

"The River at Dusk Is Saddening Me": Cheng Ch'ou Yü and *Tz'u* Poetry

By Wai-leung Wong

A POPULAR BUT NOT prolific poet, Cheng Ch'ou-yü 鄭愁予 (1933-)¹ is noted for his cute and charming lyricism, which is well exemplified by *Ts'o-wu* 錯誤 (A Mistake):

*I pass the country south of the River,
Where the face waiting in the seasons, lotus-like,
blossoms and withers.*

*No east wind, the willow catkins of March do not drift;
Your heart is a tiny lonely town,
Like a green stone street, toward evening.
No footfalls, the spring curtains of March do not part;
Your heart is a tiny casement tightly closed.*

*Clip-clop, the clatter of my horse's hoofs is a beautiful mis-
take:
I am not coming home, I'm a passer-by . . .*

—"A Mistake"

Author's Note: I would like to thank Mr. Stephen C. Soong for his enlightening comments, which have improved the quality of this essay, but I assume full responsibility for all the views expressed.

¹Cheng Ch'ou-yü, whose real name is Cheng Wen-t'ao 鄭文韜, was born in 1933 in Hopei. After graduating from Chung Hsing 中興 University, he worked at the Harbor Bureau of Keelung, where he wrote his famous marine poems. In 1968 he attended the International Writing Program at The University of Iowa. Currently he is teaching Chinese at Yale University. His poems are gathered in *Cheng Ch'ou-yü shih hsüan-chi* 鄭愁予詩選集 (*Selected Poems of Cheng Ch'ou-yü*) (Taipei, Chih-wen 志文, 1974), with an introduction by Yang Mu 楊牧 (the pen-name of C.H. Wang 王靖猷). The introduction, running more than thirty pages, is loaded with insights into Cheng's poetry. Since the appearance of his *Selected Poems*, Cheng has published only a few poems. When this present essay was near completion, a new edition of Cheng's poems came out. The volume, *Cheng Ch'ou-yü shih chi* 鄭愁予詩集 (Taipei, Hung-fan 洪範, 1979), advertised as the "definitive edition . . . compiled by the poet himself", collects a total of 153 poems written from 1951-1968.

我打江南走過
那等在季節裏的容顏如蓮花的開落

東風不來，三月的柳絮不飛
你底心如小小的寂寞的城
恰若青石的街道向晚
鷓鴣不響，三月的春帷不揭
你底心是小小的窗扉緊掩

我達達的馬蹄是美麗的錯誤
我不是歸人，是個過客……

——「錯誤」

Put in a collection of Sung *tz'u* poetry (or lyrics) in English translation, the poem is likely to be mistaken by readers with little or no knowledge of modern Chinese poetry for a *tz'u* composition, undistinguishable from the rest of the collection. Indeed, in terms of imagery and sentiment, "A Mistake" comes extremely close to a *tz'u* poem of the *wan-yüeh* 婉約 (beautiful and refined), as opposed to the *hao-fang* 豪放, (powerful and free) category.

But what does a *tz'u* poem of the *wan-yüeh* category look like? According to Miao Yüeh 繆鉞, one of the characteristics of *tz'u* is its "smallness" in diction. What the reader often encounters in *tz'u* poetry, says Miao, are "breeze," "broken clouds," "sparse stars," "distant mountains," "misty isles," "orioles," "withered flowers," "flying catkins," etc., all related to "smallness."² To illustrate his point, he cites the following lyric to the tune *Huan hsi sha* 浣溪沙 by Ch'in Kuan 秦觀 (1049-1100):

*A misty light chill ascends the small tower.
The morning sky, cloudy, with a touch of ennui, reminds
one of late autumn.
Pale smoke, flowing water—the painted screen looks
gloomy;*

漠漠輕寒上小樓
曉陰無賴似窮秋
淡烟流水畫屏幽

*Free and easy, the flying petals are light as a dream.
From the vast sky falls a drizzle, fine as sorrow.
From the precious curtain, restfully hangs a tiny silver
hook.*

自在飛花輕似夢
無邊絲雨細如愁
寶簾閒掛小銀鉤

The poem, written in the *wan-yüeh* style, reminds one of Cheng's "A Mistake", which is characterized by such words of "smallness" as "lotus," "east wind," "willow catkins," "tiny lonely town," "green stone street," "spring curtains" and "tiny casement."

In Miao Yüeh's opinion, *tz'u* is "light" in substance, "limited" in scope and "elusive" in meaning.³ The word "light" is used in both its physical and psychological senses. Physically, since it is "small," it is "light." A *tz'u* poem is not designed to arouse emotionally awe-

²Miao Yüeh, *Shih tz'u san lun* 詩詞散論 (*Essays on Shih and tz'u Poetry*) (Taipei, K'ai-ming 開明, 1953, rpt.), P. 5. Miao comments on *tz'u* poetry as a whole. However, I think his remarks best illuminate the *wan-yüeh* 婉約 category of *tz'u*, but not all *tz'u* poetry.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 6-10.

some and powerful reactions on the part of the reader and is therefore "light" in its psychological aspect. Since many examples can be drawn from classical lyrics as well as from Cheng's poems to support the "lightness" statement, further elaboration on this point seems unnecessary.

