

白樸：梧桐雨

Rain on the Wu T'ung Tree

By Po P'o (c. 1226-1313)

Translated by Shizue Matsuda



*The Emperor
listens to rain
on the wu-
t'ung tree on
an autumn
evening.*

ACT III

(CH'EN HSUAN-LI comes on stage. He recites):

Through the grace of my lord the imperial
guards I command;
His majesty's concern I am first to hear.
At times of peace military preparations
are of no demand.
Who would expect a crazy barbarian to
raise the dust of war?

I am the Lung-wu General of the Right, Ch'en Hsuan-li. The barbarian rebel, An Lu-shan, has launched an attack, and T'ung-kuan has fallen. Yesterday the ministers held a conference and decided to have the imperial seat moved to Shu temporarily, and thereby avoid the enemy's spearhead. This morning's early messenger says that the enemy is closing in on the capital. His

Majesty has ordered me to command the imperial guards and protect his procession. I have checked my troops long ago, and my men and horses await the departure.

(The EMPEROR appears leading YANG KUEI-FEI, YANG KUO-CHUNG, and KAO LI-SHIH. The CROWN PRINCE, KUO TZU-I, and LI KUAN-PI follow.)

EMPEROR: My eyes were deceived, and I have caused a mad barbarian to lead a rebellion. The situation is so urgent that I can only move west and avoid the revolting army. Oh, how it pains my heart!

(Sings)

The banner of five directions fluttering
in the midst of dawn.

Lonely and undecorated the imperial
carriage.

Too weary to raise the lash,
Languidly I step on the stirrup.
As I turn to see the flowery capital,
Each step pulls me back to it.

I have lived deep within the palace; how could I
become accustomed to the privation of a village
dwelling?

(Sings)

In the gloomy distance
I leave behind the river; mountains
remain, five or six.

Desolate beneath the forests,
Torn fences and shattered roofs, two
or three.

Far away the trees of Ch'in-ch'uan
blur in the fog;

Withering willows near the Pa Bridge
sway in the wind.

The dim morning light through the
carriage window—

How can it compare to the glittering
tiles on the palace roofs?

(VILLAGE ELDERS appear and say): Your
majesty, the hundred clans of the village pay
homage to you.

EMPEROR: What do the elders have to say?

ELDERS: The palace is where your majesty dwells;
the imperial tombs are where your ancestors
rest. Now you are disregarding all these, and
where do you intend to go?

EMPEROR: I cannot help it. I am only avoiding the

battles temporarily.

ELDERS: Since your majesty has decided not to
remain, your subjects will be obliged to have
our sons and younger brothers led by the crown
prince to destroy the rebels in the east and
regain Ch'ang-an. If the crown prince is leaving
for Shu with your majesty, who are we to accept
as the lord of the middle plain?

EMPEROR: The village elders are correct. Attend-
ants, order my son to come before me.

(The CROWN PRINCE pays his respects.)

EMPEROR: The village elders say that the middle
plain is now without a lord; they have asked for
you to remain and lead their forces to fight the
rebels. I have, therefore, appointed Kuo Tzu-i
and Li Kuan-pi as generals, and with three
thousand reserves, I bid you to return. Listen
to what I have to say.

(Sings)

I accept the loyal words of you elders
And I order you, Crown Prince, to be
in charge of an expeditionary force
against the rebels.

You too must share the troubles of the
nation.

How can I agree to have another man
seize the land?

I pass on to you this seal, the token of
transmitting the throne.

CROWN PRINCE: Your child is ordered to command
the army and dispel the enemy only. How could
I dare ascend the throne?

EMPEROR:

(Sings)

When you have expelled the rebel army,
And have saved the country,
Would you still refrain from accepting
the offer?

CROWN PRINCE: It is the nation's crisis, and your
child receives your edict. I will lead Kuo Tzu-i
and Li Kuan-pi and turn back.

*(The CROWN PRINCE bows and takes his
leave. The imperial army does not advance.)*

EMPEROR:

(Sings)

The vanguards should march speedily.
Why do they not advance?

