

CLASSICAL CHINESE POEMS THROUGH THE AGES

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贺涓滨 译

FOREWORD

These lyrics were rendered as a by-product of my PhD thesis *Towards a Typology of Love Dramas* and my translation of *The Palace of Eternal Youth*, a huge play by Hong Sheng. Although this is an essay in English proficiency, as well as a labour of love, and I am fully conscious that there will inevitably be errors, inappropriacy and unevenness, which I feel sure that the native English-speaking geniuses around me will readily spot, I, nevertheless, have still made so bold as to proffer these pieces in their present form. This approach of mine will enable the readers on each and every page to figure out my own personal image, and feel themselves in my unadorned company.

This small tome was rushed forth and took its rough shape in the days after I had submitted my dissertation and was waiting for the viva, and underwent refinement while I was confined by Fate of misfortune to hospital. The poetic task assisted the restoration of my spirit at a time when my vitality was critically depleted, and sounded a forceful note on a single remaining heart-chord, all others having snapped. It also signaled the termination of my exile in the realms of academe, and, conjured up a verdant oasis in the dusty emotional desert, where I had been making my Pilgrimage West under the Red Star, thirsty for all and any forms of life, colour, enthusiasm, humour and scholarship, ever faced with “grey-brained ideological tyranny”.

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An Ode to the Grass on the Ancient Plain
(Fu-de guyuan-cao songbie)

By Bai Juyi (772-846)

*On the plain rampant grasses grow,
Yearly decline and flourishing they undergo.
Not burnt out by the wild fire glows,
They come to as spring wind blows.
Their far-reaching fragrance invades old roads, drift down,
Their bright verdancy reaches the deserted town.
Once more I am bidding my noble friends adieu,
Farewell emotions brimming over the grasses anew.*

赋得古原草送别

白居易

离离原上草，
一岁一枯荣。
野火烧不尽，
春风吹又生。
远芳侵古道，
晴翠接荒城。
又送王孙去，
萋萋满别情。

Song of Eternal Regrets
(Changhen ge)

By Bai Juyi (772—864)

*The Emperor fancied for the fair sex and longed for a peerless one,
Seeking many years in his reign he has yet obtained none.
A daughter of the Yangs has just grown mature,
In the depths of her maiden boudoir has not yet been discovered.
Her beauty borne of heaven makes it hard to keep obscure,
Eventually she is chosen and sent beside the emperor.
Looking over her shoulder she produces charm in a hundred styles,
While all ladies in the six Consorts Palaces lose grace and colour.
In the chilly spring she is awarded a bath in the Floral-Limpid-Pool,
The smooth water in the warm fountain washes off her glossy cream.
In languor and lassitude she is helped up by the maids,
It is now that she commences to bear the imperial favour.
With cloud-like hair and flower-like face she wears hair ornaments swaying,
In the warm lotus-bed-tent they spend the spring night.
The spring night is pitifully short and the sun rises high,
From now on the monarch never goes to the court on time.
For his pleasure she is present at banquets and has no idle hour,
Following him on the vernal excursion she monopolies every single night.
Fair ladies in the Consorts Palaces amount to three thousand,
And all favours for them now fall on her single body alone.
Dressed up in the golden chamber she serves him tenderly in the evening,
At the feast in the jade tower her drunkenness is mingled with the spring.
Titles are conferred on her brother and sisters both,
Honour and grace approach the gate of Yangs' mansion.*

长恨歌

白居易

汉家重色思倾国，
御宇多年求不得。
杨家有女初长成，
养在深宫人未识。
天生丽质难自弃，
一朝选在君王侧。
回眸一笑百媚生，
六宫粉黛无颜色。
春寒赐浴华清池，
温泉水滑洗凝脂。
侍儿扶起娇无力，
始是新承恩泽时。
云鬓花颜金步摇，
芙蓉帐暖度春宵。
春宵苦短日高起，
从此君王不早朝。
承欢侍宴无闲暇，
春从春游夜专夜。
后宫佳丽三千人，
三千宠爱在一身。
金屋妆成娇侍夜，
玉楼宴罢醉和春。
姊妹兄弟皆列土，
可怜光彩生门户。

*All parents under heaven change their ideas:
Daughters should be valued more than sons!
Li Palace enters high into the blue clouds,
The fairy music drifting with breeze is heard everywhere.
Her leisurely tune and calm dance lull the music,
The monarch gazes at her everyday, never satiated.
War drums bang in Fishing Town and come shaking the earth,
Her dance "Rainbow Skirt and Feather Garment" is startled, uncompleted.
Dust and smoke arise from gates after gates and walls of imperial precinct,
Numerous carriages are heading south-west with the throne.
Swaying, the feathered banners advance, only to halt,
It's been over a hundred miles from the capitals' gates.
A bitter regret! the armies all refuse to march on,
Till she writhes and dies in front of their steeds.
Her golden florets are abandoned onto the ground,
Her jade hairpins drop, and are ignored.
The helpless monarch can but bury his face in both hands,
Looking over his shoulder, he sheds tears mixed with blood.
Yellow dust flies scattering and wind rustles,
Around the wooden roads up in the clouds
As he ascends Sword Pavilion.
Down at the foot of Mount E-mei few people travel,
Flags lose their colour and the sun turns pallid.
Rivers are ever emerald and mountains ever verdant,
The same way the sovereign's feelings day and night.
On the journey he sees the moon of heart-breaking hue,
At night he hears the bells' gut-twisting sounds.
The sky swirls and the sun spins when the throne heads back,
The Emperor tarries by her tomb, reluctant to leave.
In the clay at the foot of Horse Slope,
The beauty he abandoned is no longer to be seen.*

