

The Ancient Lute

Who knows why the ancient lute has fifty strings,
 each fret a string each string a year of bloom:
 that scholar who dreamt at dawn, lost in a butterfly's dream,
 that king who gave his heart to the cuckoo's spring song.
 Vast seas, moon-brightened: oysters cry pearls.
 Blue fields, sun-warmed: jade breathes smoke.
 This mood can wait for memory's chase,
 still as it comes, still it is lost.

—*Li Shang Yin (813 - 858)*
(Translated from the
Chinese by Susan So)

In Memory of John Thompson

In the afternoon I watch smooth brook stones:
 gold, they overshine the sun.

The rare beauty of things: dark brooks;
 and the voices of children, playing.

Where are all our books and stories?
 Rest now, silent as a sleeping fly.

I hear your words. Dark, they stir:
 petals of a rose, growing from the unseen core.

I'll drop my hook in the water, raise
 the great, grey soul, waiting in the shadow of that rock.

—*Allan Cooper*