



SELECTED POEMS FROM

The
Goddesses

BY KUO MO-JO

SELECTED POEMS FROM
THE GODDESSES

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS
PEKING

Author's Preface to the English Translation

The Goddesses can be compared to a cicada newly emerged from the chrysalis of the old society as well as of the traditional Chinese poetry.

The collection was first published in 1921, most of the poems having been written between the years 1918 and 1921.

More than thirty years have passed by and China has undergone another great transformation. *The Goddesses* is now but an exuviae of the cicada.

The Foreign Languages Press has asked me to write something for their English translation of a number of the poems selected from *The Goddesses*. But what should I write?

In my view poetry is the music invoked from men's hearts by the age in which they live.

Viewed as literature, these poems may disappoint the reader. Let them rather be taken as recordings of the age in which they were written.

Kuo Mo-jo

July 1957

Contents

Author's Preface to the English Translation

REBIRTH OF THE GODDESSES	1
THE NIRVANA OF THE FENG AND HUANG	9
COAL IN THE GRATE	17
SUNRISE	18
THE GOOD MORNING	19
PANORAMA FROM FUDETATE YAMA	21
SHOUTING ON THE RIM OF THE WORLD	22
THREE PANTHEISTS	23
BY ELECTRIC LIGHT	24
O EARTH, MY MOTHER	27
MORNING SNOW	30
SEA OF LIGHT	31
DRUNKEN SONG UNDER A FLOWERING PLUM TREE	34
PACING THROUGH JURIMATSUBARA AT NIGHT	35
I AM AN IDOLATER	36
HYMN TO THE SUN	37
FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND	38
PYRAMIDS	39
VICTORIOUS IN DEATH	41
VENUS	45
PARTING	46
SPRING SADNESS	48
NEW MOON AND WHITE CLOUDS	49
EGRET	50
SPRING SILKWORMS	51
NIGHT SONG OF A MISANTHROPIST	52

MOONLIGHT AFTER RAIN	53
BRIGHT MORNING	54
ON THE SHORE	55
STIRRINGS OF MORNING	57
STIRRINGS OF SPRING	58
WEDDING AT SUNDOWN	59
SUNRISE SEEN FROM A BOAT	60
ESTUARY OF THE WHAMPOA	61

Rebirth of the Goddesses

All things transitory
But as symbols are sent;
Earth's insufficiency
Here grows to event;
The Indescribable,
Here it is done;
The Woman-soul leadeth us
Upward and on!

Goethe: *Faust*

A fissure in the Puchou Mountain: its walls rise abruptly. On either side tower up crags, formidable as the Yangtze Gorges, shaped by nature into the semblance of the gateway to a city. Beyond the crags a vast expanse of sea stretches away to merge with the sky. In front of the crags the level ground is carpeted with luxuriant emerald grass strewn with fallen fruit. Innumerable niches pierce the walls of the sentinel crags and in each niche stands the statue of a nude goddess bearing in her hands some form of stringed or wind instrument which she seems to be playing.

Strange trees grow profusely on the mountain-sides. Their leaves are like those of the date palm; the flowers are golden in colour, with calices like agate. The flowers are large as magnolias; the ripe fruits are shaped like peaches but somewhat larger. Over the summit of the mountain hang massy white clouds, hardly distinguishable against the sky.

The time is of the remote past, a day during the struggles for kingship of Kung-kung and Chuan-hsu. It is dark.

When the curtain rises, all is silent and the silence persists for some moments when distant sounds of clamour make themselves heard.

The goddesses lay aside their instruments and slowly step down from their niches. Slowly they look round them.

FIRST GODDESS:

Since when the five-hued rocks were smelted
to fill the cracks in the heavens
darkness has been half driven away
beyond the bounds of the celestial sphere.

Within this fair world
strains of silent music have married in harmony.
How many moons have waxed and waned,
their light reflected on this wafted life-music?

SECOND GODDESS:

But why can we not bring into accord
the measures we play today?
I fear that in this universe
a catastrophe is likely to come upon us again.
Hark! This harsh clamour
ever louder, ever nearer:
is it from the waves in the sea, from wind in space,
or can it be the counterpoint of evil cries?

