

Cold Mountain Poems

James Kirkup



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Also by James Kirkup

Zen Contemplations
Japan Physical
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The Tao of Water
An Actor's Revenge

25 Poems by Han-Shan

Interpreted by James Kirkup

Calligraphy by
Matsumoto Hiroyuki

Kyoto Editions

These interpretations are partly based on the
word-for-word French versions by Jacques Pimpaneau
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In memory of Ivan Morris

The Way of the Clouds

Where is Cold Mountain ? It is not necessary to travel thousands of miles to find its location. We can climb it without leaving home. For Cold Mountain is much more than a mere geographical locality—it is a way of life, a state of mind, a condition of the heart and soul.

Cold Mountain is the last place on earth, the back of beyond. Indeed, it is beyond everything—beyond all human cares, beyond love, beyond fear, beyond possessions, beyond dreams, beyond morality, and certainly beyond religion, though it is the most spiritual place on mortal earth.

It is a place of hardship and loneliness, beyond family, beyond friends. But its rewards are peace of mind, contentment, poetry and wild laughter—laughter at the sad follies of the life one has left behind, at the ridiculous agitations of petty humanity.

Han-shan means Cold Mountain. The poet who went to live there in the eighth and ninth centuries took the name of that heavenly hermitage. It is not far from T'ien-t'ai and its Buddhist monasteries and Taoist retreats. We learn from these poems that Han-shan sometimes abandoned his solitude and visited them from time to time.

He was a kind of mortal immortal, such as we can all become if we cast away pride, possessions, ambition, shame, guilt and anger. He was the ultimate drop-out, but one who dropped up, not down—an exhilarating experience often enjoyed in Zen contemplation. In one of his poems, Han-shan claims to be over a hundred years old, but this, as Arthur Waley, one of his best translators, suggests, is possibly poetic license.

I first became acquainted with the works of Han-shan through Arthur Waley's *Chinese Poems*, which I remember reading with the utmost delight in 1961. In Japan and South-East Asia I frequently found pictures of this ragged poet-mystic, usually laughing his head off, or drinking wine with his friend Shih-the, another lovable rascal-saint. At once I felt a deep affinity with these holy bums, and they have been my constant companions ever since. Their way of life was absolute poetry.

Here I present my own interpretations of a small group of Han-shan's poems—only twenty-five out of the more than three hundred he composed. I hope that my readers may find in them some of the inexpressible comfort and joy that their radiant candour and profound simplicity have always given me. "Who will leave behind the attachments of this world/And come and sit here with me among these pale clouds...."


James Kirkup Kyoto, 1978



欲得安身處寒山可長
保微風吹幽松迎聽聲
愈好下有斑白人啼續黃
老十年歸不得忘却來
時道

I wanted to find a calm place to lay my body
Cold Mountain can keep you long in its embrace
A faint breeze blows in the remotest pines
The sound is clearer close at hand
Underneath them is a man with hair turning white
Muttering over the books of the Yellow Emperor and Lao Tsu
After ten years I can no longer find my way back
I have forgotten the road I took to get here

吾心似秋月
碧潭清皎潔
多物堪比倫
教我如何說




My heart—an autumn moon
Or green lake of brilliant purity
What is the simile I seek—if it exists
Teach me how to find it

駢馬度荒城
荒城動客情
高低舊雉堞
大小古墳塋
自振孤蓬影
長凝拱木聲
所嗟皆俗骨
仙史更無名

Walking my horse through the ruined town
The abandonment moves any rider's heart
The ancient battlements high and low
The old tombs large and small
A solitary fleabane bush rustles its shadow
The wind in the graveyard trees long since became a monotone
What makes me sign so—all these human bones
In this tale the immortals have no name

可矣寒山道而年車
馬蹤聯谿難記曲
疊嶂不知重泣露
千般草吟風一樣
此時迷徑處形問
影何從




The road to Cold Mountain is just a joke
No trace of carts or horses
Hard to keep track of all the tangled torrents
Peaks piled endlessly on peaks
Dew dropping tears on herbs of a thousand kinds
The wind strumming its one note among the pines
Just now having lost the path somewhere
My shape is asking my shadow where was it

自樂平生道烟蘿
石洞間野情多放
曠長伴白雲閑存
路不通世盡心孰
可攀石牀孤夜坐
圓月上寒山



As for me I enjoy most a humdrum way of life
Among the mugwort mists and rocky caverns
My unforced feelings oh how spontaneous and fresh
My companions always the pale drifting clouds
There are paths here but they go nowhere in particular
My heart emptied of desires is not drawn by anything
I am sitting here in the dark on a lonely bed of stones
Watching the round moon rise on Cold Mountain