As for Miao's comment that *tz'u* is "elusive" in meaning, I have decided to put it aside for two reasons. First and foremost, a thorough discussion would require elaborate and lengthy explanations. Second, I have some reservation about Miao's comment. At this point, I can only say that there are a large number of elusive *tz'u* and *shih* 詩 poems in Chinese literature; yet I am not quite sure whether *tz'u* or *shih* is more elusive.

In connection with the "limited" scope of *tz'u* poetry, Miao Yüeh has remarked that "*tz'u* is capable only of depicting feelings and scenery; it is absolutely not suitable for argument and narration."⁴ Here Miao is actually prescribing the nature of *tz'u*. It is true that a large number of famous *tz'u* poems depict feelings and scenery instead of arguing an idea or narrating a story; but it is unjust to say that *tz'u* is incapable of arguing and narrating. In respect of scope, Miao Yüeh says that "of all Chinese literary genres, *tz'u* is the most refined; one cannot deal with elusive and sad feelings if one does not write in the form of *tz'u*."⁵ Again I take this comment, especially the second half of it, with some reservation, for, even in expressing elusive and sad feelings, one does not always have to turn to *tz'u*. However, although the whole statement needs qualification, Miao has pointed out an important characteristic of *tz'u*: the feeling of sadness. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that sadness is the predominant sentiment of this genre. In the following paragraphs we shall discuss how the theme of sadness dominates *tz'u* and Cheng Ch'ou-yü's poetry, and examine the recurrent images related to this theme.

We find sadness in *shih* poetry and other genres of Chinese literature, too, to be sure, but it is in *tz'u* poetry that sadness prevails, and this sadness is often gentle and abiding. The failure to serve and hopefully save one's country, the decline and fall of a dynasty with which one has cast one's lot—these and other similar situations usually result in sadness of a more intense type, in the tragic sense that marks the poetry of Ch'ü Yüan 屈原 (343?-278 B.C.) and Tu Fu 杜甫's (712-770), as well as the works of Hsin Ch'i-chi 辛棄疾 (1140-1207) and other patriotic *tz'u* poets. In *tz'u* poems written in the *wan-yüeh* style, however, we do not encounter this kind of sadness. Instead, we find a sadness caused directly or indirectly by love—either the longing for love, love-sickness, or the parting of lovers. An example is Wen T'ing-yün 溫庭筠 (813?-870)'s *Pu-sa man* 菩薩蠻, in which the poet depicts a woman longing for love:

<i>Like hills upon hills the golden screens reflect a glittering sun.</i>	小山重叠金明滅
<i>On her fragrant cheeks, white as snow, her hair drifts.</i>	鬢雲欲度香腮雪
<i>Languidly she gets up to draw her eyebrows</i>	嬾起畫蛾眉
<i>And dallies with her make-up.</i>	弄妝梳洗遲
<i>A mirror in front and a mirror at the back reflect the flowers;</i>	照花前後鏡
<i>They and the face dazzle each other.</i>	花面交相映
<i>On her new topcoat of silk</i>	新貼繡羅襦
<i>A pair of golden partridges are embroidered.</i>	雙雙金鷓鴣

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵*Ibid.*

Getting up late in the morning, she is languorous and alone. By focusing on a pair of golden partridges, the poet suggests that she is lonely, longing for her companion.

In Li Ch'ing-chao 李清照 (1084?-1151)'s lyric to the tune *I chien mei* 一剪梅, we can find the same kind of sentiment:

<i>The pink lotus withers, the jade mat is autumn-cold.</i>	紅藕香殘玉簟秋
<i>Gently I unfasten my silk skirt</i>	輕解羅裳
<i>And alone board a magnolia boat.</i>	獨上蘭舟
<i>Who is to send me a letter of love via the clouds?</i>	雲中誰寄錦書來
<i>When the wild geese return,</i>	雁字回時
<i>The moon is full over the West tower.</i>	月滿西樓
<i>The petals drift and the water flows as usual—</i>	花自飄零水自流
<i>The same love-sickness:</i>	一種相思
<i>Sorrow at two places.</i>	兩處閒愁
<i>This feeling cannot be rid of;</i>	此情無計可消除
<i>It falls to my heart</i>	才下眉頭
<i>No sooner than it is relieved from my eyebrows.</i>	卻上心頭

The poetess wrote this lyric when her husband was far away from home; and hence the love-sickness of separation. Another one dealing with a similar situation is Wen T'ing-yün's lyric to the tune *I Chiang-nan* 憶江南, in which the poet speaks on behalf of the woman waiting, in vain, for her lover:

