

Translations in English Class

It's an old poem the one about war about the Tang poet Du Fu the one everyone in China loves standing there in springtime as the empire is in ruins and now we're breathing here together but the mountains and rivers remain and they nod as you read on saying the cities again are growing grass everywhere and the trees and see the soldiers' signal fires are still burning it has been three months we're in harmony now need no translation even the flowers worry are crying and I hate being away from home the birds startle him yes we all say we'd pay a fortune for one letter from our family as he scratches his old hair thinned too much to hold his jade hairpin.

*The flowers they say
are not crying how could they
it's not what it says*

They argue. They say I got it all, but not the part about the flowers. That's not what it says. That's not what the poet says. Flowers don't cry. It was the poet's tears. That's exactly it, I say. We mean the same thing. They insist. I hear in unison: Du Fu's tears, not the flowers. The flowers *shed* tears. As if I don't know my own language. But I insist. It's what I say, there's no difference, I want to yell. It's my translation. The flowers are crying and when I read the poem again there is no harmony, nothing is lost in translation, the flowers are crying and the empire is in ruins. Even the birds are startled.

*The last haiku waits
alone to turn out the lights
wonders where you are*

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