

11. THE USE OF LITERATURE

The use of literature

Lies in its conveyance of every truth.

It expands the horizon to make space infinite,

And serves as a bridge that spans a myriad years.

It maps all roads and paths for posterity,

And mirrors the images of worthy ancients,

That the tottering Edifices of the sage kings of antiquity may be
reared again,

And their admonishing voices, wind-borne since of yore, may resume
full expression.

No regions are too remote but it pervades,

No truth too subtle to be woven into its vast web.

Like mist and rain, it permeates and nourishes,

And manifests all the powers of transformation in which gods and
spirits share.

Virtue it makes endure and radiate on brass and stone,

And resound in an eternal stream of melodies ever renewed on
pipes and strings.

TRANSLATED BY SHIH-HSIANG CHEN

Tang Dynasty

618-907

Poets of a Generation: One

Wang Wei (699-759) and Li Po (699-762), two of the best-loved poets in all the long course of Chinese literature, were born in the same year; Tu Fu (712-770), whose name stands supreme, was their junior by thirteen years. The age of the T'ang emperor Hsüan-tsung (Ming-huang, the Illustrious) was the golden age of the shih, the common vessel of Chinese poetry which was shaped by these hands into an erudite and exquisite perfection.

Wang Wei is represented in this brief selection chiefly by an exchange of poems which he conducted with his friend P'ei Ti. If more of Wang's paintings had survived, they would have won fame to rival that of his verse. In painting and poetry alike he made more than a record or interpretation of nature: he achieved perhaps the closest union with the natural world that has ever been expressed. This sense of harmony, or even of dissolution of the self in nature emerges already from the short letter to his friend which here prefaces their exchange.

From the unearthly beauty of "On the Mountain" we descend, as sooner or later we must with Li Po, to the haze of an elegant drinking-bout. But it is a haze shot through with the gleams of a philosophy now epicurean, now Taoist in characteristic admixture. Something of the sophistication of the world from which wine opened a refuge is to be glimpsed in Li Po's precious begging-letter to a potential patron.

The translator of Tu Fu's "Autumn Meditation" sequence provides the following introductory note:

"Tu Fu wrote this sequence in 766 at K'uei-chou, a town adjoin-

ing and apparently no longer distinguished from Pai Ti (White Emperor City) on the Yangtze River, among mountains a little upstream from the gibbon-haunted Ch'ü-f'ang and Wu gorges, during his second autumn of exile in this region. ('The dewy chrysanthe-mums have 'opened twice, in tears of other days.') The eight poems, although not necessarily written at one time, show a definite continuity. The first three give impressions of K'uei-chou during twenty-four hours, from morning to morning. In these Tu Fu is already thinking of the capital Ch'ang-an far to the north; he imagines it beyond the Dipper in the night sky, and in bed thinks of night duty at the Executive Division (Shang-shu sheng), among maids burning incense and murals of ancient heroes. In the third poem the returning fishing boats and the swallows not yet driven south by the cold remind him of his isolation, of the political failures which have led to it, and of his more successful friends, whom he imagines at Wu-ling (place of five imperial mausolea) north of Ch'ang-an. The meditation now settles finally on Ch'ang-an, since 755 a 'chessboard' not only in appearance, with its grid of vertical and horizontal streets, but as the scene of a game won and lost in turn by loyalists, rebels and Tibetan invaders. The last four poems recall scenes from the time of Ch'ang-an's greatness and of Tu Fu's own brief glory in the office of 'Reminder' at court (757-58)."

The section ends with two of Tu Fu's passionate and outspoken protests against the frontier wars which in his lifetime seemed to yield place only to bloody rebellion. Tu Fu's poetry is often so entrusted with jewels of compressed esoteric allusion as to be well-nigh untranslatable; his war-poems, in contrast, are simple, direct and immediate of impact.

Wang Wei

Letter to the Bachelor of Arts P'ei Ti

[Shan chung yü P'ei hsiu ts'ai Ti shu]

Of late during the sacrificial month, the weather has been calm and clear, and I might easily have crossed the mountain. But I knew that you were conning the classics and did not dare disturb you. So I roamed about the mountain-side, rested at the Kan-p'ei Temple, dined with the mountain priests, and, after dinner, came home again. Going northwards, I crossed the Yüan-pa, over whose waters the unclouded moon shone with dazzling rim. When night was far advanced, I mounted Hua-tzu's Hill and saw the moonlight tossed up and thrown down by the jostling waves of Wang River. On the wintry mountain distant lights twinkled and vanished; in some deep lane beyond the forest a dog barked at the cold, with a cry as fierce as a wolf's. The sound of villagers grinding their corn at night filled the gaps between the slow chimes of a distant bell.