<i>Washed up and the hairdo completed,</i>	梳洗罷
<i>She alone leans out from the tower overlooking the river.</i>	獨倚望江樓
<i>A thousand sails have passed, no one brings back her lover.</i>	過盡千帆皆不是
<i>The setting sun lingers, the water gently flows.</i>	斜暉脈脈水悠悠
<i>Heart-broken she is, at the sandbank covered with white duckweeds.</i>	腸斷白蘋洲

The woman in this poem has waited for the whole day—from the morning, after she has washed up herself, until the evening. The rails on which she leans must have been made warm, just like the bar in Dante G. Rossetti's poem "The Blessed Damsel":

*The Blessed Damsel leaned out
From the gold bar of Heaven;
.....
And still she bowed herself and stooped
Out of the circling charm;
Until her bosom must have made
The bar she leaned on warm,*

but her heart certainly gets colder and colder toward the end of the long wait in vain. Besides sharing the common waiting-in-vain theme, Cheng Ch'ou-yü's "A Mistake" resembles Wen T'ing-yün's *I Chiang-nan* also in terms of plot, only the woman in Wen's lyric is saved from the additional grief her counterpart in "A Mistake" has to experience. In the latter poem, the heroine's high hope of welcoming the man home is dramatically shattered when the man on horseback declares, "I'm not coming home, I'm a passer-by."

However, different as they are in other respects, the above *tz'u* poems, two by Wen T'ing-yün, one by Li Ch'ing-chao, and Cheng Ch'ou-yü's "A Mistake", all belong to the category of *kuei-yüan* 閨怨 (boudoir sadness) poems, which constitute a large corpus in Chinese literature.

The third kind of sadness springs from the parting of lovers, as is exemplified by Liu Yung 柳永 (fl. 1034)'s renowned lyric to the tune *Yü lin ling* 雨霖鈴:

<i>Cold cicadas sound sad and desperate;</i>	寒蟬凄切
<i>It is twilight, at the long pavilion,</i>	對長亭晚
<i>When the showers have just stopped.</i>	驟雨初歇
<i>Outside the city, we drink in the tent without cheer.</i>	都門帳飲無緒
<i>I want to linger awhile,</i>	方留戀處
<i>But the magnolia boat urges me to leave.</i>	蘭舟催發
<i>We hold each other's hands, and look at each other's tearful</i>	執手相看淚眼
<i>eyes,</i>	竟無語凝噎
<i>Choking, unable to utter a word.</i>	念去去千里烟波
<i>This journey covers a thousand miles of mists and waves,</i>	暮靄沉沉楚天闊
<i>Where the evening clouds are gloomy and the southern sky</i>	
<i>vast.</i>	
<i>Since ancient times, passionate lovers have suffered the</i>	多情自古傷離別
<i>sorrows of parting.</i>	更那堪
<i>How could I stand my loneliness in this cold autumn?</i>	冷落清秋節
<i>When I sober up from wine tonight, where shall I be?</i>	今宵酒醒何處
<i>—Willow banks, morning breeze and the waning moon.</i>	楊柳岸
<i>I shall be away for years,</i>	曉風殘月
<i>The sweet moments and scenes will signify nothing.</i>	此去經年
<i>Even if there are tender feelings of a thousand varieties,</i>	應是良辰好景虛設
<i>Who is going to share them with me?</i>	便縱有千種風情 更與何人說

Apart from the above three kinds of sadness, which are all love-oriented, there is yet another kind which is not easily identifiable. Ch'in Kuan's *Huan hsi sha*, as previously cited, belongs to this last category. In such *tz'u* poems, the unhappy sentiments are caused by ennui, nostalgia, self-pity or self-lament, examples of which are too numerous to cite.⁶

THUS SADNESS IS THE archetypal sentiment in *tz'u* poetry written in the *wan-yüeh* style. Cheng Ch'ou-yü shares this sad sentiment with many traditional *tz'u* writers. The woman in his "A Mistake" is waiting for her love in vain; her lonely heart is "a tiny casement tightly closed." In sentiment this poem does not differ much from the "boudoir sadness" verse by Wen T'ing-yün and other *tz'u* writers. But in terms of artistic achievement, the fine lines in this poem

*Clip-clop, the clatter of my horse's hoofs is a beautiful
mistake:
I'm not coming home, I'm a passer-by . . .*

⁶Cf. James J.Y. Liu, "Some Literary Qualities of the Lyric (*Tz'u*)," in Cyril Birch ed., *Studies in Chinese Literary Genres* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1974), pp. 137-143.

are so dramatic and epigrammatic that it outshines many other lyrics belonging to the same category.

