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## The Complete *Ci*-poems of Li Qingzhao: A New English Translation

by  
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## Foreword

These are some of the most exquisite, feeling translations of Chinese poems I have ever encountered. Yet it was only by mere chance that they came into my hands. Jiaosheng Wang's renditions of Li Qingzhao's lyrics have impressed me so deeply that I felt compelled to share them with a wider audience rather than keep them jealously to myself.

The beauty of Jiaosheng Wang's translations lies in his ability to use simple but exacting language to convey the sentiments of the Chinese verse in English. He does not strive for preciousness or brilliance, but only to catch the spirit of the original and to convey it to his reader in the most unadorned terms possible. This attitude well suits the poetry of Li Qingzhao which often relies on guileless understatement to achieve a powerful effect. It is also evident that Wang has a lasting admiration for the material with which he is involved. Thus he does not work in haste, but is willing to go back over his versions of Li Qingzhao's lyrics again and again, slowly perfecting them until he is satisfied that he has them "just right". In this way, Wang's efforts as translator do not clash with or overshadow the poetic voice of the author. Rather, he strives to meld his own finely crafted lines with those of Li Qingzhao in an unusual esthetic harmony that merits repeated savoring. So often when reading Wang's translations of Li's lyric *œuvre*, I have the strange sensation that the two have merged into one. Experiencing Li Qingzhao via the pen of Wang Jiaosheng is as comfortably enchanting and absorbing as communing with Emily Dickinson on a dark, quiet Sunday afternoon.

Parting is all we know of heaven,  
And all we need of hell.

May this lovingly prepared volume stand as a testimony to undiscovered genius wherever it may be. I shudder to think that I almost did not have the privilege of reading these wonderful works of art. What is all the more remarkable about the accomplishment of Jiaosheng Wang is that he has never left the soil of China.

I shall be happy to pass on the comments of readers to the aged and ailing translator who lives in Shanghai.

Victor H. Mair  
Professor of Oriental Studies  
University of Pennsylvania

August 16, 1989

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the preparation of this volume, I have profited immeasurably from the experience and wealth of knowledge of many of my friends. To them I am most grateful for giving so freely of their help whenever it is solicited. I am especially indebted to my nephew Stephen C. Chen, California, for sending a considerable number of English classics published in the United States for my perusal and enjoyment over the past ten-odd years. From 1986 onwards he has further gone out of his way to encourage me by procuring many authoritative works on the art of poetry translation for my reference, as well as making many valuable suggestions, which have contributed in no small measure to my completing these translations of Li Qingzhao's ci-poems. My thanks are also due to Mr Zheng Lianghuan, formerly a student at the Shanghai Institute for Teachers' Advanced Studies where I was lecturing in the late 1970s, who has since become one of my close friends, for doing all the typing and collating of my manuscripts and for delightful conversations during the past six months and more at the expense of much of his valuable time.

Above all, I owe a deep debt of gratitude to Professor Victor H. Mair, Pennsylvania, for his appreciation of my work, and for all his encouragement and generous help, without which it would have been out of the question for this little book of mine, now honored with the Foreword he has so kindly written, to be issued in Sino-Platonic Papers.

W Js  
Shanghai  
mid-July, 1989

## INTRODUCTION

### I

Li Qingzhao (1084-c.1155), alias Yi An the Lay Buddhist, was born into a family of scholars and officials, in Jinan, Shandong Province. Her father, Li Gefei, was a professor at the Imperial Academy and a noted prose-writer; her mother had some reputation as a writer of poetry. Brought up in such a favorable environment and devoted to her studies, she acquired a deep knowledge of literature and the classics in her teens. Even as a young girl she took to writing delightful little lyrics on her excursions to the suburbs and nearby beauty spots. Ci-poems such as 'A Happy Recollection: To the tune In Dreamland' reveal her girlish naivete, her lively untamed spirit and love of nature.

At eighteen she married Zhao Mingcheng, a student in the Imperial Academy. The union was an ideal one, for they shared the same passion for poetry and the classics, ancient bronze and stone inscriptions and objets d'art, painting and calligraphy. Many were the hours they passed happily together composing poems to rhyme with each other's, and delving into points of nicety in the classics. They enjoyed touring the city and its environs and even out-of-the-way places in quest of favorite antiques and rare editions of ancient books. As a result, her poetic style became more quiet and refined. The exquisite ci-poems she wrote during this period expressed deep love for her husband as well as her feeling of loneliness whenever he happened to be away from home. But unfortunately this married happiness proved to be only temporary. In 1127 the Northern Song regime fell to the Tartars in the notorious Jing Kang Invasion when two Song emperors were ignominiously taken prisoner by the Jin army. The Zhaos suffered untold hardships fleeing the invaders, and were compelled to seek refuge south of the Yangtze. They lost most of their manuscripts and a great number of valuable books and antiques collected over several decades. Then in 1129 came the greatest catastrophe in Li Qingzhao's life: her husband died of typhoid en route to an official post. She was left an

outcast to wander aimlessly for years from one place to another. She finally settled in the Southern Song capital Hangzhou, to pass the rest of her days in loneliness and misery. Very little is recorded about the time of her death, but it is generally believed that she lived to about the age of seventy-one. The ci-poems she wrote in her declining years, replete with memories of her deceased husband and of her beloved northern homeland, are particularly admired for their pathos. But most of these were lost, like her other writings, in her precarious wanderings during those troubled years, which was an irreparable loss to Chinese literature.

## II

Before discussing Li Qingzhao's ci-poetry, it may be not out of place to make a brief mention of certain technical points characteristic of the ci-form of classical Chinese poetry. Ci was originally a kind of melody tuned to folk music which later developed into a new form of written verse consisting of lines of different lengths. A ci-poem is limited to a fixed number of characters conforming to a strict meter and rhyme scheme. According to Wan Shu's Tonal Patterns and Rhyme Schemes in Ci-poetry more than 1100 types of Ci are now extant. Each type has a label of its own, usually symbolizing some circumstance or event which occurred when the original tune came into being. For example, the ci label Bodhisattva's Gold Headdress (Pusaman) dates back to about 850, when the Tang court received as tribute from the Man minority nationality a troupe of girl singers dressed beautifully in the costumes of fairies wearing golden caps. To celebrate the occasion the tune Pusaman was played in the palace under the emperor's orders. It is therefore evident that the labels of present-day ci-poems mostly have nothing to do with their content. In some cases, however, ci-poems may have titles under their labels giving some idea of the content of the ci. Such titles may have been written by the poets themselves, or later added by commentators or anthologists for the reader's edification. Needless to say, a ci-poem may have no title at all without detriment to its intrinsic merit.



The origin of Ci dates back to the Sui Dynasty (581-618). However, since no ci-poems belonging to that period now exist, the great Li Bai of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) is now credited with having composed the first two ci-poems in Chinese literature: 'To the tune Bodhisattva's Gold Headdress' and 'To the tune Remembering the Maid of Qin'. Ci gained in popularity when in course of time other noted Tang poets, Bai Juyi, Wen Tingyun and Wei Yingwu among them, began to write ci-poems simultaneously with shi-poems. But it was not until the end of the Five Dynasties (907-960) and the beginning of the Song Dynasty (960-1279) that Ci made rapid strides, with a great number of renowned poets turning to Ci as their favorite medium of poetic expression. Though Ci dominated the literary scene for only a limited period, its popularity continued almost undiminished through the Yuan (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties to the present century. And even today, new ci-poems are printed not infrequently in the Chinese press side by side with shi-poems. That ci-poetry still occupies an important place in classical Chinese literature is further evidenced by the publication in a recent issue of the magazine Chinese Literature of ten ci-lyrics unearthed in the Dunhuang caves. Beautifully translated into English by Mr Simon Johnstone, these poems have excited a great deal of interest among lovers of ci-poetry both in China and overseas.

### III

Li Qingzhao lived at a time when Ci as a literary genre had attained to the acme of its perfection, with the emergence of two schools of Ci widely different in style and tone: the bold romantic style and the elegant restrained style. There is no doubt that Li belonged to the latter. But when it comes to the question of her status among the ci-poets, critics are prone to two extremes. While some laud her as the greatest writer of ci-poetry that China has ever produced, others deny her even the



privilege of ranking among the major Song ci-poets. The consensus today seems in favor of the Qing poet Wang Shizhen's view that while Xin Qiji was the foremost exponent of the bold romantic style of ci-poetry, Li Qingzhao was that of the elegant restrained style. She inherited and creatively developed all the fine qualities of her predecessors and finally surpassed them. She brought the elegant restrained style of ci-poetry to its highest perfection by evolving a new style of her own—the Yi An style, which exerted a profound influence on many distinguished contemporary and later poets. The great Xin Qiji was one of her admirers, and wrote a ci-poem entitled 'Going through Boshan Mountain Pass' in the Yi An style, which appears in Chinese calligraphy on Page 56. This poem suggests an atmosphere of serenity very much like that of Li Qingzhao's "Admiring Lotuses" on Page 12, with the white gull personified and in much the same mood as the egrets and gulls in Li's poem. Wang Shizhen composed no fewer than seventeen ci-lyrics rhyming with hers.

Particularly worthy of notice is Liu Chenweng, a patriotic poet who lived almost a century after Li Qingzhao in the declining days of the Song Dynasty. Like Li, he was greatly troubled by thoughts of the lost Northern Song homeland, and the sufferings of the people under the rule of the Tartar invaders. He wrote a ci-poem entitled 'To the tune Happiness of Eternal Union' to rhyme with one of Li's, with a prefatory note to the following effect:

It is now three years since I first read Yi-an's 'To the tune Happiness of Eternal Union', and was moved to tears. I cannot help feeling touched whenever I re-read it. So I have written one of my own to rhyme with hers, which, though much inferior as regards diction and style, is nevertheless even more permeated with grief.

Liu's poem with his Preface appears in Chinese calligraphy on Page 84. This incident shows that besides their literary excellence, Li Qingzhao's ci-poems, especially those written in

her later years, possess a deep social significance in that they exerted a far-reaching imperceptible influence on the thinking of the masses of that age.

IV

Speaking of poetry-writing, the noted Song Dynasty scholar and critic Wei Tai, in his Random Notes on Poetry, made a remark to the effect that poetry should be exact about the thing described, but refrain from directly expressing the feeling it is intended to convey. In this way the reader may be left to imagine for himself, and enter into the poet's inmost thoughts. Li Qingzhao's ci-poems pre-eminently possess this quality. Among the Song ci-poets she was unique as a master of poetic diction and literary devices. Her ci-poems abound in nature images drawn mostly from material things such as wine, tea and incense; window blinds and bed-cushions; flowers and plants like plum, cassia, crabapple and chrysanthemum; grass and willows; wild geese, egrets, gulls and other birds; as well as natural phenomena: the sun, the moon, the stars; rain, wind, snow, dew, frost, clouds and mists. These are sometimes followed by some description of a human event or action that presumably offers a sort of parallel to the nature images. But the poet refrains deliberately from telling her own feeling, so that the reader is left to imagine, as an aftertaste, what is disturbing her mind. For example:

No more incense smoke from the gilt lion-burner;  
Quilts in the bed—a riot of crimson waves.

.....

A jumble of parting thoughts,  
Yet I hesitate on the verge of utterance  
For fear of bitterness.  
Of late I've been growing thin,  
Not that I overdrink myself,  
Nor from lament for the autumn.

Or: This year at the end of the Earth,  
I find my hair greying at the temples.  
Now that the evening wind is growing in force,  
I shall be hard put to it to come by plum blossoms.

Except in the long poem 'A Galaxy of Beauties' Li Qingzhao seldom relied on classical allusions to achieve effect. Instead, she showed a marked preference for the metaphor and the simile. In several instances, her comparisons have a freshness all their own owing to her innovation of comparing inanimate objects, animals and birds to human beings instead of comparing human beings to these in the conventional way, as witness the following:

Sunny breezes, warm drizzle  
Take the chill off the air  
As the thaw sets in.  
Willow sprouts like a girl's eyes,  
Plum blossoms rosy-cheeked:  
Already one feels the heart of spring stirring.

