

BEAUTY YU

Li Yu

When will the spring flower
and autumn moon end? So
much to recollect! On the little
tower, last night, the east wind
blew again. Unbearable to
look homeward in the
moonlight. Carved railings,
jade steps, should still be
there, only the rosy faces fade!
Asking: How much sorrow
can one have? Just like a river
of spring water flowing east.

Li Yu (937-978). The last emperor of
the South Tang Dynasty. Captured by
the Sung conquerors and imprisoned
in the North, he wrote nostalgic
poems, including Beauty Yu,
reminiscing of his lost kingdom in the
South.

Beauty Yu. A tune title, but Yu is also
the name of an ancient beauty.

Carved...fade. The poet is imagining
what's happening in his old court.

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虞美人

李煜

春花秋月何時了 往事知多少
小樓昨夜又東風 明中
故國不堪回首月 只是朱顏改
雕欄玉砌應猶在 問君能有幾多愁
恰似一江春水向東流

From SHE: A Radical
Roads of Chinese Poetry

Yuxue Huant

NY: Roof Books
1997

[MORE EXPLANATIONS]

2. 春 or 𡇗 (spring). 艹 is grass. 屯 is the pronunciation of the entire word /chun/. 艹 is sun. Grass grows in the spring, thus the association of the word "spring" with grass.

2. 時 (time). The left component is "sun." This character also appears in a famous Confucian saying: 學而時習之不亦說乎 (Is it not pleasant to learn with a constant perseverance and application?). Ezra Pound, using his "etymosinological" interpretation, translated this sentence as: "To study with the white wings of time passing/is not that our delight" (*Pisan Cantos*: 74/464-5). Achilles Fang, who once worked closely with Pound and helped the latter's Chinese, explained in his 1958 Harvard Ph.D. dissertation *Materials for the Study of Pound's Cantos*:

Here "with the white wings of time passing" is strictly Poundian "etymosinological" interpretation of 時習; he took the second ideogram as composed of 羽 (wings) and 白 (white), but the latter component appears in the seal-script as 自. (The composite ideogram could then be interpreted as to "use one's 自 own wings," i.e., "young birds learning to fly," hence "to practise; be familiar with custom," -- Bernhard Karlgren, *Analytic Dictionary of*

Chinese and Sino-Japanese, No. 781; "習 is the rapid and

frequent motion of the wings of a bird in flying, used for 'to repeat, 'to practise,'" -- Legge's footnote.) The word 時 "time" cannot here be considered as anything but a temporal adverb modifying the verb 習.

The misinterpreted character, 習, also appeared in Robert Duncan's "Effort," a long poem which was lost and then recovered thirty years later among his papers:

but: pleasant to learn

羽

this sign
"the rapid and frequent
motion of wings" a bird
learning to fly;
an effort

"of how to enter Heaven?"

The mistakenly stroked Chinese character, among others was "in the manner of Pound but not taken from *The Cantos*."

3. 多少 (many few, i.e. how many, or, how much). It belongs to a group of Chinese words which use two opposite terms to indicate an abstract concept, such as size ("large small"), length ("long short"), weight ("heavy light"). Florence Ayscough, who collaborated with Amy Lowell on *Flower Tablets: Poems from the Chinese*, made an interesting comment on this linguistic phenomenon:

China is a land of counter-balance. Its people think in terms of compensation, and its philosophy is founded on a belief in the efficacious interaction of two essences which are called Yang and Yin.... The idiomatic speech of everyday life is full of expressions which betray this love of counterpoise. An inquiry is made about size, and the inquirer asks how 'large small' a thing may be -- if length is in question the 'long short' is referred to, and weight is described as 'heavy light.' In writing the fateful letter which decided me to send a cable asking my little dog Yo Fei, whom I had left at the Grass Hut, in Shanghai, be shipped to me in Canada, Mr. Cultivator-of-Bamboo expressed himself in the following words: 'I have been to the Grass Hut, and I have seen your little Yo Fei. You do not know *how many* few are his unwillingness. He *anything, everything* does not like.'

Thus counterpoise and balance are perhaps the most typical of all Chinese characteristics....

5. 首 or 鬚 (head). The lower part is a head; the upper is hair.

回首 literally means "turning back the head," or "look back."

6. 雕 (carve). Originally it is a name of a bird, Diao (vulture). The right component, 隹 is a hieroglyphic bird; the left, 周 means "use mouth."

A vulture uses its beak; hence "carve."

9. 向 or 向 (toward). A house with its window open "toward" north.

9. 水 or 流 (water). The other two characters in this last line, 江 (river), and 流 (flow), also use the radical 氵 (water).

RADICAL TRANSLATION]

虞美人

[Title] Yu Lamb-Beauty Man

春花秋月何時了

grass-sun-spring grass-flower plant-dry-autumn moon man-what
sun-time end

往事知多少

footstep-past matter mouth-know many few

小樓昨夜又東風

small wood-tower sun-last moon-night again sun-tree-east worm-
wind

故國不堪回首月明中

old country not earth-bearable turn-back head-hair moon sun-
moon-bright middle

雕欄玉砌應猶在

vulture-carve wood-railing jade stone-earth-knife-cut heart-shoulder-
dog-still there

只是朱顏改

one-mouth-only sun-straight-is red head-face change

問君能有幾多愁

mouth-ask mouth-respect you can hand-snatch-from-moon-have h
much autumn-heart-sorrow

恰似一江春水向東流

heart-just man-like one water-river grass-sun-spring water wind
open-toward sun-tree-east water-flow

[DIAGNOSTIC TRANSLATION]

SPRING SCENE

Tu Fu

What's in English:

What's in Chinese:

the	羊人	(lamb)
much (as different from "many")	多	(man)
blew ("blow")	吹	(grass)
-able (unbearable)	日	(sun)
-ward (homeward)	禾	(plant)
to (as in "to recollect," "to vision")	火	(fire)
-ed (carved)	月	(moon)
-s (railings, steps, faces)	口	(footstep)
-ing (railings, asking, flowing)	木	(mouth)
-y (rosy)	虫	(wood)
a	土	(worm)
	首	(earth)
	中	(head)
	佳	(middle)
	門	(bird)
	石	(door)
	刀	(stone)
	心	(knife)
	一	(heart)
	水	(one)
	何	(water)
		(toward)

Country ruined, mountains

and rivers remain

City springs, so deep in

weeds and woods

Feeling times, tears

of flowers sprinkle

Hating separation, hearts

of birds startle

Beacon fires burn for

three moons

A home-letter worth

thousands of gold

White hair scratched

gets scantier

Can hardly hold

a pin in hat

Tu Fu (712-70). With Li Po, considered as one of the greatest Chinese poets of all time.

City springs. Or "City's spring." In the original, "spring" could be a verb, corresponding to "ruined," o noun.

Feeling... Hating.... The implied subject(s) could be either flowers/birds or the poetic "I."
Ambiguity is used to render empath

Three moons. Three months.

"Three" in fact indicates "many."

A pin in hat. Ancient Chinese hair style has a top-knot on head, covered by a hat pinned to the knot.

春 望

杜甫

國破山河在

城春草木深

感時花鳥淚

恨別鳥驚心

烽火連三月

家書抵萬金

白頭搔更短

渾欲不勝簪