Now I am sitting alone. I listen, but cannot hear my grooms and servants move or speak. I think much of old days; how hand in hand, composing poems as we went, we walked down twisting paths to the banks of clear streams.

We must wait for spring to come: till the grasses sprout and the trees bloom. Then wandering together in the spring hills we shall see the trout leap lightly from the stream, the white gulls stretch their wings, the dew fall on the green moss. And in the morning we shall hear the cry of curlews in the barley-fields.

It is not long to wait. Shall you be with me then? Did I not know the natural subtlety of your intelligence, I would not dare address to you so remote an invitation. You will understand that a deep feeling dictates this course.

Written without disrespect by Wang Wei, a dweller in the mountains.

Wang Wei and Pei Ti

From "Poems of the River Wang"

[Wang *ch'uan chi*]

1. The Hill of Hua-Tzu

WANG: The birds fly away
 into infinite space:
 Over the whole mountain
 returns the splendour of autumn.
 Ascending and descending
 Hua-tzu hill,
 I feel
 unbounded bewilderment and lamentation.

P'EI: The sun sets,
 the wind rises among the pines.
 Returning home,
 there is a little dew upon the grass.
 The reflection of the clouds
 falls into the tracks of my shoes,
 The blue of the mountains
 touches my clothes.

2. The Deer Enclosure

WANG: On the lonely mountain
 I meet no one,
 I hear only the echo
 of human voices.
 At an angle the sun's rays
 enter the depths of the wood,

And shine
 upon the green moss.

P'EI: At the end of day
 the mountain looks cold.
 But a belated wanderer
 still passes on his way.
 He knows nothing
 of the life of the wood:
 Nothing remains
 but the tracks of the buck.

3. The Path of the Ash Trees

WANG: On the narrow path,
 sheltered by the ash trees,
 In the secrecy of their shade
 flourishes the green moss,
 Only swept
 when someone answers the gate,
 Fearing that the monk from the mountain
 has come to call.

P'EI: To the south of the gate,
 along by the ash trees,
 Is the path over the hillcrest,
 that leads to Lake Yi.
 When the autumn comes
 it rains much on the mountain;
 No one picks up
 the falling leaves.

4. The Pavilion of the Lake

WANG: Light the boat that carries me
 to meet the gentle guest,
 Who from a great distance
 is coming over the lake.

Then, on the terrace,
before a cup of wine,
On every side
the lotus flowers will open.

P'EI:

In front of the balcony,
as the expanse of water
fills with ripples,
The solitary moon
goes wandering without pause.
From the depth of the valley
the cries of the monkeys rise;
Borne by the wind
they reach me in my room.

WANG:

5. *The Stream at the House of the Luans*

Gusts of wind
in the autumn rain;
The water falls headlong,
it spills from the rocks in torrents.
The waves leap capriciously
one on the other in flight;
The startled white heron
comes down to earth again.

P'EI:

The voice of the stream
resounds to the farthest bay.
I walk along the shore
towards the southern ford.
Here and there on the water
ducks and egrets glide,
Always they return, impelled
to the proximity of men.

WANG:

6. *The Cove of the Wall of Meng*
My new house
is at the beginning of the wall of Meng,

Among old trees
and remains of decaying willows.
The other, after me,
who will he be?
Vain his grief
for this which was mine.

P'EI:

My new hut
is under the old wall:
Occasionally I go up
to the ancient enclosure.
There is nothing of the past now
about the old wall;
Men of today, uncaring,
come and go.

Wang Wei

Seeing Master Yüan Off on His Mission to Kucha

City on Wei
the morning rain
wet
on light dust

Around the inn
green willows
fresh

I summon you:
Drink one more cup
No old friends, my friend
When you start westward
for Yang Kuan

TRANSLATED BY C. H. KWÖCK AND VINCENT MC HUGH

To the Assistant Prefect Chang

In evening years given to quietude,
The world's worries no concern of mine,
For my own needs making no other plan
Than to unlearn, return to long-loved woods:
I loosen my robe before the breeze from pines,
My lute celebrates moonlight on mountain pass.
You ask what laws rule "failure" or "success" —
Songs of fishermen float to the still shore.

