to feed him on his way—
hardly halfway, and what a time to molt!
falls from his flock with a heavy heart:
finally finding his way to his nest,
Mrs. Crane cannot say who he is.

(20)

a jade-tiled hall hung with curtains of pearls
is one superlative beauty's home.
her splendor would make immortals blush,
her complexion the charm of a perfect peach.
mists of spring hover in the east,
autumn winds blast in from the west:
once the seasons of thirty years have passed,
her beauty will rival gnawed sugar cane's.

