Lín Bū (967-1028)

*Endless Longing+ Sorrow at Parting 2(3375)

A parting of lovers at Yángjōu, the lower Yángdž commercial crossroads of the Empire. We are reminded of Dù Mù (p291), and more distantly, at the end, of Mwò-chóu (p131). The girl speaks. The "lover's knot" was the one tied in her sash by her companion, after an intimate last moment before leavetaking.

> The hills of Wú are blue, The hills of Ywè are blue, On either hand the blue hills stand to send, and greet anew – Who knows how hard it is, to say adieu? Your tears come peeping through, My tears come peeping through, In my sash of silk, there's still the lover's knot to do – The river tide is full, and waits for you

Lín Bū (967-1028)

*Painting Crimson Lips+ Grass 4⁴345 4⁵345

Another parting song, in the form of a historical evocation. For the splendors of Golden Valley, see p105; for the suicide of Green Pearl (delicately evoked in the falling flowers of line 3), p107 and p298. The personal sadness is here mixed with, and almost lost in, a historic weariness. It has all been done before, so many times.

To Golden Valley, year on year, The springtime hues in disarray come at whose behest? A last few flowers fall and rest And all the earth in misting rain is dressed Once again the parting song, Another evening in the wayside rest speeds the parting guest; Which of them is loneliest: The roads to north, or south, or east, or west?

Apricot Blossoms

One thing $Lin B\bar{u}$ disliked about everyday life was its crassness. Hangjou in his day was a lively and prosperous place: irksome to those of quiet sensibilities. The showier apricot blossoms in this poem are given their due as attractive, perhaps even arresting – but in the end, tawdry. They get the sort of disapproval which Shvn Man-ywan meted out, less directly, to "Miss Syau" (p166).

> Rows of buds on bough and twig, the splots of blood are dry, Cheeks all deeply powdered red in springtime chill I spy. Nothing stops the misting rain from dewing them afresh; Best to watch from terraces with sympathetic eye. Boughs of willow and of peach are drooping to the ground, Waiting for the madcap mob of bird and butterfly. Like a pleasant evening on the city streets and lanes -All their charms are on display for anyone to buy.

Lín Bū (967-1028)

The Little Plumtree in My Mountain Garden

Like the previous poem, this one ends in a note of disapproval. Remembering $Y \acute{w} Sy w \acute{e} n$ -jī (p325), we ask, what happens to the Wáng Chāngs of this world, the nice guys who don't get the girl? Lín Bū's answer was: give it up - career, family, everything but poetry - and live by himself on Orphan Mountain, amid the scenery of Hángjōu's West Lake, with "plumtrees for his wife and cranes for children." Here is an inventory of the traits of the plumtree beloved of painters and poets: early blooming, pale hue, zigzag branches, musky scent, and the confusion between white flowers and white snow on the same branch, going back to p138.

Other flowers may bloom and fade, she alone is fair, Surveying the little garden with a certain winsome flair; A craggy shadow reaches out o'er water pure and clear, A darkling fragrance drifts and moves on moonlit evening air; Ere the frosty bird descends, he glances to make sure, If the pollened butterfly knew 'twere more than he could bear: By luck I have a bit of verse to make advances with, And need no clapper of sandalwood or cup of costly ware

A View of Orphan Mountain Under Snow

Here, as in Jāng Gyì (p257) and often, the note of the bell focuses and precipitates the feeling toward which the poem had been accumulating. What crystallizes out in this case is the cold astringency of the landsccape, here filled with snow, trees, and the woodcutters and stream fishermen who are the standard figures in these landscapes. All doing what it can to cancel out urban Hángjōu.

Horizon mountains, water all around, Sunlit snow lies limitless and still; Along the path, what visitor should come? Amid the woods, all day I gaze my fill. Bundles of wood are heavy, in the distance, Clumps of reeds are dry, along the rill; Towers and spires proclaim the city temple – A far-off bellstroke stirs the evening chill.

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Lín Bū (967-1028)

In My Studio on a Spring Day

Lín Bū is near the end of his life. He welcomes the spring wind as it puffs up the empty stair to his little-visited door. He may have intended this poem as a sort of valedictory: it is the last of a set of five poems which he wrote out formally in his own calligraphy. Calligraphy is a revealing art. The first two words of this poem ("empty stair," opposite), as he writes them, are less pretty than one might expect. There is strength and balance, with a touch of grace and carefulness to suggest the poet's ascetic side. It may remind us that the life he chose is not a comfortable life: it takes a certain toughness of body and strength of will to persist in it to the end. Those qualities show in the writing.

They also show in the plum blossom, a delicate but hardy flower, blooming gracefully among the snows of early spring, which Lín Bū made as fully his own, for later readers, as Táu Chyén his chrysanthemums. This hardihood of the plum will become increasingly a part of its literary persona, as years continue to pass. We will bid it farewell in the poem at the very end of this book.

Empty stair on empty stair with moss is covered o'er, The days begin to lengthen out, the swallows come once more; Fallen and gone are the apple flowers; someone is lying ill – Now and again, a breeze of spring stirs the cottage door

Méi Yáu-chýn (1002-1060)

A Walk in the Mountains on Mount Lů

One human visitor who climbed Lín Bū's steps in the last year before his death was the poet Mé1 Yán-chứn, who, with fellow poets Tsáu Tsāu and Dù Mù, is one of the most insightful commentators on the Sūndž Art of War. Mé1 wrote a preface to Lín Bǔ's peserved work. His own poetry is less a continuation of Táng than a return to an earlier style. His tactical eye here makes, and his poetic sense organizes, these observations taken from a ramble into late-autumn mountains. Dwellings, in these scenes, are usually spotted by their smokeplumes (p224), but with clouds this thick, a sound serves instead. A peaceful rural sound, amid a scene in which all is natural. One can see what it was that he responded to in Lín Bū.

> My mood enjoys the sense of wilderness: The thousand moutnains rise, now high, now low. Past lovely peaks that change with every turn, On lonely paths I wander to and fro. To treetop touched with frost ascends a bear, From stream in empty forest drinks a doe. Where might be a dwelling-place of men? Off beyond the clouds, the roosters crow.

Going Out and Coming Back On the Fifteenth Night of the First Month (1045)

The delicate observational skill shown in the poem at left is here turned on the poet himself, not at the time of his wife's death in 1044, when he had composed a group of three poems, in the tradition of Ywán Jǒn (p278) and earlier poets, but a year later. The lantern festival, on the firsdt full moon (fifteenth) of the first month of the year, was a major holiday, and a popular meeting-place for lovers. Méi considers whether he should go, hoping for a little personal distraction. This proves not to work, as an antidote for a sorrow so fresh. He gives up the idea of idle pleasure (line 6) and goes home to his children.

Méi did remarry the following year (1046), but a poem from 1048 records his first wife's appearance to him in a dream. His grief includes that of his children, and the poem is as much about their loss as about his own.

If I don't, I'll just be prey to grieving, If Ido, from grief I may feel free: Rich and poor in couples walk about, My heart feels not a trace of jollity. As one ages, feelings are more fleeting, Before one acts, the wish has ceased to be. So I come back, and look at son and daughter; I speak no word, my nose feels acidy. Last year with their mother they had gone; In her style, they'd made up prettily. Now their mother dwells in the Springs Below: Their faces are smudged; their clothes are tattery. I think how young the two of you still are, Holding back tears, I cannot bear to see. I push the lamp, and lie with face to wall, The hundred sorrows all converge in me.