

# Confucian Gentleman and Lyric Poet: Romanticism and Eroticism in the *Tz'u* of Ou-yang Hsiu

By Ruth W. Adler

Mencius said to Wan Chang: "The best Gentleman of a village is in a position to make friends with the best Gentlemen in other villages; the best Gentleman in a state, with the best Gentlemen in other states; and the best Gentleman in the Empire, with the best Gentlemen in the Empire. And not content with making friends with the best Gentlemen in the Empire, he goes back in time and communes with the ancients. When one reads the poems and writings of the ancients, can it be right not to know something about them as men? Hence one tries to understand the age in which they lived. This can be described as 'looking for friends in history' ".<sup>1</sup>

THESE WORDS EXPRESSED a major function of literature as conceived by the Confucian ideal—that of forming a link between the "superior men" of all ages, a link of common understanding and sympathy which would serve to fortify, inspire and perpetuate all that was noblest in the thought and conduct of man. Implicit in this statement also is the ancient concept of the great statesman and the literary genius as two facets of one man—a tradition which dates back to the time of the Duke of Chou (ca. 1000 B.C.) and which has extended even into the present century.

In a country which has produced many such men, there are yet those special few who stand out above the others among the unforgettable names in the history of Chinese culture. Ou-yang Hsiu 歐陽修<sup>2</sup> is one of these. He was statesman, historian, classical scholar, antiquarian, essayist and poet. Born nearly a millennium and a half after Mencius, he might have served as a model for that "best Gentleman" of whom Mencius spoke. He did indeed make friends with all the "best Gentlemen" of his day—scholars, talented statesmen and fellow writers. Beyond that, he befriended and became the mentor of many of the outstanding and brilliant elites of

<sup>1</sup>Translated by D. C. Lau. *Mencius* (Penguin Classics, 1970), VB, 8, p. 158.

<sup>2</sup>Ou-yang Hsiu (*tz'u* 字 Yung-shu 永叔; *hao* 號 Tsui-weng 醉翁 and Liu-i Chü-shih 六一居士; posthumous title, Wen-chung Kung 文忠公) was born in

A.D. 1007 in Mienchow (present day Szechuan). According to custom, however, he is considered a native of Lu-ling 廬陵 in present day Kiangsi, the ancestral home of his father, and was often referred to as Lu-ling Hsien-sheng 廬陵先生.

the younger generation. And he did, further, "commune with the ancients" as evidenced by his appreciation of the Confucian classics and of the works of later prose writers who followed the ancient style. Deriving inspiration from these, he was eventually to become a major influence in the revival and perpetuation of that style, particularly as exemplified in the writings of the 9th century statesman, Han Yü 韓愈.

Ou-yang Hsiu was only ten when he came across an incomplete set of Han Yü's works stored in an old basket at the home of friends. Having few books of his own, he persuaded them to let him have the discarded volumes which he took home and read eagerly, though comprehending but a part of the old text. The writings of Han Yü were clear and unadorned, concerned more with thought and content than with mere cleverness of style. Contrasting sharply with the ornate parallel prose and sentimentality which characterized late T'ang and early Sung literature, Han's writings were not at all popular during this time and were almost entirely neglected by most scholars. But the impact on Ou-yang Hsiu was profound and lasting. As he himself described his impressions some thirty years afterward:

"On studying the words of Han, I was struck by their profundity, richness, boldness and breadth. Although young and as yet unable to understand their full meaning, I was already attracted by their tremendous, almost boundless spirit . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Though required by the expedience of the examination system to perfect the current parallel prose style of writing, Ou-yang Hsiu continued to study the classical style of prose on his own. After passing the examinations in 1030, he was appointed to serve at Loyang, the so-called West Capital and leading cultural metropolis of Northern China. Here he continued his literary studies guided by the outstanding writers of the day, particularly the historian Yin Shu 尹洙, another enthusiast of the style of early *ku-wen* 古文 writers.

It was at this time that Ou-yang Hsiu established his great friendship with Mei Yao-ch'en 梅堯臣, one of the most talented poets of that era. Under the stimulation of this friendship, he turned his efforts to the composition of poetry, attempting to perfect his style in the traditional *shih* 詩 form and becoming interested in the writing of the currently popular *tz'u* 詞 as well. The writing of *tz'u*, considered at the time not only popular but even frivolous, was perhaps an unusual departure for a Confucian scholar such as Ou-yang Hsiu, even more so because of his firm devotion to the ancient style of writing. However, scholar and official though he may have been, with wide-ranging interests in literature, the classics, the decipherment of archaic bronzes, and the like, Ou-yang Hsiu was also very much a man of his day. He possessed a certain *joie de vivre* and he took pleasure in the conviviality of informal gatherings with other scholars and poets—often in the company of the gay and talented courtesans who charmed these men with their knowledge of classical poetry and their virtuosity as singers and players of the newest poetic and musical creations of the day. Not to have been inspired to accept the challenge of

<sup>3</sup>Translated by James T. C. Liu. *Ou-yang Hsiu*. p. 26. *An 11th Century Neo-Confucianist*. (Stanford, 1967)

creating in the new genre would have been far more unusual.

This time at Loyang was one of the happiest periods in his life and one to which Ou-yang Hsiu often alluded with great nostalgia in *tz'u* such as the following composed during his later years:

To the Tune of *Yeh hsing ch'uan*

*Memories of carefree pleasures in the West Capital.  
Since we parted,  
Who can share them with me?  
Scenic beauty of the Yi; flowers along the Lo.  
I strain my memory.  
The old ramblings seem but a dream.*

夜行船

憶昔西都歡縱  
自別後  
有誰能共  
伊川山水洛川花  
細尋思  
舊遊如夢

*To see it now is even more poignant.  
Wistfully I hear the songs,  
And bells tolling in painted towers.  
Returning, white-haired, from distant shores  
I drain the golden goblet.  
Who is left to see me off?*

今日相逢情愈重  
愁聞唱  
畫樓鐘動  
白髮天涯逢此景  
倒金尊  
殢誰相送

That there was an even lighter side to these early years of officialdom and literary pursuits is clearly revealed in the following *tz'u* which recaptures the charm and spirit of this period in his life:

To the Tune of *Yü-lou ch'un*

*Often I recall the charm of Loyang—  
Warm mists, gentle breezes adding pleasure to  
wine;  
Orioles' songs at banquets seemed invitations to  
linger,  
While blossoms peeped atop the walls as by design.  
Parted now by the blue of a thousand hills,  
I gaze 'til slanting rays sink below the tower...  
Memories stir just seeing peonies turn red.  
A flood of spring sadness fills my dreams.*

玉樓春

常憶洛陽風景媚  
煙暖風和添酒味  
鶯啼宴席似留人  
花出牆頭如有意  
別來已隔千山翠  
望斷危樓斜日墜  
關心只爲牡丹紅  
一片春愁來夢裏

In the tradition of the poetic diction of the time, warm mists, breezes, orioles and flowers were delicately veiled descriptions of pleasures among the courtesans in the drinking houses of the gay metropolis. Because Ou-yang Hsiu was known to have been devoted to the pleasures of wine and women, this and other of his *tz'u* were interpreted as having erotic implications. But even beyond this, it is lovely even considered as nothing more than an evocation of a natural setting once known and long remembered.