THIRD GODDESS:

Were they not the barbarous hordes
that passed by the foot of this very Puchou Mountain?
They go, they said, to fight for some paltry hegemony;
this turbulence has become intolerable.
Sister goddesses, what are we to do?
Our celestial canopy, built of five-coloured stone,
may well be shattered in fragments.
The weary sun merely sleeps in space,
no longer shedding its burning waves of light.

FIRST GODDESS:

I will go forth and create new light,
no longer will I remain a mere goddess in a niche.

SECOND GODDESS:

I will go forth and create new warmth
to compound with your newly created light.

THIRD GODDESS:

Sister goddesses, new wine may not be contained in old skins.
I will go forth and create a new sun
to contain your new light and new heat.

CHORUS OF GODDESSES:

We will create a new sun,

no longer will we remain mere statues in niches.

The goddesses dissolve into the sea beyond the mountain gateway. Behind the mountain rises the clash of embattled emperors.

CHUAN-HSU:

I received Heaven's mandate;
Heaven appointed me to rule the world!
Kung-kung, do not let yourselves be caught up by the
Spirit of Death;
let me establish my rightful place as leader.

KUNG-KUNG:

I know nothing about this rant of heaven and earth!
I follow my nature in my desire to be emperor.
If there is to be talk of the Spirit of Death, then I'll
deal out death for you.
Chuan-hsu, you had better look out for your own skin!

CHUAN-HSU:

The ancients had a saying: there cannot be two suns in
the sky, nor two rulers among the people.
Why do you press your rivalry to me?

KUNG-KUNG:

The ancients had a saying: there cannot be two rulers
among the people, nor two suns in the sky.
Why are you bent on opposing me?

CHUAN-HSU:

Why, you . . . you mountain echo!

KUNG-KUNG:

I must satisfy my impulse to become ruler.

CHUAN-HSU:

But what necessity urges you to become ruler?

KUNG-KUNG:

Ask the sun — why must it shine?

CHUAN-HSU:

Then let you try your strength with me.

KUNG-KUNG:

And let you try your strength with me.

Shouts of "War! War! War!" from the massed soldiery. Clamour of fighting, clashing of weapons, sounds of blood-spurting, thuds of falling bodies, thunder of trampling feet.

OLD PEASANT (*bearing a ploughshare he makes his way across the battlefield*):

My heart's blood is quite dried up.

Battle has been joined again over my fields of corn.

When will the Yellow River run clear,

when will man's life come to an end?

SHEPHERD BOY (*guiding his flocks across the battlefield*):

Ah! I should not have reared those fighting dogs,

usually they fought over crusts of bread,

but when that was finished they ate heads of sheep.

I must take my sheep and flee.

A horde of wild men enter. They are armed. They pass across the battlefield from the opposite direction.

WILD MEN:

Let us make merry while the time favours it.

Let us go and join the battle beyond the mountain.

The hair bends whither the wind blows:

Whoever wins we stand to gain.

Beyond the mountain is heard: "Long live Chuan-hsu! Long live the emperor!" Trampling of feet, cries of pursuit: "Traitors, you shall not escape. Heaven is about to strike you down!"

Kung-kung bounds forth from beyond the mountain at the head of his followers. His hair is shorn, his body tattooed, his loins garbed in plantain leaves. There are wounds on his body; his bronze sword and stone weapons are dripping with fresh blood.

KUNG-KUNG:

Oh shame! Oh, horror! I am utterly defeated.

Would I had the old villain's skull

to carve into a wine-cup!

He licks blood from his weapons and scowls with immense ferocity.

Here is the northern pillar of heaven, the mountain of

Puchou;

my life span has been cleft as is this mountain.

Comrades-in-arms, though I may not live to be king,
I cannot make my peace with that old scoundrel.
You have depended on me up to now:
now I have need of your lives.

The followers pick up the fallen fruit and eat of it.

The god of hunger is calling out from our stomachs!
They say the magic fruit of Puchou gives unlimited
strength to the eater:
there is still a moment before the universe shivers
asunder.

Go on, get a bellyful of it!

The sound of pursuit becomes more and more insistent.

The war-cries of the foe are like the fury of the
breakers:
they but hasten this helpless vessel to the bottom.
My followers! Lend me your skulls!
Crack this northern pillar of heaven!
Crack it!

The troops rush head foremost against the mountain wall. Thunder reverberates and lightning plays all round. Then, a great thunder-clap, the mountain splits apart and the vault of heaven crashes down. A black cloud billows up. Kung-kung's followers fall dead at the foot of the mountain.

