THE SOUTH COUNTRY

(Part of South-east China along the southern side of the Yangtze River)

I

So all the world praises the South Country to me:
‘It best befits you a wanderer there to spend your life.
The waters in spring look bluer than the skies,
And rains will lull you to sleep in the painted boat.

The wine-shop maids are as charming as the moon,
Their glowing arms like frozen frost and drifted snow.
Do not go home before you are old,
Lest you should break your heart.’

II

Now I recall the joys of the South Country:
When I was young and my spring attire was light,
On horseback I roamed by the arched bridge,
And on the terraces red sleeves beckoned at me;

Behind the emerald screen and the gold-knockered doors,
I got drunk and slept amid the thick-growing flowers of love.
Were I to see those flowers once again,
Even though my hair grew white, I swear, I would never come home.

WEI CHUANG
FORMERANCE

From the sun-touched hills the mists begin to withdraw,
In the clearing sky the scattered stars look fewer;
The sinking moon still shines on the faces of the lovers,
Who are shedding tears at parting in the early morning.

Much has been said,
Yet we have not come to the end of our feelings;
Looking back she says again:
‘If you remember my silken skirt of green,
Have tender regard for the sweet grass wherever you go.’

NIU HSI-CHI
HERBIRTHDAY

A feast being spread in spring-time,
With a cup of green wine and a joyous song,
I repeat my salutation and offer my three wishes:
First, may you have a long life;
Second, may I have good health;
Third, may we live as the swallows on the beam,
Happily together all the year round.

FENG YEN-CHI
THE FISHERMAN'S SONG

The spray of waves, as on purpose, makes a thousand drifts of snow,
The flowering peach-trees in silence form a regiment of spring.
A bottle of wine,
A fishing rod—
How many men upon earth are as happy as I?

A light oar in the spring breeze, a leaf-like boat;
A silken line, a slender hook.
The eyot is spread with flowers,
The goblet filled with wine.
In the wide world of waters liberty is mine.

PRINCE LI YÜ


C O U R T L I F E

Just after the evening toilet the snow-white flesh shines;
In the Spring Hall the royal maids stand arrayed.
The music of reeds and pipes rings out to the horizon,
While the Song of the Rainbow Skirts is played over again.

On the wind, who is scattering perfumed powder?
I beat tune on the balustrade, drunk and overcome with joy.
On my return make not the candles shine with their red flames;
For I go to roam on horseback in the bright moonlight.

Prince Li Yü
THE T R Y S T

The flowers bright, the moon dim, and a light mist eddying about—
Tonight is meant for me to go to my love.
Off with my stockings, I walk down the fragrant steps,
With my gold-lined slippers in hand.

At the south side of the Painted Hall we meet;
I fall trembling in his arms and say:
‘Because it was so hard to come to you,
Let me have your very best caress.’

Prince Li Yü
PAST AND PRESENT

I

The flowering trees have lost their spring hues,
All too soon!
It can’t be helped that it rains fast in the morning and blows
hard in the evening.

Tears on Her rosy cheeks
Entreat me to stay and get drunk—
Can ever this happen again?
It is destined that life be always full of regret and waters
for ever flow towards the sea.

II

In silence I go alone up to the Western Chamber,
Above which hangs the sickle-shaped moon;
In the deep, lonely court of paulownia trees is gaoled the
chilly autumn.

Cut it, yet unsevered,
Order it, the more tangled—
Such is parting-sorrow,
Which dwells in my heart, too subtle a feeling to tell.

Prince Li Yu
Separation

Since my departure, spring is half gone,
Every sight is heart-rending to me.
Below the steps the plum-blossoms fall white like snow;
When brushed away, they cover me over again.

The wild-geese come with no message at all;
Remote is my home, which even dreams can scarcely reach.
The sorrow of separation is like the grass of spring;
The further you travel, the more it grows.

Prince Li Yü
A LOVE SONG

Her hair is a mass of cloud,
Her teeth are strings of pearls;
In a flowing gown and a light skirt of gauze,
Softly she knits her dark-blue brows.

The autumn wind blows harsh,
To its accompaniment falls the rain,
Beyond the windows are several plantain-trees,—
Oh, how can she bear this weary night!

Prince Li Yü
REGRETS

I

BEYOND the curtain the rain drizzles;
Spring is declining.
My silken coverlet is too thin to stand the chill of the
morning watch.
In a dream I forgot that I was in a strange land,
And indulged myself in merry-making.

Alone in the twilight I lean over the balcony;
Far off lies my native land,
Which it is easy to part from, but hard to see again.
Flowing waters and faded flowers are gone for ever,
As far apart as heaven is from earth.

II

The thought of the past brings me only grieves,
Which will not be banished before my present vision:
The autumn wind sweeps through the court-yard and moss
grows up the steps.
The pearl screen hangs free and unrolled,—
All day long no one has called on me.

My golden sword has been buried deep,
My valour sunken among chaff and weeds.
In the evening cool and serene the moon spreads her
radiance,
Reminding me that the shadows of the crystal domes and
marble halls
Fall blankly upon the River Ch’in-huai.

PRINCE LI YÜ

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