In 'Spring at Wu Ling', one of her best-remembered ci-poems, by the ingenious use of colloquialisms, she has created the metaphor 'grasshopper of a boat' to bring the smallness of the boat into charming relief:

I hear 'Twin Brooks' is still sweet  
With the breath of spring.  
How I'd, too, love to go for a row,  
On a tiny skiff.  
But I fear at 'Twin Brooks'  
My grasshopper of a boat  
Wouldn't be able to bear  
Such a load of grief.

Li Qingzhao was also a gifted user of Personification, as shown in the following passages from 'Admiring Lotuses':

Beautiful beyond words  
Are these verdant hills and sparkling streams  
That endear themselves to me so warmly.

.....

Dozing egrets and gulls on the sand  
Do not so much as turn their heads,  
As if they, too, resent my going away so early.

In her ci-poems we often find simple phrases used in preference to ornate expressions such as are frequently found in the work of her contemporaries. She had a remarkable gift for refining everyday colloquialisms and turning them into plain expressions with a literary flavor that sometimes even have a deep meaning. Her poems are enriched by a wealth of parallel sentences and reiterative words and phrases beautifully adapted from colloquialisms. Take one of her masterpieces "Autumn Sorrow, to a Long Melancholy Tune", which begins with seven pairs of characters ingeniously repeated—a literary feat characteristic of Li's genius that is much admired but hardly ever equalled by later writers. Such repetition not only lends a musical rhythm to the poem but serves as a powerful prelude to the nature images that follow: tantalizing weather, flavorless wine, howling evening wind, vanishing wild geese, faded chrysanthemums strewn neglected on the ground, fine rain dripping lugubriously on the leaves of parasol-trees, and lastly the author's own wizened self at the window in the deepening twilight. The melancholy picture called up by all these, summed up in the concluding sentence, cannot but enter deeply into us, and make our minds respond with ecstasy.

V

In her celebrated Essay On Ci-poetry, Li Qingzhao laid down hard and fast rules to define the difference between ci and shi, two forms of poetry different in their aims. While shi expresses the will, ci conveys the feelings. Ci is therefore a school all its own.

Li Qingzhao's shi-poems, of which only fifteen survive, were mostly written to satirize the Northern Song emperors' capitulationist policy, as the following translation of her well-known shi-poem Lines Written On A Summer's Day indicates:

In life we should be heroes among the living;  
After death, let us be heroes among the ghosts.  
To this day we miss that ancient hero Xiang Yu,  
Who would rather die than cross to the East of the River!

This satire reveals the poet's clearcut stand against the North Song emperor who fled with his ministers to the South of the Yangtze when pursued by the Jin invaders. It is evident that shi-poems such as this one, though important from a political point of view as her favorite medium for expressing her political ideas, were different in some respects from her ci-poems.

When it comes to the question of style, there is no doubt that Li's shi-poems are far eclipsed by her ci-poems, because the former are mostly written in straightforward, matter-of-fact language, and lack the refined elegance and charm of the latter. It is therefore on her achievements as the leading exponent of the elegant restrained style of ci-poetry that her great fame rests today. The renowned scholar Zheng Zhengduo rightly comments: "As regards style and artistic concept, her five-character and seven-character shi-poems are none too good. But her ci-lyrics, it may be said, are peerless among the ancients, and likely to be so in the generations to come... And among poets of all time, she should not rank below either Tao Qian, Li Bai and Du Fu, or Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi." And Li Diaoyuan, in his Random Notes On Ci-poetry From A Rain-washed Village, has this to say: "There is not one of Li Qingzhao's ci-poems but is done with exquisite artistry. "

In reading Li Qingzhao's ci-poems, we are conscious of a kind of lingering charm rarely to be found in the works of her contemporaries. This is because her verse with its rich imagery suggests and hints rather than directly expresses the feeling. It was perhaps this irresistible charm that the American poet Amy Lowell referred to as the perfume of a poem which she considered more important than its metrical form.

VI

In her lifetime Li Qingzhao is said to have compiled a book entitled Shu Yu Ci (Jade Rinsing Ci) in several volumes comprising most of her ci-poems written during the two periods of her eventful life (i.e. before and after the fall of the Northern Song in 1127). But all we now have of her ci-poems number only about seventy-eight, of which forty-three are believed to be from her pen, the remaining thirty-five, though generally attributed to her, are still of doubtful authorship despite scholarly debates in the many centuries since her death. However, some consolation may be derived from the fact that even this small number that survive reveal her versatile genius at its best.

This book of The Complete Ci-poems of Li Qingzhao: A New English Translation with the Original Texts in Chinese Calligraphy, contains a total of fifty-five ci-poems. Besides all the forty-three ci-poems written by Li herself, it includes twelve\* chosen from those attributed to her, which have long enjoyed popularity because of their being written in the style of Li Qingzhao and their own intrinsic value as poetry.

Although the nuances of Li Qingzhao's ci-poems are too subtle for the translator to transplant effectively to another language, it is hoped that this slender volume will increase the reader's understanding and enjoyment of these treasured lyrics by one of China's greatest poets.

\*i.e. poems on pp. 2-3, 26-27, 34-35, 38-39, 40-41, 42-43, 58-59, 96-97, 98-99, 100-101, 104-105, 112-113.

However, it must be pointed out that in a very few cases, while in one anthology a certain poem is listed as written by Li herself, in another it may be placed in the category of poems attributed to her. In such circumstances the translator has no alternative but to follow the anthologist he thinks most reliable, taking into consideration as well the intrinsic merits of the poem itself.







點絳脣 天真

蹴罷秋千起來慵整  
紆紆手  
露濃花瘦薄汗輕衣透  
見客入來襪剗金釵  
溜和羞  
走倚門回首却把青梅嗅

Tune: "Rouged Lips"

Naivete

Stepping down from the swing,  
Languidly she smooths her soft slender hands,  
Her flimsy dress wet with light perspiration—  
A slim flower trembling with heavy dew.

Spying a stranger, she walks hastily away in shyness:  
Her feet in bare socks,  
Her gold hairpin fallen.  
Then she stops to lean against a gate,  
And looking back,  
Makes as if sniffing a green plum.

如夢令 春晚  
昨夜雨疏風驟，濃睡不消殘酒。  
試問卷簾人，却道海棠依舊。  
知否？知否？應是綠肥紅瘦。

Tune: "A Dream Song"<sup>1</sup>

Spring Ends

Last night there was intermittent rain, a gusty wind.  
Deep sleep did not relieve me of  
The last effects of wine.  
I ask the maid rolling up the blinds,  
But she replies: "The crab-apple is lovely as before."  
"Don't you know?"  
"Oh, don't you know?"  
"The green should be plump and the red lean?"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A short poem noted for its swift turns of thought  
expressed with the utmost economy of words.

<sup>2</sup>A famous line in the Chinese text which almost  
baffles translators with its rich imagery.

一翦梅 離愁

紅藕香殘玉簟秋。輕解羅裳，獨上蘭舟。  
雲中誰寄錦書來？雁字回時，月滿西樓。

花自飄零水自流。一種相思，兩處閒愁。  
此情無計可消除。才下眉頭，却上心頭。

Tune: "A Sprig of Plum Blossom"

Sorrow of Separation

The lotus has wilted, only a faint perfume remains;  
On the bamboo mat there's a touch of autumn chill.  
Softly I take off my silk dress  
And step on board my orchid skiff alone.  
Who is sending me the letter of brocade  
From beyond the clouds?  
When the wild geese<sup>1</sup> return  
The moon will be flooding the West Chamber.

Flowers fall and drift away,  
Water glides on,  
After their nature.  
Our yearning is the sort  
Both sides far apart endure—  
A melancholy feeling there's no resisting.  
As soon as it leaves the eyebrows  
It surges up in the breast.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Wild geese were thought to be bearers of letters, especially love messages, because of their regular migrations from north to south and vice versa.

<sup>2</sup>The original is a famous couplet that serves as a natural sequel to the foregoing three lines.

小重山

春到長門春草青  
紅梅些子破未開  
勻碧雲籠碾玉成塵  
留曉夢驚破一瓿春  
花影壓重門  
疏簾鋪淡月  
好黃昏  
二年三度負東君  
歸來也  
著意過今春



Tune: "Little Overlapping Hills"

Spring returns to my lonely chamber,<sup>1</sup>  
Once more spring grass is lush and green.  
Some red plum blossoms are open,  
Others have yet to bloom.  
I grind tea bricks into fine jade powder  
In a pot carved with azure clouds,<sup>2</sup>  
Still under the spell of the morning's dream,  
Till all of a sudden I am woken  
By a jug of spring.<sup>3</sup>

Flower shadows press at the double gate,  
Pale moonlight silvers the translucent curtains.  
A beautiful evening!  
Three times in two years<sup>4</sup>  
We've missed the spring.  
Come back without further ado  
And let's enjoy our fill of this spring!

<sup>1</sup> "Chang Men" (High Gate Palace) in the original poem used to be where Empress Chen of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - A.D.220) lived in loneliness when she was out of favor with Emperor Wu. It is a metaphor for "lonely chamber".

<sup>2</sup> An allusion to the Song custom of grinding tea bricks into fine powder in a carved pot which is then put over the fire to make tea.

<sup>3</sup> delicious spring tea.

<sup>4</sup> "The Beginning of Spring" (li chun), the first solar term in the lunar calendar, sometimes occurs twice a year.

鷓鴣天

枝上流鶯和淚聞新啼痕間舊  
啼痕一春魚雁無消息千里關  
山勞夢魂 無一語對芳樽安  
排腸斷到黃昏甫能炙得燈兒  
了雨打梨花深閉門

Tune: "Partridge Sky"<sup>1</sup>

The migrant oriole on the bough—  
Tears fill my eyes  
As I hear its sweet trills,  
Fresh tearstains mingling with old.  
A whole spring—and no word from you;  
A thousand li beyond the mountain pass—  
I search for you in my dreams.

Wordless, facing the cup,  
I resign myself to heart-rending sorrow till dusk.  
No waiting for the lamp oil to run out.<sup>2</sup>  
I shut the door tight  
As rain pelts the pear blossoms.

<sup>1</sup>The authorship of this poem has been the subject of some debate. I am in favor of the view of Professor Jin Jichang of Shanxi University that both the content and the style of the poem show it to be from the pen of Li Qingzhao rather than of Ouyang Xiu or Qin Shaoyu as some scholars believe.

<sup>2</sup>A Buddhist saying with an intriguing exotic flavor used to signify the tedium of waiting.

怨王孫 賞荷

湖上風來波浩渺，秋已暮，紅  
稀香少。水光山色與人親，說  
不盡、無窮好。

蓮子已成荷葉老，清露洗蘋  
花汀草。眠沙鴟鷺不回頭，似  
也恨、人歸早。

Tune: "Complaint Against A Prince"<sup>1</sup>

Admiring Lotuses

Wind on the lake sends the waves  
Drifting far and wide.  
Autumn deepens. A few lotus blossoms remain  
With a lingering fragrance.  
Beautiful beyond words are these verdant hills and  
sparkling streams  
That endear themselves to me so warmly.

Lotus pods ripen into seed  
As lotus leaves grow sere;  
Duckweed and rushes fringe the bank  
Fresh-washed by crystal dew.  
Dozing egrets and gulls on the sand  
Do not so much as turn their heads,  
As if they, too, resent  
My going away so early.

<sup>1</sup>Written probably before the poet's marriage in 1101.

This poem is noted for two characteristics: it describes the scenes of autumn in a tone of cheerfulness rather than melancholy; it is entirely free from feelings of sadness or nostalgia such as we find in most of Li Qingzhao's ci-poems.