(The army shouts.)

My attendants view the scene and shake
in terror;

The romance between Hsuan-tung (唐玄宗), ruler of the T'ang Empire from A.D. 713 to 756, and his beautiful concubine Yang Kuei-fei (楊貴妃), is a favourite theme for writers of poetry and drama. An Emperor torn between love and duty to the state, the struggle of power between the court and the army, the Tartar rebellion that molested the land—all are sources of inexhaustible material. The masterpiece that immortalizes this great passion was Po Chü-i's Song of Unending Sorrow (長恨歌)—a poem many times translated into English—which describes the Emperor's feelings before and after the loss of his lady love in lines at once vivid and memorable. Written some four centuries later, the Yuan play Rain on the Wu-t'ung Tree portrays this enduring love in its many facets, and echoes the tragic strains of the great T'ang poem. Writing in a delicate and graceful style, Po P'o, author of 16 plays, successfully creates an atmosphere of remorsefulness sustained to the very end of the fourth act. The detailed description and psychological penetration, apparent in the two acts printed here, explain why the play is often cited as a representative work of historical drama written by one of the great masters of the genre.

The guards in anger hold their lashes
and the horses rear.
In hatred, clad in armor,
They draw their glittering swords,
And line up in rows and groups,
Pressing forward as tight as fish scales.

CH'EN HSUAN-LI: The army says that the nation has a traitor, and that he has caused the emperor's departure. Unless this evil near his majesty is removed, the minds of the troops cannot be pacified.

EMPEROR: What is this that you say?

(Sings)

I expose myself to the dust of ten
thousand li.

Instead of sharing my sorrow,
Are you forcibly placing the blame on
me

When your country has never failed
you?

What causes the army to harbor re-

luctance?

I ask you, why do you not reveal your
mind?

CH'EN HSUAN-LI: Yang Kuo-chung has been abusing his power and has misled the nation. He now communes with the barbarian messenger, and he seems to intend betrayal. May I request that he be executed in order to appease the anger of the people?

EMPEROR:

(Sings)

Accordingly Yang Kuo-chung deserves
to be hacked to death

If he has provoked the rebel An Lu-
shan to disturb the middle kingdom,
But it perturbs me to eliminate a
trusted retainer.

Moreover, he is of blood relation to
Fei-tzu.

Even if he is decapitated, would it not
sully

The law of the five penalties?

Dismissing him from his office and
degrading him to a commoner

Should be equivalent to execution.

Is this acceptable?

General Ch'en Hsuan-li, scrutinize it.

(The army shouts angrily. CH'EN HSUAN-LI says): Your majesty, the army is already swerving, and your subject is unable to control it. What is to be done?

EMPEROR: I will leave it to your discretion.

(The mob kills YANG KUO-CHUNG.)

EMPEROR:

(Sings)

Densely a forest of spears encircles
him;

The shout of triumph rumbles through
the hills.

Clearly it must be that under General
Ch'en's orders

Yang Kuo-chung has been executed.

(The soldiers grasping their swords press
forward.)

EMPEROR:

(Sings)

Shouting in confused clamor,

The six armies halt, lining up their
weapons.

Horses gather on the hill of Ma Wei.
I shake in terror without a solution;
Suddenly my hair stands in fear.

The forces in loyalty follow the seal
Held by the general, his command so
solemn.

Military powers are in his hands; the
sovereign is helpless.

Oh general, do you not see how terri-
fied I am?

Yang Kuo-chung is already dead. Why does the
army not proceed?

CH'EN HSUAN-LI: Since Kuo-chung has rebelled, it
is not proper to have Kuei-fei accompany you.
I suggest that your majesty should sacrifice your
love and put her to law.

EMPEROR:

(Sings)

Kao Li-shih, explain to Ch'en Hsuan-li
that high and low should not be
confused.

How can he say that Fei-tzu should be
punished?

Soon she is to be ranked as empress;
She serves in my chamber.

No offense has she committed; besides,
she is good and intelligent.

Not at all is she like Pao-ssu of Chou
who delighted in false beacons,

Nor like Tan-chi, King Chou's favorite,
who saw a man's knees dissected.