CHUAN-HSU (naked, his hair dishevelled, in build like a huge ape. He leads his men, armed like himself, from the battlefield):

Rebels, where do you think you will flee to?
The gods strike swiftly! Great heavens, what is this?
Rocks and stones fly through the air, the earth shudders, the
mountain is bursting asunder.
Aaaaah . . . ! All is chaos, chaos! What can be hap-
pening?

The thunder and lightning become more and more fierce. A flash of lightning reveals the bodies of Kung-kung, Chuan-hsu and their followers lying scattered about. After a while the thunderclaps become less violent and gradually die away. The whole stage is in darkness. Silence of five minutes.

Sound of swimmers approaching from afar. Women's voices in the darkness:

- The thunderclaps have ceased.
- The lightning has died away.
- The battle of light and dark is over.
- What of the weary sun?
- It is driven out of the sky.
- Has the fabric of heaven been torn asunder after all?
- Have the forces of dark, once driven away, now crept back?
- What can be done with the rent fabric of heaven?
- Shall we smelt more coloured stone to repair it?
- Such coloured dross can serve no purpose now:
however far it is set in decay, we should not patch it up
again.
- Let our newly created sun issue forth,
then will it shine through all the inner world and the
outer.
- The limits of the celestial sphere serve no purpose
now.
- But the new sun will surely become weary?
- We must be for ever creating new light and heat for
it.
- Ugh! Everywhere underfoot are the remains of men's
bodies.
- What shall we do with them?
- Bear them to the niches and mould them into gods.
- Yes and set them playing silent music as we once did.
- The new sun, my sister, why has it not yet risen?
- It burns too fiercely, we fear it will explode;
we have it still plunged in the sea.
- Ah! We now feel new warmth.
- Our hearts are like crimson carp,
leaping in a crystal bowl.
- We desire to embrace all things.

— Let us sing a song of welcome to the newly created sun.

In Unison:

Sun, although you are still far away,
sun, although you are still far away,
now the morning bell can be heard pealing in the sea:
ding-dong, ding-dong, ding-dong!

Ten thousand golden arrows shoot at the Wolf of Heaven;
the Wolf of Heaven grieves in the dark.
Now the funeral knell can be heard in the sea:
ding-dong, ding-dong, ding-dong!

We wish to quaff a stoup of wine.
Drink to the everlasting life of our new sun.
Now the drinking bells sound in the sea:
ding-dong, ding-dong, ding-dong!

*The stage suddenly lights up. Only a white curtain is to be seen.
The stage-manager appears.*

STAGE-MANAGER (*bows to the audience*):

Ladies and gentlemen, you have become tired of living in the foetid gloom of this dark world. You surely thirst for light. Your poet, having dramatized so far, writes no more. He has, in fact, fled beyond the sea to create new light and heat. Ladies and gentlemen, do you await the appearance of a new sun? You are bid to create it for yourselves. We will meet again under the new sun.

Notes

Material for the play has been taken from the following sources:

Lieb Tzu (ancient Taoist philosophical work): "... Heaven and earth are also material things, and things are subject to deficiencies. Hence in ancient times the goddess Nu-kua forged five-coloured rocks to fill in the cracks, and broke

off the turtle's feet and set them up as the four pillars of the sky. Thereafter, when Kung-kung struggled with Chuan-hsu for kingship, in his fury he threw himself against Puchou Mountain. He snapped this pillar of heaven and upset the balance of the four-cornered earth. As a result, the sky tilted down at the north-west corner, so that the sun, the moon and the stars now move in that direction. The earth being inclined in the south-east, all watercourses drain away thither."

Sbuo Wen (the Han dynasty dictionary): "Nu-kua was an ancient goddess, who shaped the ten thousand things. . . . She first invented the pipes and flute."

Shan Hai Ching (ancient book of folklore and legends): "To the north, the Puchou Mountain faces Chupi Mountain, and Yuehchung Mountain is not far away; to the east it faces the salt marsh of Yu, which is where the Yellow River disappears underground after leaving its turbid, seething source. Here there are delicious fruits which are like peaches; the leaves are like those of the jujube tree and the flowers are yellow with a red calyx. These fruits can refresh one when one is fatigued."