浣溪沙 春暮

小院閑窗春色深  
重簾未卷影沉沉  
倚樓無語理瑤琴  
遠岫出雲催薄暮  
細風吹雨弄輕陰  
梨花欲謝恐難禁

Tune: "Sand of Silk-Washing Brook"

Late Spring

A small courtyard, an idle window:

The mellow tints of spring.

Double blinds unfurled:

A room deep in shadow.

Upstairs, silently,

Someone plucking a jade zither.

Clouds emerging from far-off peaks

Hasten the fall of dusk.

A soft breeze blowing rain

Dallies with light shade.

Pear blossoms already past their bloom——

I'm afraid one can't keep them from fading.



醉花陰 重陽

薄霧濃雲愁永晝。瑞腦銷金獸。  
佳節又重陽。玉枕紗櫥半。  
夜涼初透。  
東籬把酒黃昏後。有暗香盈袖。  
莫道不消魂。簾卷西風人。  
比黃花瘦。

Tune: "Drunk in the Shade of Flowers"

Double Ninth Festival<sup>1</sup>

Fine mist, thick clouds:  
A day of sadness drags on.  
The incense in the gilt animal-burner is running out.  
Once more the festive day of Double Ninth returns,  
And my mesh-curtained bed and jewelled pillows  
Are just drenched in the chill of midnight.

Beside the east hedge I drink after dusk;  
A subtle fragrance fills my sleeves.  
Don't say one is not pining away!  
When the west wind blows the blinds aside,  
I am frailer than the chrysanthemums.

<sup>1</sup> Legend says that the Ninth Day of the Ninth Month in the lunar calendar was originally a day when people in ancient times went to the hills to escape natural calamities, each wearing a bag filled with dogwood. Later it became a festival for groups of friends or members of a family to go picnicking on the hills to enjoy the brisk air and mellow tints of autumn—a custom immortalized in one of the Tang poet Wang Wei's quatrains, in which the famous line "On festive occasions one thinks doubly of absent dear ones" is often quoted to this day.

This poem was written not long after the poet married Zhao Mingcheng, when the latter had to leave home at short notice to take up a distant official post. Its vivid images are pregnant with implicit feelings which she leaves for the reader to imagine. The concluding three lines, famous for their lyric charm, are frequently quoted. It is said that when her husband received the poem, he was overcome with admiration and took pains to compose fifty poems to the same tune to rival and surpass hers, but without success.

鳳凰臺上憶吹簫 別情

香冷金猊被翻紅浪起來慵自梳頭  
任寶奩塵滿日上簾鉤生怕離懷別  
苦多少事欲說還休新來瘦非干病  
酒不是悲秋 休休這回去也千萬  
遍陽關也則難留念武陵人遠煙鎖  
秦樓惟有樓前流水應念我終日凝  
眸凝眸霎如今又添一段新愁

Tune: "Nostalgia for Fluting on the Phoenix Terrace"  
Separation

No more incense smoke from the gilt lion burner;  
Quilts in the bed: a riot of crimson waves.  
A night of unrestful sleep,  
And I am in no mood to comb my hair,  
Heedless that my jewelled toilet-set is covered with dust,  
And the morning sun peeping above the curtain-hooks.  
A jumble of parting thoughts,  
Yet I hesitate on the verge of utterance  
For fear of bitterness.  
Of late I've been growing thin,  
Not that I over-drink myself,  
Nor from lament for the autumn.

Finished! Finished!

Ten thousand Songs of Farewell<sup>1</sup> failed to detain  
The loved one—now gone far away  
To Wu Ling Peach Blossom Springs.<sup>2</sup>  
Here in this mist-locked chamber  
I sit brooding the livelong day,  
With only the limpid stream showing me sympathy  
As it glides quietly past the terrace.  
A fresh wave of regret floods my heart  
Where I gaze.

<sup>1</sup>An allusion to a poem written by Wang Wei of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) to see off a friend, which in later generations came to be widely used as a song of farewell, with its last line "West of Yang Guan you'll have no more old friends" sung as a refrain. Yang Guan was an ancient pass in present-day Gansu Province.

<sup>2</sup>The poet compares her husband to the fisherman who sojourned in the Land of Peach Blossom Springs in Tao Yuanming's Utopian essay.

蝶戀花 離情

暖雨晴風初破凍，柳眼梅腮，已覺春心動。  
酒意詩情誰與共，淚融殘粉花鈿重。  
乍試夾衫金縷縫，山枕斜欹，枕損釵頭鳳。  
獨抱濃愁無好夢，夜闌猶剪燈花弄。

Tune: "Butterflies Linger Over Flowers"

Separation

Sunny breezes, warm drizzle  
Take the chill off the air  
As the thaw sets in.  
Willow sprouts like a girl's eyes,  
Plum blossoms rosy-cheeked:  
Already one feels the heart of spring stirring.  
Oh the delights of wine and poetry—  
Who will now share them with me?  
The gold-petalled hair-piece feels heavy,  
And tears melt my rouge.

I try on my lined dress sewn with gold thread,  
Recline idly on a pile of pillows,  
Crushing my phoenix hairpin.  
No pleasant dream comes to one  
Alone in deep sorrow.  
At dead of night I sit up,  
Trimming the tell-tale wick  
Of my bedside lamp.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The wick of the candle burnt into a flowery shape was thought to be a good omen, here presumably of the lover's return.

浣溪沙 暮春

淡蕩春光寒食天  
玉爐沉水裊殘煙  
夢回山枕隱花鈿  
海燕未來人斗草  
江梅已過柳生棉  
黃昏疏雨濕秋千



Tune: "Sand of Silk-Washing Brook"

Late Spring

Spring colors, mild and rippling,  
Usher in Cold Food Day.<sup>1</sup>  
Wisps of dying incense smoke  
Wreathe the jade burner.  
I wake from my dream to find myself  
Still wearing the gold-petalled hair-piece,  
Reclined on my pillows.<sup>2</sup>

Swallows have not come back from the sea,<sup>3</sup>  
People are already competing in games of grass.  
Riverside plums past their bloom,  
Catkins appear on the willows.  
Rain drizzles as twilight deepens,  
Wetting the garden swing.

<sup>1</sup>The Day of Cold Food customarily occurred two days before Qingming (Pure Bright), the fifth solar term in the lunar calendar. On this day people in ancient times abstained from cooking to lament the hermit Jie Zhitui, who let himself be burnt to death rather than obey the summons of the Duke of Jin in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.), when the latter set fire to the mountain forest where he was hiding.

<sup>2</sup>A line capable of two interpretations. The present translation follows the one preferred by most authorities.

<sup>3</sup>A stanza full of emotional significance. Each of the images given reflects some feeling that must be disturbing the poet's mind.

浣溪沙 暮春

髻子傷春懶更梳  
晚風庭院落梅初  
淡雲來往月疏疏  
玉鴨熏爐閑瑞腦  
朱櫻斗帳掩流蘇  
通犀還解避寒無

Tune: "Sand of Silk-Washing Brook"<sup>1</sup>

Late Spring

Languidly I leave my tresses uncombed,  
Regretting that spring will soon be over.  
Plum blossoms in the courtyard  
Begin to fall in the evening breeze,  
And moonbeams grow sparse  
As light clouds drift to and fro.

The jade duck-censer idle  
With the incense unlit.  
Drooping tassels of many-colored feathers  
All but conceal the small cherry-tinted bed-curtain.  
My rhinoceros hairpin<sup>2</sup>—  
Is it still proof against the cold?

<sup>1</sup> Some critics pay tribute to this poem as being in the style of High Tang lyricism—replete with feeling through sheer imagery.

<sup>2</sup> A kind of rhinoceros horn said to diffuse warmth was sent as tribute to the Tang court by Viet Nam. Here it means "a rhinoceros cushion" or "a rhinoceros hairpin", both of which are relevant to the context.

減字木蘭花

賣花擔上買得一枝春欲放  
淚染輕勻猶帶彤霞曉露痕  
怕郎猜道奴面不如花面好  
雲鬢斜簪徒要教郎比并看

Tune: "Magnolia Flowers" (A shorter version)

From the flower vendor I bought  
A sprig of spring just bursting into bloom—  
Sprinkled all over with teardrops  
Still tinged with traces of  
Roseate clouds and morning dew.

Lest my beloved should think  
I'm not so fair as the flower,  
I pin it slanting in my cloud hair,  
And ask him to see  
Which of us is the lovelier:  
The flower or I.

怨王孫 閨情

帝里春晚重門深院草綠  
階前暮天雁斷樓上遠信  
誰傳恨綿綿

多情自是多沾惹難拚舍  
又是寒食也秋千巷陌人  
靜皎月初斜浸梨花

Tune: "Complaint Against A Prince"

Spring in the Boudoir

Late spring in the Imperial city,  
A hall deeply secluded within double gates.  
Once more the grass in front of the steps  
Grows lush and green,  
And from my upstairs window  
I gaze and gaze at the last wild geese  
Vanishing from the evening sky.  
Nowhere to find a messenger to convey  
My teeming thoughts far away.  
I am in deep sorrow—  
A sorrow that never abates.

The deeper your love, the more poignant  
The feeling of sadness there's no resisting.  
It is again Cold Food Day.  
The garden swings lying idle,  
The lanes deserted.  
All is quiet save a bright moon  
That slants down to drench the pear blossoms.

浣溪沙 寂寞

莫許杯深琥珀濃  
未成沉醉意  
先融疏鐘已應晚來風  
瑞腦  
香消魂夢斷  
辟寒金小髻鬟  
松醒時空對燭花紅



Tune: "Sand of Silk-Washing Brook"

Solitude

Fill no more this cup of amber,  
A feeling of intoxication comes over me  
Before I am deep drunk.  
Evening wind blows,  
Echoing the intermittent chimes of bells.

The borneols have gone out, my dream is interrupted.  
My tresses fall loose,  
The gold-bird<sup>1</sup> hairpin is so small.  
I wake up and brood idly  
Over the glowing candle flame.

<sup>1</sup> An allusion to a bird which spit gold presented as  
tribute by Viet Nam to the King of Wei in the Period  
of the Three Kingdoms (220-265)

點絳脣 寂寞

寂寞深閨愁腸一寸愁千縷  
惜春春去几點催花雨

倚遍欄杆只是無情緒人何  
處連天衰草望斷歸來路

Tune: "Rouged Lips"

Loneliness

Fine rain urges the falling petals,

And soon spring will be fled

Love it as I may.

A twinge in my aching heart,

And I am overwhelmed by a thousand sad thoughts,

Secluded in my lonely chamber.

Impossible to get out of this mood of depression,

Moving from one end of the balustrade to the other.

Where is he, the one dear to my heart?

The road by which he may return I cannot glimpse,

Withered grass stretching to the farthest skies.

怨王孫 春暮

夢斷漏悄愁濃酒惱寶枕  
生寒翠屏向曉門外誰掃  
殘紅夜來風

玉簫聲斷人何處春又去  
忍把歸期負此情此恨此  
際擬託行雲問東君

Tune: "Complaint Against A Prince"

Late Spring

The clepsydra has stopped dripping;

My dream is broken.

Heavy drinking last night

Intensifies my sorrow.

A chill falls on my jewelled pillow

As the kingfisher screen

Faces a new dawn.

Who swept away the fallen petals outside my door?

Was it the wind that blew the whole night through?

Echoes of a jade flute die away,

The player gone nobody knows where.<sup>1</sup>

Spring, too, will soon be fled,

Yet he has the heart not to keep

His date to return.

I ask the God of Spring

Through the drifting clouds,

What I should do with this longing, this regret,

This moment of time.

<sup>1</sup>Legend has it that the daughter of Duke Mu of the State of Qin (c. 7th century B.C.) married Xiao Shi, a gifted flute player. The couple lived happily in a jade tower, and one day riding a phoenix they flew away together to the Land of Immortals.