Only a while ago her brother was
executed;

No matter what faults she may have
She should be pardoned on my behalf.

Do not seize her recklessly.

KAO LI-SHIH: Kuei-fei actually has no fault. But
the army has already killed Kuo-chung, and as
long as Kuei-fei is near you, how can they feel
safe? I beseech your majesty to contemplate
the situation, and if the soldiers are pacified,
your majesty may also be rested.

EMPEROR:

(Sings)

Only a flute, a drum, plus a lute,
And tick tick the beating of ivory
chopsticks,

Even with the addition of the dance
music of eighteen flowers

Wherein would they peril the empire?
But I hear that the last king of Ch'en
met his death

All because of Hou-t'ing-hua.

YANG KUEI-FEI: My life is not worth sparing, but
your majesty's kindness and affection in these
past years I still have not repaid, and I am loath
to be separated.

EMPEROR: Fei-tzu, I cannot settle the matter. The
army is swerving and I cannot guard even
myself.

(Sings)

That they oppose me in this way
No doubt is a sign of their deviation.

Seeing that I hanker after her,
They held the three foot dragon sword.

Even if they did not pierce her to death
They would still frighten her to death.

Why should they ask for my per-
mission?

I suppose they still respect the Imperial
House?

CH'EN HSUAN-LI: I request that your majesty hurry
in discarding affection and rectifying the law..

YANG KUEI-FEI: Your majesty, is there not a way
to spare me?

EMPEROR: Oh, what shall I do!

(Sings)

There'll be no chance to see the growth
of the silk tree.

No more will I be able to lift up in
wonder my living blossom.

To the end of the world we were to
ride together on a green phoenix.

How much I have loved her!

How can I bear to have her lie under
the hills of Ma Wei?

CH'EN HSUAN-LI: The rebellion of An Lu-shan was
caused by the Yang's brother and sister. If you
do not execute both of them and appease the
anger of the people, when can the calamity be
eliminated? I request your majesty to give us
the Yang Woman so that the cavalry may tram-
ple over her, and thus, give evidence of our
sincerity.

EMPEROR: How can I have her face that? Kao Li-
shih, lead Fei-tzu into the Buddhist temple and

tell her to end her own life there. After that, let an officer verify it.

KAO LI-SHIH: I have a white silk sash here.

EMPEROR:

(Sings)

She is the begonia blossom, glamor
drips from the petals.

How could she have been the root for
the nation's disaster?

Never again will she draw her curved
brows like far away mountains.

Her cloudy hair will be dishevelled
How can I stand hoofs trampling on
her face?

On her delicate neck to be strangled
Already the long white silk has been
prepared.

There she alone will meet her death
But I, agonized with pain, am power-
less.

KAO LI-SHIH: Lady, let us go. The army has been
delayed.

*(YANG KUEI-FEI turns to the EMPEROR and
says):* Your majesty, have mercy!

EMPEROR: Do not blame me!

(Sings)

In such extreme confusion, how can I
rescue her?

In this undue chaos, how can I detain
her?

If I postponed her death for half an
hour

He'll forcibly strangle her: Ch'en
Hsuan-li clamors.

(KAO LI-SHIH leads KUEI-FEI off.)

EMPEROR:

(Sings)

What makes them secretly blame her
alone?

Behind her follow the shining weapons
of the guards

With a few palace maids attending.

Do not shock my delicate queen!

Someone! Go and see her! Tell her!

Oh, have pity on the realm of the T'ang
dynasty!

*(KAO LI-SHIH comes back with KUEI-FEI's
garment. He says):* Death has been bestowed on
the lady. The six armies may proceed and
inspect.

*(CH'EN HSUAN-LI leads the cavalry: they
trample around.)*

(The EMPEROR weeps and says): You have
left me behind!

(Sings)

I knew not that today you were to lie
below the hills of Ma Wei

Our vows at the Ch'ang-sheng Palace
have become vain.

I reproach the heartless and mad whirl-
wind

How could it have blown off only my
best flower?

