

SAMPLER

*The Wine Cup*

By Richard Berengarten

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# The Wine Cup

Twenty-four Drinking Songs  
for Tao Yuanming

Richard Berengarten

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Thanks too to Yang Guohua for the photo of a white clay drinking cup from the Northern and Southern Dynasties Period (420 to 589 CE), which is the source of the front cover image by Arijana Mišić-Burns. In his early days, Tao Yuanming (365? to 427 CE) might well have drunk from a cup such as this, though after he retired from public life to live (and drink) in rural seclusion – so the story goes, under the shade of five willows – it’s doubtful if he would have used quite so fancy a vessel.

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SAMPLE

# Dark Blaze

*The way that can be wayed is not the way of ways*

How many of us find the way of ways  
That has no name? There's one reply: *Who knows?*  
I sip my wine and relish its dark blaze.

I pour another cup. How the light plays,  
Changing across the sky in streaks and glows!  
How many of us find the way of ways?

Tracking the rising moon through summer haze  
After my work is done, as the light goes,  
I sip my wine and relish its dark blaze.

Dissolve desire? Stop searching? Simply praise?  
Another cup, perhaps, before repose?  
How many of us find the way of ways?

See fireflies flicker in their damp arrays  
Down by the brook. Longing for dreamtime grows.  
I sip my wine and relish its dark blaze.

Dusk thickens and my eyesight ebbs and sways.  
Forgetting is a way too, I suppose.  
How many of us find the way of ways?  
I sip my wine and relish its dark blaze.

## I pass the gate

*My gaze drifts over the west garden  
Where the hibiscus blooms – brilliant red.*

I pass the gate. The red hibiscus blooms.  
Its flowers fold. Soon they will fade and fall.  
Come, drink a cup. Fate calls us to our dooms.

Remember palaces? Tall-ceilinged rooms?  
Rich ceremonies? The emperor's gilded hall?  
I pass the gate. The red hibiscus blooms.

Remember those fine servants, squires and grooms  
Attendant on us, scurrying to each call?  
Come, drink a cup. Fate calls us to our dooms.

Our skulls will soon be planted deep in tombs  
Where feasting ants and cockroaches will crawl.  
I pass the gate. The red hibiscus blooms.

Autumn already? Bring rakes, spades, and brooms.  
Sweep summer up till no speck's left at all.  
Come, drink a cup. Fate calls us to our dooms.

*Change* weaves its webs on insubstantial looms.  
But here is wine. For this the clay grew tall.  
I pass the gate. The red hibiscus blooms.  
Come, drink a cup. Fate calls us to our dooms.



## Dusts

*On, on, on! After a hundred years  
Body and name alike will be forgotten.*

Now this thatched cottage is my hermitage,  
Following quiet woodland paths seems best.  
Against oncoming night, why rant or rage?

When young I was half-blinded in a cage  
Of city-dust and rubbish, hope possessed.  
Now this thatched cottage is my hermitage.

Seventy-five, and still I earn my wage  
By piecemeal work, with scant let-up or rest.  
Against oncoming night, why rant or rage?

What point is there in shouting, at my age?  
I grin, breathe deep, walk by, like any guest.  
Now this thatched cottage is my hermitage.

My heart beats on against its old ribcage.  
To touch the moment passing, that's the test  
Against oncoming night. Why rant or rage?

A hundred years – our fate and heritage.  
Considering that, I'm nothing if not blessed.  
Now this thatched cottage is my hermitage,  
Against oncoming night, why rant or rage?