

Lín Bū (967-1028)

*Endless Longing+
Sorrow at Parting
2(3375)

A parting of lovers at Yángjōu, the lower Yángdǔ commercial crossroads of the Empire. We are reminded of Dù Mù (p291), and more distantly, at the end, of M̀wò-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?

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 landscape, 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.

空階

Méi Yáu-chv́n (1002-1060)

A Walk in the Mountains on Mount Lǔ

One human visitor who climbed Lín Bū's steps in the last year before his death was the poet Méi Yán-chv́n, who, with fellow poets Tsáu Tsāu and Dù Mù, is one of the most insightful commentators on the Sūndž Art of War. Méi wrote a preface to Lín Bū'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 Jǐn (p278) and earlier poets, but a year later. The lantern festival, on the first 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 I do, 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 acidic.
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 tattered.
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.