The heroine in a number of Cheng's poems is the typical solitary woman in endless waiting. Sometimes, the solitude is imposed by a proud, manipulating man, as is shown in his *Ch'ing-fu* 情婦 (Mistress):

*In a small town with green stone streets lives my mistress
Whom I left without a thing
Except a bed of gold-thread chrysanthemums and a high
window
Which perhaps admits lonesomeness from the blue.
Perhaps... but chrysanthemums are patient in waiting.
I suppose lonesomeness and waiting are good for women.*

*So I never went there but in a gown of blue
That she might feel it was the season
Or the bird's migration,
For I'm not the kind of person who keeps going home.*

tr. by Yü Kwang-chung 余光中⁷

在一青石的小城，住着我的情婦
而我什麼也不留給她
祇有一畦金綫菊，和一個高高細窗口
或許，透一點長空的寂寥進來
或許……而金綫菊是善等待的
我想，寂寥與等待，對婦人是好的

所以，我去，總穿一襲藍衫子
我要她感覺，那是季節，或
候鳥的來臨
因我不是常常回家的那種人

Here again is the man, proud and lordly:

*In the tiny Sister Harbor, when the men mooring there are
raptured
You will heave a gentle tide,
Which is the swell of a girl's passionate tears.*

⁷This translation and the following other translations of Cheng's poems by Yü are quoted from Ch'i Pan-yüan 齊邦媛 *et al.*, ed., *An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Literature; Taiwan: 1949-1974* (Taipei, National Institute for Compilation and Translation, 1975), Vol. I. The translator, Yü Kwang-chung, is a very important poet himself. For an analysis and evaluation of Yü's works, see *Huo-yü te feng-huang: Yü Kwang-chung tso-p'in p'ing-lun chi* 火浴的鳳凰: 余光中作品評論集 (*The Phoenix Bathing in Fire: A Collection of Critical Essays on the Works of Yü Kwang-chung*) (Taipei, Ch'un Wen-hsüeh 純文學, 1979), edited by myself. The rest of Cheng's poems and other poems quoted in this present essay are my own translations.

*Nestling against all the helms and clinging to the edge of
mooring men's dream,
Perhaps you will move me and cause me to slowly cast the
long anchor in spite of myself.*

—“Chieh-meï kang” (Sisters Harbor)

小小的姊妹港，寄泊的人都沉醉
那時，你與一個小小的潮
是少女熱淚的盈滿
偎着所有的舵，攀着所有泊者的夢緣
那時，或將我感動，便禁不住把長錨徐徐下碇
——「姊妹港」

The element of male chauvinism is most clearly revealed by *Ch'uang wai te nü-nu* 窗外的女奴 (Slave-girls Outside the Window) where, in the form of metaphor, the man regards his girls as slaves:

*I am God facing south. My naked arms are wrapped with
the gauze-like night, so that the stars hanging down the wrists are
my slave-girls.*

我是南面的神，裸着的臂用紗樣的黑夜纏繞。於是，垂在腕上的星星是我的女奴。

Such poems with lordly attitudes might appear offensive to some modern readers. But this is what Cheng Ch'ou-yü is.

Cheng has written about the parting of lovers in the traditional vein of “beautiful and refined” *tz'u* poetry as well. The following is quoted from his *Fu-pieh* 賦別 (Parting):

*This time I take leave of you; it is wind, rain, and evening.
You smile and I wave my hand,
And a lonely road extends in two directions.
By now you must have returned to your home by the river
bank,
Combing your long hair or putting your wet overcoat in
order.
Yet my return journey in the wind and rain is still long.
The mountain recedes into the distance, the plain expands
wider and wider.
Alas, in this world, I am afraid, darkness has indeed taken
shape . . .*

這次我離開你，是風，是雨，是夜晚；
你笑了一笑，我擺一擺手，
一條寂寞的路便展向兩頭了。
念此際你已回到濱河的家居，
想你在梳理長髮或是整理濕了的外衣，
而我風雨的歸程還正長；

山退得很遠，平蕪拓得更大，
 哎，這世界，怕黑暗已真的成形了……

The setting of this poem—"it is wind, rain, and evening"—is identical with that of Liu Yung's *Yü lin ling*.

Cheng Ch'ou-yü is the pen-name of Cheng Wen-t'ao 鄭文韜. The characters *Ch'ou-yü* 愁予 appeared at least in two famous pieces of traditional Chinese poetry. One is *Hsiang Fu-jen* 湘夫人 in *Ch'u-tz'u* 楚辭; the other is *P'u-sa man* 菩薩蠻, "Written on a Wall at Tsao-k'ou in Chiang-hsi 書江西造口壁" by Hsin Ch'i-chi. They read respectively:

<i>The Child of God descends on the northern isle.</i>	帝子降兮北渚
<i>Looking afar, I am saddened.</i>	目眇眇兮愁予
<i>Gently the autumn wind blows;</i>	嫋嫋兮秋風
<i>On the Tung-t'ing Lake leaves are falling.</i>	洞庭波兮木葉下

