

Translations by John Turner

These new translations of some familiar Chinese poems – the shih (詩) of Li Po, Meng Hao-jan, Tu Mu and Shih Chao of the T'ang Dynasty; and the ts'u (詞) of Hsin Ch'i-chi and Yen Shu of Sung, and Nalan Hsingteh of Ch'ing – are from the hand of the late Rev. John Turner, S.J. His version of T'ao Yuan-ming's "Peach-Blossom Fountain" appears on page 63-65. A collection of Fr. Turner's translations, tentatively titled *Sea-Hawks Are Calling and 120 Other Poems*, is being edited by Rev. J. Deeney, S.J. It is scheduled for publication late this year.

DAWN IN SPRING

How suddenly the morning comes in Spring!
On every side you hear the sweet birds sing.
Last night amidst the storm—ah, who can tell.
With wind and rain, how many a blossom fell?

Meng Hao-jan

春
眠
不
覺
曉
孟
浩
然
處
處
聞
啼
鳥
夜
來
風
雨
聲
花
落
知
多
少

春
曉

LOVE—LONGING

The North Country grasses now
Slender beryl threads appear:
Mulberries in the Midlands here
Green their branches bow.

While my lord still meditates
Whether to return or no,
Still thy pretty playfellow
Broken-hearted waits.

O spring-time winds, unknown to me ye be.
Who bade you pierce my silken canopy?

Li Po

燕
草
如
碧
絲
李
白
秦
桑
低
綠
枝
當
君
懷
歸
日
是
妾
斷
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何
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春
思

Rev. John Turner, S.J. (1909-1971)

John Turner, scholar, poet and Jesuit priest, was born in Dublin in 1909. At the end of his schooldays in Belvedere College, Dublin, he became a Jesuit, continuing his education in various Jesuit houses of study and in University College, Dublin, where he read classics. He spent the years 1935 to 1938 in Hong Kong, and he started there that intense study of Chinese language and literature that was to fill his life till his death two years ago. From 1946 onward Hong Kong was his permanent home, though he spent a couple of years (1947-49) lecturing on English in Chung Shan University, Canton, and sought in vain for relief from ever more crippling arthritis in his native country.

He was dominated by two rarely united passions, an austere passion for pure scholarship and an exuberant passion for artistic perfection — in his youth he almost decided to give his life to painting. Scholarship — classics, the Irish language, and then Chinese — absorbed him in early manhood. He wrote some satirical verse for the amusement of his companions, but his serious poetry was almost all religious verse, written for himself alone and barely surviving in fading scribbles on odd scraps of paper.

In the 1950's, at the urging of some friends, he took up the task of translating a representative collection of Chinese poems of all periods, thus giving vent to his poetic urge without sacrificing his cherished scholarship.

Perfectionist as he was, he kept on repolishing his translations, even in his last years when his arthritic fingers could scarcely hold a pen. Those who knew him best took it for granted publication would have to be posthumous. They proved right. If he had lived to be a hundred, he would have gone on to the end, perfecting his translations and adding to them, never satisfied.

He died suddenly in 1971, leaving a vast mass of paper — notes for a dictionary, critical jottings, lists of phrases, scraps of original poems and, scattered here and there, his translations, all too often without any indication of the originals.

His editors have had to labour long and hard to put together the collection now being prepared for publication. It was a labour of love and, they believe, work worth doing.

By REV. A. BIRMINGHAM, S.J.
Editor, Sunday Examiner, Hong Kong.

SNOW AT MORNING

Out on the moors it snowed all night;
And yet my nag must go.
No sign of human life in sight,
One hears the first cock crow.

Shih Chao

早行遇雪
石召
荒郊昨夜雪
羸馬又須行
四顧無人跡
鷄鳴第一聲

A SAD FAREWELL

Who loves too much, they think
 No love to know.
 Still, as farewell I drink,
 No smile I show.
 The candle, as in pity of
 This sad leave-taking,
 Sheds its proxy tears of love
 Until day's breaking.

Tu Mu

多情卻似總無情
 惟覺樽前笑不成
 蠟燭有心還惜別
 替人垂淚到天明

贈別

杜牧

MUTABILITY

A new song, and another cup of wine!
 An air of yesteryear is haunting still
 This ancient lodge. But will that twilight day
 That's sinking in the West come back again?

And ineluctably the blossoms fall.
 And swallows, like the ones I knew, return.
 And mournfully I tread the scented ways
 Of this small pleasure-garden, to and fro.

Yen Shu

一曲新詞酒一杯
 去年天氣舊亭台
 夕陽西下幾時回
 無可奈何花落去
 似曾相識燕歸來
 小園香徑獨徘徊

浣溪紗

晏殊

ENLIGHTENMENT

In youth, ere Grief to me was known
 I loved to climb on high, I loved to climb on high:
 In many a laboured lay
 Grief would I there portray.

But now, with Grief familiar grown,
 Slower to speak am I, slower to speak am I.
 At most, I pause and say,
 "What a fine autumn day!"

Hsin Ch'i-Chi

醜奴兒 辛棄疾

少年不識愁滋味愛上層樓
 愛上層樓爲賦新詞強說愁
 而今識盡愁滋味欲說還休
 欲說還休卻道天涼好個秋

TO THE TUNE OF "LOVE-LONGING"

By weary turn
Of river and bourn
On unto Elm Pass yonder must I go,
Where through the dark a thousand tent-lights glow.
The long night-watches round,
In roar of wind and snow
Dreams that would wander homeward all are drowned.
—At home is no such sound.

Nalan Hsingteh

長相思

納蘭性德

山一程水一程身向榆關那畔行

夜深千帳燈

風一更雪一更聒碎鄉心夢不成

故園無此聲