I think of her soul across the end of
heaven

Forming some veils of colored mist.

Oh heaven! When Ming-fei of Han was
given to the barbarian king,

It was only that her lute was dampened
as she wept to the western wind.

When have we ever seen the six armies
trample on

A corpse that lay on the yellow sand?

*(He picks up her handkerchief and weeps.
He says):* Fei-tzu, where have you gone, leaving
only this handkerchief behind? How pitiful!

(Sings)

Who took her brocade stockings and
her fine silken slip?

I can only lament and hug the tear-
stained silk band.

How sorrowful, her coffin was not
lined with mercury,

Nor did the palace maids draw it with
linen,

Or sprinkle it with wine and tea.

Only a thin soil buries her temporarily,
And I could not select a mound for
her grave.

Yellow dust scatters in the gust of the
sad wind

The sky darkens and the sun declines.
Beyond us, green waters and blue
mountains

Step by step we ascend Chien-ling and
Pa-chia

Sorrow fills my heart and tears of
vexation flow.

And rest at the end of my present life.
But this helpless emperor weeps, rocked
on the back of a piebald horse.

ACT IV

(KAO LI-SHIH enters and says):

I am Kao Li-shih. From the days of my youth I have served in the inner palace. I was favored and promoted by his majesty and given the position of Chief Eunuch of the Six Palaces. In the past the emperor fancied the beauty of the daughter of the Yang clan and ordered me to bring her to the palace. His affection for her was exceptional; he enfeoffed her as Kuei-fei and bestowed on her the title, T'ai-chen. Thereafter, the barbarian rebel rose, and under the disguise of loyalty attacked Yang Kuo-chung, and the emperor was forced to flee to Shu. On his way, the imperial army would not proceed, and the Lung-wu General of the Right, Ch'en Hsuan-li, memorialized and executed Yang Kuo-chung, whereby the calamity extended to Yang Kuei-fei. The emperor had no way out but to accept her strangling at the hamlet of Ma Wei. At present the rebels have been pacified; the emperor has returned, and the crown prince has been enthroned. His Majesty is now retired and resides in the Western Palace, and day and night he only yearns after Lady Yang. He ordered me to hang her portrait, and morning and night he weeps and offers sacrifice. I must prepare and wait for his highness here.

(The EMPEROR enters and says):

From the time I fled to Shu and returned to the capital, the crown prince has destroyed the rebels, and he has ascended the throne. I live my old days in retirement in the Western Palace, and daily I only think of Fei-tzu. I ordered an artist to paint a life-size portrait of her, and as I sacrifice to her and confront her daily, my distress only increases.

(He weeps and sings)

Ever since I left for Shu and returned
to the capital,
What is there in a moonlight night and
a flowery morning?

This past half a year, how my gray
hairs have increased
How can I straighten out my sorrowful
looks?

The court officials would mock at my
emaciation.

High on the hanger I raise her portrait
The fragrance of lichee fruit and
flowers on the sandal wood table
The sight pierces my heart.

(He looks at the portrait and sings)

I am overcome with grief

And my body totters.

I call out loud, T'ai-chen Fei!

But no reply

In tears of rain I wail.

The court painter is skilled in art

He portrays in exact precision.

Although excelling in color and strokes,

He conveys not the dance by the

Ch'en-hsiang Pavilion,

Nor the charm on horseback in front

of the Hua-o Tower.

Her beauty is indescribable!

Oh Fei-tzu, I shall always remember

The autumn festival and the banquet
at Hua-ch'ing Palace,

The seventh eve party, the prayings for
talent at Ch'ang-sheng Palace.

We vowed to be trees with intertwining
boughs and birds with wings con-
nected.

Who would have thought that you
would ride the phoenix,

And return to the clouds by curtailing
your life so soon?

The more I hold you in view, the more your
memory pierces me. What am I to do?

(Sings)

I long to build a Yang Fei Temple,

But how can I without power?

