Acknowledgments

As I was working on this translation I often wondered how much the great poet would have written if he had been employed in a respectable, middling position in the imperial Secretariat over the course of his career, constantly dealing with the incoming problems of the empire. He would have surely contributed a verse or two on demand, but he would never have had the time to get into one of those “Du Fu moods” that sustain his best poetry.

I received the Mellon Distinguished Achievement Award in 2005. Although I had to postpone the beginning of the award to 2007 to take care of university obligations, it promised to provide me some unscheduled time to work on this enterprise, the possibility of which I had always entertained. The Mellon Foundation made such time possible and has continued to be supportive when I discovered that, no matter how hard and efficiently I worked, the time was not enough for Du Fu’s 1400 poems.

When Xiao Difei’s massive Du Fu quanji jiaozhu 杜甫全集校注 finally appeared in 2014, with seven major editors on the cover page for a project that took thirty-five years to complete, I felt that I was not alone. My student Luke Bender aptly described the enterprise of working on Du Fu a “black hole for time and effort.” After collating 1400 poems in the early editions myself, I find in the end that the work has been done in Xiao’s edition. I have no regrets, but I am glad to declare it complete, whatever its flaws.

These volumes begin the Library of Chinese Humanities as a dual-language resource. The Mellon Foundation has generously supported these and other initial volumes in this series, so that they may appear both in standard print format and open-access on the Web.

Several of my graduate students have helped in this process. Wangling Jinghua worked on the bibliography at an early stage. Du Feiran helped with the allusion dictionary and in adding the Xiao Difei page numbers. Most of all I must thank Luke Bender, who spent a long time going over everything. I cannot think of a more fruitful association between advisor and advisee. Luke, who will write his dissertation on Du Fu, offered innumerable corrections and alternative interpretations. We both learned things. 後生可畏.

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I don’t believe in translation by committee; but when one person ventures, and others point out errors, incoherencies, and awkwardness, it is a gift beyond the embarrassment. Other readers see the typo that was invisible because the author knew what he intended; other readers see the infelicity of phrasing that becomes obvious once it is pointed out; other readers supply knowledge of particulars or obviously better interpretation that the author overlooked. We are still a community, and that is a strength. I owe a debt of gratitude to the members of the editorial board who edited this massive beast, Ding Xiang Warner and Paul W. Kroll. Paul Kroll then went over and above the call of duty by going through the proofs when I was away in China.

To my wife and constant companion Tian Xiaofei I owe the obvious debt of gratitude for listening and solving problems I could not solve without an outside perspective. I owe my son George, to whom I dedicate this book, the gift for constantly reminding me that there is a world outside the demanding office and the book being made; and in that world all these other things do not matter very much.