<i>The river at dusk is saddening me;</i>	江晚正愁予
<i>Deep in the mountains I hear the sound of partridges.</i>	山深聞鷓鴣

The line "The river at dusk is saddening me" is especially significant in our present discussion for two reasons. First, the poet's surname 鄭 and the character 正 in *cheng ch'ou yü* 正愁予 (is saddening me) are homonyms; it is very likely that the pen-name Cheng Ch'ou-yü was adopted from this line. Second, the word *wan* 晚 (at dusk; evening) and a cluster of words with meanings similar to it appear again and again in *tz'u* poetry in general and in Cheng Ch'ou-yü's poetry in particular. *Wan* as a recurrent image is a key to understanding the unique mood and sentiment of *tz'u* poetry; it is also a key to understanding the similarity between Cheng Ch'ou-yü's work and *tz'u* lyricism.

IN THE ARTICLE, WE have so far quoted in entirety or in part six *tz'u* poems, all taken from anthologies at random:

- (1) *Huan hsi sha* by Ch'in Kuan;
- (2) *P'u-sa man* by Wen T'ing-yün;
- (3) *I chien mei* by Li Ch'ing-chao;
- (4) *I Chiang-nan* by Wen T'ing-yün;
- (5) *Yü lin ling* by Liu Yung;
- (6) *P'u-sa man* by Hsin Ch'i-chi.

Of these, four (poems three to six)—in other words, a two-third majority—deal with events happening in the evening and/or night. In fact, wherever the time element can be identified with certainty, the vast majority of *tz'u* poems are found to depict things that happen in the evening and/or night. Evening (and/or night) is the archetypal time in *tz'u* poetry.

Northrop Frye, dean of the school of archetypal criticism, rightly states that the thematic mode of tragedy is one of fall and death; tragedy is comparable to the evening of a day, and to the autumn season of a year, both of which symbolize fall and death in the cyclical movement of nature. (In contrast, according to Frye, comedy is comparable to morning or spring, while romance is noon or summer.) Frye's archetypal criticism is a huge framework within which the critic has built a hierarchic world of literature.⁸ Though Frye

⁸See the third essay in Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1957).

draws little from Chinese literature in building his theoretical framework, it does not mean that Chinese literature cannot fit into his framework. In Chinese literature, evening sadness has a long tradition; so does autumn sadness. It is late in the day when the sun sets and then "dies" in the west. It is late in the year when autumn comes, with the plants withering, the animals and birds hiding themselves and most living things decaying. In traditional China, criminals were often executed in autumn rather than in other seasons. Naturally, evening and autumn are the "objective correlatives" of sadness. The blending of sadness, autumn and evening together is the fusion of emotion with external objects (*ch'ing ching chiao jung* 情景交融), which is one of the most important canons in Chinese poetics.⁹ Substitute sadness for tragicness, and we will find Frye's archetypal theory very helpful in illuminating the correlation between the sentiment of *tz'u* and its imagery. Very often, evening, autumn, and all the elements of sadness may appear in a single lyric. For example, the season of two of the four "evening" lyrics (that is, poems three and five) can be unmistakably identified as autumn.

Though there are archetypes in literature, creative writing is by no means a mere complying with cut and dried formulas. Spring, instead of autumn, can also make people feel sad; but the effect is always achieved by ironic contrast, or by focusing on the lateness of the season. Here is the first part of Ch'in Kuan's *T'a so hsing* 踏莎行:

<i>In the fog, the towers and terraces are lost.</i>	霧失樓台
<i>In the moonlight, the pier can hardly be seen.</i>	月迷津渡
<i>Though I have strained my eyes, the Peach Blossom Utopia</i>	桃源望斷無尋處
<i>is nowhere to be found.</i>	可堪孤館閉春寒
<i>How could I bear to live in a lone inn locked in spring chill?</i>	杜鵑聲裏斜陽暮
<i>Amid the cries of cuckoos, the sun is setting.</i>	

The season is spring, but it is a chilly spring, with the weather completely contrary to that of the archetypal spring day, when the breeze is gentle and the sun warm. Then there is the lateness of spring that causes sadness, as is found in Yen Shu 晏殊 (991-1055)'s famous *Huan hsi sha*:

<i>A newly composed lyric, a cup of wine.</i>	一曲新詞酒一杯
<i>Last year's weather, at the same pavilion.</i>	去年天氣舊亭台
<i>The sun is setting—when will it return?</i>	夕陽西下幾時回
<i>It can't be helped: the flowers are falling.</i>	無可奈何花落去
<i>They look familiar: the swallows are coming back.</i>	似曾相識燕歸來
<i>In the fragrant garden path, alone I linger.</i>	小園香徑獨徘徊