閑自訪
高僧烟
萬三層
親指歸
月掛一
燈



Nothing better to do I visited an eminent monk
Mists and mountains were interlaid in thousands of folds
The master himself pointed out the way back
There was a moon hanging round as a wheel

今日遊嚴前坐坐坐久烟
雲收一道清谿冷千尋
白石嶂平頭白雲朝影靜
明月夜光浮身上應一
塵垢心中那更憂

Today sitting beneath a precipice
After a long time sitting here mists and clouds withdraw
On a single path a stream of icy water
The tops of the green mountains are one thousand fathoms high
The dawn shadows of the pale clouds are still
The bright moon's nocturnal radiance bathes
My body—neither dust nor dirt—
So how could there still be cares at the centre of my being

寒山多幽奇登者皆
恒憚月照水澄二風吹
草獵二凋梅雪作花机
木雲充葉觸雨轉鮮
靈非晴不可陟

Cold Mountain—oh how remote and strange
They who climb it are often made afraid
When the moon is shining its waters turn transparent
When the wind blows the grasses make a rustling sound
On stunted plum trees the snow lays its blossom
In their bare boughs the only leaves are clouds
But when rain falls all this grows fresh and lively
If it is not fine weather one cannot cross the mountain


茅棟野人君
門前車馬跡
林幽偏聚鳥
谿澗本藏魚
山果携兒摘
事田共婦鋤
室中何所有
唯有一牀書

Under a rood of thatch the country dweller makes his home
Few the carts and horses that pass his gate
In the remote forests the birds keep to themselves
In broad waterways the fish lie in hiding
I gather mountain berries with my son
I tend the terraced rice fields with my wife
In my house what do I have—
Only a bed and some books

千雲萬水間
中有一閑士
白日遊青山
夜歸巖下睡
倏爾過春秋
寂然忘塵累
快哉何所依
靜若秋江水

Among a thousand clouds and ten thousand streams
There stands someone with nothing to do
In broad daylight he wanders the green mountains
At night he returns to sleep beneath the precipice
Springs and autumns rapidly pass by
All alone—no ties with the word of dust—
Joy—borne up how—by what—
I am calm as the waters of a river in autumn

人生不滿百常懷
千載憂白身病始可
又為子孫愁下視禾根
下上者桑樹頭科龜
居東海到底始知休



One human life does not fill even one hundred years
But often it contains a thousand years of sorrow
When sickness begins to mend of its own accord
Worries begin again over son or grandson
One gazes at the ground the rice stubble
One looks up to the crests of the mulberry trees
When all burdens drown for ever in the sea
Then you may begin to know the meaning of contentment

有身與無身是我
復非我如此密思
量遷延倚巖坐
足間青石早生頂上
紅塵墜已見俗中
人雲牀施酒菓



Have I a body or have I none
And am I really I or am I not—
So my thought keeps questioning itself and counts
The quietly-passing days as I sit learning against my precipice
Between my feet green grasses growing
On top of my head the red dust falling
Already I have seen men among the common crowd
Who will bring offerings of fruit and wine to my deathbed

憶昔過逢處
人間逐勝遊
樂山登萬仞
愛水汎千舟
送客琵琶谷
携琴鸚鵡洲
焉知松樹下
抱膝冷颼颼

I remember places I encountered in the past
In the world of men I visited one by one all the famous places
Taking pleasure in mountains I have climbed ten thousand fathoms
Loving water I have sailed on a thousand boats
I have conducted visitors to the Valley of the Lute
I played my seven-stringed cithern on the Isle of Parrots
How could I have foreseen that here beneath a ragged pine
I would be hugging my knees with cold in a whipping gale ?

時人尋雲路
雲路香無蹤
山高多嶮峻
澗闊方玲瓏
碧嶂步乘後
白雲西復東
欲知雲路處
雲路在虛空



The men of our times seek the way of the clouds
The way of the clouds is dark silent trackless
The high mountains are oh so dangerous and precipitous
From the wide valleys come few sounds of chiming bronze or jade
Before and behind nothing but green peaks
Pale clouds fill the west and fill the east
If you would know where the way of the clouds is found
The way of the clouds is found in nothingness

田家避暑月斗酒共
歡雜排山果疎圍酒
樽蒼葍將代席蒼葉
且充盤醉後搖顛坐須
彌小彈丸

龍

Country households take shelter in the hottest months
I have a cask of wine—with whom shall I share it—
I have put out all kinds of mountain fruits
And lined up the wine-cups side by side
I've cut reeds in place of the worn-out mats
And leaved of the banana plant will do for my plates
After drinking deeply, sitting with my head in my hands
Mount Sumeru looks less than nothing