Indeed, the writings of Ou-yang Hsiu very much reflect his awareness and love

of nature, as well as a wide knowledge of plants and flowers. Among his prose writings, for example, there is a remarkable treatise on the peony of Loyang (*Feng-su chi ti san* 風俗記第三). In the third chapter of this, he describes the delight the residents of the city take in their springtime flowers:

“According to the custom of Loyang, almost everybody is fond of flowers. When spring comes, everyone in the city, whether rich or poor, wears flowers—even the peddlars. When the flowers bloom, the scholars and populace alike, all turn out for a stroll. . . .”

洛陽之俗。大抵好花。春時。城中無貴賤。皆插花。雖負擔者亦然。  
花開時。士庶競爲遊遊。

And so, when he exclaims, “Memories stir just seeing peonies turn red,” this may really be nothing more than fond recollections of those spring strolls in Loyang. In the context of the poem, however, it does seem quite clear that remembrance of peonies triggers a host of other memories and sensual pleasures as well, so that it may be closer to actuality to consider this and similar *tz’u* a blend of both nostalgia and eroticism.

These carefree years were soon interrupted by political controversy, power struggles at court, foreign invasions, clashes between the newly-arisen progressive thinkers and the older conservatives. More than once, Ou-yang Hsiu became embroiled in these controversies and was intermittently exiled, for a total of about ten years, to posts remote from the court. When the time came for him to leave the pleasures and beauties of Loyang, he voiced his sorrow in a beautiful lyric which, like the preceding ones, suggests beneath its surface charm, once again the charming world of courtesans:

To the Tune of *Yü-lou ch’un*

*Now is Loyang’s season of fragrant beauty.  
Perfumes, now heady, now faint, float forth.  
Floating gossamer tendrils mean to entwine us  
fast,  
Low bending willows, on impulse, vie to say fare-  
well.  
  
Rosy apricot blossoms obscure the verdant hills.  
Travelling toward the mountain paths, I rest in the  
foothills.  
Tonight, who will roam afar with me?  
None but the moon beyond the silent, lonely inn.*

玉樓春

洛陽正值芳菲節  
穠豔清香相間發  
遊絲有意苦相縈  
垂柳無端爭贈別  
  
杏花紅處青山缺  
山畔行人山下歇  
今宵誰肯遠相隨  
惟有寂寥孤館月

These banishments took him to I-ling 夷陵 in 1036 as district magistrate (nearly two thousand miles from the capital where the Yangtze emerges from the grandeur of the Three Gorges and not far from his childhood home in Suichow 隨州); then from 1045 to 1048 to Ch’uchow 滁州 in Anhwei where he served as governor, and finally,

after a brief sojourn in Yangchow 揚州, to the beautiful lake country of Yingchow 穎州 (modern Fu-yang). It was during these periods of comparative retirement that Ou-yang Hsiu was able to devote many hours to work on the *New History of the Five Dynasties* which he had begun with Yen Shu 晏殊<sup>4</sup> and to the writing of essays and poetry, creating in particular the great prose masterpieces which have earned him his enduring fame.

HE CONSIDERED WRITING TO BE a natural and integral part of the personality of the ideal Confucian gentleman, rather than something to be viewed independently as an art in itself. It was a belief to which he attached considerable significance as this advice to a fellow writer makes clear:

“It is not that scholars do not try to seek the Way, it is rather that only a few succeed in attaining it. Not that the Way is beyond reach, but scholars are often diverted by other goals. Although it is difficult to acquire mastery and felicity in the art of writing, it is all too easy to be pleased with oneself and scholars frequently succumb to the attractions of this art. Having achieved some degree of mastery, they conclude: ‘I have attained genuine knowledge.’ Some even go so far as to discard all other matters, concerning themselves with nothing else and justifying their behavior by stating: ‘I am a writer and my sole job is to write well.’ This is why those who succeed in attaining the Way are so few. In his old age, Confucius returned to the State of Lu and completed the *Six Classics* in a matter of only a few years. Yet students of *The Book of Changes* cannot spare any time for *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, nor can students of *The Book of History* spare any time for *The Book of Songs*. How slight was the added effort on the part of Confucius! And yet what a supreme achievement! Though it is impossible to emulate the Sage’s writings, if a person attains the Way, maturity will manifest itself spontaneously in his writings.”<sup>5</sup>

Always outspoken and frank, even during his early years at court, Ou-yang Hsiu frequently offended those in power, yet never feared to defend what he thought was right though it might provoke Imperial wrath and demotion or banishment from court. He put into practice what he wrote and stood firmly by his ideals and his friends. When political controversies arose, he did not hesitate to voice his beliefs, siding with his friend, Fan Chung-yen 范仲淹, author of the famous quote that a scholar should be “first in worrying about the troubles of the world and last in enjoying its pleasures.” It was this that led to his first banishment to I-ling in the wake of Fan’s similar dismissal from court. Nevertheless, upon his recall some years

<sup>4</sup>The project had been begun during his younger days as a joint venture with his friend, Yen Shu. Unfortunately, Yen died after having written only about 4,000 words. Ou-yang Hsiu decided to continue the project alone during his exile and, on his return to political prominence in 1060, was asked as an honor to present his manuscript to the court. He declined, saying it was not yet satisfactory or complete because

of the lack of reference material in the remote places where he had been. He withheld the manuscript for political reasons during his lifetime and it was not until after his death that it became available.

<sup>5</sup>Translated by Huang Kuo-pin. “*Ta Wu Ch’ung hsü-ts’ui shu*” (答吳充秀才書), *Ou-yang Wen-chung-kung ch’üan-chi* 歐陽文忠公全集.

later to catalogue the Imperial Library and then to serve as critic-advisor on policy, Ou-yang Hsiu again unhesitatingly defended the close alliance between himself and his coterie, including Fan, in his celebrated essay, "On the Partisanship of Friends 朋黨論." In defense against these charges, he argued for the rights of superior men to form political groups as long as these were founded on moral and ideological principles:

"Your subject has heard that the partisanship of friends is traceable to ancient times but it is expected of the ruler to distinguish between gentlemen and unworthy men. The friendship between gentleman and gentleman is based on the Way, and that among unworthy men, on profit. This is a matter of course."

"Not so with the gentleman. What he adheres to is honor and righteousness; what he practices is loyalty and honesty; and what he prizes is a good name and integrity. When gentlemen cultivate themselves on such a basis, they share the Way and help improve one another. When they serve the country on this basis, they are of one mind and cooperate from beginning to end. Such is the friendship of gentlemen.