TRANSLATED BY CYRIL BIRCH

Li Po

On the Mountain: Question and Answer

You ask me:
Why do I live
on this green mountain?
I smile
No answer
My heart serene
On flowing water
peachblow
quietly going
far away

This is another earth
another sky
No likeness
to that human world below

Spring Thoughts

O grass of Yen
like green silk flowing
Green boughs low
on mulberries of Ch'in

All that time!
you've been thinking of home
and all that time!
my heart breaking
In my silk bedcurtain
spring wind

It does not know me
 slipping in? Why does it come

To Someone Far Away

When she was here
pretty darling flowers filled the hall
 Now she's gone
pretty darling left her bed behind

On her bed
 th'embroidered coverlet
 rolled up
 never slept in again

Three years to the day
 still keeps
 the scent of her

Fragrance never lost
pretty darling
 never came back
 Yellow leaves falling
 when I think of her
 white dew
 on green moss

Night Mooring at Cow's Creek: I Think of the Old Man

At Cow's Creek
 on Western River
 the night
 Sky still blue
 not a rag of cloud
 I go on deck
 to look at the bright moon

thinking of
 the great General Hsieh of old

I also
 can make poetry
 but that man's like
 will not be found again

In the morning
 The maple leaves
 we make sail and go
 fall as they will

TRANSLATED BY C. H. KWÖCK AND VINCENT MC HUGH

Visiting Han-tan: The Dancers at the Southern Pavilion

They sang to me and drummed, the boys of Yen and Chao,
 Lovely girls plucked the sounding string.
 Their painted cheeks shone like dazzling suns;
 The dancers' sleeves shook out like blossoming boughs.
 Bringing her wine I approached a handsome girl
 And made her sing me songs of Han-tan.
 Then lutes were played, and coiling away and away
 The tune fell earthward, dropping from the grey clouds.
 Where is the Prince of Chao, what has he left
 But an old castle-moat where tadpoles breed?
 Those three thousand knights that sat at his board,
 Is there one among them whose name is still known?
 Let us make merry, get something in our own day
 To set against the pity of ages still unborn.

To Yüan Tan-ch'iu¹

My friend is lodging high in the Eastern Range,
 Dearly loving the beauty of valleys and hills.
 At green spring he lies in the empty woods,

1. The "Friend Tan-ch'iu" (Taoist adept and friend of the poet's) of the fourth of the drinking songs below.

And is still asleep when the sun shines on high.
 A pine-tree wind dusts his sleeves and coat;
 A pebbly stream cleans his heart and ears.
 I envy you who far from strife and talk
 Are high-propped on a pillow of grey mist.

To His Old Friend Hsin

Long ago, among the flowers and willows,
 We sat drinking together at Ch'ang-an.
 The Five Barons and Seven Grandees were of our company,
 But when some wild stroke was afoot
 It was we who led it, yet boisterous though we were
 In the arts and graces of life we could hold our own
 With any dandy in the town—
 In the days when there was youth in your cheeks
 And I was still not old.
 We galloped to the brothels, cracking our gilded whips,
 We sent in our writings to the Palace of the Unicorn,
 Girls sang to us and danced hour by hour on tortoise-shell mats.
 We thought, you and I, that it would always be like this.
 How should we know the grass would stir and dust rise on the
 wind?
 Suddenly foreign horsemen were at the Hsien-ku Pass
 Just when the blossom at the Palace of Ch'in was opening on the
 sunny boughs.
 Now I, unhappy, am on my way to banishment at Yeh-lang,
 Wondering if a day will come when the Golden cock¹
 Will bring me pardon and return.

Fighting South of the Ramparts²

Last year we were fighting at the source of the Sang-kan;
 This year we are fighting on the Onion River road.
 We have washed our swords in the surf of Parthian seas;
 We have pastured our horses among the snows of the T'ien Shan.

