436 Ywán

Ní Dzàn (1301-1374)

## Written on No Particular Occasion On the Fifth day of the Sixth Month

Ní Dzàn, a major painter of this period, figures in the \*Chīng-lóu Jí+ as a wealthy eccentric, fanatical about his personal cleanliness, It is said of Dzàn that his poetry shows the same tight, dry, astringent quality as his influential paintings. Certainly the play of light in this poem, from moss to robe, and from a cloud to its reflection in the pool, is handsomely done. As for the conventional ending, with the little village and the immortals on cranes; it is simply that: a conventional ending. A piece of wishful thinking – the sort of ending one can only bring off in a painting. That is, or very nearly is, the whole point of painting.

Onto my robe, the moss begins
to climb with its verdant stain
Fading light from the overcast
in the spring pool gleams again;
To this desolate village, all day long
no carriage and horse have come –
But now and then a wisp of cloud
accompanies a crane

Late 437

## \*Bamboo Branch Song+ For the West Lake

This quietly daring piece is one of eight (Yáng Wéi-jv̄n, who had suggested the idea, himself wrote nine) on the "Bamboo Branch" theme. "Bamboo Branch" is a folksong of non-Chinese, specifically Mán, origin (p276-277). This poem takes up the seepage of "Mán" elements into Chinese culture, such as the Mongolisms which are common in Ywæn operas (like the word for "wine," darasun). The girl here, who has no such contamination, is compared in the title to the West Lake, which had long typified scenic beauty and refinement, and now, in its southern location, also suggests freedom from all these much resented foreign influences. It is the girl, representing the next generation, who will be free of them.

2

Beside the lake, there dwells a girl,
fifteen or some such thing,
Raven silk to wrap her hair,
a touch of powdering;
It bothers her that mom and dad
mix Mán words in their speech –
And as alone the stove she tends,
with fresher voice doth sing.

438 Ywáen

Yw Ji (1272-1348)

## Staying Late At Shàng-fāng Lodge (1333)

Yw In has been called the best of the Ywæn poets. He was a prodigy, able to read at age three. He had a capital career as a teacher of Confucianism and a compiler in the Palace. From a life of intensive literary work (his fluency was as notable as his precocity), he is said to have left behind at his death an enormous body of writings, comprising almost a myriad items. They are mostly occasional, even ephemeral: many exchanges with friends, countless inscriptions on paintings. In 1333, when Is had retired from the capital to a remote village, conditions in the north were hard, and from that year onward, they got harder. Natural disasters and famines were followed by uprisings, and after that, by proto-dynastic rivalries. The most odious of these rivals would found the Míng dynasty in 1368.

Nothing on the horizon promised relief, personal or national. The national spirit is here symbolized by that quintessentially pure flower, the plum. To endure the hard years that lay ahead, and realize the hope expressed by N1 Dzàn (p437), the plum would indeed need to have a heart of iron.

4

Deep in the mountains, drifted snows
the very eaves enfold,
Alone beside the covered lamp
I sit as night grows old;
Did not the flowers of the plum
have iron in their hearts,
How could they possibly contrive
to weather so much cold?