"He therefore who is the ruler should merely rid himself of false parties consisting of unworthy men and employ the true associations of gentlemen; then he can bring peace and order to his land."<sup>6</sup>

No less trenchant were his advisory memorials to the throne, as illustrated by these excerpts from a work entitled, "On the Difficulty of Being a Ruler":

"Alas, the difficulty of selecting personnel is great indeed! But it is not so great as that of judging advice. This is varied in nature. Some, being brilliantly eloquent and presenting all sides of each question, gives delight. Some of it, being faithful counsel, is straightforward and plain but mostly deliberate. It is not difficult to judge either, but it depends on the enlightenment, or lack of it, on the part of the listener. Flattering advice complies with the wishes of the man to whom it is offered and thus is disposed to please. On the other hand, frank advice, which is displeasing to the listener, can provoke anger. It is not difficult to judge either, but it depends on the wisdom or stupidity of the listener."

"In the selection of personnel, a mistake visible to the whole country but not to the ruler is the greatest danger. There are innumerable instances in history where disorder, disaster, defeat and downfall have resulted from such an error."<sup>7</sup>

His persuasive prose writings, produced during his terms at court, as well as the historical writings and reflective essays written during his intermittent periods of banishment, not only revived the ancient classical style in brilliant form, but were

<sup>6</sup>Translated by S.S. Liu, *Chinese Classical Prose*, A *RENDITIONS* book, (The Chinese University Press, 1979) p. 141.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 159 and 163.

to shape the character of Chinese prose for centuries to come. As a man to whom writing was the visible expression of his inner world, the tangible essence of his emotions and ideals, Ou-yang Hsiu instinctively sought emotional satisfaction and spiritual sublimation during these turbulent times through the medium of his writing, perhaps especially through poetry. And here, too, his influence was felt as he laid the groundwork for the new type of *shih* which came to be regarded as typical of the Sung.

At this time poetry was undergoing a transition from the passion of the T'ang to a more subtle mood of unadorned simplicity (*p'ing-tan* 平淡) and incorporated a broader range of subject matter, notably social problems and the human scene. There was an attempt to transcend the artificial elegance and flowery diction of much of T'ang poetry and to replace it with a diction that was plain, concrete and even colloquial—a diction which included the frequent use of “raw words” (*ying yü* 硬語), another instance of stylistic inspiration from the poetry of Han Yü.

In sharp contrast to these innovations, the *tz'u* which had developed earlier during the late T'ang and Five Dynasties, now began to flourish. It was a poetry of elegance, languor and sentimentality. Taking as its central motif feminine loveliness and the exquisite melancholia of separation and love denied, this poetry was written in a new style, intimately dependent upon music for its structure, from which derived the term, “*tz'u*” 詞, literally, “words” (for music).

With music as an integral part of the *tz'u* form, the lyric and emotional qualities of poetry inevitably gained ascendancy over the moral and didactic aspects. The “world” was largely that of love—neglected, lost or denied—in settings of extravagant beauty and peopled by women of exquisite loveliness. But if the themes of love, beauty and loneliness were ever-recurring, the words for narrating them were even more rigidly fixed. The physical attributes of this world were, *de rigeur*, storied towers, carved balustrades, fragrant boudoirs, a slender curve of moon, fine mists and rain, drooping willows, clouds of incense or cold, dead ashes in a golden censer, utensils of jade, golden wells, crystal curtains, fallen flowers, the lonely drip of the water clock. Delicate hands and soft flesh were “jade;” luxuriant masses of hair were “black clouds;” “pearls” of dew sparkled on the grass; golden phoenixes danced on embroidered screens. A typical example is this poem by Wen T'ing-yün 溫庭筠 (ca. 820-870), from the *Hua-chien chi* 花間集, flowery, sensuous and almost completely delineated by the highly selective diction mentioned above:

To the Tune of *Keng-lou tzu*

<i>Willows droop softly</i>	更漏子
<i>In the fine spring rain.</i>	柳絲長
<i>Past the flowers, sounds of distant dripping.</i>	春雨細
<i>Cries of wild geese from beyond the passes</i>	花外漏聲迢遞
<i>Wake the crows on the city walls.</i>	驚塞雁
<i>On my painted screen—golden partridges.</i>	起城烏
	畫屏金鷓鴣
<i>Mist—fragrant, gossamer,</i>	香霧薄
<i>Drifts past the screen.</i>	透簾幕
<i>Deep is my sorrow in this cage of gold.</i>	惆悵謝家池閣

*Red candles shaded,  
Silken curtains drawn,  
Long, long I dream. If you but knew!*

紅燭背  
綉簾垂  
夢長君不知

The scene is one of fragile beauty and the mood of gentle sadness is suggested subtly: willows, symbols of parting, accentuating a lonely hour as they droop in the fine, cold mist; the melancholy sound of dripping from accumulations of rain somewhere off in the garden; the pre-dawn quiet shattered by cries of crows startled into wakefulness. With the economy of a single metaphor, "lakes and pavilions of the Hsieh," (the literal reading of the phrase in the third line of the second verse), Wen T'ing-yün further delineates the setting—an elegant house of courtesans—recalling at the same time, in the origin of the metaphor, another courtesan, the beautiful Hsieh Ch'iu-niang. Unlike the wild geese flying free from the remotest reaches of the land, or even the homely city crows, the speaker feels caged, destined to remain, like the golden partridges on her screen, confined to this place of luxury and love, but without the one of whom she dreams and for whom she longs.

The attitude of Ou-yang Hsiu toward the ornate parallel prose of his time was reflected in his feeling about the poetry of his age as well. He deplored the over-refinement of the *Hsi-kun* 西崑 school with its elaborate allusions and fanciful imagery and urged, in its place, a return to greater simplicity and realism. With respect to the new genre, the *tz'u*, however, he did not entirely escape the influence of the *Hua-chien* poets, as can be seen from many of his own *tz'u*. This may have been both because of the peculiar nature of the *tz'u* itself, particularly because it was intended to be sung, and also because of the social milieu in which it flourished.

THE NORTHERN SUNG CAPITAL of Pien-ching 汴京, to which Ou-yang Hsiu returned in later years, was a busy, thriving metropolis. After the chaotic period of the Five Dynasties, times were relatively stable. All manner of small trades flourished; artisans of all sorts produced a wide variety of wares; shops, restaurants, places of entertainment, wine shops and brothels abounded. Musical entertainment was a major source of enjoyment and relaxation for all classes,—men of leisure, intellectuals, officials of all ranks, as well as the common people. It became a challenge for literati to compose lyrics for the popular tunes of the day, often embodying in these the tunes of the common people, the world of the leisured class as well as that of the courtesan. In the gay and carefree milieu which gave rise to these poems, it is scarcely to be wondered at that the themes were frivolous, romantic and frequently erotic. Yet, in these times, it was not considered amiss even for men of distinction and stature, such as Ou-yang Hsiu himself, to write such poetry as a diversion, nor did these men consider the writing of *tz'u* beneath their dignity. Such notable *tz'u* writers as K'ou Chun 寇準, Yen Shu, Han Ch'i 韓琦, Fan Chung-yen, Sung Ch'i 宋祁, Ch'ien Wei-yen 錢惟演, Ssu-ma Kuang 司馬光 and Chen Yao-tso 陳堯佐 constitute a veritable roster of prominent statemen of the early Sung. Because most of these were not as prolific as Yen Shu or Ou-yang Hsiu, their romantic and even erotic lyrics attracted less attention. Nor were great statesmen the only contributors to this genre. The ranks were swelled by the creations of married women, Taoist priests and Buddhist monks. Of some forty-six *tz'u* which remain today out of the



voluminous output of the Buddhist monk, Chung Shu 仲殊 for example, a significant number are more overtly erotic than those of many popularly recognized writers of romantic *tz'u*. Many deal quite openly with illicit love affairs and the betrayal of young woman, as in the following:

