

Three Poems by Ts'ao Chih

Translated by Mok Wing-yin

Ts'ao Chih (A.D. 192-232), the talented and unhappy son of Ts'ao Ts'ao and a representative poet of the Han-Wei transitional period known as "Chien-an", commands a host of admirers in the English language. Miss Mok Wing-yin has made a detailed study of this brilliant exponent of the five-word verse form for her Master of Philosophy thesis at the University of Hong Kong. For this study she translated all of Ts'ao Chih's 60-odd extant poems in both the ku-shih (古詩) and yueh-fu (樂府) styles. We present here the following three as typical of the poet's beautiful and sentient verses.

THE PEERLESS BEAUTY

The peerless beauty, so lovely and yet so demure,
Is picking mulberry leaves by the forked road.
The tender twigs swing lightly in their abundance,
And gently fly the falling leaves, hither and thither.
Her sleeve is rolled up, and her fair hand
Is twined with golden bracelets round the wrist,
Her hair is adorned with pins of golden birds,
And a jade-green pendant hangs from her waist.
She is wrapt up in strings of gleaming pearls
Mixed with coral and large green beads.
The long embroidered gown flutters
As her skirt sways back and forth with the wind.
Where her eyes go, a stream of light follows,
And as she breathes, the air is filled with the scent of orchids,
The passers-by stop to look at her, and
Those who are taking a rest forget their meals.
"Where does she live? Which part of town?"
In a house near the southern gate of the city,
The green mansion overlooking the main road;
It has tall, big gates, and double bolts too.
Ah, her face is like the glory of the morning sun,
Who could fail to find attraction in such beauty?
But where are the match-makers, what do they do?
She's not yet betrothed, I can see no jade or silk.
The lovely lady has great admiration for the upright,
But virtuous men are hard to find.
Those who see her would only chatter and chatter,
How could they know what's on her mind?
Though in her prime, she seldom comes out of her chamber,
But one could hear her sighing, when she wakes up at night.

美女篇

美女妖且閑，採桑岐路間。柔條紛冉冉，落葉何翩翩！
攘袖見素手，皓腕約金環。頭上金爵釵，腰佩翠琅玕。
明珠交玉體，珊瑚間木難。羅衣何飄飄，輕裾隨風還。
顧盼遺光彩，長嘯氣若蘭。行徒用息駕，休者以忘餐。
借問女何居，乃在城南端，青樓臨大路，高門結重關。
容華耀朝日，誰不希令顏？媒氏何所營？玉帛不時安。
佳人慕高義，求賢良獨難。眾人徒嗷嗷，安知彼所觀？
盛年處房室，中夜起長歎。

曹植詩三首

野田黃雀行

高樹多悲風，海水揚其波。利劍不在掌，結友何須多？
不見籬間雀，見鷄自投羅？羅家得雀喜，少年見雀悲。
拔劍捎羅網，黃雀得飛飛。飛飛摩蒼天，來下謝少年。

名都篇

名都多妖女，京洛出少年。寶劍直千金，被服麗且鮮。
闔鷄東郊道，走馬長楸間。馳騁未能半，雙兔過我前。
攬弓捷鳴鏑，長驅上南出。左挽因右發，一縱兩禽連。
餘巧未及展，仰手接飛鳶。觀者咸稱善，眾工歸我妍。
我歸宴平樂，美酒斗十千。膾鯁騰胎鯁，炮鼈炙熊蹯。
鳴儔嘯匹侶，列坐竟長筵。連翩擊鞠壤，巧捷惟萬端。
白日西南馳，光景不可攀。雲散還城邑，清晨復來還。

THE YELLOW BIRD IN THE FIELD

Among the tall trees, mournful winds often rise
 And call up the rolling waves upon the seas.
 My sword, though powerful, lies not in my hand;
 If friends are friends indeed, we need but a few.
 Can you not see the little bird near the fence?
 He stumbled into the net when he saw the eagle;
 The catcher, having got the bird, was overjoyed,
 But a young man, seeing its plight, was grieved.
 He took out his sword, and cut the net asunder,
 So once again, the yellow bird could fly;
 Higher and higher it flew, till it touched the sky,
 Then down it came to thank the young man.

THE GREAT CITY

In the great city, you can see beautiful women everywhere,
 And gallant young men who come from Loyang.
 With swords worth a thousand pieces of gold,
 And dressed fashionably in clothes fresh and bright,
 They love to watch cock-fights in the eastern suburbs,
 Or go riding along roads sheltered by catalpas.
 Mounting my steed, I ride along, and. . . .
 Two rabbits run across my path.
 I take the bow, and give out a whirling dart,
 Then go quickly up the southern mountain,
 With my bow on the left, the arrow flies out on the right,
 I hit the two rabbits at once,
 And before I can show them more of my craft and skill
 I raise my hand, and get hold of the bird.
 The lookers-on all shout in applause,
 Those who know archery say that it's a beauty!
 We return and hold a banquet in P'ing-le;
 Rare, expensive wine is served to the guests,
 The carp, hashed fine, comes with the shrimps,
 Turtles have to be eaten cold, bear-paws should be hot.
 In the bustle, we talk loudly, and whistle to our friends,
 They sit close to one another, rows on rows.
 We take turns in the ball and board games,
 So swift and skilful, everyone has his own style.
 The white sun is riding down the west,
 Don't reach out for time that has passed;
 Like scattered clouds, we return to the city,
 But we'll be back in the fresh clear morning.