1. Hoisted when an amnesty was proclaimed.

2. Li Po wrote this poem to an old tune, the original words of which, by

The King's armies have grown grey and old
 Fighting ten thousand leagues away from home.
 The Huns have no trade but battle and carnage;
 They have no fields or ploughlands,
 But only wastes where white bones lie among yellow sands.
 Where the house of Ch'in built the Great Wall that was to keep
 away the Tartars,

There, in its turn, the House of Han lit beacons of war.
 The beacons are always alight, fighting and marching never stop.
 Men die in the field, slashing sword to sword;
 The horses of the conquered neigh piteously to Heaven.
 Crows and hawks peck for human guts,
 Carry them in their beaks and hang them on the branches of with-
 ered trees.

Captains and soldiers are smeared on the bushes and grass;
 The general schemed in vain.
 Know therefore that the sword is a cursed thing
 Which the wise man uses only if he must.³

TRANSLATED BY ARTHUR WALEY

an anonymous writer of about the first century, run as follows:

They fought south of the ramparts,
 They died north of the wall.
 They died in the moors and were not buried.
 Their flesh was the food of crows.
 "Tell the crows we are not afraid:
 We have died in the moors and cannot be buried.
 Crows, how can our bodies escape you?"
 The waters flowed deep
 And the rushes in the pools were dark.
 The riders fought and were slain;
 Their horses wandered neighing.
 By the bridge there was a house:
 Was it south, was it north?
 The harvest was never gathered:
 How can we give you your offerings?
 You served your prince faithfully,
 Though all in vain.
 I think of you, faithful soldiers:
 Your service shall not be forgotten.
 For in the morning you went out to battle
 And at night you did not return.

3. Quotation from the *Tao te ching*.

Four Poems on Wine

1

Amidst the flowers
 a jug of wine—
 I pour alone
 lacking companionship,
 So raising the cup
 I invite the moon,
 Then turn to my shadow
 which makes three of us.
 Because the moon
 does not know how to drink
 My shadow merely
 follows my body.
 The moon has brought the shadow
 to keep me company a while,
 The practice of mirth
 should keep pace with spring.
 I start a song
 and the moon begins to reel,
 I rise and dance
 and the shadow moves grotesquely.
 While I'm still conscious
 let's rejoice with one another,
 After I'm drunk
 let each one go his way.
 Let us bind ourselves for ever
 for passionless journeyings.
 Let us swear to meet again
 far in the Milky Way.

2

If Heaven itself
 did not love wine,
 Then no Wine Star
 would shine in the sky.

And if Earth also
 did not love wine,
 Earth would have no such
 place as Wine Fountain.
 Have I not heard
 that pure wine makes a sage,
 And even muddy wine
 can make a man wise?
 If wise men and sages
 are already drinkers
 What is the use
 of seeking gods and fairies?
 With three cups
 I understand the great Way
 With one jar
 I am at one with Nature.
 Only, the perceptions
 that one has while drunk
 Cannot be transmitted
 after one is sober.

3

In the third month
 the city of Hsien-yang—
 Thousands of flowers
 at noon like brocade.
 Who is able
 in spring to be sad alone?
 Faced with this
 to drink is the shortest way
 Infinite things
 as well as short and long
 Alike have early been
 offered us by Creation.
 A single cup
 may rank with life and death,
 The myriad things
 are truly hard to fathom.

Once I am drunk
 losing Heaven and Earth,
 Unsteadily
 I go to my lonely pillow.
 Not to know
 that my self exists—
 Of all my joys
 This is the highest.

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM ACKER

4

Have you not seen
 How the Yellow River, which flows from heaven and hurries
 toward the sea, never turns back?
 Have you not seen
 How at the bright mirrors of high halls men mourn their
 white hairs,
 At dawn black silk, by evening changed to snow?
 While there is pleasure in life, enjoy it,
 And never let your gold cup face the moon empty!
 Heaven gave me my talents, they shall be used;
 A thousand in gold scattered and gone will all come back again.
 Boil the sheep, butcher the ox, make merry while there is time;
 We have never drunk at all till we drink three hundred cups.

Master Ts'en,
 Friend Tan-ch'iu,
 Here comes the wine, no standing cups!
 I have a song to sing you,
 Kindly turn your ears to me and listen.
 It is nothing to feast on jade to the sound of bells and drums.
 I ask only to be drunk for ever and never wake!
 They lie forgotten, the sages of old;
 Only the great drinkers have left us their names.
 In time gone by, when the Prince of Chen feasted in the hall of
 Peace and Joy,
 At ten thousand a quart he never stinted the revellers.
 Why must our host say he is short of money?