To the Tune of *T'a so hsing*

*Thick moisture penetrates her garments;  
A hidden fragrance drifts over the steps.  
Flowers in the rain heighten her grief-worn looks.  
Phoenix slippers sodden, she lingers long,  
Silent, wordless, and languorous.*

*On her brow, fresh sorrows;  
In her hand, the written word—  
Why not ask a courier to dispatch the letter?  
Her grievance must be only against her fickle love.  
But who at court would care about lovers' complaints?*<sup>8</sup>

踏莎行

濃潤侵衣  
暗香飄砌  
雨中花色添憔悴  
鳳鞋溼透立多時  
不言不語厭厭地

眉上新愁  
手中文字  
因何不倩鱗鴻寄  
想伊只訴薄情人  
官中誰管閒公事

Though Ou-yang Hsiu was not immune to the frivolity of trying his hand at the popular new genre, and even of adopting much of its conventionalized language, he did bring a special dimension to this poetry with his unusually perceptive understanding of the feminine psyche and his keen awareness of a woman's emotions. Two *tz'u* on the theme of parting lovers illustrate this sensitivity as well as his skillful use of natural symbols to achieve a sense of realism and universal appeal:

To the Tune of *Tieh lien hua*

*A Yüeh maiden gathers lotus by autumn waters.  
Golden bracelets gleam dimly  
Through narrow sleeves of gauze.  
Shimmering reflection gathering flowers—flowers  
fair as she.  
Her tender heart, more tangled than fibrous lotus  
root.*

*Purple mallards on the bank, wind-tossed waves at  
evening.  
Through heavy mists, floating vapors—  
No sign of earlier companion.  
Faint singing floats from distant boats homeward  
bound,  
But parting grief reaches the far shores of Chiang-  
nan.*

蝶戀花

越女採蓮秋水畔  
窄袖輕羅  
暗露雙金釧  
照影摘花花似面  
芳心只共絲爭亂

鵝鵝灘頭風浪晚  
霧重煙輕  
不見來時伴  
隱隱歌聲歸棹遠  
離愁引著江南岸

<sup>8</sup>Translated by Frederick C. Tsai.

Here the poet presents a beautiful young girl kneeling by the water. It is a scene of freshness far removed from the cloying artificiality of the boudoir. Her face is reflected, not in a jewelled mirror, but in the coolness of rippling water. Even mention of her simple gold bracelets is muted, seen as they are veiled through gauze. There is no need for elaborate adornments and appurtenances for us to know she is extraordinarily lovely. The simple appellation "Yüeh maiden" brings to mind Hsi Shih 西施, the legendary beauty of Yüeh, whose charms were deployed to bring about the downfall of the Prince of Wu in the 5th century B.C. The feeling of intense sorrow is expressed through natural phenomena: autumn waters, windtossed waves at day's end, the curtain of mists screening her last view of her departing lover. Her state of mind is likened to the tangle of fibrous lotus, confused and in turmoil. Added significance is given to this metaphor, as pointed out by Liu<sup>9</sup>, by the use of *ssu* 絲, threads or fibres (of the lotus) to evoke its homonym 思, meaning thoughts. The feeling of aloneness is intensified by the sound of singing from boats whose happy occupants are going home *together* after a day's outing. It is a feeling that anyone who has ever been alone in a crowd of merrymakers can well understand. Similar devices are used in the following poem:

To the Tune of *Ch'ang hsiang-ssu*

*Duckweed blankets the stream  
Willows ring the bank.  
I see him off west of the river.  
When I return, the moon hangs low on the shore.*

*Heavy, heavy the mists  
Chill, chill the wind.  
Again I lean on the vermilion gate and hear the  
horses neigh.  
So cold . . . a pair of gulls fly by.*

長相思

蘋滿溪  
柳繞堤  
相送行人溪水西  
回時隴月低

煙霏霏  
風淒淒  
重倚朱門聽馬嘶  
寒鷗相對飛

Having said farewell, the girl returns alone as the day is ending and the cool moon is just rising. It is damp and cold and the only sound—hardly companionable—is a distant neighing of horses, perhaps the very ones bearing her lover away. As in the previous poem, aloneness is underscored by a solitary pair of gulls flying by in the cold. But even they are a pair and have each other. Even more poignant are those lyrics which describe the heartbreak of a woman who has been abandoned. Some of these, as for example, *Ying t'ien ch'ang* below, retain the conventional boudoir setting with its appointments of phoenix hairpins, pearl curtains, fallen blossoms and the mirror decorated with fabulous *luan* birds, and are highly reminiscent of the *Hua-chien* poets. The final line, however, instead of fading away in gossamer melancholia, ends harshly with the perceptive observation: "Spring grief—crueller than any other ill!"

<sup>9</sup>James J.Y. Liu, *Major Lyricists of the Northern Sung*. (Princeton, 1974) p. 52.

To the Tune of *Ying t'ien ch'ang*

*Slim crescent moon. She is before her luan mirror.  
Tresses and phoenix hairpins in careless disarray.  
Pearl curtains sparkle.  
Remote, her two-storied tower.  
Forlorn. Fallen blossoms scattered by a fickle  
wind.*

*Green mists hang low on the willow lane.  
Whence comes the sound of the windlass in the  
golden well?  
Near dawn, recovered from last night's wine.  
Spring grief—crueller than any other ill!*

## 應天長

一彎初月臨鸞鏡  
雲鬢鳳釵慵不整  
珠簾淨  
重樓迥  
惆悵落花風不定

綠煙低柳徑  
何處轆轤金井  
昨夜更闌酒醒  
春愁勝卻病

In other *tz'u* on this theme, Ou-yang Hsiu frequently returns to nature for metaphors to convey emotions. Viewed after a sleepless and desolate night, a lonely scene at the shore of a lake becomes the setting in *Yü chia ao*:

To the Tune of *Yü chia ao*

*Waters reflect the green of patterned lotus leaves.  
Shaded by flowers, a solitary boat is moored.  
Last night the rain fell, thin and cold.  
Sleepless, I grieved.  
At dawn, I felt again the stirring of the west wind.*

*Rain-tossed, wind-pounded, golden pistils scattered  
—  
Only the green pods remain on the double stems.  
Lotus seeds and I—how much alike!  
Ill-favored our fate.  
Year after year, bitterness deep in the heart.*

## 漁家傲

荷葉田田青照水  
孤舟挽在花陰底  
昨夜蕭蕭疏雨墜  
愁不寐  
朝來又覺西風起

雨擺風搖金蕊碎  
合歡枝上香房翠  
蓮子與人長斷類  
無好意  
年年苦在中心裏

The lake is deserted, a lone boat anchored quietly at the shore, and only the orderly array of lotus leaves is reflected in the mirror of the waters. Against this scene of solitude, the poet explores the woman's feelings: grief has destroyed her sleep with a relentless persistence like that of the cold rain which has shattered the blossoms, leaving to each nothing but a shell filled with the bitter seeds of sorrow.

