



Lǐ Chīng-jàu (1083-c1141)

*Riverside Immortal+

76755

The source line here is actually by Fǎng Yén-sz (p344). The poems depict a lonely wife, bored with latent plumblossoms (#1), then charmed, and pained, with opened ones (#2). Chīng-jàu's preface goes:

*"In Master Oūyáng's *Magpie on the Bough+ is the line "deep as deep, as deep as well it may," of which I am very fond; I have used it in two "garden courtyard" stanzas. The tune is the old *Riverside Immortal+."*

1

Garden courtyard deep as deep
 as deep as well it may;
 Cloudy window, misty room, the bolts are run;
 Twigs of willow, buds of plum
 to open have begun;
 To Mwò-líng trees there comes returning spring,
 In Jyèn-kāng city dwells an aging one.
 Pangs at moonlight, songs to wind,
 all the many things
 That have gone away with age, and nothing won.
 Who is there to sorrow, when
 the blossoming is done?
 To trim the lamp entices not at all,
 In treading snowfall interest is there none

2

Garden courtyard deep as deep,
 as deep as well it may,
 Cloudy window, misty room, the spring is slow.
 At diminished loveliness
 why should one feel woe?
 Night has come, and with it pleasant dreams:
 There must have bloomed a southern branch or so.
 Their jewels thin, their incense light,
 a boundless agony,
 Tibetan flute from southern tower do not blow:
 That thick perfume has opened full
 who is there to know?
 You warm soft winds and dilatory sun,
 To apple-blossom season do not go!

*The Censer+
2(44¹644¹333)

This ornate piece on the Herdboy and Weaving Maid theme (p117) mingles technique with strong feeling. Especially notable is the handling of the final group of three 3-word lines in each stanza (compare Jōu Bāng-yén, p381). The sharpness of the 1-syllable phrases prefixed to lines 3 and 6 (and to 11 and 14 in the second stanza) is part of Chīng-jàu's prosodic persona: hers is typically an angular rather than a fluid rhythmic progression. The observer first contemplates the separation of the heavenly lovers, and then, in the second stanza, notes evidence of their passionate meeting (dark and rainy skies symbolize the sexual union of divinities). The poet takes a more intense view of her subject than had Dù Mù's girl (p284), borrowing instead (in line 3) a famously desolate phrase from Lǐ Yw (p348). Parting and meeting are equally occasions of sorrow.

Grass-hid insects chirping low,
Dryandra leaves descending slow;
Truly
Sorrow is heavy, in heaven above and here below.
Both cloudy Steps and moonlit earth,
Tightly locked, no entrance show:
So let
The drifting shallop come,
The drifting shallop leave -
No meeting shall they know
Bridge of stars and birds for steeds:
Together once in all the year;
But think
How endless are their absence-pain, their parting-woe.
The Herdboy and the Weaving Maid –
If not that soon she back must go,
What if
Sky a moment clear,
Cloud a moment rain,
Wind a moment blow?

Lǐ Chīng-jào (1083-c1141)

*On Phoenix Terrace, Thinking of the Flute Player+

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The form, Chīng-jào's own, features her prosodic signature, the interruptive 1-beat line, in a stark tetrameter rhythmic texture. The asymmetry between the two stanzas (both end with . . . ¹44634344, but each begins differently) is worth studying. The first stanza-incipit is inscenative, the second is retrospective. The climax comes in the retrospection; in the repeated "Why?" with which it begins. Wáng Wéi's Yáng-gwān Song (p201), a regular feature of farewells, might be repeated, as much as three times, to postpone parting moment. Our hard-eyed poetess knows that such gestures are vain. The north is threatened by the Tartars, and her husband, on duty elsewhere in these evil times, is more than merely absent. He and her whole world are threatened.

Incense cold in golden lion,
Covers mussed in crimson waves,
I have not combed the hair that's gotten all awry;

Care not

On jewel box if dust be thick
Or by the screen if sun be high.
I've always dreaded lonely sorrow, secret grief;
There are so many things
I fain would tell, but let it lie –
This year I've grown so thin;
It doesn't come from too much wine,
It's not for autumn that I sigh.