The Nirvana of the Feng and Huang

In Arabia in ancient times there lived a magical bird, the Phoenix. When it had reached the age of 500 years, it made a pyre of fragrant wood and committed itself to the flames. Then from the dead ashes it returned to life never to die again with a fresh and extraordinary beauty.

Now, this bird may well be the Feng-Huang bird of China. The Feng is the male, the Huang the female. In the *Yen Kung Tu* (Elucidation of the Illustrations of Confucius) we read: "The Feng-Huang is the essence of fire; it is born on Mount Tanhsueh." According to the *Kuang Ya* dictionary: "As to the Feng-Huang... the cry of the male bird is jig-jig, that of the female bird is jug-jug."

Prelude

The eve of the new year is at hand and in the sky
the Feng-Huang pair dart here and about.
Mournful strains are heard as they fly away,
bearing fragrant twigs in their bills they return,
fly back to the Tanhsueh Mountain.

To the right is the withered plane tree,
to the left the parched spring;
before the mountain the limitless expanse of the sea,
behind it the vast dismal plains,
over the mountain the frozen sky traversed by icy winds.

The sky is now dark with evening,
the fragrant wood is heaped high.
The Feng is weary with flying,
the Huang is weary with flying;
their hour of death approaches.

The Feng pecks the twigs:
points of flame fly out.
The Huang fans the sparks:

wreaths of fragrant smoke rise up.

The Feng pecks on
and the Huang fans the flame.
The fragrant smoke overspreads the peak,
the glow of the fire suffuses the peak.

The dusk has now deepened,
the fragrant wood is burning.
The Feng is weary with pecking,
the Huang is weary with fanning:
their hour of death is at hand.

Alas for the Feng and Huang!
The Feng dances, dances high and low,
the Huang sings, sings in tragic vein.
The Feng dances,
the Huang sings her song.
The commonalty of birds flock thither,
fly in from the skies to witness the death-rite.

Song of the Feng

Jig-jig, jig-jig, jig-jig,
Jig-jig, jig-jig, jig-jig.
Vast is the universe, cruel as iron.
Vast is the universe, sombre as lacquer.
Vast is the universe, rank as blood.

Universe, O universe!
Why do you exist?
Whence do you come?
Where are you cradled?
Are you an empty sphere limited in reach,
or a continuum of unlimited size?
If you are an empty sphere limited in reach

whence comes the space that contains you?
What else has existence outside yourself?
If you are infinite and all-embracing
whence comes the space that you hold in yourself?
And why does life exist within you?
Are you a life-endowed flux,
or are you a lifeless mechanism?

I raise my brow and ask of Heaven,
but Heaven is reserved and aloof, has no knowledge of these
things.

I bend my brow and ask the earth,
but the earth is dead, it has no breath.

I look out and ask the sea,
but the sea is raising its voice in grieving.

Ah!

To exist in the mire and gloom of this world
would cause even a diamond sword to rust.

Universe, O universe,
let me rail at you with all my powers:
you blood-besmirched slaughter-house,
prison surfeited with misery,
graveyard clamorous with ghostly hordes,
hell astir with capering demons,
why should you exist at all?

We fly westwards:
the west, alike, is a slaughter-house.

We fly eastwards:
the east, alike, is a prison.

We fly southwards:
the south, alike, is a grave.

We fly northwards:
the north, alike, is a hell.

Living in such a world
we can but learn from the lament of the sea.

Song of the Huang

Jug-jug, jug-jug, jug-jug,

Jug-jug, jug-jug, jug-jug.

Five hundred years of tears have streamed like a cataract,
five hundred years of tears have dripped like wax from candle.

Unceasing flow of tears,

filth that cannot be washed away,

flame of passion that cannot be extinguished,

shame that cannot be cleansed.

This shadowy life of ours,

towards what haven is it drifting?

Ah, this dreamy, shadowy life of ours

is like a lonely boat on an ocean:

to the right are trackless waters,

to the left are trackless waters.

No beacon shines ahead,

no shore is seen behind.

The sail is torn,

the mast broken,

the oars have floated away,

the rudder has rotted away.

The weary boatman merely sits and moans,

the angry surge rolls over in the sea.

Ah, this shadowy, drifting life of ours

is like a drugged sleep on such a dark night as this.

Before us is sleep,

behind us is sleep.

We come like a gust of wind,

we go like a whisp of smoke.

Coming like wind,

going like smoke,

sleep behind,

sleep before.