Sometimes, both conventional *tz'u* imagery and ordinary activities are combined in the same poem. In *Tieh lien hua* below, interwoven with images of golden censer, embroidered coverlet and silken curtains, is the homely touch of small paper cutouts which the woman has fashioned for the New Year's decorations and to help while away the lonely hours. Thinking of her lover, she has cut out a pair of swallows to perch together on the bare branches. Perhaps she is also thinking of the flight of swallows as symbols of farewell. The time, early spring and the beginning of a New Year, should be a time of anticipation and hope, but for her there is only

a brief dulling of sorrow with wine and the long wait for the respite of sleep through the cold night.

To the Tune of *Tieh lien hua*

*Through the screen, the cold East wind.  
Amid snow, sweet plum blossoms  
Herald early Spring.  
On branches of wintersweet, a pair of tiny  
swallows—  
Papercuts artfully fashioned with golden scissors.*

*Hastily she kindles the golden censer, orchid-  
fragrant.*

*Her lovely eyes, bright with wine.*

*Troubled and distraught.*

*Beneath embroidered coverlets, Spring's sleep  
comes but with dawn.*

*Beyond the gauze window—unsensed within  
silken cutains—daybreak.*

蝶戀花

簾幕東風寒料峭  
雪裏香梅  
先報春來早  
紅蠟枝頭雙燕小  
金刀剪綵呈纖巧

旋暖金爐薰蕙藻  
酒入橫波  
困不禁煩惱  
繡被五更春睡好  
羅幃不覺紗窗曉

The use of elements of nature and the external world as counterpoint to the inner world of emotions is indicative not so much of originality in his handling of the *tz'u* form, as it is in revealing the depth of Ou-yang Hsiu's own intuitive perception of the world around him. Attuned not only to the subtleties of the human mind, but to the infinite nuances in the natural world—mountains and rivers, birds, trees and flowers, wind, rain or the clean-swept air of a remote village, the kaleidoscope of changing seasons—Ou-yang Hsiu portrayed these in his prose and *shih*, and eventually in his *tz'u* as well<sup>10</sup>.

One of his most quoted prose passages, written during a prolonged period of exile in Ch'uchow from 1048 on, aptly illustrates this dual attunement to nature and to the human heart:

“However, Old Drunkard's heart is not set on wine, but lies somewhere betwixt the mountains and the rivers. The delight of mountains and rivers comes from the heart and is derived from wine.”

<sup>10</sup> Themes other than love and the sorrows of the boudoir were not unprecedented in *tz'u* history. During the later T'ang when the genre was being developed, *tz'u* did not differ markedly either in theme or form from the *shih*, and *tz'u* about many subjects, including nature, are to be found as, for example, in the poems of Po Chü-i 白居易. The conventionalized world and poetic diction began later with the *Hua-chien* poets and persisted into the early Sung. Yet even within the *Hua-chien* school itself there is a discernible schism into two groups. The major one, led by Wen T'ing-yün, created poems

whose most outstanding features were the voluptuousness, elegance and melancholy mentioned above. The other group, led by Wei Chuang 韋莊 (A.D. 836-910), wrote *tz'u* which were more restrained, less frivolous and somewhat more varied in theme. The tradition of Wei Ch'uang was extended about two generations later by Feng Yen-ssu 馮延巳 (A.D. 903-960) who wrote with great feeling both about love and sorrow, often against a backdrop of nature, and whose *tz'u* struck a responsive chord in Ou-yang Hsiu and greatly influenced his style.

“Shortly after, the sun sets over the mountains, the shadows of the revelers are scattered and the guests follow the Prefect as he returns home. A pall of darkness covers the trees, while the birds warble here and there as the guests leave. However, while the birds know the delights of mountains and trees, they do not know those of men; and while men know the delights of traveling with the Prefect, they do not know how the Prefect enjoys their pleasures. It is the Prefect who can share their pleasures while drunk and write about them while sober. Who is the Prefect? It is none other than Ou-yang Hsiu from Luling.”<sup>11</sup>

Following the prolonged banishment at Ch'uchow, Ou-yang Hsiu spent a brief sojourn at Yangchow, the famous metropolis at the junction of the Grand Canal and the Yangtze; then requested a transfer to a smaller place where he might attract less attention. He was assigned to Yingchow, the beautiful lake country, where he settled his family permanently. Inspired by the charm of the area, he composed his series of thirteen lyrics about West Lake (in present day Anhwei, not the renowned West Lake of Hangchow), all written to the tune *Ts'ai-sang tzu*, describing that lake in all of its moods and variations:

Its bustle and gaiety:

<p><i>Who does not delight in it—West Lake!</i>  <i>Its beauty knows no season.</i>  <i>Flying canopies chasing close on each other.</i>  <i>Oh to be among the flowers, drunk with jade goblet!</i></p>	<p>何人解賞西湖好          佳景無時          飛蓋相追          貪向花間醉玉卮</p>
--	---

<p><i>Painted pleasure boats, wine-laden—West Lake!</i>  <i>Where gay are the sounds of pipes and strings</i>  <i>And goblets of jade pass to and fro.</i>  <i>I drift on the placid waves, wine-lulled to sleep.</i></p>	<p>畫船載酒西湖好          急管繁絃          玉盞催傳          穩泛平波任醉眠</p>
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Its jewel-like serenity:

<p><i>Clouds float by . . . beneath the boat.</i>  <i>Sky and water are clear and limpid.</i>  <i>My gaze lingers now skyward, now below</i>  <i>And I wonder—another world in the lake?</i></p>	<p>行雲卻在行舟下          空水澄鮮          俯仰留連          疑是湖中別有天</p>
--	---

<p><i>Cloud wisps, rosy in evening glow—lovely West Lake!</i>  <i>Flowers at its banks, duckweed floating by the shore.</i>  <i>Endless stretch of tranquil waters.</i></p>	<p>殘霞夕照西湖好          花塢蘋汀          十頃波平          野岸無人舟自橫</p>
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<sup>11</sup>S.S. Liu. *Chinese Classical Prose*, pp. 187, 189.