With throne abdicated and court de-
clined,

When alone I keep awake in my lonely
bed,

Sorrow and lament reach the highest
tier of Heaven

In life we shared bed and pillow,

But no way to share a coffin at death.
 Who could have foreseen that amidst
 the dust of Ma Wei ridge
 That I was to let fall begonia blossom?

I feel somewhat weary. I'll take a walk below
 the pavilion for a while.

(Sings)

I bring myself out from the palace,
 And stroll around the pavilion.
 The willow sways its green threads
 The lotus opens its painted bud.

I view the lotus and long for the charm-
 ing face;
 I meet the willows and recall her slen-
 der waist.
 Again they decorate the Shang-yang
 Palace,
 But she alone roams the streets of
 Ch'ang-an.

I still remember the time we stood
 below the wu-t'ung tree
 When I beat a drum with my red ivory
 chopsticks.
 She smiled and held her golden silk
 garment,
 And danced to the music of the rain-
 bow robe.

But now weeds fill the emerald plat-
 form,
 And below the trees no fragrance linger.
 In vain I face the shadow of the wu-
 t'ung tree;
 I do not see my precious one.

(He sighs and says): I dread the memories
 from a walk; it is better that I return.

(Sings)

I had hoped to brighten my mind by
 reverting to pleasure and joy,
 But it only incites past memories;
 heaven and earth are barren.
 Dispirited I return, only to a lonely
 bed;
 How am I to pass the night, the lan-
 guishing thoughts?

In the light enshrouding mist, strings
 of smoke from the incense rise;
 Piercing the twilight, the silver lamp

glitters.

The sounds of a drum far away
 Already time the evening.
 With secret thoughts I watch the clear
 sky

Hoping that she may come in my
 dreams.

Isn't it said that the mouth echoes the
 heart?

Therefore, unceasingly I call her name.

Unnoticed a spell of drowsiness has approached;
 I shall try to sleep a little.

(Sings)

My mind is awake, my heart is uneasy
 From the four walls sound the autumn
 insects.

Suddenly the west wind lifts the
 curtain,
 And far away I see dark clouds covering
 the land.

Moaning I put some clothes on and
 lean on the screen

Reproaching myself that my eyes will
 not close.

The dry leaves had drop-drop fluttered
 to the steps,

But the sharp sharp west wind brushes
 through and sweeps them up.

Suddenly whisp-whisp shaken by the
 wind the silver light crackles

The palace bells ring clang-clang.

The red bamboo screens bang-bang in
 the wind

Ding-dong the wind bells ring from the
 eves.

(He sleeps and sings)

Sighing I lie down with my clothes on.
 Droopingly I fall asleep.

(YANG KUEI-FEI enters and says): I am Yang
 Kuei-fei. I am giving a party at the palace today.
 Palace maid, ask his majesty to attend.

EMPEROR:

(Sings)

Suddenly I see a maid in blue costume
 coming to inform me.

She says that T'ai-chen is inviting me
 to a party.

(He sees KUEI-FEI and says): Fei-tzu, where
 have you been?

YANG KUEI-FEI: Today I have prepared a feast at the Ch'ang-sheng Palace. May I ask your majesty to attend?

EMPEROR: Then tell all the musicians of the Pear Garden to be prepared.

(KUEI-FEI exits. EMPEROR awakens. Startled, he says): Ah! It was only a dream. The Fei-tzu whom I had seen so clearly is gone.

(Sings)

Just like the day she, had finished
bathing
Her gleaming face was charming.
My good dream was about to conclude,
and I awoke
Tears dropping on my collar wet my
silken handkerchief.

How distressful and painful!
Is it the wild geese flying over the
tower that awakened me?
Or is it the cricket below the steps,
Or could it be the wind bells on the
eaves,
Or the golden cock on the perch?
'Tis none other than the lonely rain
drops
On the wu-t'ung tree by the window.
Patter-patter it falls on the leaves
Drop-drop it wets the cold boughs
And wounds me, the one who is al-
ready afflicted.