人生如
塵埃
恰似
空中
白雲
終日
行
遠
不離
其
中
不
離
其
中
神
仙
不
可
得
煩
相
計
事
如
流
水
如

Human life is a whirl of dust
Just like an insect at the bottom of a bowl
All day man struggles on, turning and turning
And never leaves the bottom of the bowl
Never can he reach the immortals
His troubles and his schemings are never-ending
And while the months and years pass by like running water
All of a sudden he's an old man

不若看葉裡花能得
幾時好今日是人攀
明朝待誰掃可憐
嬌艷情年多轉成
老將世比於花紅
顏豈豈長保




You gaze at the flowers among the leaves
How long will their radiant season last—
Today they live in fear of being plucked
Tomorrow they will be waiting for the sweeper's broom
An eager heart's attachments are full of charm and freshness
But as the years go by grow withered and old
If one compares this world with flowers
How long does it last the rosy glow of youth

桃花欲經夏
風月催不待訪覓
漢時人能守一箇在
朝之花遷為所歲
人移改今日揚塵
處昔時為大海

The flowers of the peach would like to last all summer
But the winds and the moons will not stay for them
Though you may seek to find men of the Han Era
Not one of them is left here now
Morning after morning the blossoms fade and fall
Year after year men are swept away and die
Today—here where you see a whirl of dust—
There was once in days long ago a vast sea

高峯頂上四顧
極處邊坐無人
知孤月照寒泉
泉中且無月月自在
青瓦吟此一曲歌
歌中不是禪



High—high up on the mountain crest
I gaze on all sides at a limitless prospect
Sitting alone here I am the only one to know
The lonely moon lights the icy spring
For the moment there is no moon upon the spring
The moon is hanging in the sky the blue sky
I repeat this poem in a melodious murmur
But after all this poem is not zen

欲向東巖去，干今
無量事。昨來攀
葛上，本路因風煙。
徑窄衣難進，苔粘
履不前。何位茲丹桂
下，且枕白雲眠。



Ever since I first desired to go to the eastern precipice
Until this day I have not measured the years
Yesterday hauling on creepers I clambered up here
Half-way up the wind and the mist made it hard for me
On the narrow track wearing these robes it was difficult going
The mosses clogged my steps and my wooden sandals stuck
But I pause now under a crimson cinnamon tree
For the moment I am resting—pale clouds for my pillow

登陲寒山道，寒山路不窮。
谿長石磊磊，澗澗草濛濛。
苔滑非關雨，松鳴不假風。
誰能超世界，共坐白雲中。

I am climbing the path to Cold Mountain
The path to Cold Mountain knows no ending
In the labyrinthine torrents piles of stones
By the broad rivers grasses bright with water droplets
The mosses are slippery in the rain it makes them treacherous
The pine trees need no wind to make them mourn
Who will leave behind the attachments of this world
And come and sit here with me among these pale clouds

家住綠山巖下庭
並更不共艾新藤
垂繚繞古石豎巉
巖山之果獼猴摘
池之奧白鷺銜仙
書一函卷樹下讀

My cottage stands below a green precipice
I no longer bother to pull up the weeds in the yard
The new calamus canes are leaning over all around
The ancient stones of steep cliffs towering
Monkeys are picking the mountain fruits
A white heron catches in its beak the fish in my pool
With one or two books about the immortals
I am reading to myself muttering under a tree

層山山水秀烟霞鎖
翠華微澗拂紗巾
露沾蓑草衣足跡
遊方履手執古藤枝
更觀塵世外夢境
復何為



Layer upon layer of mountains and leaping streams
Mists and rosy clouds of sunset glimmering delicate green
The powdered water sprinkles my gauze cap with tiny drops
The dew drenches my cape with grassy rains
On my feet the pilgrims' wooden-soled sandals
In my hand an old calamus stalk
I gaze upon the world of dust beyond
But in the domain of dreams what awaits me yet

卜祝函居地天台
更莫言猿蹄
霧冷嶽色草門
連折葉覆松室
開池引潤泉已甘
休萬事采薇度
殘年



By divination I chose a retired spot to dwell
In the Mountains of Tian-tai it goes without saying
Monkeys clamour icy torrents in the mists
The colour of the mountains matches my grassy gate
I gather leaves and cover my roof with chips of pine
I dig a pond and make a channel to bring it water
Already with a willing heart I have left the things of this world behind
To pass the years remaining to me I am gathering ferns

鳥弄情不堪其時臥草
菴好桃紅燦楊柳
正舞旭日銜青嶂晴
雲洗綠潭誰知出塵
俗馭上寒山南



My hear cannot endure the language of the birds
At this moment I am in bed in my hut of reeds
The wild cherries are of a brilliant luminous red
The willow boughs hang straight with furry catkins
The rising sun is caught between the teeth of blue-green peaks
The pale clouds are rinsed in lakes of jade
Does anyone know I have left the world of dust behind
And that I am wandering up the south flank of Cold Mountain



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