遂令天下父母心，
不重生男重生女。
骊宫高处入青云，
仙乐风飘处处闻。
缓歌慢舞凝丝竹，
尽日君王看不足。
渔阳鼙鼓动地来，
惊破霓裳羽衣曲。
九重宫阙烟尘生，
千乘万骑西南行。
翠华摇摇行复止，
西出都门百余里。
六军不发无奈和，
婉转蛾眉马前死。
花钿委地无人收，
翠翘金雀玉搔头。
君王掩面救不得，
回看血泪相和流。
黄埃散漫风萧索，
云栈萦纆登剑阁。
峨嵋山下少人行，
旌旗无光日色薄。
蜀江水碧蜀山青，
圣主朝朝暮暮情。
行宫见月伤心色，
夜雨闻铃断肠声。
天旋日转回龙驭，
到此踌躇不能去。
马嵬坡下泥土中，
不见玉颜空死处。

Facing each other, the sovereign and subjects all shed tears,
Heading eastward for the capital's entrance they let their horses gallop.
Ponds and gardens remain the same as before,
Lotuses still in waters and willows in the yard.
The lotus blossom resembles her face and the willow leaves her brows,
How could he help shedding tears when facing such a view?
It is now the day peach-blossom opens in spring breeze,
It is now the hour paulownias shed leaves in autumnal rain.
West Palace and South Court are full of autumn grasses,
Fallen leaves stain all the stone-steps and petals are no longer swept.
Court musicians have newly gained white hair,
Maids and eunuchs are all aged now.
Pondering pensively, as glow-worms fly in the nocturnal court,
Trimming a single lamp over 'n' over, he can never fall asleep.
Bell and drum strike the late hour when the night has just begun,
The Milky Way glimmers as the day is about to break.
Tiles in pair like mandarin-teals are chilled with frosty florets,
His feather-downie is cold at the absence of his partner.
The vastness between life and death spans several years,
Yet still her soul has never entered into his dream.
There is a necromancer, a native of Linqiong,
Who can reach souls and spirits with his steadfast sincerity.
Moved by the emperor's restless love-longings,
By the practice of his shamanism he searches assiduously for her.
Brushing clouds aside and riding the air he races like thunder 'n' lightning,
Ascending to Heaven and sinking into Earth he hunts everywhere.
Up to the blue firmament and down to the Yellow Fount,
Nowhere is she seen.

君臣相顾尽沾衣，
东望都门信马归。
归来池苑皆依旧，
太液芙蓉未央柳。
芙蓉如面柳如眉，
对此如何不泪垂？
春风桃李花开日，
秋雨梧桐叶落时。
西宫南内多秋草，
落叶满阶红不扫。
梨园弟子白发新，
椒房阿监青娥老。
夕殿萤飞思悄然，
孤灯挑尽未成眠。
迟迟钟鼓初长夜，
耿耿星河欲曙天。
鸳鸯瓦冷霜华重，
翡翠衾寒谁与共？
悠悠生死别经年，
魂魄不曾来入梦。
临邛道士鸿都客，
能以精诚致魂魄。
为感君王展转思，
遂教方士殷勤觅。
排云驭气奔如电，
升天入地求之遍。
上穷碧落下黄泉，
两处茫茫皆不见。

He learns of the fairy hill on the sea, which lies in the airy void,
Where delicate towers and pavilions emerge from colourful clouds,
Where is the residence of many dainty fairies and nymphs.
One of them is called Supreme Verity,
Her skin suggests snow and her face a flower.
He knocks at the door of the west wing in the golden tower,
The fairy maid reports to her about the imperial courier.
On hearing of the herald sent by the Emperor,
Her dreaming soul in the floral bed-curtains is perturbed.
She dresses hastily and pushes her pillow aside and stumbles to 'n' fro,
The meandering pearled curtains and silver screens open.
With her cloudy hair-bun somewhat tilted, she's just awoken,
Wearing untidy florets, she descends from the hall.
Her airy sleeves puff up lightly, as if
She were still dancing "Rainbow Skirt and Feather Garment".
Her jade face shows her loneliness and tears run in railings down,
Like a twig of pear blossom drenched in the spring rain.
Staring with love, she shows gratitude to the monarch:
"Both your face and voice become faint since the farewell.
Love in the Palace of Bright Sun has been broken off,
Time in Peng-lai Paradise has dragged by;
Looking down at the human world,
The Capital is not seen, but dust and mist;
Only the old tokens can convey my deep feelings,
This hairpin and jeweled case are to be delivered to you;
One pin of the pair and half of the case shall stay with me,
Both pins and case are divided between us;
If only our hearts are as firm as the gold,
We shall meet whether in heaven or in the world."