Morning, instead of evening, can also bring about sadness; but, again, the result is always achieved by ironic contrast or by focusing on its lateness. In Ch'in Kuan's *Huan hsi sha*, quoted above, the morning is not the archetypal morning, when the sunshine is bright and warm; rather, it is a cloudy and chilly morning, "like late autumn." In Wen T'ing-yün's *P'u-sa man*, also quoted above, it is late rather than early in the morning that the action takes

⁹For a discussion on the correlation of imagery and emotion, see "*Chung-kuo shih-hsüeh-shih shang te yen-wai-chih-i shuo*" 中國詩學史上的言外之意說 ("Concepts of the Ulterior Significance in the History of Chinese Poetics") in my book *Chung-kuo shih-hsüeh tsung-heng lun* 中國詩學縱橫論 (*Essays on Chinese Poetics*) (Taipei, Hung-fan, 1977).

place ("And dallies with her make-up late"). Borrowing Frye's theory of displacement,¹⁰ we may say that in these poems, since spring is chilly and morning cloudy, since spring and morning are both in their late periods, they assume the moods of autumn and evening.

GOING BACK TO CHENG CH'OU-YÜ'S poems, we see that the time of "A Mistake" is "toward evening." Although the season of the poem is spring, it is not in the spring mood, because there is "no east wind": "the willow catkins of March do not drift . . . the spring curtains of March do not part." As the first line indicates, the time of "Parting" is clearly evening, which is the favorite time of the day in Cheng Ch'ou-yü's poetry.

The speaker in Cheng's poems is usually a vagrant-minstrel, who takes leave of his girls and travels alone, writing his poems and drinking his wine. At one time, he sees a deserted fortress, around which are

*The nervous and hollow loophole eyes,
The nails on which bugles were hung,
The lookout tower battlements
Worn flat by evenings and homesick boots.*

怔忡而空曠的箭眼
掛過號角的鐵釘
被黃昏和望歸的靴子磨平的
戍樓的石梁啊

He laments the decaying place, is nostalgic about its heroes and warriors, and then,

*In the moonlight let me deliver "The General's Order"
Plaintive on my lute . . .*

—*"Ts'an pao"*
"Deserted Fortress"
tr. by Yü Kwang-chung

趁月色，我傳下悲威的「將軍令」
自琴絃……

——「殘堡」

Here the time is his favorite evening. At another time, again in the evening, he joins the lonely travellers in a country inn, a "home" lit by campfire, where wine and meat are served, where men talk with each other about their vagrancy. This is his *Yeh tien* 野店 (Country Inn), which begins with the following couplet:

*Who passed to us the poet's profession?
Hoisting a lamp in the evening.*

是誰傳下這詩人的行業
黃昏裏掛起一盞燈

At sunset, when the color of the sky quickly changes, the passage of time is most

¹⁰By "displacement" Frye means "the adaptation of myth and metaphor to canons of morality or plausibility"; see Frye, p. 365.

conspicuous. Time passes; and with time the hero, the beauty, and indeed history and life. These are causes of sadness in much of Cheng's poetry. But Cheng the contemplative poet is sometimes fascinated merely by the passage of a colorful scene in the evening. In his *Wan hung chih shih* 晚虹之逝 (Passage of an Evening Rainbow) the short-lived color belt is in the western sky,

*But evening says it is now cold
And covers the pretty red tie with his big gray lapel.*

但黃昏說是冷了
用灰色的大翻襟蓋上那條美麗的紅領帶

Another "evening" poem is *Wan Yun* 晚雲 (Evening Clouds):

*Here comes July, craggy are the evening clouds of July.
Look up at the blue river tender and slow through the
canyons.*

*Suddenly, autumn droops her girdle and unties her brocade
purse:
Small hands all across the plain waving, are filled with gold.*

*Or as if in winter,
Busy partridges trudging for miles in the snow at night
To catch the last fair of the year. . .*

(tr. by Yü Kwang-chung)

七月來了，七月的晚雲如山，
仰視那藍河多峽而柔緩。

突然，秋垂落其飄帶，解其錦囊，
搖擺在整個大平原上的小手都握了黃金。

又像是冬天，
匆忙的鸚鵡們走卅里積雪的夜路，
趕年關最後的集……

Like the previous one, this poem is purely a description of the evening scene.

Thus we see that Cheng Ch'ou-yü shares with traditional *tz'u* poets the obsession with evening; both the modern poet and his classical counterparts use diction that is "small" and the substance of their poems is usually "light." Is Cheng's preoccupation with evening and "smallness" descended from the *tz'u* tradition? Or is their similarity a mere coincidence? It is difficult to tell. But as far as tradition is concerned, one thing is clear: Cheng has drawn phrases and ideas from some of the most famous *tz'u* poems. Apart from his pen-name, which we have discussed above, the line "Autumn droops her girdle and unties her brocade purse" from "*Wan yün*", for instance, is obviously borrowed from "the fragrant bag is secretly untied, the silk girdle lightly detached," (香囊暗解，羅帶輕分) which are lines in Ch'in Kuan's *Man T'ing fang* 滿庭芳.