Send to the shop at once, keep the cups filled.
 My five-flower horse,
 My fur which cost a thousand,
 Call the boy, send him out to change them for good wine,
 And let me forget with you the sorrows of ten thousand ages!

TRANSLATED BY A. C. GRAHAM

Letter to Han Ching-chou

[Yü Han Ching-chou shu]

In the most brilliant society in the empire, I have heard it said that the highest rank is not worth as much as acquaintance with Governor Han. How have you brought men to such a pitch of admiration? Has it not been by acting as did the Duke of Chou, who thrice spat out a half-chewed mouthful of food as he left the table to answer the door and who three times caught up his dripping hair and left the washbasin to meet a caller—and thus, do not you too have the heroes of the empire come running to serve under you? Once they mount your dragon gate, their renown and worth are multiplied tenfold. Hence the coiled-dragon, retired-phoenix gentlemen all wish to have their fame from you and have your excellency establish their value. Your excellency is not arrogant by reason of wealth and rank, nor do you disregard those who are poor and humble. Mao Sui stood out among three thousand retainers as an awl sticks out through a cloth bag; if you will give me the chance to show my abilities, then I shall be a Mao Sui among your followers.

I am a commoner from Lung-hsi. I have been a vagabond through Ch'u and Han. At fifteen, I was fond of swordplay, and went around visiting often the feudal lords. At thirty, I had perfected my literary style and was in touch with the Prime Minister. Although I am not a full six feet in height, still in my heart there is the courage of ten thousand men, and every prince, duke and nobleman will vouch for my moral rectitude. Such is my character: would I dare not expose it entire before your excellency?

Your excellency writes like an angel; your pen plumbs creation and change; your virtuous conduct moves Heaven and Earth; your learning embraces the human and the divine. I hope you will be

willing to open your heart and your countenance to me and will not break off our interview because I do not bow deeply enough.

Certainly if you were to receive me with a great banquet and give me free rein in refined conversation, I would ask that you try me, whether I could not dash off ten thousand words while you wait. The whole world considers your excellency to be the judge of writers and the final arbiter in literature. Once appraised and approved by you, a man's worth is recognized. So, on this occasion your excellency surely will not grudge me the square foot of ground I occupy before you, but will rather give me reason to open wide my eyes and blow out my breath, exalting myself to the blue skies. When Shan T'ao' became governor of Chi-chou, he sought out and brought to light more than thirty persons, some of whom became *ssu-chung* and *shang-shu*. Your excellency himself has recommended several men, some of whom you recognized for their abilities, and some you rewarded for their purity. Whenever I see one of them, sensible of benefits received, examining himself, or through a sense of loyal duty, striving with might and main, I am profoundly moved and realize that your excellency has succeeded in inspiring the worthy men of the country with your own ardent spirit.

It is for this reason that instead of turning to someone else, I put myself at the service of the country's great man. If in time of stress or difficulty you should have need of me, I am at your disposal. Since not every man is a Yao or a Shun, and no one is perfect, how can I be complacent about the worth of my advice? But when it comes to literary work, I have assembled some scrolls with which I would wish to soil your sight and sully your hearing, though I fear my minuscule talent of writing poetry is unworthy of attention from such a great man as yourself. If you would deign to look over this wastepaper, I will ask you for pen and paper and a scribe therewith; afterwards I could retire and sweep out an empty room and have copies made of my work, which I would offer to you, that it might have the more value by being appreciated by a connoisseur. I hope you will condescend to give me a fair share of your encouragement and praise. Only your excellency can arrange this matter.

TRANSLATED BY J. R. HIGHTOWER

1. Shan T'ao: see above, p. 162.

Tu Fu

Autumn Meditation

[*Ch'iu hsing*].

1

Gems of dew wilt and wound the maple trees in the wood:
From Wu mountains, from Wu gorges, the air blows desolate.
The waves between the river-banks merge in the seething sky,
Clouds in the wind above the passes meet their shadows on the ground.

Clustered chrysanthemums have opened twice, in tears of other days;

The forlorn boat, once and for all, tethers my homeward thoughts.
In the houses winter clothes speed scissors and ruler;
The washing-blocks pound, faster each evening, in Pai Ti high on the hill.

