

Dr. Nicolai Volland

CHNS120

Chinese Literature

Week 03-02

Poetry: Female Voices

Text 1

From: Stephen Owen (trans. and ed.). *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 580.

Li Qing-zhao (1084–ca. 1151)

Although the surviving corpus of lyrics that can confidently be attributed to her is rather small, Li Qing-zhao's work has a distinct quality all its own. Song lyric often aspired to join technical mastery and an ease that gives the impression of natural speech. Some of Li Qing-zhao's longer songs achieve precisely this quality. Li Qing-zhao was also one of the earliest theorists of the song lyric, and her "Discourse on Lyric" (*Ci-lun*) asserts the difference of the genre from classical poetry (*shi*).

Like a Dream (*Ru meng ling*)

I will always recall that day at dusk,
the pavilion by the creek,
and I was so drunk I couldn't tell
the way home. My mood left me,
it was late when I turned back in my boat
and I strayed deep among lotuses—
how to get through?
how to get through?
and I startled to flight a whole shoal
of egrets and gulls.

SHU TING (1952–) Shu Ting (Gong Peiyu)'s junior high school education was disrupted and she was sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. In the early 1970s, she supported herself with a number of odd jobs, including assignments in textile and lightbulb factories. She is now a member of the Chinese Writers Association and has traveled extensively in Europe and the United States.

ASSEMBLY LINE

On the assembly line of Time
Nights huddle together
We come down from the factory assembly lines
And join the assembly line going home

Overhead
An assembly line of stars trails across the sky
By our side
A young tree looks dazed on its assembly line

The stars must be tired
Thousands of years have passed
Their journey never changes
The young trees are ill
Dust and monotony deprive them
Of grain and color
I can feel it all
Because we beat to the same rhythm

But strangely
The only thing I do not feel
Is my own existence
As though the woods and stars
Maybe out of habit
Maybe out of sorrow
No longer have the strength to care
About a destiny they cannot alter

1980

Translated by Eva Hung

Text 2

From: Joseph S.M. Lau,
Howard Goldblatt (trans. &
eds.). *The Columbia Anthology
of Modern Chinese Literature*
(New York: Columbia
University Press, 2007),
xxxvii, 580-81.

XIA YU (HSIA YÜ, 1956–) Xia Yu was born in Taiwan, but now divides her time between Paris and Taipei. She received a B.A. in film and drama from National Arts College, and has worked in television and theater. She makes a living as a lyricist and translator, and is the author of four volumes of poetry.

L'EMPIRE À LA FIN DE LA DÉCADENCE

For Qiu Jin, Qing dynasty revolutionary martyr

A waltz not without its possibilities of mutual destruction
Like your revolution

I discover I've appeared in the guise of a man
Like you

Dancing toward the nadir
Nadir *ad infinitum*

To the endless verge of toppling
The empire at the end of its decadence

But I am merely an androgyne
In a gloomy *salon*

Releasing my splendor
My clamorous masculinity

1991

Translated by Steve Bradbury

Text 3

From: Lau & Goldblatt,
Columbia Anthology, xl, 600.