Wang Wei (CE 701-761)

Zhongnan Mountain

Taiyi nears the celestial capital;  
Continuous mountains arrive at the edge of the sea.  
White clouds, as I turn and gaze, merge.  
Azure mists, as I enter and look, disappear.  
The whole expanse shifts at the central peak.  
Shadow and light differ in every valley.  
Wishing to seek lodging among men,  
I cross the water to ask an old woodsman.


Deer Enclosure

Empty mountain, no man is seen.  
Only heard are echoes of men’s talk.  
Reflected light enters the deep wood  
And shines again on blue-green moss.


Deer Fence

On the empty mountain, no one is seen  
But the sound of voices is heard  
Returning: light enters the deep forest  
Again: it shines on the green moss

- From *How to read Chinese poetry: a guided anthology* translated by Cai Zonqi

Calling-Bird Brook

Man quiet: sweet osmanthus falls  
Night tranquil: the spring mountain empties  
The rising moon startles mountain birds  
Which call awhile in the spring stream

- From *How to read Chinese poetry: a guided anthology* translated by Cai Zonqi
Answering Vice-Prefect Zhang

As the years go by, give me but peace,
Freedom from ten thousand matters.
I ask myself and always answer:
What can be better than coming home?
A wind from the pine-trees blows my sash,
And my lute is bright with the mountain moon.
You ask me about good and evil fortune?
Hark, on the lake there's a fisherman singing!


A Message to P’ai Ti

Cold and blue now are the mountains
From autumn-rain that beat all day.
By my thatch-door, leaning on my staff,
I listen to cicadas in the evening wind.
Sunset lingers at the ferry,
Cooking-smoke floats up from the houses …
Oh, when shall I pledge Chich-you again,
And sing a wild poem at Five Willows!


My Retreat At Chung-Nan

My heart in middle age found the way,
And I came to dwell at the foot of this mountain.
When the spirit moves, I wander alone
Where beauty is known only to me.
I will walk till the water checks my path,
Then sit and watch the rising clouds,
And some day meet an old woodcutter,
And talk and laugh and never return.

Cooling Off

Clear waters drift through the immensity of a tall forest.  
In front of me a huge river mouth  
receives the long wind.  
Deep ripples hold white sand  
and white fish swimming as in a void.  
I sprawl on a big rock,  
billows nourishing my humble body.  
I gargle with water and wash my feet.  
A fisherman pauses out on the surf.  
So many fish long for bait. I look  
only to the east with its lotus leaves.

- From *To Touch the Sky: Poems of Mystical, Spiritual & Metaphysical Light* translated by Willis Barnstone.

Drifting on the Lake

Autumn is crisp and the firmament far,  
especially far from where people live.  
I look at cranes on the sand  
and am immersed in joy when I see mountains beyond the clouds.  
Dusk inks the crystal ripples.  
Leisurely the white moon comes out.  
Tonight I am with my oar, alone, and can do everything,  
yet waver, not willing to return.

- From *To Touch the Sky: Poems of Mystical, Spiritual & Metaphysical Light* translated by Willis Barnstone.

Living in the Mountain on an Autumn Night

After fresh rain on the empty mountain  
comes evening and the cold of autumn.  
The full moon burns through the pines.  
A brook transparent over the stones.  
Bamboo trees crackle as washerwomen go home  
and lotus flowers sway as fisherman's boat slips downriver.  
Though the fresh smell of grass is gone,  
a prince is happy in these hills.
- From *To Touch the Sky: Poems of Mystical, Spiritual & Metaphysical Light* translated by Willis Barnstone.