*At the deserted beach, boats gently right themselves.*

*In the southwest, the moon is rising and floating  
clouds disperse.*

*At the railing it is cool and fresh.*

*How pure and fragrant the lotus!*

*A lake breeze revives my wine-flushed face.*

西南月上浮雲散

軒檻涼生

蓮芰香清

水面風來酒面醒

And were it not for its pattern, set to the same tune, this final example from the series seems far removed from the typical *tz'u*:

*Sky and water—the loveliness of West Lake!*

*Nature's face so fresh and new.*

*Gulls and egrets relaxed in sleep.*

*Following my wont, I listen to the pipes and strings.*

天容水色西湖好

雲物俱鮮

鷗鷺閒眠

應慣尋常聽管絃

*Pure breeze, white moon . . . a perfect night.*

*A lustrous field of jade.*

*Who longs for treasured horse or fabled bird?*

*In my boat, I am an immortal!*

風清月白偏宜夜

一片瓊田

誰羨驂鸞

人在舟中便是仙

The same sense of delight in the world around him is detailed in Ou-yang Hsiu's prose writings and in his *shih* as, for example, in the following poem in the old five-word style:

*I love the water below the pavilion.*

*Tumbling from the wild cliffs,*

*Singing as if falling from the skies,*

*It runs out over the eaves*

*And down the rocky gorge,*

*Making hidden springs bubble and foam.*

但愛亭下水

來從亂峯間

聲如自空落

瀉向兩簷前

流入巖下溪

幽泉助涓涓

響不亂人語

其清非管絃

豈不美絲竹

絲竹不勝繁

所以屢攜酒

遠步就潺湲

野鳥窺我醉

溪雲留我眠

山花徒能笑

不解與我言

惟有巖風來

*Its voice does not disturb our talk,*

*The pure tone so unlike that of pipe and strings.*

*For lovely though they are,*

*Strings and flute are just too much.*

*So often, wine in hand,*

*I walk the distance to the falling waters.*

*Wild birds espy my tipsiness,*

*Low clouds hull me to sleep.*

*The mountain flowers merely smile,*

*Not capable of conversing with me.  
Only the fresh cliff breeze comes  
To stir awake my wine-drowsed senses.<sup>12</sup>*

吹我還醒然

The water, clouds, birds, flowers and wind—all elements in his *tz'u*—appear in this poem as well. Only the mood is different. In the *tz'u*, these elements create a feeling of serenity and delicacy. In the *shih*, however, there is a robustness and vitality which result not only from the crispness and regularity of flow of the five-word metre, but from the transposition of the same elements to a more rugged setting. Here the serene waters of West Lake have been replaced by a tumbling mountain freshet, a lively spring and a wild music no less pleasing than the man-made sounds of pipe and string. Though the poet is still bemused by wine, as in his *tz'u*, here he too becomes more alive—no longer gazing in dreamy rapture at the beauty about him, but actively involved in his environment which, to reverse the picture, is now contemplating him! “The wild birds espy my tipsiness. Low clouds lull me to sleep.” And although he explains that the flowers cannot walk with him, still he understands their laughter and joy in the same way as Chuang Tzu understood the fish. In the *tz'u* cited, the dynamic mood is muted and subdued, but the subjective and real involvement of the poet is apparent in both poems. Similarly, even in such a conventional poem on the sorrow of parting as the following:

To the Tune of *Yü-lou ch'un*

玉樓春

*You've gone. I do not know how far.  
All is cold and lonely. So much sadness!  
As you journey on, letters grow fewer.  
Across widening waters, no word.<sup>13</sup> Where can I  
ask?*

別後不知君遠近  
觸目淒涼多少悶  
漸行漸遠漸無書  
水闊魚沈何處問

*Deep in the night, bamboos beat an autumn dirge.  
A million leaves cry out their grief.  
On my lone pillow, I seek you in dreams.  
But no dreams come. The lamp flickers and dies.*

夜深風竹敲秋韻  
萬葉千聲皆是恨  
故欲單枕夢中尋  
夢又不成燈又燼

The line, “deep in the night bamboos beat an autumn dirge,” carries with it echoes of his *fu* on the “Sound of Autumn” (秋聲賦). Because of this association, the poem becomes more than a conventional expression of melancholy and conveys a sense of desolation and futility which are, to the poet, the very essence of autumn:

... Oh, how sad! It is the sound of autumn. Can this be how it comes? Yes, this is the face of autumn: cruel and unfeeling; no trace

<sup>12</sup>*T'i Ch'uchow tsui-weng-t'ing chi* 題徐州醉翁亭記.

fish is lost,” recalling the phrase 魚雁沈沈, in which the fish and geese are symbols for letters.

<sup>13</sup>Literally, “In the waters that separate us, the

of mist or frost or cloud; bright and clear, with the sun brilliant in its high vaulted sky; its breath fierce and raw, penetrating our very bones. Its mood is chill and lonely. Mountains and streams are desolate and silent. And so the voice of autumn, bitter and icy, bursts forth in shrieks and wails.

Luxuriant plants and dense carpets of green vie in their lush beauty. Magnificent trees and rank vegetation delight the eye. Then autumn brushes the grass and the verdure fades; it comes upon the trees and the leaves are stripped. It wreaks havoc and destruction in a single breath of unexpended fury. For autumn is the agent of punishment and death.

Another such situation occurs in the following poem taken from the first of Ou-yang Hsiu's two cycles of *tz'u* to the tune of *Yü chia ao* 漁家傲, each of which describes the year, month by month, in twelve individual lyrics:

<i>Eighth month—autumn's peak and the wind is fierce.</i>	八月秋高風歷亂
<i>Withered orchid. Shattered iris. Only red lotus at the shore.</i>	衰蘭敗芷紅蓮岸
<i>The frost moon, full—</i>	皓月十分光正滿
<i>A cool radiance over the bank.</i>	清光畔
<i>Year after year, how I miss the festive gatherings!</i>	年年常願瓊筵看
<i>Autumn sacrifices draw near. Grieving, I watch the homebound swallows.</i>	社近愁看歸去燕
<i>Rivers and heavens, so vast . . . endless clouds.</i>	江天空闊雲容漫
<i>Sung Yü in his time suffered deeply,</i>	宋玉當時情不淺
<i>Voicing melancholy grievances.</i>	成幽怨
<i>My home is a thousand li away. I fear my heart must break!</i>	鄉關千里危腸斷

The time is once again autumn—lonely, chill. The intensity is at a somewhat greater level than in the previous *tz'u*. Again there is the implied description of another autumn, this time suggested by the reference to Sung Yü 宋玉 who wrote:

<i>Alas for the breath of autumn!</i>	悲哉秋之爲氣也
<i>Wan and drear! flower and leaf fluttering fall and turn to decay.</i>	蕭瑟兮草木搖落而變衰
<i>Sad and lorn! as when on journey far one climbs a hill and looks down on the water to speed a returning friend.</i>	憶慄兮若在遠行
<i>Empty and vast! the skies are high and the air is cold.</i>	登山臨水兮送將歸
<i>Still and deep! the streams have drunk full and the</i>	



water are clear.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the machinations of political enemies and the spreading of malicious rumors, Ou-yang Hsiu's integrity as a man of Confucian ideals became increasingly apparent both through the writings which occupied him throughout his career, as well as through the performance of his duties in whatever capacity he chanced to find himself. By 1057, he was once again recalled to court and became Chief Imperial Examiner. He was further assigned the task of compiling the *New T'ang History*—a rare honor for an individual. On its completion in 1060, he was promoted to Assistant Military Commissioner and then, a year later, to Assistant Councillor in Charge of State Affairs. His friends were also given leading posts. For the first time he was solidly in power and succeeded in achieving stability in turbulent periods of reform. He served also as Secretary of the *Hanlin* Academy of eminent scholars and ultimately rose to the rank of Vice-Premier in which capacity he was able, because of his prominence, to carry as much weight as a full-fledged Prime Minister.

