

Tea House

At the rickshaw-jammed gate of Chengtu,
I knew those ash trees, green umbrellas
for the White Heron, the famous tea house,
where townfolks reclined in bamboo chairs,
sipping jasmine tea, munching sunflower seeds.

They recalled the suns and moons of T'ang
they marveled at the glamorous new world;
their firecracker laughter over a joke
crackling along the stream of their talks,
in those long, long summer evenings.

The sparrows took a fancy at the party:
they hopped down, one by one, pecking at leisure
the flower seeds or crumbs at the sidewalks;
those birds were, too, incurable chatterers,
in those long, long summer evenings.

Sometimes a gaunt stroller occupied the yard:
his red-cap monkey, brisk as a child, would grin
and bow and shake hand with the spectators,
tirelessly picking up coins for his master,
in those long, long summer evenings.

Sometimes a troubadour came chanting a ballad,
while dusk was deepening into flickering candles;
over those sleepy heads his voice drifted on,
like tide upon some abandoned sand, winddriven,
moaning incessantly into the eastern seas.

— *Stephen Shu-Ning Liu*