*Why?**Why?*

This time he has really gone:
A thousand, myriad rounds of Yáng-gwān Song
Never could have kept him by.

I miss

The man of Wū-líng far away.
Around the tower mist-plumes fly.
There is just the little stream before the tower
That must be noticing
How all day long I fix my eye –
I fix my eye on where
Approaches yet a higher pitch
Of misery for me to try.

Quatrain For a Summer's Day

The Tartars have conquered the north, and are now threatening the territory south of the Yángdǔ. Míng-chǐng is given a post in the new southern capital, but presently that too is threatened. The court again flees south. In 1129, Míng-chǐng sets out in response to a summons from the temporary imperial headquarters, but falls sick on the way and cannot go further. Chīng-jǎu in a single day and night rushes “three hundred leagues” to his side, only to find him terminally ill. Following his death she has no choice but to join the stampede, abandoning her household goods and struggling to take with her the best of their bronze collection.

This piece is not a polymetric verse, the medium of her private feelings, but a public utterance in the regular shī form. Its placid title does not prepare us for its denunciation of the Sòng ministers and generals, who had retreated behind the Yángdǔ and abandoned the north to the invaders. The poem, with its allusion to the faithful dead of the Nine Songs (p70), praises valiant Syàng Yǔ, who in a similar moment of crisis had scorned to do as the Sòng leaders had so ignominiously done, and cross the river to safety and a lesser kingdom (p78).

During life, a captain of the living,
 After life, a hero among the dead –
 Syàng Yǔ, we still remember to this day,
 To eastern refuge would not turn his head

Lǐ Chīng-jàu (1083-c1141)

*Like a Dream+
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From this time on, Chīng-jàu lived as a widow in her brother's household, going with him from one post to another. She was too well brought up to express her vexation by anything so gauche as Yw Sywén-jī's fit of temper (p325n). Still, the job of being the personal maid of the astringent poetess, whose petals of youth (the reds, below) were yielding to the leaves of age (the greens), cannot have been a very easy one. You try to be encouraging, to protect the mistress from ill tidings, to soften the blow – and what do you get for it? You get a just-awakened mistress who can tell you, from the same evidence as Mvng Hàu-rán (p209), what things are really like in the garden, and who is not having any of your cheerful reportage, about the flowers being still unharmed.

All last night the rain came down, the storm made din
 A heavy sleep has not dispersed the wine within;
 I ask the girl who's rolling up the blinds:
 She says the apple trees are still as they had been,
 Look again,
 Look again:
 It ought to be that greens grow fat, and reds grow thin

Jū Dùn-rú (c1080-c1175)

*Lovely Nyèn-nú+

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The end of life can be met with rage, as in Lǐ Chīng-jàu, above, or with genial resignation, as here. The poet sees himself as an actor, with a temporary role on the stage of life. The ‘interlude’ (dzá-jyù) in the next-to-last line was a comic skit in two parts, interpolated among the turns of a long entertainment; it had grown out of the performances witnessed by Wáng Añ-shí (p365). Later, in the Ywán, this ‘interlude’ was developed into a full four-act opera. Here, the emphasis is on lightness. Wine, women, and historical melancholy have all lost their power to beguile the poet into philosophy or retrospection.

Prosodically, the 1-beat incipit, used with mordant effect by Lǐ Chīng-jàu, and the four/six metrical texture, used to convey starkness by the same poet, p392, here give instead a relaxed, undisturbed, accepting quality.

Now I'm old, I can be gay.

Because

Through the world of men I've gone,

Beyond the realm of things I stray.

I take

The sea of care, the hill of woe,

And crumble them in bits away:

Nevermore deceived by flowers,

Not in trouble over wine,

Unperturbed, whatever place I stay.

I eat my fill, and sleep essay.

And when I wake, I climb the stage and start the play

Never mind if Then be gone and Now be here,

Since my hairs have gotten gray

I let

Things just happen as they may.

I don't seek eternal life,

Or fawn upon the Buddha,

Or study what poor lost Confucius had to say.

I'm slow to argue with the wise,

All I do is make them laugh,

So I go on, my same familiar way.

And when the interlude is done,

My costume to the jester I will give away.