2

On the solitary walls of K'uei-chou the sunset rays slant,
Each night guided by the Dipper I gaze towards the capital.
It is true then that tears start when we hear the gibbon cry thrice;
Useless my mission adrift on the raft which came by this eighth month.¹

1. The cries of gibbons in the gorges downstream remind Tu Fu of the fisherman's song:

Of the three gorges east of Pa the Wu gorge is longest,
When I hear the gibbon cry thrice the tears wet my clothes.

The moonlit river running straight to the horizon suggests the legend of a fisherman who saw a raft floating out to sea every year in the eighth month (mid-autumn), mounted it, and was carried to the Milky Way. Tu Fu sees himself as drifting too far from home ever to return.

Fumes of the censers by the pictures in the ministry elude my
sickbed pillow,
The whitewashed parapets of turrets against the hills dull the
mournful bugles.

Look! On the wall, the moon in the ivy

Already, by the shores of the isle, lights the blossoms on the reeds.

3

The thousand houses, the circling mountains, are quiet in the
morning light;

Day by day in the house by the river I sit in the blue of the hills.

Two nights gone the fisher boats once more come bobbing on
the waves,

Belated swallows in cooling autumn still flutter to and fro.

K'uang Heng writing state papers, which earned me no credit,
Liu Hsiang editing classics, my hopes elsewhere . . .³

Yet many of my school friends have risen in the world.

By the Five Tombs in light cloaks they ride their sleek horses.

4

Well said, Ch'ang-an looks like a chessboard—

Won and lost for a hundred years, sad beyond all telling.

The mansions of princes and nobles all have new lords,

And another generation wears the caps and robes of office.

Due north on the mountain passes the gongs and drums shake,
To the chariots and horses campaigning in the west the winged
dispatches hasten.

While the fish and dragons fall asleep and the autumn river
turns cold

My native country, untroubled times, are always in my thoughts.

5

The gate of P'eng-lai Palace faces the southern hills,

Dew collects on the bronze stems high in the Misty River.

2. Tu Fu as "Reminder" at the capital (757-58) lost favour by writing
critical memorials, and later he resigned his post as Commissioner of Educa-
tion at Hua-chou (758-59). He contrasts himself with K'uang Heng and Liu
Hsiang, both of the last century B.C., successful respectively as statesman and
editor of ancient documents.

Behold in the west on Jasper Lake the Queen Mother descend,
Approaching from the east the purple haze fills the Han-ku pass.³
The clouds roll back, the pheasant-tail screens open before
the throne:

Scales ringed by the sun on dragon robes! I have seen the
majestic face.

I lay down once by the long river, wake left behind by the years,
Who so many times answered the roll of court by the blue
chain-patterned door.

6

From the mouth of Ch'ü-t'ang gorges here to the side of Crooked
River there

For ten thousand miles of mist and wind the touch of pallid autumn.
Through the walled passage from Sepal Hall the royal
splendour coursed,

To the little park Hibiscus Blossom the griefs of the frontier came.
Pearl blinds and embellished pillars closed in the yellow cranes,
Embroidered cables and ivory masts startled the white seagulls.

Look back and pity the singing, dancing land!

Ch'in from most ancient times was the seat of princes.

7

K'un-ming Pool was the Han time's monument,

The banners of Emperor Wu are here before my eyes.

Vega threads her loom in vain by night under the moon

And the great stone fish's plated scales veer in the autumn wind.⁴

The waves toss a zizania seed, over sunken clouds as black:

3. Tu Fu refers variously to the P'eng-lai Palace in Ch'ang-an, named
after one of the fairy islands in the Eastern sea; the copper pans raised on
pillars which the Emperor Wu (140-87 B.C.) made to collect dew for the elixir;
the Misty River is the empyrean; the Western Queen Mother (Hsi-wang-mu)
who banqueted King Mu (1001-947 B.C.) at Jasper Lake in her country far to
the west, an incident which the poet fuses with her later descent from the sky
to teach the arts of immortality to the Emperor Wu; the philosopher Lao Tzu
coming through the passes preceded by a purple cloud on his final journey
to the west.

4. K'un-ming Pool near Ch'ang-an was made by the Emperor Wu for
naval exercises. Near it was a statue of the Weaver girl (the star Vega), and
in it a stone whale with movable fins and tail.