慶清朝慢

芍藥

禁幄低張，彤欄巧護，就中獨占殘春。  
容華淡冶，綽約俱見，天真待得群花  
過後，一番風露曉妝新。妖嬈態、妬  
風笑月，長端束君。  
東城邊、南陌上，  
正日烘池館，競走香輪，綺筵散日，誰人  
可繼芳塵。更好明光宮殿，幾枝先近  
日邊。勻金尊倒拚了，盡燭不管黃昏。

Tune: "Celebrating the Clear Serene Dawn"  
To the Late Peony

Usurper of the last days of spring,  
Canopied by low palace curtains,  
Protected by exquisite crimson railing;  
Delicate, unadorned,  
Nature's very image untrammelled by art!  
Let all other flowers hide away!  
To you alone the dewy breeze of morn does bring  
A hundred charms after your early toilet—  
Envied by the wind and laughing at the moon,  
Enough to make the God of Spring fall in love with you,  
Ever reluctant to depart.

Perfumed carriages jostle one and all,  
Through the southern streets,  
To where sunshine bathes Brookside Hall<sup>1</sup>  
East of the city wall.  
Who can succeed you when you become fragrant dust,  
The banqueting once over?  
Let all the golden cups be drained,  
All the candles gutter out,  
And yellow twilight fall unheeded in the west!  
But miss not your boughs  
Nestling beside the Palace of Brilliance,<sup>2</sup>  
By the Sun<sup>3</sup> first softly caressed.

<sup>1</sup> Presumably a popular resort to which people of rank and wealth flocked to enjoy shows of rare flowers and plants.

<sup>2</sup> A luxurious palace built in the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, reputed for its walls inlaid with pearls and its staircases and doors shining with gold, the whole palace being a blaze of light even on a dark night.

<sup>3</sup> A pun meaning both royalty and the sun.

攤破浣溪沙 桂花

接破黃金萬點輕  
剪成碧玉葉層層  
風度精神如彥輔  
大鮮明

梅蕊重重何俗甚  
丁香千結苦粗

生熏透愁人千里夢  
却無情



Tune: "Sand of Silk-Washing Brook"

(a New version)

To the Cassia Flower

Your petals—twisted into ten thousand flecks of soft gold;

Your leaves—layer upon layer of carved emerald jade.

Graceful in bearing,

Noble and bright in spirit,

You are worthy to compare

With the ancient scholar Yan Fu.<sup>1</sup>

Beside you how vulgar the plum,

For all its profusion of petals;

How coarse the lilac,

With its innumerable knotty branches.

But your all too heady perfume,

O you heartless flower!

Wakes my sorrowful dream

Of a thousand li away.

<sup>1</sup>The style name of Yue Guang of the Jin Dynasty (265-420), a scholar renowned for his erudition, wisdom and eloquence as well as his upright character as an official.

采桑子

晚來一陣風兼雨洗盡炎光  
理罷笙簧却對菱花淡淡妝  
絳綃縷薄冰肌瑩雪膩酥香  
笑語檀郎今夜紗櫺枕簟涼

Tune: "Picking Mulberry Seeds"

A gust of evening wind and rain  
Washes the heat of blazing sunlight away.  
My piping done,  
I lightly touch up my face before the mirror.

Smooth as snow, fragrant as cream,  
My soft skin glistens  
In my flimsy sleeping-robe of purple silk.  
I smile and say to my beloved:  
"Tonight, our mat and pillows will be cool  
Inside the gauze bed-curtains."

浣溪沙 閨情

綉幕芙蓉一笑開，斜偎寶鴨  
襯香腮。眼波才動被人猜。  
一面風情深有韻，半牋嬌恨  
寄幽懷。月移花影約重來。

Tune: "Sand of Silk-Washing Brook"<sup>1</sup>

Longing in the Boudoir

A smile of happy recollection lights up her face  
As she gently draws aside the curtain  
Embroidered with blooming lotus,  
And leans against the jewelled duck censer,  
Her perfumed cheek on her hand, musing.  
If she but rolls her eyes  
She will immediately give herself away.

That first sweet meeting full of tenderest love!  
She might as well send half a page  
With endearing reproaches unburdening a pensive heart,  
And have him come again  
When the moon is moving the flower shadows.

<sup>1</sup>This is one of the ci-poems attributed to Li Qingzhao whose authenticity is questioned on the ground that the content is unworthy of a woman of her moral status. But it is included in many anthologies because the poet expresses her love boldly in defiance of the feudal shackles of her day and for some exquisite lines which bring out her inmost feelings in a lifelike way.

漁家傲 早梅

雪里已知春信至，寒梅點綴瓊枝。  
膩香臉半開嬌，旖旎當庭際。  
玉人浴出新妝洗。

造化可能偏有意，故教明月玲瓏。  
共賞金尊沉綠蟻，莫辭醉此。  
花不與群花比。

Tune: "Fisherman's Pride"

Early Plum Blossom

Glossy branches of jasper,  
A sprinkling of early blossoms,  
Touched up by snow bring  
The first tidings of spring.  
Soft and delicate in her new make-up,  
Fragrant face half showing,  
She emerges in the middle of the courtyard—  
A beauty in the flower of youth fresh from her bath.

Nature must have regarded her with special favor,  
To lavish on her such splendid moonbeams.  
Come drain these golden cups of emerald  
Till we are drunk.  
Of all flowers this is the one beyond compare.

行香子 七夕

草際鳴蛩，驚落梧桐，正人間、天上愁濃。  
雲階月地，開鎖千重。縱浮槎來，浮槎去，不相逢。  
星橋鵲駕，經年才見，想離情、別恨難窮。  
牽牛織女，莫是離中，甚霎兒晴，霎兒雨，霎兒風。



Tune: "On the Trail of Sweet Incense"  
The Seventh Day of the Seventh Lunar Month<sup>1</sup>

A deep gloom broods over Heaven and Earth.  
In the rank grass crickets are chirping,  
And parasol-trees, startled, let fall their leaves.  
Clouds for stairs, the moon for floor,  
To Heaven the way is blocked by a thousand barriers,  
And floating rafts<sup>2</sup> ply to and fro  
To no avail.

On this night magpies form a star bridge to span the Milky Way,  
Where Cowboy and Weaving Maid keep their yearly tryst.  
Endless must be their murmurings of love and regret  
After long separation!  
But whence these sudden changes  
Of sun and rain and wind  
In the midst of their love-making?  
Can it be that they are taking leave of each other  
At this very moment?

<sup>1</sup>A beautiful folk-tale dating back many centuries says that the Cowboy and the Weaving Maid (the two stars Altair and Vega on opposite sides of the Milky Way) loved each other so much that they incurred the displeasure of the Emperor of Heaven for neglect of duty and were permitted to meet only once a year on the night of the Seventh Day of the Seventh Month, crossing the Milky Way by a bridge formed by magpies.

<sup>2</sup>According to the "Book of Natural Science (bowuzhi)" written by Zhang Hua of the Jin Dynasty, in ancient times the Milky Way was connected with the sea, and people setting out from the sea on a huge wooden raft, would reach Heaven after sailing ten-odd days. There they could catch sight of the Weaving Maid busy at her loom in the palace and the Cowboy herding cattle on the bank of the Heavenly River.

如夢令 憶舊

常記溪亭日暮沉醉不知  
歸路興盡晚回舟誤入藕  
花深處爭渡爭渡驚起一  
灘鷗鷺

Tune: "A Dream Song"

A Reminiscence

It was a day at Brookside Pavilion<sup>1</sup>  
That I often fondly remember,  
When, flushed with wine,  
We could hardly tear ourselves away  
From the beautiful view at sunset.  
Returning late by boat  
When we'd enjoyed our fill,  
We got lost and strayed  
To where the clustered lotuses  
Were at their thickest.

Pushing and thrashing,

Pushing and thrashing as best we could,

We scared into flight

A shoreful of dozing egrets and gulls.

<sup>1</sup>A beauty spot in present-day Jinhua, Zhejiang Province, where the poet spent her girlhood years, and made delightful excursions to the suburbs, which she ever afterwards fondly remembered.

菩薩蠻 懷舊

歸鴻聲斷殘雲碧  
背窗雪落爐煙直  
燭底鳳釵明  
釵頭人勝輕  
角聲催曉漏  
曙色回斗  
牛春意看花難  
西風留舊寒

Tune: "Bodhisattva's Gold Headdress"<sup>1</sup>

Nostalgia

The honks of departing wild geese die away;  
Only scattered clouds are lingering in an azure sky.  
Outside the back-window snow falls thick and blinding,  
Smoke from the incense burner rises straight and high.  
My phoenix hairpin lurid under the candle's glow;  
From the hairpin pendants of figurine and flower designs<sup>2</sup>  
Swing languidly to and fro.

Bugles hasten the break of day,  
As dawn stars<sup>3</sup> fade in the Milky Way.  
Futile my search for the first blooms of spring:  
A wintry chill to the west wind does cling.

<sup>1</sup> Many authorities are of opinion that this poem expresses nostalgic sentiments by the use of a series of images, and that the characters ming and qing in the first stanza are key words which imply a suggestion of melancholy. In this translation I have therefore used "lurid" and "languidly" instead of "bright" and "lightly" for these two characters respectively. However, there is one annotator who thinks that the poem is a portrayal of a young woman impatient for an outing to enjoy the sights of early spring.

<sup>2</sup> Ornaments made of gold foil and colored silk thread to decorate the hair with.

<sup>3</sup> dou and niu in the original text refer presumably to the stars of Ursa Major.

蝶戀花 呂樂館寄姐妹

淚濕羅衣脂粉滿。四疊陽關，唱到千千遍。人道山長山又斷。滿微雨，聞孤館。惜別傷離方寸亂。忘了臨行酒盞深。和淺好把音書憑。過雁東來，不似蓬萊遠。

Tune: "Butterflies Linger Over Flowers"<sup>1</sup>

A Farewell Letter to My Sisters

Written at an Inn in Chang Luo

Tears stain my silk robe with rouge and powder  
As the Song of Farewell is repeated  
Thousands of times over.  
I'm told the going's hard  
Over these endless ranges of mountains  
That block the view.  
In my lonely lodge I listen all night  
To the patter of mizzling rain.

Regrets at parting drive my mind to distraction:  
I forget how full I filled your cups  
As I bade you adieu.  
Be sure to send word  
When the wild geese pass.  
After all Dong Lai is not so far off  
As Peng Lai.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Written when the poet was en route to Dong Lai, i.e. Laizhou in present-day Shandong Province, where her husband had just taken a new official post. She must then be around 38 years of age.

<sup>2</sup>According to legend, Peng Lai was an island in the Eastern Sea, where the Immortals dwelled.

漁家傲 記夢

天接雲濤連曉霧，星河欲轉千帆舞。  
仿佛夢魂歸帝所，聞天語，殷勤  
問我歸何處。  
我報路長嗟日暮，學詩謾有驚人句。  
九萬里風鵬正舉，風休住，蓬  
舟吹取三山去。



Tune: "Fisherman's Pride"<sup>1</sup>  
A Dream

Billowing clouds surging across the heavens  
Merge into dawn's hazy mist.  
Sails in their thousands toss and dance  
As the Milky Way recedes.  
In a vision I find myself before the Heavenly Ruler,  
Who asks solicitously  
Where I wish to be off to.

"My journey is a long one," I reply.  
"The sun is setting all too soon.  
And my brilliant poetic attempts, alas!  
Have come to no purpose."  
Presently a whirlwind rises, and lo!  
The Mighty Roc<sup>2</sup> is winging to the Empyrean  
On a flight of ninety-thousand li.  
Blow, O Whirlwind! Blow on without cease.  
Blow my tiny craft to the three far-off isles<sup>3</sup>  
Where the Immortals dwell.