Autumn appears in Cheng's poems—*Tang hsi-feng tsou kuo* 當西風走過 (When the West Wind Passes) and *Tz'ao-li-ch'ung* 草履蟲 (Paramecium), for example—too, but not as

often as evening. Evening is sad; so is autumn. When it is autumn evening, sadness in the poem becomes more poignant. However, as we have seen, sadness is the sentiment that dominates only some of Cheng's poems. Cheng is not a poet writing in Su Shih 蘇軾 (1037-1101)'s or Hsin Ch'i-chi's "powerful and free" style; neither is he a Ch'in Kuan chanting his sadly "beautiful and refined" lyrics. His poems are "beautiful and refined", but only with an occasional touch of sadness. Few modern Chinese poets resemble the traditional *tz'u* poets as closely as Cheng, whose work is a worthy continuation of the *tz'u* tradition. A poet writing entirely in the shadow of his predecessors would have no significance of his own. Cheng is not such a poet. His modern vocabulary and syntax, together with his sensibility and skill, have created a distinguished style. He borrows phrases and ideas from the tradition, but is original in his art, especially in creating his own metaphors.

Since the literary revolution, the language of modern Chinese poetry has been in the main what is called vernacular as opposed to the classical. Vernacular Chinese, characterized by its use of modern syntax and vocabulary, has indeed injected vitality into classical Chinese. But, in the hands of inferior writers, the vernacular language often appears crude and clumsy, sometimes even outrageous, to discerning eyes.

However, with Cheng Ch'ou-yü's language, we find a remarkable maturity to which not many Chinese poets up to the fifties could have aspired. For example, in Cheng's *Hsiao-hsiao te tao* 小小的島 (A Small Small Island), a lovely piece which reminds one of W.B. Yeats's "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," the vocabulary and syntax are unmistakably modern, yet the use of words is beautifully economical, as can be seen in the first stanza of the poem:

*The small, small island where you live I'm now thinking of.
It belongs to the tropics, to the kingdom of green.
On the shallow sand, fishes of five colors
always dwell,
Little birds leap and sing on the branches, like piano keys
going up and down.*

你住的小小的島我正思念
那兒屬於熱帶，屬於青青的國度
淺沙上，老是棲息着五色的魚羣
小鳥跳響在枝上，如琴鍵的起落

Another example, Cheng's famous line and a half, which have already been cited, reflects the same virtue:

*In the moonlight I deliver the "General's Order"
Plaintive on my lute . . .*

The following epigrammatic couplet from *Pieh-chieh chiu-tien* 邊界酒店 (Tavern on the Border), again a combination of modern vernacular features with poetic refinement,

*How he desired to step across! One single step, and it's
homesickness.
That beautiful homesickness, tangible at an arm's stretch.*

多想跨出去，一步即成鄉愁
那美麗的鄉愁，伸手可觸及

would in inferior hands become

他多麼地想要跨出他的腿啊，他的一個步伐
就可以使他感染到鄉愁了
那個美麗的鄉愁呀，他的一隻手伸出去
就可以觸摸到它了

Cheng is skillful at creating metaphors, the capacity for which is generally regarded as a sign of poetic genius. Cheng compares an evening rainbow to a "beautiful red neck-tie" and the vanishing of this rainbow to the tie's being covered by "A big gray lapel" ("Passage of an Evening Rainbow"). The first stanza of *Yeh ke* 夜歌 (Night Song) is based on a metaphor:

*Now our harbor is quiet
The tall cranes point their long noses at the sky
Like giant elephants reaching for food
And the stars everywhere in the sky are drooping like fruits*

這時，我們的港是靜了
高架起重機的長鼻指着天
恰似匹匹採食的巨象
而滿天欲墜的星斗如果實

The image of elephants reaching for fruits is quite a lovely one; modern poets with anti-industrialization sentiments (Robert Lowell, for instance) would hardly look at the operation of the "ugly" cranes from such an angle. However, having gathered a bundle of beautiful images during the years he was working at the Harbor Bureau of Keelung, and following in the steps of traditional Chinese *tz'u* poets, who often tended to romanticize the things they saw, Cheng Chou-yü has chosen to view industrialization with a friendly eye.