Dew on the calyx chills the lotus, red with dropped pollen.
 —Over the pass, all the way to the sky, a path for none but the birds.
 On river and lakes, to the ends of the earth, a single old fisherman.

8

The Kun-wu road by Yü-su River ran its meandering course,
 The shadow of Purple Turret Peak fell into Lake Mei-p'i.
 Grains from the fragrant rice-stalks, pecked and dropped by
 the parrots:

On the green *wu-f'ung* tree branches which the perching
 phoenix aged.

Beautiful girls gathered kingfisher feathers for spring gifts:
 Together in the boat, a troop of immortals, we drifted late into
 the evening . . .

This brush of many colours once forced the elements.
 Chanting, gazing, in anguish my white head droops.

Looking Out Over the Plains

Clear autumn, sight has no bounds;
 High in the distance piling shadows rise.
 The farthest waters merge in the sky unsullied;
 A neglected town hides deep in mist.
 Sparse leaves, which the wind still sheds,
 Far hills, where the sun sinks down.
 How late the solitary crane returns!
 But the twilight crows already fill the forest.

TRANSLATED BY A. C. GRAHAM

Thoughts on a Night Journey

Reeds by the bank bending, stirred by the breeze,
 High-masted boat advancing alone in the night,
 Stars drawn low by the vastness of the plain,
 The moon rushing forward in the river's flow.

How should I look for fame to what I have written?
 In age and sickness, how continue to serve?
 Wandering, drifting, what can I take for likeness?
 —A gull that wheels alone between earth and sky.

TRANSLATED BY CYRIL BIRCH

Recruiting Officer at Shih-hao Village

[*Shih hao li*]

Came at dusk into Shih-hao village
 Draft officer there

rounding up people by night

Old man

climbed over the wall

escaped

Old woman came out the door

staring

Officer roared

Angry as a bull!

Old woman cried
Enough to twist your bowels!

I heard her

She went up and spoke to him:

"I had three sons

on the border at Yeh

The first one

sent me a letter

My other two sons

a while back

killed in battle

Survivors

lucky to be alive at all

The dead

gone for good

There are no more men in this house

only
 my grandson at the breast
 His mother
 stayed here to look after him,
 in and out of the house
 without a decent
 skirt on her legs
 I'm an old woman
 weak in the back
 but please! sir
 let me follow you
 when you return tonight
 hurrying to meet
 the draft at Ho-yang
 I'll be in time to cook
 a morning meal
 for the soldiers"
 Night late
 talk dwindled away
 I seemed to hear
 low sobbing
 At dawn
 resumed my journey
 The old man alone
 when I said goodbye to him.

TRANSLATED BY C. H. KWÖCK AND VINCENT MC HUGH

A Song of War Chariots

[*Ping ch'e hsing*]

The war-chariots rattle,
 The war-horses whinny.
 Each man of you has a bow and a quiver at his belt.
 Father, mother, son, wife, stare at you going,
 Till dust shall have buried the bridge beyond Ch'ang-an.
 They run with you, crying, they tug at your sleeves,

And the sound of their sorrow goes up to the clouds;
 And every time a bystander asks you a question,
 You can only say to him that you have to go.
 . . . We remember others at fifteen sent north to guard the river
 And at forty sent west to cultivate the camp-farms.
 The mayor wound their turbans for them when they started out.
 With their turbaned hair white now, they are still at the border,
 At the border where the blood of men spills like the sea—
 And still the heart of Emperor Wu is beating for war.
 . . . Do you know that, east of China's mountains, in two
 hundred districts
 And in thousands of villages, nothing grows but weeds,
 And though strong women have bent to the ploughing,
 East and west the furrows all are broken down?
 . . . Men of China are able to face the stiffest battle,
 But their officers drive them like chickens and dogs.
 Whatever is asked of them,
 Dare they complain?
 For example, this winter
 Held west of the gate,
 Challenged for taxes,
 How could they pay?
 . . . We have learned that to have a son is bad luck—
 It is very much better to have a daughter
 Who can marry and live in the house of a neighbour,
 While under the sod we bury our boys.
 . . . Go to the Blue Sea, look along the shore
 At all the old white bones forsaken—
 New ghosts are wailing there now with the old,
 Loudest in the dark sky of a stormy day.

TRANSLATED BY WITTER BYNNER