400 Sùng

Lù Yóu (1125-1210)

*The Moon On The Mountain Pass+

From his father, Yóu inherited a determination to see the north reconquered. This was at odds with official peace policy, embodied in the Tartar treaty of 1162, which led to a mixture of military weakness and commercial success that Yóu found repugnant. Being at odds with the government, he had only a modest career; at one point he served under Fàn Chúng-dà. Mixed in with scenes of rural life in his collected poems, are the outbursts on which his reputation as a patriot rests. In the successive rhyme-marked quatrain units of this old-style lyric piece (compare Tsáu Tsāu, p93), with its soldier persona (as in the Hàn lyrics, p86), he ridicules his general's inactivity, laments his fallen comrades' useless sacrifices, and empathizes with his betrayed countrymen, here portrayed (next-to-last line) as ready to rise up and die fighting.

Peace became the policy

fifteen years ago,

The general at the border post

to battle does not go;

By crimson tower, one faintly hears

the throb of song and dance,

The horse has eaten itself to death,

string-broken is the bow

A clank of kettle, in the camp,

hastens the waning night,

At twenty I joined the regiment:

now my hair is white;

Who now hears, in the sound of the fife,

the heart of a stalwart man?

In vain, the bones of our fallen mates

upon the sands gleam white.

There've always been, on the Central Plain,

skirmishes with the Huns,

But now they are bequeathing it

to grandsons, from their sons:

Those left behind, prepared to die,

look hither for relief -

How many bosoms are wet, tonight,

with the tears of the waiting ones.

Southern 401

*The Beanleaves are Yellow+

Lù Yóu has a second persona, which is suggested by his self-chosen epithet, Fàng-w̄ng ("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 Shr 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 $Ch\bar{1}ng-j\bar{a}u$'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.

402 Sùng

Syīn Chì-jí (1140-1207)

*Partridge Sky+
A Caller Had Spoken Spiritedly of His Ambitions;
Remembering My Own Youth, I Wrote This in Jest
7777 33777
(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 Yen (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"

Southern 403

*The Ugly Slave+ Written On a Wall, on the Road to Bwó-shān 2(7447) (1188)

Like Lù Yóu, Syīn Chì-jí had distinguished himself by martial exploits in his younger days, and been frustrated in his later days by the peace party's refusal to entertain plans for recovering the north. Here, at 49, he contrasts the easy sorrows of an ardent youth with the inexpressible sorrows of maturity.

A duplicated element, lines 6-7 (from Lǐ Chīng-jàu, p392), may have been the starting-point for the poem. Notice how the 4-beat lines mix with the 7-beat lines (each 4+3). The whole verse is constructed of cadenced and uncadenced 4's, highlighted by whole repeated lines.

Once I did not know the taste

of sorrow in the mouth:

I loved to climb the tower high,
I loved to climb the tower high,
And there, composing some new song,
to force a sorrowful sigh.

Now I know too well the taste

of sorrow in the mouth:

I fain would tell, but let it lie,
I fain would tell, but let it lie;
Instead, I'll say how cool the air,
how fair the autumn sky.