

*The Beanleaves are Yellow+

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Lù Yóu has a second persona, which is suggested by his self-chosen epithet, Fàng-wǎng (“The Unrestrained Old Man”). It is his Táu Chyén image, and his later life did resemble Táu’s – he lived as a farmer (on a government pension), and in a thousand poems, entered into the spirit and texture of rural life. He also found time, as Sū Shì had done, to produce imitations of Táu’s poems; a perhaps dangerous precedent. There is a point where imitation of other people’s poems empties the poem itself, or where (as with Jōu Bāng-yén, p380) a poem goes beyond allusive, and becomes merely a vehicle for allusions. Such are the hints that the “poem” form itself may be losing vitality.

The 3-syllable line interrupting this quatrain-based verse adds emphasis to the ending. It owes something to Lǐ Chīng-jāu’s verse (p394) on nighttime rains. The poet may be hinting that, of his two personas, the patriotic and the reclusive, the one on display at the left is the real one.

All spring long, the wind and rain
 have blustered constantly;
 When wind and rain at last come clear,
 empty is every tree.
 For stippled red on muddy sands,
 who feels sympathy?
 I hate it boundlessly –
 For there, this broken-down old man
 his whole life’s course can see.

Syīn Chì-jí (1140-1207)

*Partridge Sky+

A Caller Had Spoken Spiritedly of His Ambitions;
Remembering My Own Youth, I Wrote This in Jest

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(1200)

Here is a verse form distinguished from regular heptameter only by the separation of one 7 into two 3's, at the onset of the second stanza. At just this point, the poet turns from past to present. And finds, at the age of 61, not a shining but a useless sword. It was perhaps a tactful way of distancing himself from some who sought to raise the war policy question in the Southern Sung government.

The men of Yēn (the northeastern region) are the barbarians; those of Hàn are the Chinese. The splendor of the clothes and the weapons recalls many earlier frontier poems (Lú Jàu-lín, p181; Wáng Hàn, p200); here, their very ornateness has a slightly self-mocking effect.

The poem ends on a note of gentle resignation. The war to start a war is over, and his side has lost.

In my youth, there rallied a myriad men
to my flag that flapped so free,
We mounted, and crossed the River broad,
clad in our finery,
At night, the Yēn brigades prepared
their silver-figured quivers;
At dawn, from Hàn came a flying storm
of gold-tipped archery

Recalling bygone years,
I sigh for the present me:
The wind of spring no darker dyes
my white beard's brilliancy,
I've given my myriad-word design
"To Conquer The Alien Host"
In trade for my eastern neighbor's book:
"How to Plant a Tree"