<sup>1</sup> Among all Li Qingzhao's ci-poems this is one unique in style and content. Written probably after the fall of the Northern Song Dynasty when she found herself an exile in South China with all her hopes and aspirations frustrated, it was a work of pure romance, conceived in a trance, worthy of the greatest masters of the romantic style of ci-poetry. It shows the versatility of her genius capable of producing a masterpiece in a style other than the elegant restrained style of ci of which she was generally recognized as the foremost exponent. Among its most enthusiastic admirers was Liang Qichao, a great essayist and critic in the last years of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

丑奴兒近

博山道中效李易安體  
宋 卓棄疾詞

千峰雲起驟雨一霎兒  
價更遠樹斜陽風景怎生  
圈画青旗賣酒山那畔  
別有人家只消山水光中  
無事過這一夏  
午醉醒時松窗竹戶萬千  
滴酒野鳥飛來又是一般  
閑暇却怪白鷗觀着人欲  
下來下舊盟都在新來  
莫是別有說話

<sup>2</sup>A fabulous bird first described in the works of Zhuang Zi in the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.). When migrating to the South Seas it is said to strike the waters for 3000 li before soaring to a height of 9000 li on a whirlwind. Hence the popular saying "Roc's Journey" frequently used by the Chinese to this day to congratulate someone embarking on a career of lofty aspirations.

<sup>3</sup>i.e. the three legendary isles "Penglai, Fangzhang and Yingzhou" in the Bohai Sea.

青玉案 懷归

一年春事都來幾  
早過了三之二  
綠暗紅嫣  
渾可事垂楊庭院  
暖風簾幕  
有個人憔悴

買花載酒長安市  
又爭似家山  
桃李不枉東風  
吹客淚  
相思難表  
夢魂無據  
唯有歸來是

Tune: "Bowl of Green Jade"<sup>1</sup>

Nostalgia

Spring's glory—how far is it advanced?  
Two-thirds already gone.  
Lush foliage deep in verdure,  
Red blossoms all smiles:  
Are barely passable.  
A courtyard shadowy under weeping willows,  
A room with curtains brushed by warm breeze:  
Here's someone withering away!

A riot of flowers on sale for my choosing  
As I ride through the streets of Changan,<sup>2</sup> wine my freight—  
What are these beside the peach and plum of my native hills?  
Blame not the east wind bringing tears to a wanderer's eyes!  
Nostalgic feelings are hard to express;  
Cherished dreams—a mere illusion.  
What can I do but return to my home town?

<sup>1</sup>In view of its similarity in content and style to quite a few other ci-poems of Li Qingzhao this poem must have been written by Li after the removal of the Song capital to Jian Kang south of the Yangtze, though it is attributed to Ouyang Xiu or an anonymous writer by some annotators.

<sup>2</sup>"Changan" is here used as a synonym for "the capital".

菩薩蠻

怀旧

風柔日薄春猶早  
夾衫乍著心  
情好睡起覺微寒  
梅花鬢上殘  
故鄉何處是  
忘了除非醉  
沉水卧時燒  
香消酒未消

Tune: "Bodhisattva's Gold Headdress"

Nostalgia

A mild sun, a soft breeze,  
The touch of a lined coat just put on:  
Early springtime finds me  
In a somewhat cheerful mood.  
There's a bit of chill, though, on getting up,  
And the plum blossom in my hair  
Has wilted.

My old home—where may it be?  
There's no forgetting about that  
Unless I am drunk.  
No scent left of the sandalwood incense  
Lit overnight,  
But the effect of wine  
Is with me still.

蝶戀花

上巳名親屬記夢

永夜恹恹歡意少  
空夢長安認取  
長安道為報  
今年春色好  
花光月影宜相照  
隨意杯盤雖草草  
酒美梅酸恰稱人懷抱  
醉莫插花花莫笑  
笑可憐春似人將老



Tune: "Butterflies Linger Over Flowers"  
Giving a Party to My Relatives on the Third  
Day of the Third Lunar Month<sup>1</sup>

A Dream

Low spirits, a long dreary night.  
Idly I dreamed I was on my way back  
To our beloved old capital—  
The familiar road a blaze of  
Beautiful flowers in the moonlight  
As home I went with news of  
This year's glorious spring.

A few home-cooked dishes at the party,<sup>2</sup>  
But just to our taste:  
The plums sour, the wine delicious.  
In my cups how I'd have loved to deck my hair  
With a spray of bloom,<sup>3</sup>  
But for fear the flowers would chaff me.  
But soon, oh how soon!  
I woke to the stark reality:  
We were both of us aging,  
The Spring and I.

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the ancient Chinese custom of holding parties of friends or families at the river's edge on the Third Day of the Third Lunar Month to ward off evils. It dates as far back as the Jin Dynasty, when Wang Xizhi, China's greatest calligraphist, wrote an essay in his imperishable calligraphic style celebrating one such event.

<sup>2</sup> The party described in this stanza may be considered as either a continuation of the dream, or an event which actually took place. The former idea seems preferable.

<sup>3</sup> An allusion to Ouyang Xiu's essay "The Customs of Loyang", which records that in spring the women of Loyang used to take delight in decorating their hair with flowers.

訴衷情

枕畔聞殘梅噴香

夜來沉醉卸妝遲  
梅萼插殘枝  
酒醒熏破春睡  
夢遠不成

歸

人悄悄月依依  
翠

簾垂更接殘蕊  
更撚餘香

更得些時

Tune: "Airing Inmost Feelings"

I smell the fragrance of faded plum blossoms  
by my pillow

Last night, dead drunk, I dawdled  
While undoing my coiffure,  
And fell asleep with a sprig of  
Faded plum blossom in my hair.  
The fumes of wine gone,  
I was woken out of my spring sleep  
By the pungent smell of the petals,  
And my sweet dream of far-off love  
Was broken beyond recall.

Now all voices are hushed.  
The moon lingers and softly spreads her beams  
Over the unfurled kingfisher-green curtain.  
Still, I twist the fallen petals,  
I crumple them for their lingering fragrance,  
I try to recapture a delicious moment.

臨江仙 春回并序

歐陽公作蝶戀花有深深深几許之句予酷愛  
之用其語作庭院深深數闋其聲即曰臨江仙也

庭院深深深几許雲窗霧閣常  
扁柳梢梅萼漸分明春歸秣陵  
樹人老建康城感月吟風多  
少事如今老去無成誰憐憔悴  
更凋零試燈無意思踏雪沒心情

Tune: "Immortal On The Riverbank"  
Spring Returns

Prefatory Note. The Venerable Sir Ouyang, in his "Butterflies Linger Over Flowers", has the line "Deep, how profoundly deep the courtyard is!" I very much admire it, and have composed a few rhymes beginning with the same words, the tune being the traditional "Immortal On the Riverbank".

Deep, how profoundly deep the courtyard is!  
Its rooms and casements  
Perpetually locked in mist and cloud.  
Willow sprouts and plum buds begin to show  
As spring brings a new lease of life  
To the trees of Mo Ling,<sup>1</sup>  
Where I am fated to live out my little sojourn.

How many times we chanted verses together  
On moonlit evenings leaning against the spring breeze!  
Who cares I am now withering with age,  
Alone and with nothing accomplished?  
No point in pre-views of lanterns,<sup>2</sup>  
No mood to go treading the snow.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Mo Ling and Jian Kang were ancient names for today's city of Nanjing.

<sup>2</sup>This alludes to the Song custom of visiting shows of festive lanterns before the Lantern Festival was celebrated on the Fifteenth Day of the First Month in the lunar year.

<sup>3</sup>The poet recalls happy days in the past when she went with her husband for walks in the snow composing verses impromptu.

念奴嬌 春思

蕭條庭院又斜風細雨重門須閉  
寵柳嬌花寒食近種種惱人天氣  
險韻詩成扶頭酒醒別是閑滋味  
征鴻過盡萬千心事難寄  
樓上幾日春寒簾垂四面  
玉欄杆慵倚被冷香消新夢覺不許  
愁人不起清露晨流新桐初引  
多少游春意日高烟斂更看今日晴未

Tune: "The Charm of a Maiden Singer"  
Spring Thoughts

Slanting wind, misty rain  
Once more assail a courtyard bleak and desolate.  
The double-gate needs must be shut.  
Favorite flowers, darling willows:  
Cold Food Day approaches,  
With unsettling weather in all its changing moods.  
I finish a poem with difficult rhymes,  
Sober up from the fumes of strong wine  
With a queer sense of listlessness.  
My multitude of thoughts—who will convey them  
Now the wild geese have all winged out of sight?

Spring chill fills the upper rooms,  
For days on end the curtains are drawn on all sides:  
I am too languid to lean over the balustrade.  
The incense burnt out, my quilts feel cold  
As I wake from a new dream.  
No dawdling in bed for one who comes to grief  
When Spring is calling with all its diversions:  
Young parasol-trees sprout new leaves;  
Clear dew trickles in the first flush of dawn.  
Now the sun is riding high, the fog withdraws.  
Still I'd rather wait,  
To see whether the day will really be fine.

鷓鴣天 寂寞

寒日蕭蕭上鎖窗  
梧桐應恨夜來霜  
酒闌更喜團茶苦  
夢斷偏宜瑞腦香  
秋已盡日猶長  
仲宣懷遠更淒涼  
不如隨分樽前醉  
莫負東籬菊蕊黃



Tune: "Partridge Sky"

Solitude

The parasol-trees must hate  
Last night's hoar frost  
As their shadows fall on my patterned window  
Where the bleak sun is dismally climbing.  
Bitter brick tea will just do for me after wine,  
And the borneols smell good  
Now my dream is interrupted.

Autumn ends, but the day is still long.  
I feel more dreary than  
The homesick Zhong Xuan<sup>1</sup> of bygone days.  
Better be content with my cup  
As is my wont,  
And not miss the chrysanthemums  
Blooming by the east hedge.

<sup>1</sup>The style name of Wang Can (c.177-217), one of the seven masters of the Jian An style of shi poetry. He wrote a nostalgic prose-poem to vent his homesickness while living in a remote town after the fall of the Han Dynasty.

端人嬌

後庭梅花開有感

玉瘦香濃檀深雪散今年恨探梅  
又晚江樓楚館雲閑水遠清晝永  
憑欄翠簾低卷坐上客來樽前  
酒滿歌聲共水流雲斷南枝可  
插更須頻剪莫直待西樓數聲  
羌管

Tune: "A Weary Lovely Maid"

When the Plums in the Back Garden Burst into Bloom

Body slim as thin jade,  
Branches with crimson halo.  
Petals like snowflakes scattering,  
A perfume that intoxicates.  
I regret I again missed seeing you  
In the first flush of this spring.  
Here at my riverside lodge,<sup>1</sup> I feel listless  
As the stream that glides away  
In the wake of leisurely clouds.  
I spend the clear long day  
Idly leaning against the balustrade  
With the kingfisher-green curtain rolled low.

My guests arrive. We burst into song as we fill our cups—  
A melody that flows on quietly as a rippling stream,  
Halts now and then like scudding clouds.  
Let the southern branches of blossom  
Be cut diligently when good to deck the hair with.  
Wait not till the mournful notes of a Tartar flute  
Break out from the West Tower.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The original Chinese translated literally is "a riverside tower in Chu", which means in effect a riverside lodge far away from home that revives nostalgic thoughts.

<sup>2</sup>"Falling Plum Blossoms" was a plaintive song played on a horizontal flute that reminded one of the transiency of spring. The poet Li Bai alluded to it in his "Hearing the Flute on Yellow Crane Tower". The last line here is a pun on the song and the jarring Tartar flute.

