

Lǐ Chīng-jàu (1083-c1141)

*Drunk Among the Flowers+ 2(75545)

Lǐ Chīng-jàu came of a literary family (her father was praised as a prose stylist by Sū Shr), and she herself reached the top rank as a verse poet. At eighteen she married Jàu Míng-chúng, a man of antiquarian taste, and an avid collector of inscribed bronzes. They would have memory contests (on what page, of what book, did a certain passage occur?) to see who got to drink their tea first. "When I won, I would lift my cup and laugh, until the tea spilled and soaked the front of my dress, so that I had to get up without drinking anything after all." It is charming, but how must Ming-ching have felt, to find himself partnered for life with a stronger memory and a better poet? Once, on the festival of the 9th day of the 9th month, Ching-jau wrote a verse to the tune *Drunk Among the Flowers+ beginning "Mists so thin, clouds so thick, daylight hours so slow." He was determined to outdo her. For three days and nights he wrote feverishly, piling up 50 verses to the same tune. He mixed hers in with his, and showed the 51 verses to his friend $L\hat{u} D\hat{v}$ -fu. He read them all, and said with a little smile, "There are three good lines in the lot." Okay, even if hers is one of the good lines, odds are he has her beat, two to one. Victorious for a change, Ming-chivng then confidently asks, "Which three lines?" Dv-fu replies by reciting the lines with which this poem ends:

> Let no one say it does not rend the heart: The screen goes up on western wind, And one more thin than yellow flowers below

Skunked again! But we may annotate a bit: the western wind is the autumn wind; the "yellow flowers" are chrysanthemums, the quintessential autumn flower; Eastern Fence is Táu Chyén (p128), the quintessential chrysanthemum poet.

Mists so thin, clouds so thick,

daylight hours so slow, Incense burned to ashes long ago; A lovely time of year, the Double Nine: Pillow of jade, chest of silks – Not til midnight does the coldness grow

A cup of wine by Eastern Fence, in the twilight glow, Her sleeves with darkling fragrance overflow; Let no one say it does not rend the heart: The screen goes up on western wind, And one more thin than yellow flowers below

Lǐ Chīng-jàu (1083-c1141)

*Riverside Immortal+ 76755

The source line here is actually by F vng Yen-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-kang 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 Li Yŵ (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-jàu (1083-c1141)

*On Phoenix Terrace, Thinking of the Flute Player+ 446¹44634344 ^{1,1}454¹44634344

The form, Chīng-jàu'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 Wǔ-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 Yángdž. Míng-chúng is given a post in the new southern capital, but presently that too is threatened. The court again flees south. In 1129, Míng-chúng sets out in response to a summons from the temporary imperial headquarters, but falls sick on the way and cannot go further. Chīng-jàu 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 $sh\bar{r}$ form. Its placid title does not prepare us for its denunciation of the Sùng ministers and generals, who had retreated behind the Yángdž and abandoned the north to the invaders. The poem, with its allusion to the faithful dead of the Nine Songs (p70), praises valiant Syàng Yw, who in a similar moment of crisis had scorned to do as the Sùng 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 Yử, we still remember to this day, To eastern refuge would not turn his head

Lǐ Chīng-jàu (1083-c1141)

*Like a Dream+ 6656226

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 Yŵ 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 Myng 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

*Pledge of Faithfulness+ 7565 333444

Chīng-jàu's last years are little documented. There is a story of her remarriage, but nothing in her preserved collection bears it out. What we find instead, in this seemingly late piece, is someone whose past is too remote to be revisited even in a dream, symbolized by the yearning additive even line amid the crisply definite odd lines of the first stanza. On awakening, she is intent on wresting from the present (the three 3-beat lines, pushing in with small details of reality; the answering three 4-beat lines, beating back against the dying moment) a little more of beauty, of life, of happiness, of whatever it is that the plum blossom symbolizes in Chinese poetry. Her career ends, not like Yŵ Sywæn-jī's in actual, but in symbolic, violence.

> Night is here, I'm deeply drunk, my makeup very slow, Boughs are stuck with blossoms in a row; I wake from wine, the scent has pierced my springtime sleep, My dream is ended: back I cannot go. Heartfelt bitter grief, Moonbeams' limpid glow, Purple curtain low; I crumple up the last few blooms, I wring their still-remaining scent, I get a moment more or so

Jū Dùn-rú (c1080-c1175)

*Lovely Nyèn-nú+ 4¹44¹4444546 64¹443644546

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-jyŵ) 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-shŕ (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.