復愁十二首選二

萬國尚防寇
故園今若何
昔歸相識少
早已戰場多

胡虜何曾盛
干戈不肯休
閭閻聽小子
談笑覓封侯

Sadder Still (Two Poems)

The whole country is still at war;
I wonder what has happened to my old home.
Last time I was there, few familiar faces;
Even then, too many battlefields.

Can there yet be such a plague of Tartars?
Else why so many still at arms.
In every village, you hear the little boys,
Laughing about the medals they will win.

Note: Du Fu’s last visit to his home town had been in 758, during the An Lushan rebellion. This was written in 767, when he was at Kuizhou, under martial law due to the threat of a Tibetan invasion.
三絕句選一
殿前兵馬雖驍雄
縱暴略與羌渾同
聞道殺人漢水上
婦女多在官軍中

A Quatrain

Although the Emperor’s troops are well-trained and courageous, At pillage, they are a match for Tartars.
I heard they killed many men up on the Han River, Then brought their wives and daughters back as plunder.

Note: In 765, after a civil war broke out among the garrison commanders in Sichuan, the Tibetans took advantage of the confusion and struck deep into China, briefly reaching as far as Chang’an, which they partially sacked. Large numbers of people fled, and it was these refugees whose mistreatment by their own Emperor’s army Du Fu indicted.
兵車行

車轔轔
馬萧萧
行人弓箭各在腰
耶孃妻子走相送
塵埃不見咸陽橋
牽衣頓足攔道哭
哭聲直上千雲霄
道旁過者問行人
行人但云點行頻
或從十五北防河
便至四十西營田
去時里正與裹頭
歸來頭白還戍邊
邊亭流血成海水
武皇開邊意未已
君不聞
漢家山東二百州
千村萬落生荊杞
縱有健婦把鋤犁
禾生隴畝無東西
況復秦兵耐苦戰
被驅不異犬與雞
長者雖有問
役夫敢申恨

A Ballad of War Chariots

Chariots thunder,
Horses neigh;
The troops all carry bows and arrows at their waists.
Their parents, wives and children run along side to say goodbye,
Raising so much dust that you can’t see the Xianyang Bridge;
They pull at the men’s clothes, some stumble and block the road crying,
Their cries sounding all the way to highest cloudy heaven.

Someone passing at the roadside questions the troops,
Who tell him, “Just more of us being drafted.”

“Some of us were in the north at fifteen to defend the Yellow River;
Now at forty, we’re sent west to build garrisons in the borderlands.
Then, the village head had just given us cloth caps of adulthood;
Now returning with white hair, we are sent to the frontier wars again.
So much blood has been shed out there, it would fill an ocean;
But the Han Emperor’s ambition to expand his realm is still not achieved.
Sir, have you not heard
That in the two hundred Prefectures east of the mountains,
A thousand towns and ten thousand villages are thick with weeds?”

“Some places, strong women have taken up the shovels and hoes,
But the grain grows anywhere, no longer neat in rows.
The soldiers of Qin were famed for their stamina in war,
But now they are driven into battle like dogs or chickens.”

“Sir, though you have asked the question,
How can we dare speak frankly about our troubles?”
且如今年冬
未休關西卒
縣官急索租
租稅從何出
信知生男惡
反是生女好
生女猶得嫁比鄰
生男埋沒隨百草
君不見
青海頭
古來白骨無人收
新鬼煩冤舊鬼哭
天陰雨濕聲啾啾

“For example, this winter,
The troops from Guanxi are still at the frontier;
But local officials are still extorting taxes.
Where are these taxes to come from?”

“Now we believe it is bad to have a son,
And better to give birth to daughters.
If you have a daughter, she can still marry someone in the village;
If you have a son, he will be buried on some distant steppe.”

“Sir, have you not seen,
By the Koko Nor,
Bones lying there, uncollected for ages?
New ghosts lament while old ghosts wail;
At night or in the rain, you can hear their never-ending cries.”