轉調滿庭芳 懷舊

芳草池塘綠陰庭院晚晴寒透窗紗玉  
鉤金鎖管是客來時寂寞尊前席上惟  
愁海角天涯能留否酴醾落盡猶賴有  
梨花 當年曾勝賞生香熏袖活火分  
茶極目猶龍驕馬流水輕車不怕風狂  
雨驟恰才稱煮酒殘花如今也不成懷抱  
得似舊時那

Tune: "A Perfumed Garden" (a new version)

A Reminiscence

A pond fringed with sweet-smelling grass;  
A courtyard canopied by green shadows.  
Evening chill seeps through  
The window-curtains as the sun declines.  
Suddenly there's a creak  
In the jade curtain-hooks and golden door-locks;  
It's my friends coming to visit.  
Our dinner-party is not without a queer sense of loneliness,  
My mind clouded by the thought  
Of their leaving all too soon for lands far away.  
Will the pear-blossoms help make them stay  
Now the raspberries are all faded?

I recall happy days in the past  
When fine carriages in streams  
And horses like writhing dragons  
Thronged the gate and guests in perfumed robes  
Sipped tea brewed over a living fire.  
Unafraid of sudden storms,  
We had our fill of toasting  
While we admired falling blossoms.  
Now our moods are changed,  
Will they ever return—  
The good old days?

清平樂

年年雪里常插梅花醉  
接盡梅花無好意  
贏得滿衣清淚  
今年海角天涯  
蕭蕭兩鬢生  
華看取今晚風勢  
故應難看  
梅花

Tune: "Pure Serene Music"<sup>1</sup>

Year after year in the snow I used to get drunk  
While picking plum blossoms to put in my hair.  
Now twisting all the fallen petals to no good purpose,  
I only drench my clothes with pure tears.

This year at the end of the earth,  
My hair at the temples is streaked with grey.  
Now that the evening wind is growing in force,  
I shall be hard put to it to enjoy plum blossoms.

<sup>1</sup>A poem full of pathos written probably after the fall of the Northern Song. In the concluding line the poet seems to anticipate further trouble for herself and the nation.

玉樓春  
紅梅

紅酥肯放瓊苞碎  
探看南枝開遍未  
不知醞藉多少香  
但見包藏無限意  
道人憔悴春宵底  
悶損闌杆愁不倚  
要來小酌便來休  
未必明朝風不起



Tune: "Spring in the Jade Pavilion"

Red Plum Blossom

Soft red petals ready to unfold,  
Luscious jade-green buds begin to break.  
Tell me, are her southern branches all in full bloom?  
I know not how much perfume she has in store,  
I am only aware that her heart is throbbing  
with boundless love.

The Taoist recluse<sup>1</sup> at the spring window, how she pines!  
No leaning against the balustrade, her mood so depressed.  
Come have a drink, if you will, with no more ado.  
Who knows but that tomorrow the wind may blow the  
blossoms away?

<sup>1</sup> Being virtually an exile in her later years, the poet may have considered herself a Taoist in her loneliness, though not actually a believer in Taoism.

滿庭芳 殘梅

小閣藏春，閉窗鎖畫，堂無限深幽。  
篆香燒盡，日影下簾鉤。手種江梅，更  
好又何必臨水登樓。無人到，寂寥渾  
似，何遜在揚州。從來知韻勝，難堪  
雨藉，不耐風揉。更誰家橫笛，吹動濃  
愁。莫恨香消雪減，須信道、迤邐掃情  
留。難言處，良宵淡月，疏影尚風流。

Tune: "Perfumed Garden"

Fading Plum Blossom

My small boudoir hides a sprig of spring  
Behind locked windows where no daylight filters.  
The painted hall adjoining—a retreat of profound seclusion.  
The coiled incense burnt out,  
Shadows of the sun lengthen below the curtain-hooks.  
Lonely as He Sun<sup>1</sup> in Yangzhou,  
With no one coming to visit,  
Need I go roaming distant streams and towers  
In quest of wild blossom  
Now that the plum I planted  
Is blooming luxuriantly?

Unsurpassed in charm,  
My Flower cannot stand being trampled on by wind and rain.  
And whose is that horizontal flute  
That wakes such painful memories?  
Grieve not when her subtle perfume dissolves  
And snow-white petals fall.  
Even though no vestige of her remains,  
Her tender love will endure!  
And on calm evenings, her lacy shadows  
Cast by a pale moon  
Will be beautiful beyond words.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A gifted poet in the Liang Dynasty (502-557) whose poems were much appreciated for their subtlety by the great Tang Poet Du Fu. When he was an official at Yangzhou, he very much loved a plum tree in the courtyard of his office. He missed it so much when he was transferred to Loyang, that his superiors granted his request to return to Yangzhou out of sympathy. Thenceforth the tree completely engrossed his attention so that he could hardly tear himself away from it. He loved to sit facing the tree and write poetry whenever he was free from official duty. Li Qingzhao evidently attributed his doting on this tree to a sense of loneliness he must have felt when he considered that to be an official was devoid of meaning.

<sup>2</sup> A description derived partly from "Ode to the Plum Blossom" by the poet Lin Heqing of the Song Dynasty, generally considered the finest eulogy of plum blossoms in classical Chinese literature.

多麗

咏菊

近諸本多作白菊  
惟歷代詩餘作菊

小樓寒、夜長簾幕低垂。恨蕭蕭、無情風雨，夜來揉損瓊肌。也不似、貴妃醉臉，也不似、孫壽愁眉。韓令偷香，徐娘傅粉，莫將比擬。未新奇、細看取、屈平陶令，風韻正相宜。微風起，清芬醞藉，不減酴醾。

漸秋闌、雪清玉瘦，向人無限依依似愁凝。漢皋解佩似淚洒，紈扇題詩朗月清。風濃煙暗雨，天教憔悴度芳姿。縱愛惜、不知從此留得幾多時。人情好何須更憶，澤畔東籬。

Tune: "A Galaxy of Beauties"

White Chrysanthemums

Autumn chill steals into my small chamber,  
Curtains hung low as the long night drags on.  
It grieves me to see your creamy flesh  
Damaged overnight by relentless wind and rain.  
You are not like Yang Guifei<sup>1</sup> flushed with wine,  
Sun Shou<sup>2</sup> with knitted eyebrows,  
Jia Wu<sup>3</sup> who stole royal incense for Han Shou,  
Or Lady Xu<sup>4</sup> who powdered half her face to please a one-eyed  
emperor.

It would be inappropriate to compare you to these.  
On maturer thoughts, your charm may fitly be likened  
To that of Qu Yuan and Tao Qian<sup>5</sup>.  
Your subtle fragrance, wafted by a soft breeze  
Has all the sweetness of blooming raspberries.

Pure as snow, slim as jade, at autumn's decline,  
You lean towards people with infinite tenderness  
And with as much pathos as the two fairy maidens  
Who made a present of their belt pearls  
To Zheng Jiaofu at Han Gao<sup>6</sup>,  
And Lady Pan<sup>7</sup> writing a mournful poem on a silk fan.  
Bright moon, serene breeze may be followed  
By thick mists, dark showers.  
It is Heaven's will that you shall wither  
As your scented breath fades away.  
There's no telling how long  
Your beauty will yet remain, love you as I may.  
But with me as your devoted admirer,  
Need you envy the orchids gathered on the riverbank by Qu Yuan,  
Or the chrysanthemums picked by Tao Qian beside the east hedge?

永遇樂 宋劉辰翁詞并序

余自乙亥上元誦李易安永遇樂為之涕下  
今三年矣每聞此詞輒不自堪遂依其聲又  
托之易安自喻雖辭情不及而悲苦過之

璧月初晴黛雲遠澹春事誰主禁苑嬌寒  
湖堤倦暖前度遽如許香塵暗陌華燈明昼  
長是懶攜手去誰知道斷煙禁夜滿城似愁  
風雨宣和舊日臨安南渡芳景猶自如故湘  
帆流離風鬟三五能賦詞最苦江南無路鄜州  
今夜此苦又誰知否空相對殘釵無寐滿村社鼓

- <sup>1</sup>Yang Guifei, favorite concubine of Emperor Ming Huang of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), one of the most famous beauties in Chinese history.
- <sup>2</sup>Sun Shou, wife of Liang Qi in the East Han (25-220), notorious for her coquetry.
- <sup>3</sup>Jia Wu, daughter of a minister in the third century, who stole incense from the Imperial Palace to make love to Han Shou, then a minor official under the minister.
- <sup>4</sup>Lady Xu, a concubine of the one-eyed Emperor of the Liang Dynasty in the sixth century, said to be so coquettish that she powdered half her face to win his favor.
- <sup>5</sup>Qu Yuan, alias Qu Ping, great philosopher and poet of the Kingdom of Chu in the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.). Slandered by his political adversaries, he was out of favor with the king, and his loyal efforts to serve the state were ignored. He was exiled, and finally drowned himself in the river Milo, on whose banks he used to wander listlessly before taking his own life. His "Elegies of Chu", in which he vented his political grievances, was an immortal contribution to classical Chinese literature.

Tao Qian, alias Tao Yuanming (c.365-427), one of China's greatest writers of pastoral poetry. Abandoning the post of a petty official he enjoyed the life of a recluse in the quiet of his native fields, and wrote in praise of the simple way of living.
- <sup>6</sup>According to legend, Zheng Jiaofu was presented with belt pearls by two fairy maidens while passing Han Gao in present-day Hubei Province.
- <sup>7</sup>Lady Pan was a concubine of Emperor Cheng of the Han Dynasty (206-24 B.C.). Out of favor with the emperor, she aired her feelings in a poem inscribed on a silk fan. This attracted the emperor's attention, and she was finally restored to his favor.

鷓鴣天 桂花

暗淡輕黃體性柔  
情疏迤邐只香留  
何須淺碧深紅色  
自是花中第一流  
梅定妒 菊應羞  
画欄開處 霧冠中秋  
騷人可煞無情思  
何事當年不見收



Tune: "Partridge Sky"

To the Cassia Flower

Fair Flower!

Dark, pale, light yellow in color,

Soft and gentle by nature.

Aloof and remote,

A subtle fragrance trails behind you.

What need for light green or deep crimson,

You choicest of flowers!

Let plum blossoms be envious,

Chrysanthemums be ashamed!

You are crowned Queen of Mid-autumn

At the Grand Exhibition of Flowers.

How unfeeling of the poet Qu Yuan

To be so cold towards you

As to deny you a place

In his masterpiece.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> An allusion to Li Sao (Encountering Sorrow), a chapter in Qu Yuan's "The Elegies of Chu", in which he listed many precious flowers and plants as symbolic of men of high virtue, but omitted to mention the cassia flower, presumably out of bias.

添字采桑子 芭蕉

窗前誰種芭蕉樹  
陰滿中庭  
陰滿中庭  
葉葉心心  
舒卷有餘情  
傷心枕上三更雨  
點  
滴霖霖  
點滴霖霖  
愁損北人不慣  
起來听

Tune: "Picking Mulberry Seeds"<sup>1</sup>  
(an enlarged version)

Banana Trees

Who planted the banana trees in front of my casement,  
    Filling the courtyard with shadows,  
    With shadows?  
Each leaf a heart brimming over with love  
As it closes or unfolds.

Patter of midnight rain on the leaves  
Haunting the pillow—  
    Dripping ceaselessly,  
    Dripping ceaselessly.  
Dismal sounds, painful memories:  
An outcast from the North in the throes of sorrow  
Cannot bear to sit up and listen.

<sup>1</sup> Since banana trees grow in South China, this poem must have been written when the poet had fled to the South at the time of the Tartar invasion.

憶秦娥

臨高閣，亂山平野煙光薄。煙光薄，

薄棲鴉歸後，暮天聞角。

斷香殘酒情懷惡，西風催柵梧

桐落。梧桐落，又還秋色，又還寂寞。

Tune: "Remembering the Maid of Qin"

Jumbled mountains, rolling plains:

The view from this high tower

Blurred in thin gleaming mist,

Thin gleaming mist.