With all these official duties and responsibilities, Ou-yang Hsiu still found time for literary pursuits and the other pleasures abounding in Pien-ching where

<i>New tunes and bewitching smiles</i>	新聲巧笑於柳陌花衢
<i>permeate willow paths and flower lanes;</i> <sup>15</sup>	按管調絃於茶坊酒肆
<i>Sounds of pipes and strings</i>	
<i>echo in teahouses and wineshops.</i> <sup>16</sup>	

Moments of leisure were spent relaxing in these teahouses and wineshops, composing *shih* and adding to his already sizeable output of *tz'u*. Over the years, he had created some of the most romantic and endearing in the genre, often succeeding in endowing them with a greater depth of emotion and sense of reality than did many earlier *tz'u* poets. The scenes he describes with such empathy have been considered by some (in direct contrast to those who would deny he wrote love lyrics at all<sup>17</sup>) to depict his own sorrows and frustrations in love during his earlier years. The following is one such example:

<sup>14</sup>Translated by David Hawkes in *Ch'u Tz'u, The Songs of the South*. (Beacon Paperback, Boston, 1962) p. 92.

<sup>15</sup>Willow and flower usually denote the gay quarters.

<sup>16</sup>Meng Yüan-lao 孟元老. Introduction to *Tung-ching meng-hua-lu* 東京夢華錄, written in 1147.

<sup>17</sup>Some went so far as to insist that the political enemies of Ou-yang Hsiu had themselves composed and circulated these "lascivious *tz'u*" in order to destroy his reputation, and thus some 73 of his lyrics were deliberately removed from later editions of his

text, *Liu-i Tz'u* 六一詞 (The Tz'u of the Six Ones). (These censored poems, however, do appear in other collections of his work.) The *tz'u* were attributed to the well-known literary scholar, Liu Chi 劉幾 who, like many others, failed the doctoral examinations in 1057 as a result of the change in policy instituted by Ou-yang Hsiu who was then Imperial Examiner. A further anecdote relates how, a few years later, Liu Chi was able to imitate the ancient style favored by Ou-yang Hsiu so successfully that the latter, being extremely impressed by a paper by one Liu Hui 劉輝, awarded him first place in the examination. Not until afterward was he stunned to find out that Liu Chi and Liu Hui were one and the same person.

To the Tune of *T'a so hsing*

*Through winding path of jade moss,  
Past deep courtyard of green willows.  
Stealing to our night tryst. The bamboo curtain  
is still rolled up.  
Spotlighting me, alas! the bright moonlight!  
I would hide, but flowers offer little cover.*

*Our rendezvous seems doomed;  
Last time did not go well.  
The marker in the water clock has reached its  
end.  
I tap on the balustrade, but no one answers.  
Clearly, from behind the curtain, the sound of  
scissors cutting.*

## 踏莎行

碧蘚回廊  
綠楊深院  
偷期夜入簾猶捲  
照人無奈月華明  
潛身卻恨花深淺

密約如沈  
前歡未便  
看看擲盡金壺箭  
闌干敲遍不應人  
分明簾下聞裁剪

Much of the typical *tz'u* imagery is present in this poem—the jade moss, the willows, the silent courtyard, the flowers, moonlight and water, the bamboo curtain and the balustrade. But they appear in a context far from the usual. No one is leaning listlessly on the balustrade, the water clock does not echo emptily in the lonely night (glancing at its marker tallies, the lover realizes the lateness of the hour), behind the curtain is no languishing maiden, but a very real girl having the last word in a lovers' quarrel. There is a touching realism about the poem and, moreover, a feeling of identity with the lover—he could be tossing pebbles at a window today just as easily as tapping on a balustrade in Sung China nearly a thousand years ago. One can feel with him the terrible brightness of the moon, the inadequate shelter of the shrubs as he stands, illumined, within view of the uncovered window. As he waits he realizes there seems to be no hope of a meeting. Is it, he wonders, because last time they quarreled? Perhaps a gentle rap on the balustrade will bring her? But no soft voice answers—only the click of the scissors, startlingly loud and clear in the still night. This final touch imparts an eloquent climax to the poem. Had all been darkness and had the bamboo shades been drawn, he might have supposed that there was a mistake about the time or that the girl had unintentionally fallen asleep. But the rolled-up curtain, the girl herself tantalizingly out of sight, and the cold, metallic sound of snapping scissors at an hour when everyone should have been asleep, revealed very clearly that she had stayed up deliberately and knew he was there. No mournful drip of the water clock could have equalled the meaningful sound of the busy scissors.

Another lyric describes a happier rendezvous:

To the Tune of *Nan-hsiang tzu*

*This maiden so fair,  
Deeply crimsoned her lips, faintly powdered her  
cheeks.  
We met by the flowers.*

## 南鄉子

好個人人  
深點脣兒淡抹腮  
花下相逢  
忙走怕人猜

*She hastened to go, lest anyone know.  
Leaving behind tiny crescents of embroidered  
slippers.*

*In stockinged feet she returns,  
Raven tresses and gold phoenix hairpins slipping.  
We walk, smiling. Walk, embracing.  
Tenderly close.  
Young and foolish, she lingers briefly in my arms.*

遺下弓弓小繡鞋  
剗襪重來  
半鞦烏雲金鳳釵  
行笑行行連抱得  
相挨  
一向嬌癡不下懷

As in the first poem, there is tension and conflict, as well as the passion of a stolen moment—elements which endow the poem with a reality for the most part lacking in the lyrics of the *Hua-chien chi*. It is reminiscent of Li Yü's description of a forbidden meeting with the young princess—his wife's sister—told from the viewpoint of the girl:

To the Tune of *P'u-sa man*

*Bright flowers and moon clouded by light mist.  
A perfect time to go to my love.  
Fearfully, I mount the fragrant steps,  
Gold-embroidered slippers in my hand.*

*South of the painted hall we meet.  
Briefly, I cling to him, trembling.  
"So hard it is for me to steal away,  
Love me now with all your heart!"*

菩薩蠻  
花明月暗籠輕霧  
今宵好向郎邊去  
剗襪步香苔  
手提金繡鞋

畫堂南畔見  
一向偎人顫  
好爲出來難  
教君恁意憐

Although the theme is almost identical, there is a difference in mood. In the lyric by Ou-yang Hsiu, the secret rendezvous has a light-hearted, almost mischievous air about it. The first encounter is brief and suggests the conspiracy of the subsequent meeting when the girl returns quietly in stockinged feet, in charming *dés-habillé*. The meeting is tender and lingering as they walk along, hand in hand, basking in each other's smiles and, briefly oblivious of all danger, embrace. But in the poem by Li Yü there is an undercurrent of something almost ominous. The moon is gloomy, the girl walks fearfully—one can almost sense her holding her breath—and when she reaches her lover, there is no basking in the warmth of mutual smiles. Instead, she leans against him, shivering, seeking not only his love, but refuge from the chill of the night and of her own apprehension.