This rain is not expected to save the
parched sprouts,
Nor moisten the withered grass,
Or open the buds,
Who should expect its melancholy
presence in autumn?
Against the blue boughs and green
branches
The rain drops splash and burst.
Its sound increases a hundred-and-ten-
fold when it falls on plantain leaves,
Continuous pearls and interlocked jades
splashing to a thousand pieces.
In vain it fills the earthen jars,
And vexes the mind of an exasperated
person.

When its sound is tense it resembles
ten thousand pearls dropping on a

jade tray.

When its sound echoes it resembles
groups of pan-pipes played at a
banquet.

When its sound is clear it resembles a
cold spring running between the
rocks.

When its sound is ferocious it resem-
bles war drums beaten below the
banners.

The rain will grieve me to death,
Oh, how it grieves me to death!

This unceasing rain withers the wu-
t'ung leaves;
Each drop drops to break one's heart.
In vain the silver frame encircles the
well.

The best thing to do with the wu-
t'ung's growing branches,
Is either to burn them as firewood or
saw them down.

Formerly when Fei-tzu danced on the emerald
platform, it was below this tree, and when Fei-
tzu and I made a vow, it was towards this tree.
Today in dreams we sought each other, but the
tree startled me awake.

(Sings)

That night at the Ch'ang-sheng Palace
Where we walked the corridors and
pledged our love,
Strolling together under the wu-t'ung
tree
Where we chatted to our hearts' con-
tent.
That morning at the Ch'en-hsiang Pa-
vilion,
With the rainbow dance and the music
of Liu-yao.
Where with red ivory chopsticks I beat
the rhythm,
And the accelerated k'ung and shang
notes were clamorous.
Just at that happy occasion
What was planted is so mournful today
I secretly calculate its revenge.

KAO LI-SHIH: Your highness, all plants and trees
have the sounds of rain, it is not only the wu-
t'ung tree.

EMPEROR: How do you know? Listen to what I tell you.

(Sings)

The misty rain on the willow
Pitter-patters on the building, wetting
the bamboo screen.

The threads of rain on the plum
Dot the river and fill the pavilion.
Apricot blossoms in the rain, a balustrade
of weeping red.

Pear blossoms in the rain, a beauty so
lonely;

Lotus blossoms under the rain, its
green umbrella wavering;

Sweet peas in the rain, with drooping
green leaves;

But they all are not like the wu-t'ung
tree that startles and breaks my
dreams.

Aggravating my remorse and adding to
my sorrow

Continuing through the evening and
night,

Surely it is the water fairy playing
Wetting the willow and sprinkling it in
the wind.

Its sweeping sound resembles that of
water cascading from a dragon
mouth into two ponds.

The beating sound is like silkworms
eating mulberry leaves in a fray.

It falls and runs over the steps, like
water flowing through the clepsydra.

When it jumps up to the carved eaves,
It sounds like wine dripping into a new
barrel,

Straight through until the clepsydra
has ended.

My pillow is cold; the quilt is chilly
The candle is out, and the incense is
gone.

It should know that showers in summer

pass unnoticed

Like Kao Feng's wheat that floated
away.

It relies on the western wind, and low
it whistles on the gauzè window.

It brings cool air and shakes the embroidered door.

Does it mean that heaven wishes to
stir my sorrow

By bringing me the sounds of bells that
once echoed along the cliff?

Like the beating of Hua Nu's deer-skin
drum

Like Po Ya's Song of Narcissus

It rinses the chrysanthemums and
moistens the bamboo fence,

It drains the moss and breaks the walls.
It washes the lakes, the mountains,
and the grottoes,

It soaks the withered lotus and flows
over the pond.

Powder on the wings of late butterflies
is gone

The fireflies are wet and do not shine.
Near the green windows the crickets
chirp,

Their cries are so close but high are the
wild geese.

Here and there the sound of beating
clothes

Adds to the coolness exceedingly early.
This night in deliberation, rain and
man challenge their patience.

With the drop-drop beating on the
copper vessel

The rain increases and tears follow.
Rain drops moisten the cold boughs,
And tears stain my dragon robe.

Both unwilling to give in,
With one wu-t'ung tree in between,

Tears and rain will keep dropping
straight until dawn.