Across the sunset sky

Flash crows coming home to roost;

At fall of dusk

Calls a distant bugle.

Fading incense, remnants of wine:

A heart full of remorse.

Parasol-leaves falling,

Parasol-leaves falling—

Urged by the west wind.

Haunting me always,

Autumn's somber colors.

Never leaves me alone,

The pain of loneliness.

攤破浣溪沙 久病初愈

病起蕭蕭兩鬢華  
卧看殘月上窗紗  
蘆菖連梢煎熟水  
莫分茶  
枕上詩書閑處好  
門前風景雨來佳  
終日向人多醺藉  
木犀花

Tune: "Sand of Silk-Washing Brook"

(a new version)

On Recovering from a Long Illness

Beside the window, convalescent I lie reclined,  
My sparse hair greying at the temples,  
My mind serene as I watch a waning moon  
Climb the gauze curtains.  
A drink of cardamom<sup>1</sup> leaf tips boiled over a living fire  
Will do for me instead of tea.

An idler's boon:  
Reading leisurely propped on pillows;  
Lovelier after rain:  
The view outside my door.  
Sweet-scented cassia blossoms,  
Delicate and loving,  
Leaning towards me all day long.

<sup>1</sup> A medicinal herb still needful to the poet in her convalescence because of its effects of dispelling stomach ache, alleviating vomiting, etc., which can, however, be counteracted by a drink of tea.

好事近 寂寞

風定落花深  
簾外擁紅堆雪長  
記海棠開後  
正是傷春時節  
酒闌歌罷  
玉尊空  
青缸暗  
明滅  
魂夢不堪幽怨  
更一聲啼鴂



Tune: "Happiness Approaches"

Solitude

The wind has subsided.

Outside the curtains thick lie fallen petals:

A profusion of white and red.

The crab-apple blooms and fades:

A timely reminder

To lament the spring.

Drinking and singing done,

Cups of jasper empty.

The blue oil lamp flares and dims.

I fall into a trance.

Melancholy memories are unbearable—

Unbearable even without the call of a solitary cuckoo.

生查子 楚雲深

怨遠人

年年玉鏡臺  
梅蕊宮妝困  
今

歲未還家  
怕見江南信

酒從別後  
疏淚向愁中盡

遙想楚雲深  
人遠天涯近

Tune: "Dark Clouds of Chu"<sup>1</sup>

Complaint Against A Long

Absent One

Year after year I have wearied of  
Doing my hair in the plum-petal palace-style,  
Facing the mirror stand of jade.  
It's one more year he's not come back,  
And I dread to get news from South of the River.

Drinking—scarcely in the mood now he's away;  
Tears—cried dry in the depth of sorrow.  
I keep daydreaming of him  
Lost deep in the dark clouds of Chu,  
Farther away from me than the ends of the earth.

<sup>1</sup>The authorship of this poem remains a matter of doubt, but it is generally believed to have been written by Li Qingzhao when she was in the Northern Song capital. Her husband was apparently away from home in Chu,—a region covering present-day Hunan and Hubei then considered remote.

青玉案

異地相逢

征鞍不見邯鄲路莫便怱怱歸  
去秋風蕭條何以度明窗小酌  
暗燈清話最好流連霧

相逢各自傷遲暮猶把新詞  
誦奇句藍絮家風人所許如  
今憔悴但餘双淚一似黃梅雨

Tune: "Bowl of Green Jade"

A Fortuitous Meeting

Haste not back so soon!  
No glimpse yet of Handan Road<sup>1</sup>  
For all our peregrinations.  
Autumn wind so dreary,  
How are we to while our days away?  
A drink under a clear window,  
An idle chat beside a dim lamp,  
Would be the ideal way to relax.

Each laments her declining years as we meet,  
Chanting many a new verse with thrilling rhymes——  
Poetic talent a family tradition people much prize.<sup>2</sup>  
Now frail and decrepit,  
Nothing remains to me but profuse tears  
Falling like rain in the season of yellowing plums.

<sup>1</sup>Legend has it that a scholar named Lu, while travelling on Handan Road, met a Taoist priest who gave him a magic pillow. When he went to sleep, he dreamed that he passed several decades living in wealth and prosperity. But on waking he found that the pot of millet he had left boiling on the stove was not yet done.

<sup>2</sup>One day Xie An the Imperial Tutor (c.third century) was at home with his nephew Xie Lang and niece Xie Taoyun when it suddenly began to snow. He asked each of them good-humoredly what the snowflakes looked like. Xie Lang thought they might be likened to grains of salt dropped from the air. But Taoyun said the simile wasn't so good as 'willow catkins whirling in the wind'. Thenceforth 'salt and willow catkin' came to be regarded as a family tradition of literary talent.

臨江仙 梅花

庭院深深深幾許  
雲窗霧閣春遲  
為誰憔悴損  
芳姿夜來清夢  
好應是發南枝

玉瘦檀輕無限恨  
南樓羌管休吹  
濃香吹盡又誰知  
暖風遲日也別到  
杏花肥

Tune: "Immortal On The Riverbank"

To the Plum Blossom

Deep, how profoundly deep the courtyard is!  
Spring comes late to these casements and terraces  
Buried in mists and clouds.  
For whom do you pine away, O Flower!  
And lose your lovely looks quite  
When but last night I dreamed—  
How sweet and vivid that dream—  
Your southern branches were bursting into bloom?

That you should be frail as jade  
And your boughs lose much of their crimson sweetness  
As though weighed down with infinite sorrow!  
Away with that Tartar flute in the South Tower  
Blowing away your rich perfume  
Nobody knows whither,  
And let the days lengthen  
When balmy breezes blow.  
But do stay till the apricot blossoms round out!

孤雁兒 梅花

序

世人作梅詞下筆便俗予試作一篇乃知前言不妄耳

藤牀紙帳朝眠起說不盡無佳思沉  
香斷續玉爐寒伴我情懷如水笛聲  
三弄梅心驚破多少春情意

小雨疏風蕭蕭地又催下千行淚吹簫  
人去玉樓空腸斷與誰同倚一枝折得  
人間天上沒個人堪寄



Tune: "The Lone Wild Goose"

Plum Blossoms

Prefatory Note. People tend to be vulgar as soon as they start writing a ci-poem about the plum. Of this I was unaware till I had made an attempt myself.

Paper bed-curtains,

A couch of rattan.

No pleasant thoughts ease a troubled mind

When my morning sleep ends.

Sandalwood incense burning fitfully,

The jade censer fallen cold—

Companion to my feelings thin as water.

A flute playing "Falling Plum Blossoms" three times over

Startles the plum-trees into sudden bloom,

And the air is filled with all the sweetness of spring.

Fine rain, gusty wind:

Lugubrious sounds once more urge

A thousand lines of tears.

Gone is the flute-player,

Deserted the jade tower

Nobody now shares with one broken-hearted.

I pluck a spray of bloom,

But who can I send it to,

The two of us now so far apart—

In Heaven and on Earth?

行香子

天與秋光轉轉情傷探金英知近重  
陽薄衣初試綠蟻新膏漸一番風一  
番雨一番涼 黃昏院落淒淒惶惶  
酒醒時往事愁腸那堪永夜明月  
空林間砧聲搗蛩聲細漏聲長

Tune: "On the Trail of Sweet Incense"

Golden chrysanthemums just in bloom  
Tell of the approach of the Double Ninth Festival.  
A bounteous gift from Heaven these autumnal tints,  
Which however bring sadness in their train  
As circumstances change.  
I try on my thin dress, taste new-brewed wine,  
Aware that I am in for  
A spell of wind,  
A spell of rain,  
A spell of cold.

Yellowing twilight fills my rooms  
With gloom and anxiety.  
Memories of heart-rending sorrow  
Overwhelm me as I sober up from wine.  
An unending night,  
A full moon flooding an empty bed.  
In my ears the dull thud  
Of mallets on the washing-blocks,  
The feeble chirp of crickets,  
The monotonous dripping of the clepsydra.

永遇樂 元宵

落日鎔金暮雲合壁人在何處染柳煙  
濃吹梅笛怨春意知幾許元宵佳節融  
和天氣次第豈無風雨來相召香車寶  
馬謝他酒朋詩侶 中州盛日閨門多暇  
記得偏重三五鋪翠冠兒撚金雪柳簇  
帶爭濟楚如今憔悴風鬟霜鬢怕見  
夜間出去不如白簾兒底下聽人笑語

Tune: "Joy of Eternal Union"<sup>1</sup>  
Lantern Festival

The setting sun—a pool of molten gold;  
Evening clouds—discs of emerald jade.  
Where is he—the one in my thoughts?  
Spring willows robed in hazy mist;  
"Falling Plum Blossoms" wafted by a plaintive flute:  
Lovely springtime—how far is it advanced?  
Warm sunshiny weather at the Lantern Festival ——  
Who knows but it may be  
A prelude to wind and rain?  
My old wine and poetry companions send  
Perfumed coaches, fine horses to take me for a ride,  
But I decline all their invitations.

Sweet are memories of our old capital in its heyday!  
Young ladies with time to spare  
Made the Lantern Festival a special occasion for joy.  
In kingfisher-feather caps and  
Gold-thread jewelled hair ornaments,  
They vied with one another for loveliness.  
Now worn with care,  
My hair wind-blown and temples frosty,  
I dread going out on festive evenings.  
I'd much prefer to stay behind the screen  
And listen to youthful talk and laughter  
As people pass by.

<sup>1</sup> The advent of the Lantern Festival revived memories of the poet's happy days in the Northern Song capital, the loss of which to the Tartars was always in her thoughts. Nearly a century afterwards, the patriotic poet Liu Chenweng was deeply moved on re-reading this poem, and composed one of his own to rhyme with hers, the Chinese text of which with his brief preface appears on Page 84 . A rough translation of the preface may also be found in the Introduction.

聲聲慢 絕望

尋尋覓覓冷冷清清悽悽慘慘戚  
戚乍暖還寒時候最難將息三杯  
兩盞淡酒怎敵他晚來風急雁過  
也正傷心却是舊時相識滿地  
黃花堆積憔悴損如今有誰堪摘  
守着窗兒獨自怎生得黑梧桐更  
兼細雨到黃昏點點滴滴這次第  
怎一箇愁字了得

A Long Melancholy Tune (Autumn Sorrow) <sup>1</sup>

Despair

Searching, seeking.<sup>2</sup>

Seeking, searching:

What comes of it but

Coldness and desolation,

A world of dreariness and misery

And stabbing pain!

As soon as one feels a bit of warmth

A sense of chill returns:

A time so hard to have a quiet rest.

What avail two or three cups of tasteless wine

Against a violent evening<sup>3</sup> wind?

Wild geese wing past at this of all hours,

And it suddenly dawns on me

That I've met them before.

Golden chrysanthemums in drifts —

How I'd have loved to pick them,

But now, for whom? On the ground they lie strewn,

Faded, neglected.<sup>4</sup>

There's nothing for it but <sup>to</sup> stay at the window,

Motionless, alone.

How the day drags before dusk descends!

Fine rain falling on the leaves of parasol-trees——

Drip, drip, drop, drop, in the deepening twilight.

To convey all the melancholy feelings

Born of these scenes

Can the one word "sorrow" suffice?<sup>5</sup>

李清照詞評論一斑

王士禎(漁洋)清人在《花草蒙拾》中有云詞有婉約豪放二派僕謂婉約以易安為宗豪放惟幼安(辛棄疾)稱首人皆謂漁洋此論非宋明人所及

鄭振鐸在《中國文學史》中有云她的五七言詩并不甚好她歌詞却是她的絕調象她那样的詞在意境方面在風格方面都可以說是前無古人後無來者她是獨創一格的又在《文學大綱》中又云易安即在各時代的詩人中她所占的地位也不能在陶潛李杜歐陽修蘇軾之下

胡雲翼在《中國詞史大綱》等中有云《漱玉詞》每首冰瑩玉潤令人把玩不忍釋手如大珠小珠落玉盤又云清照後期愁苦之詞所反映的不僅是個人的感情同時也是南渡人士辭鄉別土破國亡家的共同哀愁具有一定的社會意義

李調元在《雨村詞話》中有云李清照詞無一首不工



<sup>1</sup>The character man in the label means "a long tune", not "slow". In this poem Li Qingzhao expresses her sentiments with rapidity and abandon but none of the characteristics of the elegant restrained style in which most of her ci-poems are written. The poem is in fact rather like a prose-poem (fu) which makes us recall Ouyang Xiu's famous prose-poem "Autumn Sounds".