In the following, Ou-yang Hsiu borrows another theme of Li Yü's—that of a charming coquette, adapting it to make it his own:

To the Tune of *Nan-ko tzu*

*Phoenix hairdo, gold-washed ribbon, dragons  
adorning her comb,  
She approaches the window, exchanging smiles*

南歌子  
鳳髻金泥帶  
龍紋玉掌梳  
走來窗下笑相扶

*with him.  
Charmingly, she asks if her brows are fashionably  
darkened.*

愛道畫眉深淺  
入時無

*Toying with her brush, she snuggles close; begins  
her flower painting studies.*

弄筆俚人久  
描花試手初  
等閒妨了繡功夫

*Idly dallying, she delays her embroidery work.*

笑問雙鴛鴦字

*With winning smile she wonders, "How does one  
write 'mandarin ducks'?"*

怎生書

The poem displays a perceptive insight into the charmingly transparent artifices of a young woman in love. What mirror could reflect her loveliness more than his admiring gaze as she bids him study her delicately drawn brows? What more subtle flattery of his male ego than to acknowledge his connoisseurship of feminine styles? What more innocent way to find herself so close to him? She lingers by his side, brush in hand, to create the illusion that it is he who is detaining her from more serious pursuits. After a token attempt at her embroidery and at tracing the outlines of flowers and characters to be embroidered, she again appeals to his wisdom—this time on a seemingly less frivolous plane—but she knows he will not fail to respond to the suggestion of mandarin ducks. In these small details and insights lies the charm of the poem and the special touches which give it life and a timeless universality.

Although Ou-yang Hsiu chose often to express his emotions frankly and directly in many of his love poems, he was also a master of the subtly disguised erotic lyric. He sang of the delights of love and of the passions of springtime, drawing over all a diaphanous veil of allusion which lent to his poems the charm of a landscape whose lushness and beauty are filtered through mists and hazes; the scenes have a soft radiance and muted loveliness, yet stir the imagination with what is hidden beyond view. The following poem seems to depict a tranquil spring day, but it is also replete with delicate imagery of a somewhat erotic nature:

*To the Tune of Yüan lang kuei*

阮郎歸

*In Southern gardens, spring comes early—outing  
time!*

南園春早踏青時  
風和聞馬嘶

*Soft breezes carry the sound of horses whinnying.  
Green plums are bean small; willow leaves curved  
like eyebrows.*

青梅如豆柳如眉  
日長蝴蝶飛

*Butterflies dance in the long day.*

花露重  
草煙低

*Flowers are heavy with dew, mists low on the  
grass.*

人家簾幕垂  
鞦韆慵困解羅衣

*Everywhere lattice screens hang closed.*

畫梁雙燕棲

*In the swing, I rest languorously with loosened  
garments.*

*In the painted eaves, a pair of swallows nest.*

The mood is unmistakable. As nature awakens to spring, so do dormant human emotions. The undercurrent of stirring desires is delicately balanced by the almost overwhelming feeling of languor—the narrator, indolent, sways in the swing, and even the mists lie heavy on the flowers. There is a feeling of hypnotic passivity and of receptivity to the mood of nature.

In a *shih* counterpart, the identical theme and mood are repeated:

<i>Green trees in full leaf, birds singing on the mountain.</i>	綠樹交加山鳥啼
<i>A fresh breeze ripples the waters and sets the petals flying.</i>	晴風蕩漾落花飛
<i>Birds sing, flowers dance, the prefect is drunk.</i>	鳥歌花舞太守醉
<i>Tomorrow, wine-glow gone, spring will have already vanished.<sup>18</sup></i>	明日酒醒春已歸

There is a mounting tension spreading from the burgeoning trees, the singing birds, the caress of the wind, the gay abandon of the flowers to the poet. Overcome by it all, he is drunk—more, perhaps, with spring and love than with wine.

With even greater boldness, the poet goes on to reveal his most intimate encounters in the green groves:

<i>To the Tune of I han yüeh</i>	憶漢月
<i>Rosily voluptuous on branches slender and graceful,</i>	紅豔幾枝輕裊
<i>Newly blossoming in the East wind . . .</i>	新被東風開了
<i>Bending to the mist, they weep tears of dew. For whom so seductive?</i>	倚煙啼露爲誰嬌
<i>Provocative, they charm the butterflies, excite the bees.</i>	多情遊賞處
	留戀向
	綠叢千繞
<i>Filled with thoughts of love, I wander in delight.</i>	酒闌歡罷不成歸
<i>Longing, yearning . . . amid green groves, a thousand twists and turns.</i>	腸斷月斜春老
<i>But when the wine is drunk and pleasures done, it is hard to return.</i>	
<i>My heart is breaking with the waning moon—spring has grown old.</i>	

Enchanted by the seductive flowers, the poet abandons himself to the joys to be found among the thousand inviting paths in the green groves. But following the attainment of his desires, he concludes on a bittersweet note of sadness, a sudden welling up of melancholia. Again there is the reality of contrast in the mingling of pleasure and sorrow, recalling the meditative philosophy of Wang Hsi-chih 王羲之's *Lan T'ing Chi Hsü* 蘭亭集序 (Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Collection [of poems]):

<sup>18</sup>*Feng le t'ing yü ch'un* 豐樂亭遊春.

Having attained one's desire, one grows surfeited and weary; the emotions change with shifting circumstances. How truly lamentable this is! That which had been so desired only a short while before, in the twinkling of an eye, has already become old and worn. Still one cannot but be moved by this. How much more then, must one be stirred by (an awareness of) the span of human life which must follow the laws of nature and, in the end, draw inevitably to its close!

The writings of Ou-yang Hsiu are like a tapestry through which is woven the unifying thread linking the unique sensibilities and inner world of this man with the external world in which he moved. Whether the latter was the world of politics and service to his country, of personal commitment to friendships and ideals; or of sensual pleasures, natural beauty and the way of the human heart, all of these found expression through his literary creativity. He revealed himself freely, both as the Confucian gentleman and scholar of whom Mencius spoke and as a compassionate human being who spoke with the eloquence of understanding to Emperor, common man and the feminine spirit. More than the style in which he chose to express himself, it was these qualities which have endowed both his prose and poetry with a timeless and universal appeal.

Coming from a man who was both his protégé and a great literary genius in his own right, these words of Su Tung-p'o 蘇東坡's, though they must be considered in the light of praise offered to a mentor, still convey a sense of the place occupied by Ou-yang Hsiu in Chinese history even to this day:

He was like Han Yü in his discussion of the Great Way, like Lu Chih 陸贄 in that of human nature, like Ssu-ma Ch'ien 司馬遷 in recording historical events and like Li Po 李白 in writing poetry and *tz'u*.