Of all the poems Cheng wrote at the harbor, "As Though in a Mist" is perhaps the prettiest:

*I came back from the sea, bringing the mariner's stars two
and twenty.
You ask me about the voyage; I look up at the sky and
smile . . .
As though in a mist,
The earrings ringing, we groped through the dark tresses,
Parting the eyelashes with the lightest of breaths, for the
lighthouse light.*

*The equator was a streak of moist red, fading as you smiled.
The meridian was a string of dark blue pearls
That shed for dividing time when you fell fast in thought.*

*I come back from the sea whose treasures you own
aplenty . . .
The approaching shells, the reproaching sunset clouds,
And the coral reef I wouldn't risk steering near.*

—"As Though in a Mist"
tr. by Yü Kwang-chung

我從海上來，帶回航海的二十二顆星。
 你問我航海的事兒，我仰天笑了……
 如霧起時
 敲叮叮的耳環在濃密的髮叢找航路；
 用最細最細的喘息，吹開睫毛引燈塔的光。

赤道是一痕潤紅的線，你笑時不見。
 子午線是一串暗藍的珍珠，
 當你思念時即為時間的分隔而滴落。

我從海上來，你有海上的珍奇太多了……
 迎人的編貝，曠人的晚雲，
 和使我不敢輕易近航的珊瑚的礁區。

——「如霧起時」

In this poem, readers can still find such words as “stars”, “earrings”, “lightest”, “streak”, “pearls” and “shells”, which are similar to those in classical *tz'u* in their “smallness”. But it hardly resembles *tz'u* poems written in the *wan-yüeh* style. Such terms as “lighthouse”, “equator”, “meridian” and “coral reef”, unknown to people about 1,000 years ago, are only used by modern men. The life of a mariner too, as far as I know, never appeared as a theme in *tz'u* poetry of the Sung dynasty. As it is, the above poem is the work of a modern Chinese poet who has succeeded in assimilating the “short song” (小令) technique of classical *tz'u* poetry. It begins with a mariner coming back from the sea, who when asked about the voyage in a rendezvous with his girl, only smiles and answers the question indirectly. With the girl apparently in his embrace, the mariner tells her how he groped through the thick mist, ringing the bells to look for the light of the lighthouse; how the equator and the meridian are alike; what the shells, the evening clouds and the coral reef signify to him. All the things the mariner recounts are metaphors: the mist is the girl's tresses, the bells her earrings, the lighthouse her bright eyes, the equator the thin line between her lips in their closure, the meridian her tear drops, the shells her teeth, the evening clouds her cheeks, and the coral reef (which the mariner wouldn't risk approaching) her body. What the mariner perceived and conceived on his voyage are all related to his girl. In such a short poem, colors (red, blue, black and white), lines (vertical as well as horizontal), sounds and emotions (sorrow and gaiety) are richly interwoven. With its language so refined, its images so evocative, it can certainly rank with the most beautiful love poems written in Chinese. Indeed, it can be regarded as a triumph of metaphors.

In “A Mistake”, quoted at the beginning of this essay, metaphors again play an important role: “. . . the face waiting in the seasons, lotus-like, blossoms and withers,” “Your heart is a tiny lonely town/Like a green stone street, toward evening,” and “Your heart is a tiny casement tightly closed” are all metaphors. But what Cheng Ch'ou-yü has achieved in “A Mistake” is not merely its metaphorical language. Its structure and the paradox at the end, too, are excellent. The poem begins with the vast country south of the River, then zooms to the town, the street, the curtain, the casement, the invisible, yet central, figure—the woman who has been waiting for seasons in loneliness—and then to her dramatic encounter with the man. The climax of the story comes briefly but forcefully when the “beautiful” hope is shattered: the hope is “beautiful” but it is a “mistake”, for the man is not coming home. The poem does not tell us how the merciless man leaves the woman and continues his journey, but with the word “passer-by” we can imagine that, as he leaves, the scene shifts from the casement to the street, to the town and to the vast country, and the story ends where it began. Whereas the words “pass” in the first line and “passer-by” in the

last complete the circular structure of the poem, the "tiny lonely town," the "green stone street" and the "tiny casement tightly closed", with sizes varying from big to small, occupy strategic points in this structure. The objects, either "tiny," "closed" or "green" (obviously a cold color), apart from providing the poem with the setting, also describe the woman's feelings of loneliness and alienation. That these words can perform a double function testifies fully to Cheng's fine and subtle craftsmanship. The theme and sentiment of "A Mistake" are very traditional; it is one of the numerous *guei yüan* (boudoir sadness) poems depicting the loneliness of women in their endless waiting for men. There is little difference between the woman in this poem and those in *tz'u* pieces. One cannot, for instance, tell the woman in "A Mistake" from her counterpart in Wen T'ing-yün's *I Chiang-nan*, cited above. Yet, despite all these similarities, "A Mistake", with its modern syntax and verbal paradox ("a beautiful mistake"), has an unmistakable modern ring. For the verbal paradox, though a favorite rhetorical device in modern Western and Chinese poetry, is rare in classical Chinese poetry. It is precisely in this sense that "A Mistake" can lay full claim to modernity.

Cheng is not yet a major poet, for, up to the present, his scope (both thematically and technically speaking) is still limited, and the quantity of his work is less than impressive.¹¹ Yet surely impressive is his charming lyricism, which is a worthy continuation and development of the classical *tz'u* tradition.

¹¹He has written about 160 poems in some thirty years.