<sup>2</sup>This masterpiece of Li Qingzhao's is admired among other things for the three groups of re-iterated characters at the beginning of the poem. The three groups are ingeniously inter-related, the second group being the result of the first, and the third the result of the second. This heightens the pathos.

<sup>3</sup>The word "evening" is used in most anthologies, but the eminent poet and prose-writer Yu Pingbo is in favor of using "dawn" instead of "evening".

<sup>4</sup>Some commentators interpret the above lines as follows:

"Golden chrysanthemums in full bloom,  
Their fallen petals in drifts—  
Who would pick them  
Now I'm withered and worn?  
On the ground they lie strewn, neglected."

<sup>5</sup>Li Qingzhao shows great creativity in saying that the word "sorrow" is inadequate to convey a multitude of melancholy feelings, instead of using hyperboles in the conventional way.

浪淘沙

悼亡

簾外五更風吹夢無踪  
画樓重上與誰同  
記得玉釵斜揜火  
竇篆成空  
回首紫金峰  
雨潤煙濃  
一江春浪醉醒中  
留得羅襟前日淚  
彈與征鴻

Tune: "Sand Washed by Waves"

In Memoriam

Outside the curtains the howling fifth-watch wind  
Blows away the last vestige of my melancholy dream.  
Who will be my companion  
When I go up the painted tower again?  
I remember how he loved to chaff me  
Poking the fire sideways with my jade hairpin—  
A memory now vanished like the auspicious omen  
In the seal-character incense.

Recollections flood my mind  
Of happy days gone by  
When the two of us climbed Purple Gold Peak<sup>1</sup> hand in hand  
Gazing at the hazy view below:  
A river of spring waves wrapped in rain and mist,  
Gliding away as if half-sober and half-tipsy.  
I keep on my garment  
Tears shed the day before—  
To shoot to the wild geese  
As they wing past.

<sup>1</sup> Presumably an allusion to the Purple Gold Hill (Zhi Jing Shan)  
in today's city of Nanjing.

南歌子

悼亡

天上星河轉，人間簾幕垂涼。  
生枕簟淚痕滋，起解羅衣聊  
問夜何其。翠貼蓮蓬小，金  
銷藕葉稀。舊時天氣舊時衣，  
只有情懷不似舊家時。

Tune: "A Southern Song"

In Memoriam

In Heaven the Milky Way turns,  
On Earth all curtains hang low.  
A chill steals on to my pillow-mat  
Damp with tears.  
I sit up to unloosen my silk robe,  
And idly ask myself:  
"What hour of night is it?"

The kingfisher-embroidered lotus-pods seem small,  
The gold-stitched lotus leaves are sparse.  
The same weather, the same clothes,  
As of old.  
Only my feelings are quite other  
Than those of old times.

武陵春 春暮

風住塵香花已盡  
日晚倦梳頭  
物是人非事事休  
欲語淚先流  
聞說雙溪春尚好  
也擬泛輕舟  
只恐雙溪舴艋舟  
載不動許多愁

Tune: "Spring at Wu Ling"<sup>1</sup>

Spring Ends

The wind has subsided,  
Faded all the flowers:  
In the muddy earth  
A lingering fragrance of petals.  
Dusk falls. I'm in no mood to comb my hair.  
Things remain, but all is lost  
Now he's no more.  
Tears choke my words.

I hear "Twin Brooks"<sup>2</sup> is still sweet  
With the breath of spring.  
How I'd, too, love to go for a row,  
On a light skiff.  
I only fear at "Twin Brooks" my grasshopper of a boat  
Wouldn't be able to bear  
Such a load of grief.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Written in 1135, six years after her husband's death, when Li Qingzhao was living at Jinhua in today's Zhejiang Province as a temporary refuge from the Jin invasion.

<sup>2</sup>A stream in the southeast of Jinhua often visited by poets in Tang and Song times as a scenic resort.

<sup>3</sup>A line famed for the beauty and freshness of its imagery.

## POSTSCRIPT

### I

In the discussion of Li Qingzhao's ci-poem 'Autumn Sorrow, To A Long Melancholy Tune' in the Introduction, I missed an interesting piece of information which has since come to my notice. In Huang Mogu's Commentary On Li Qingzhao's Works (published comparatively recently) I came across a remark made by the noted critic Chen Tingzhuo (supported by two other critics) in his Random Notes On Ci-poetry to the effect that the seven pairs of reiterated characters at the beginning of the poem are merely a show of verbal dexterity that has little to do with the beauty and pathos of the poem as a whole. By comparison, he goes on to say, images in the second stanza such as chrysanthemums strewn neglected on the ground and the patter of fine rain on the leaves of parasol-trees in the deepening twilight seem far more touching. Nevertheless, these characters have been rhapsodized over by many other critics, among them Zhang Duanyi who praises them enthusiastically by comparing them to a magic sword dance performed by the famous ballerina Lady Gong Sun of the Tang Dynasty. Since opinions in favor of these characters are in the overwhelming majority, it seems that the consensus cannot be altered.

The frequent use of the characters shou and chou (meaning 'thin' and 'sorrow') also bores some readers. However, it must be remembered that Li's ci-poems were closely bound up with the ups and downs of her life. It was her forte that she never hesitated to lay bare her grief, though implicitly, as she actually felt it. For instance, she probably wrote the line "When the west wind blows the blinds aside, I'm frailer than the chrysanthemums" (pp.16-17) to substantiate the preceding line "Don't say one is not pining away!", with the additional implication that morally she is as pure as the chrysanthemums. Here the character shou is a key word indicative not only of a physical feature but of her longing for her absent husband. As to the character chou, its use seems to be fully justified in poems like 'Autumn Sorrow' written when she was actually overwhelmed with poignant grief or loneliness.



In short, criticisms such as these tell us that critics are likely to differ so widely in their views that the bewildered reader has either to depend on his own judgement or to take the consensus as his criterion. On the other hand, we should in fairness make reasonable allowance for certain idiosyncracies from which Li Qingzhao, like other great writers, was not entirely free, but which by no means detract from the intrinsic merit of her ci-poems.

## II

Mention must be made of an incident in Li Qingzhao's later years that I omitted in the Introduction. As we have seen, her married life was little short of idyllic before the fall of the Northern Song in 1127. But after the death of her husband Zhao Mingcheng in 1129, she had to wander from one place to another in face of the Jin invasion, until finally she settled in Hangzhou, the capital of the Southern Song, where she lived in utter misery and loneliness as an outcast. It was during this period, presumably about the year 1132 when she was forty-nine years of age, that the most controversial event in her life occurred: she is said to have committed the folly of marrying Zhang Ruzhou, an unscrupulous petty official with the ulterior motive of seizing her property who maltreated her cruelly not long after their marriage. Luckily she succeeded in getting a divorce by appealing to the court about three months afterwards. Scholars in the Ming and Qing Dynasties wrote volumes to refute this sordid story of her re-marriage as a sheer fabrication deliberately invented by her adversaries to ruin her reputation. Since Li was uncompromising in her political opinions, and prone to harshness in her criticisms of many contemporary writers, these well-intentioned scholars naturally thought that she had many enemies in a dispute in which she was involved. However, as no reliable records are available, the matter will in all probability remain one of controversy for many years to come.

III

As we leaf through the pages of Li Qingzhao's ci-poetry, it is particularly refreshing to browse among its famous lines, to some of which I have already referred in the Notes to the poems in which they appear. These famous lines enchant us with their vivid imagery, and a rhythmic charm produced by arranging the words in the most appropriate order. They seem to come so effortlessly from the author's pen that the reader is enthralled without being aware of the pains she must have taken to write with such naturalness in spite of all the exacting demands of ci-prosody. Below are quoted some more famous lines which merit attention because they are admired by most authorities on ci-poetry.

1. huang hun shu yu shi qiu qian Translation:

Rain drizzles as twilight deepens,

Wetting the garden swing.

From 'Late Spring, to the tune Sand of Silk-Washing Brook'  
(pp.22-23)

The images in this line suggest that the writer, troubled by the feelings implicit in the preceding lines, is in a sort of reverie and at a loss what to do.

2. chong liu jiao hua han shi jin Translation:

Favorite flowers, darling willows,

Cold Food Day approaches,

From 'Spring Thoughts, to the tune Charm of a Maiden Singer'  
(pp.68-69)

A line admired chiefly for the beauty of the phrase chong liu jiao hua intended to convey the poet's anxiety for the willows and flowers in the approaching unsettling weather.

3. qing lu chen liu, xin tong chu yin Translation:

Young parasol-trees sprout new leaves;

Clear dew trickles in the first flush of dawn.

From 'Spring Thoughts, to the tune Charm of a Maiden Singer'  
(pp.68-69)

A beautiful couplet with vivid imagery descriptive of the tempting calls of spring mentioned in the preceding line.

4. hong ou xiang can yu tan qiu Translation:

The lotus has wilted, only a faint perfume remains;

On the bamboo mat there's a touch of autumn chill.

From 'Sorrow of Separation, to the tune A Sprig of Plum Blossom' (pp.6-7)

A line unanimously praised for the rhythmic effect created by its utmost economy of words. In seven characters it paints a lucid picture of four judiciously selected images depicting scenes both inside and outside the room: the bamboo mat and autumn chill; the wilted lotus and its faint perfume. These combine to suggest the poet's feeling of loneliness when her husband is away. She probably achieved this remarkable succinctness by learning from the great Du Fu of the Tang Dynasty, who is reputed to have explored language to its utmost limits in the parallelisms of his poems.

## Biographical Note

Jiaosheng WANG, a native of Zhejiang Province, was born in Shanghai in January, 1905. His only formal schooling was a four-years' English course at a missionary school, where he graduated in 1925. Because of his aptitude for the English language, the school principal intended to send him to study abroad, and this inspired his early aspiration to be a writer. But circumstances drove him instead to work at a bank from 1926 until he became a teacher of English at a middle school in 1956. His great passion for English literature impelled him to devote his leisure hours exclusively to the study of English classics and practice in writing English. He profited by corresponding with the school principal, some university professors, and other learned friends. The early 1940s saw his first attempts at literary work when he published a series of sketches of life under the title "A Chinese Diary" in the *North China Daily News* and a few other articles in *The China Journal of Science and Art*, all on topics of literary and artistic interest. This was followed by the publication in *Chambers's Journal*, Edinburgh, of the first article he sent abroad. His retirement in 1972 afforded him the opportunity of lecturing on English grammar and usage at an institute for teachers and other institutions. He toured scenic places and wrote more than two dozen articles for *China Daily*, some of which were later included in his book *Travel Notes* published in 1986. Other publications of his during this period included translations of Zhu Ziqing's "Moonlight on the Lotus Pond" and Yu Dafu's "Autumn in the Old Capital" in *The World of English*, which won him the warm appreciation of its Editor.

Jiaosheng Wang's ill-health in recent years has not diminished his lifelong interest in literary work, which is now focussed on the translation of classical Chinese poetry in hopes of promoting cultural understanding between the people of China and of other countries. He has translated a number of Tang and Song lyrics for periodicals in Shanghai and Hong Kong. In his long apprenticeship to writing and translation, he is mainly self-taught. He takes a keen interest in Chinese calligraphy as a hobby.



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